

Where You Go, I Will Go (Ruth and Naomi) by David Avshalomov

[Note by the composer.]

This work was written in 2002 at the request of Christopher Rhodes for his Santa Monica (CA) High School Chamber Singers (advanced women's choir), who performed the premiere under his direction. The English translation was worked out in consultation with my Rabbi and friend, Jeffrey Marx, of Sha'Arei Am (the Santa Monica Synagogue).

The piece is, in effect, a miniature dramatic oratorio. In structure, form, and vocal textures the music harkens back to the techniques and procedures of Medieval and Renaissance choral settings. The form is a chain of discrete but connected and related short sections that flow to create the arch of the story. Introductory episodes lay out the tragic background narrative of the tale. A group of increasingly dramatic middle sections build up to a climax with the astonishing, bitter outburst by Naomi. The well-known devoted response of Ruth concludes the work, which ends gently as though with a blessing before sleep. Ruth's avowal is sung first in Hebrew (the only section so set) in a "shadow canon" and then repeated twice in English (the first time starting in two canonic solo voices answered by the full choir).

The melodic style is tonal, often nearly modal, with occasional mild modern harmonic touches, the setting of the words simple, direct, and pure. This reflects my intention to honor and dignify with music the deep mutual bond between daughter-in-law and mother, born of shared loss and suffering and mutual support, that the story illumines.

This work is dedicated to mothers everywhere.