BERNSTEIN Chichester Psalms
COPLAND In the beginning & motets
BARBER Agnus Dei
CORYDON SINGERS
conducted by Matthew Best
A man of phenomenal and wide-ranging musical gifts, Leonard Bernstein is one of the great figures of twentieth-century American music. Following his time at Harvard University he entered the celebrated Curtis Institute in 1941 where a friend said, (apropos his outstanding talent), ‘Lenny is doomed to success’. It was a true prophecy in that Bernstein’s many-faceted career has inevitably restricted the number of works he has composed and it was, therefore, most fortunate that the Very Reverend Walter Hussey, Dean of Chichester, chose such a propitious time to approach the composer to write a work for the 1965 Chichester Festival. Bernstein had decided to take a sabbatical year, free from busy conducting schedules, to meditate on the current state of music and his own attitude towards it. This freedom also allowed him to take up whatever creative venture appealed to him and Bernstein summed up his feelings at this time in an article which appeared in the New York Times of 24 October, 1965. Much of the article appeared in verse as the following short excerpt illustrates:

Of time to think as a pure musician
And ponder the art of composition.
For hours on end I brooded and mused
On materiae musicae, used and abused;
On aspects of unconventionality,
Over the death in our time of tonality,
Over the fads of Dada and Chance,
The serial strictures, the dearth of romance,
‘Perspective in Music’ the new terminology,
Physiomathematomusicology;
Pieces called ‘Cycles’ and ‘Sines’ and ‘Parameters’—
Titles too beat for these homely tetrameters;
Pieces for nattering, clucking sopranos
With squadrons of vibraphones, fleets of pianos
played with the forearms, the fists and the palms
—And then I came up with the Chichester Psalms.

These psalms are a simple and modest affair,
Tonal and tuneful and somewhat square,
Certain to sicken a stout John Cager
With its tonics and triads in E flat major.
But there it stands the result of my pondering,
Two long months of avant-garde wandering—
My youngest child, old-fashioned and sweet.
And he stands on his own two tonal feet.

The text of ‘Chichester Psalms’ is in Hebrew and the work opens with a powerful introit that appears again at the end of the first movement and at the end of the last. Unsurprisingly, the composer of West Side Story brings to the piece colourful word painting and vivid orchestration. Psalm 100 is set in an agitated and almost dance-like seven-four rhythm that contrasts fittingly with the opening of the second movement, a lyrical setting of Psalm 23 for boys’ choir and soloist. The alto solo is affectingly accompanied by the harp but when this attractive melody is taken up by the boys’ choir it is interrupted by fierce outbursts from the men’s choir: ‘Why do the nations rage?’ (Psalm 2). Although the boys resume their pastoral melody and the disturbance moves into the background the disquiet remains in evidence even until the end. The third movement begins with an orchestral meditation which features densely written string passages of compelling effect. The mood of the music finally yields to one of comfort for the setting of Psalm 131 and the work ends quietly with a unison Amen as a solo trumpet recalls the first phrase of the chorale.

Already a competent player of the piano and the cello at the age of six, Samuel Barber was admitted to the Curtis Institute at fourteen. He was recognised as a composer from his early twenties and won a Pulitzer scholarship in 1935 at the age of twenty-four and, in the following year, the American Academy’s Prix de Rome. The fastidious textures of Barber’s compositions are directly related to
the care taken in their preparation and their lyrical style establishes immediate contact with audiences. Among his early works the setting of Arnold’s ‘Dover Beach’ was notable, but it was the slow movement of his string quartet of 1936 that was to bring Barber international fame. The composer’s adaption of it for string orchestra under the title ‘Adagio for Strings’ led to its first performance under the baton of Toscanini and its acceptance by a wide public.

The Adagio reveals Barber’s adherence to European musical tradition and is one of the most lovely inspirations in twentieth-century music. The lovingly drawn tendrils of its melody are exquisitely balanced on luminous harmony creating an effect of poignant beauty that few can resist. The inspiration of Bach in this music has often been noted so it is fitting that, as with so many of the great master’s pieces, the Adagio should be adapted for performance in various ways. Barber made this arrangement of the piece in 1967 and as a setting of the Agnus Dei it fulfills a new and enlightening role.

Even though, before the turn of the century, Charles Ives had produced choral music of singular originality, it was still pertinent of Gilbert Chase, in his book America’s Music, to state: ‘What we really needed was some American music to which no European master of composition could sign his name and get away with it.’ It seems extraordinary that such problems were to be addressed in the 1920’s in France, by a Frenchwoman, Nadia Boulanger. It was to this lady that several generations of American composers were drawn; among them Aaron Copland, Virgil Thomson, Roy Harris, Walter Piston and Elliott Carter. An avowed disciple of Stravinsky, Mlle Boulanger imposed a severely disciplined method of study on her pupils tempered with encouragement always to develop their own musical styles. That she was able to accomplish this establishes her as one of the greatest musical pedagogues in the history of the art.

It was whilst Copland was under the instruction of Nadia Boulanger, in Paris in 1921, that he wrote the Four Motets of which three are included on this record. In his autobiography the composer points out the influence of Mussorgsky evident in these pieces, a composer whose music Copland much admired. These unaccompanied Motets were performed both at Fontainbleu and Paris under Nadia Boulanger’s direction, but the composer agreed to their publication with mixed feelings since he felt that they were written in a style that was not truly his own. No such problems of personal style relate to the concisely written ‘In the Beginning’ of 1947. By this time Copland’s musical personality was clearly defined and this work, which features a mezzo-soprano soloist with unaccompanied mixed chorus, dispels any illusions that Copland’s choral music is inevitably ‘folksy’ in style. Here the composer weaves a web of rhythmic phrases that effectively cohere into longer sentences and the stimulating harmonies reflect his great affection for the early religious music of the USA. These rhythmic patterns and the frequent use of ‘perfect’ intervals give the music its own true identity and help to create an atmosphere which completely transcends the period in which it was written. Copland, the composer of such attractive scores as Billy the Kid and Appalachian Spring, has even had some of his music taken up by ‘pop’ groups, but his wide-ranging output has embraced music that has from time to time been considered very problematical. When, on his return to the USA from Paris, he produced his Symphony for Organ and Orchestra, the conductor, Walter Damrosch, expressed the opinion that: ‘If he can write like that at twenty-three, in five years he’ll be ready to commit murder.’

PETER LAMB © 1986
**Chichester Psalms** LEONARD BERNSTEIN (1918–1990)

1. **I** Urnah, hanevel, v’chinor! A-irah shahar!
   
   **PSALM 108: 2**
   
   Hariu l’Adonai kol haarets.
   Iv’du et Adonai b’simcha.
   Bo-u l’fanav bir’nanah.
   D’u ki Adonai Hu Elohim.
   Hu asanu, v’lo anahnu.
   Amo v’tson marito.
   Bo-u sh’arav b’todah,
   Hatseirotav bit’hilah,
   Hodo lo, bar’ chu sh’mo.
   Ki tov Adonai, l’olam has, do,
   V’ad dor vador emunato.

2. **II** Adonai ro-i, le ehsar.
   
   **PSALM 100**
   
   Bin’ot desche yarbitseini,
   Al mei m’nuhot y’nahalini,
   Naf’ shi y’shovev,
   Van ‘heini b’ma’ aglei tsedek, l’ma’ an sh’mo.
   Gam k’i eilech b’gei tsalmavet,
   Lo ira ra, ki Atah imadi.
   Shiv’t’cha umishan’ techa hemah y’nahamuni.

   **PSALM 23: 1–4**
   
   Lama, rag’shu goyim ul’umim yeh’gu rik?
   Yit’yats’vu malchei erets,
   V’roznim nos’du yahad
   Al Adonai v’al m’shilho.
   N’natkah et mos’roteimo,
   V’nashlichah mimenu avoteimo.
   Yoshev bashamayim yis’hak,
   Adonai yil’ag lamo!

   **PSALM 2: 1–4**
   
   Ta’aroch l’fanai shulchan neged tsor’rai
   Dishanta vashemen roshi cosi r’vayah.
   Ach tov vahesed yird’ funi kol y’mei hayai
   V’shav’ti b’veit Adonai l’orech yamim.

   **PSALM 23: 5–6**

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Awake, psaltery and harp! I will rouse the dawn!

Make a joyful noise unto the Lord all ye lands.
Serve the Lord with gladness.
Come before His presence with singing.
Know ye that the Lord, He is God.
It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves.
We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.
Enter into His gates with thanksgiving,
And into His courts with praise.
Be thankful unto Him, and bless His name.
For the Lord is good, His mercy is everlasting,
And His truth endureth to all generations.

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.
He leadeth me beside the still waters,
He restoreth my soul,
He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness, for His name’s sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me.
Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me.

Why do the nations rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together
against the Lord and against His annointed,
saying, let us break their bonds asunder,
and cast away their cords from us.
He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh,
and the Lord shall have them in derision!

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies,
Thou anointest my head with oil, my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.
III Adonai, Adonai, logavah libi,
V’lo ramu einai, v’lo hilachti
Big’dolot uv’niflaot mimeni.
Im lo shiviti v’domam’ti,
Naf’shi k’gamul alei imo.
Kagamul alai naf’shi.
Yahel Yis’rael el Adonai me’atah v’ad olam.
PSALM 131
Hineh mah tov, umah nayim,
Shevet ahim gam yahad.
PSALM 133: 1

Agnus Dei  SAMUEL BARBER (1910–1981)
Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi:
miserere nobis,
Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi:
dona nobis pacem.

In the beginning  AARON COPLAND (1900–1990)
In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.
And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.
And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness.
And God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.
And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so.
And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.

And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so.
And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called He Seas: and God saw that it was good.
And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so.
And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: and God saw that it was good.
And the evening and the morning were the third day.

And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years:
And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth: and it was so.
And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.

And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth. And the evening and the morning were the fifth day.

And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for food: and it was so. And God saw every thing that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

THUS the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made. These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew: for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground. But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground. And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

GENESIS 1; 2: 1–7
6 Help us, O Lord  AARON COPLAND (1900–1990)
Help us, O Lord,
For with Thee is the fount of life.
In Thy light shall we see light.
Let us march and try our way.
Turn to God.

It is good that man should wait.
It is good that man should hope,
Hope for the salvation of the Lord.
Help us, O Lord.

7 Have Mercy on us, O my Lord  AARON COPLAND (1900–1990)
Have mercy on us, O my Lord.
Be not far from us, O my God.
Give ear unto our humble prayer;
Attend and judge us in Thy might.
Uphold us with Thy guiding hand;
Restore us to Thy kindly light.
Ah, have mercy on us, O my Lord.

Be not far from us, O my God.
O my heart is sorely pained.
Cast me not away from Thee.
Then we shall trust in Thee;
Then we will bear our place.
Have mercy on us, O my Lord.
Be not far from us, O my God.

8 Sing ye praises to our king  AARON COPLAND (1900–1990)
Sing ye praises to our King,
O sing ye praises to our King.
Come and hear all ye men;
Come and hear my praises.
He doth bless all the earth;

Bringeth peace and comfort.
Shout unto God all ye men;
Shout unto God all your praises.
O sing ye praises,
Sing ye praises to our King and Ruler.

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Front illustration: The raising of Lazarus
Romanesque sculpture from Chichester Cathedral, Sussex, England

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LEONARD BERNSTEIN (1918–1990)

Chichester Psalms
with DOMINIC MARTELLI boy soprano, RACHEL MASTERS harp, GARY KETTEL percussion, THOMAS TROTTER organ

1 Psalm 108: 2; Psalm 100 Maestoso ma energico ........................................... [3'37]
2 Psalm 23; Psalm 2: 1–4 Andante con moto, ma tranquillo ............................. [5'49]
3 Psalm 131; Psalm 133: 1 Prelude—Peacefully flowing ............................... [9'11]

SAMUEL BARBER (1910–1981)

4 Agnus Dei ................................................................. [9'50]

AARON COPLAND (1900–1990)

5 In the beginning .......................................................... [15'56]
  with CATHERINE DENLEY mezzo-soprano

6 Help us, O Lord .......................................................... [2'42]
7 Have mercy on us, O my Lord .................................................. [3'44]
8 Sing ye praises to our King .................................................. [2'10]

CORYDON SINGERS
MATTHEW BEST conductor
LEONARD BERNSTEIN (1918–1990)

1 Chichester Psalms [18'59]  
with DOMINIC MARTELLI boy soprano, RACHEL MASTERS harp, GARY KETTEL percussion, THOMAS TROTTER organ

SAMUEL BARBER (1910–1981)

4 Agnus Dei [9'50]

AARON COPLAND (1900–1990)

5 In the beginning [15'56]  
with CATHERINE DENLEY mezzo-soprano

6 Help us, O Lord [2'42]  7 Have mercy on us, O my Lord [3'44]  
8 Sing ye praises to our King [2'10]

CORYDON SINGERS  
MATTHEW BEST conductor

‘An imaginative and enterprising programme, extremely well sung and recorded’ (Gramophone)  
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