

## **Randall Thompson (1899-1984)**

Randall Thompson has been described as American in spirit and universal in appeal. His choral works are a high point in American choral literature. He taught at Harvard, the Curtis Institute of Music, and the University of Virginia. The West Valley Chorale is performing two of his works on the December concerts, "Last Words of David" and "Alleluia," and one on the April concerts, "Choose Something Like a Star" from Frostiana with words by Robert Frost.

"The Last Words of David" (1949) 2 Samuel 23:3, 4

He that ruleth over men must be just,  
Ruling in the fear of God.  
And He shall be as the light of the morning,  
When the sun riseth,  
Even a morning without clouds;  
As the tender grass springing out of the earth  
By clear shining after rain  
Alleluia. Amen.

It was commissioned by the Boston Symphony Orchestra in honor of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Serge Koussevitzky's directorship. The chorus of the Berkshire Music Center (now Tanglewood Music Center) performed it with the BSO for the works premier.

"Alleluia" (1940)

This commission from Koussevitzky was for the opening of the Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood, which he founded in 1940. It was to be a fanfare but with WWII looming, Thompson chose instead to compose an introspective work. Alleluia is the Latinized form of the Hebrew word meaning "praise the Lord." It is the tradition to start each summer session at Tanglewood with the singing of this piece.

Koussevitzky (1874-1951) was a Russian-born conductor, composer and double-bassist, known for his long tenure as music director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra from 1924 to 1949. He was a champion of modern music who commissioned many works for the BSO including the premier of Gershwin's Second Rhapsody.

## **Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990)**

Leonard Bernstein studied music at Harvard graduating in 1939 and then attended Curtis Institute of Music for two years. While there he studied orchestration under Randall Thompson. He then studied conducting with and in 1942 became the protégé of Koussevitzky.

Koussevitzky gifted a pair of cufflinks to Bernstein which he wore at every concert he conducted.

### ***Mass: A Theatre Piece for Singers, Players, and Dancers***

In 1966 Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis asked Bernstein to compose a work for the inauguration of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. Bernstein began writing *Mass* in 1969 as a large-scale theatrical work based on the Traditional Latin Mass. Bernstein invited composer and lyricist Stephen Schwartz, who had recently opened the musical *Godspell* off-Broadway, to collaborate as co-lyricist. The world premiere took place on September 8, 1971.

Bernstein's score combines elements of musical theater, jazz, gospel, blues, folk, rock, and symphonic music, and the libretto combines Latin and English liturgy, Hebrew prayer, and additional lyrics written by Bernstein and Schwartz.

The version we will be singing is edited to be accessible to school, community, and church choirs. It honors Bernstein's mission to bring music to the people, particularly young people. Many of you may have watched his Young People's Concerts in your youth.

Edward Seckerson (British music journalist specializing in musical theatre) wrote in 2021: "Put simply, no other work of Bernstein's encapsulates exactly who he was as a man or as a musician; no other work displays his genius, his intellect, his musical virtuosity and innate theatricality quite like *Mass*."

Some have praised it while others thought it blasphemous. Over the years, the ideas and dissent embodied in *MASS*, which were so threatening to the political and religious establishments in the volatile early-1970s, have become a more accepted part of spiritual and political discourse. *MASS* came full circle when, in 2000, Pope John Paul II requested a performance at the Vatican. Its radical mixing of musical styles, too, has also become less shocking and more accepted in the musical sphere. Time has revealed *MASS* to be a visionary piece that continues to be relevant in today's society; with its thought-provoking themes about violence and war, as well as questions about faith displayed through an amalgamation of musical styles.