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THE CHORAL MUSIC OF DAVE BRUBECK: YES, THAT DAVE BRUBECK!



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The Choral Music of Dave Brubeck: Yes, THAT Dave Brubeck!

An Interview with Dave Brubeck

Regarding His Choral Music

William M. Skoog



Dave Brubeck, one of the most renowned jazz musicians of our time and designated a Living Legend by the United States Library of Congress, is a prolific composer of choral music in various forms. This author/conductor first became acquainted with Brubeck's choral works at the University of Denver (DU), performing *Gates of Justice* with the Dave Brubeck Quartet and the DU Orchestra. It was an inspiring experience and it seemed important to learn more about this man's choral music throughout this conductor's career, which, happily, has occurred.

Brubeck's music moves people and delivers a strong message of hope and inspiration to audiences everywhere. At Rudolphinum, in Prague, his Mass, *To Hope*, received three encores, after which the concert manager informed us that this was "... unheard of at the Rudolphinum..." Since that time, a number of his pieces have been performed at Bowling Green State University, where he was commissioned to write a piece for the University Men's Chorus.

The man and his music have enriched this author's life and the lives of many singers and audiences tremendously. Moreover, he and his music represent a significant cultural heritage and American musical legacy. His music deserves to be known and performed, which is the purpose to this article: to introduce Brubeck's choral music to choral directors, and to inspire and encourage conductors to perform it.

Skoog Why and when did you feel the urge to write choral music?

Brubeck The first piece for chorus I wrote was *Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled (ye believe in God)*. It was composed after the sudden death of my nephew, Philip, who was sixteen. I wrote it to comfort my brother Howard. When my friend, the late Ernest Farmer, then president of Shawnee Press, saw the manuscript, he said, "Dave, you have a natural ability to write choral music. Why don't you write an oratorio?" Thus, the idea of composing *The Light in the Wilderness* was born. It was first going to be called *The Temptations and Teachings of Christ*, and the libretto is built around those themes. It was published by Shawnee Press and premiered and recorded in 1968 by the Cincinnati Symphony, Erich Kunzel, conducting.

William Skoog holds a DA from the University of Northern Colorado, and serves as director of choral activities at Bowling Green State University, directing the Collegiate Chorale and the University Men's Chorus, and teaching courses in choral literature and conducting. He has conducted in numerous state, regional, national and international choral festivals, including the Lucerne International Choral Festival and Dvořák Festival in Europe, and has conducted the Prague Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Santa Maria and Moravian Symphony Orchestra, and the Toledo and Fort Wayne Symphony Orchestras.

Choral music was not completely unfamiliar to me. For seventeen years my mother directed the Presbyterian Church Choir in Concord, California, and, as a child, I often attended rehearsals. At College of the Pacific, I enjoyed the unaccompanied choir directed by a wonderful musician, J. Russell Bodley. I would often sneak in to their rehearsals to listen, because I liked the sound of the voices.

Skoog It seems that you like to begin with text as an inspiration for choral music. Is that accurate? Many of the texts you select are sacred or reference social values—is there a particular motivation?

Brubeck Once *Iola*, my wife, was aware of the direction I was headed in writing *The Light in the Wilderness*, she selected most of the texts for me from the *King James Bible*. It was the obvious and natural source for the narrative.

A year or so ago I read *Christmas Hymn* by the wonderful American poet Richard Wilbur, and set it to music. The most recent poem I have set is one by Wendell Berry. It is titled *The Peace of Wild Things*. My wife and I, working together, have also set the Chief Seattle speech that deals with the environment from the Native American point of view. Also, I have set many poems by Langston Hughes in a suite called *Hold Fast to Dreams*. So, the texts are not always sacred in the sense of being liturgical, but they do deal with philosophical and sacred themes.

Skoog You served in World War II as a private under General George Patton, and it has been said that experience had a profound impact on you and your music. Did this experience affect your musical life?

Brubeck My experience in Patton's Army in World War II is still with me every day, every waking moment, and sometimes in my sleep. This experience changed my view of life. The most threatening part of my Army experience occurred during the Battle of the Bulge when we were overrun by a massive German push. I was lost behind the ever-changing German line trying to find my way back to the American side. During this crucial period, and the events that followed, with our Army liberating prison and slave labor camps, I was profoundly disturbed by what I observed. I told myself that someday I wanted to study and write a composition about the Ten Commandments, because of the inhumanity that I had witnessed. All sides of the European conflict worshipped the same God, yet the basic laws that we had been taught to follow had been ignored. I tried to compose such a piece at that time, but decided what I was writing was not adequate for the subject. So, 60 years later I tried again and wrote a choral piece called *The Commandments* that was premiered by the Providence Singers, with Russell Gloyd conducting, in Rose Hall at Lincoln Center, September 2005, in a concert that included *The Gates of Justice* and was sponsored by the New York Jewish Music & Heritage Society.

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Skoog Are there other unique stories behind the composition of certain pieces? Are there specific texts that “spoke to you” in some fashion?

Brubeck Following the premier of my *Mass To Hope*, a priest who had encouraged me to write the Mass, complimented me for what I had done, but said that he regretted that I had left out the “Our Father.” I asked him, “Do you mean *The Lord’s Prayer*?” He said, “Yes. Why don’t you add it to the Mass?”

I answered “No,” because, in my mind I had completed the Mass, and now I planned a vacation with my wife and children in the Caribbean. One night after we were in the Caribbean I dreamt the entire “*Lord’s Prayer*.” It was complete with chorus and accompaniment. Now it is included in the published version of the Mass.

On another occasion, I was asked by the diocese of San Francisco to write a piece for Pope John Paul the Second, who would be conducting Mass in the huge San Francisco stadium, Candlestick Park. They wanted nine minutes of music to be played when the Pope entered and circled the stadium in the Popemobile. They gave me one sentence as text: *Upon this rock I shall build my church and*

the jaws of hell shall not prevail against it. I turned down the commission because I felt that I could not write nine minutes of music on one sentence of 18 words. That night I had a dream that solved the problem. In the dream, I realized that by approaching the text in a Bach-like manner, I could compose a chorale and fugue in which the words are repeated over and over in the fugal pattern.

Though I speak with the tongues quotation was written on a piece of paper that was tacked on the window sill above my wife’s desk. It stood us both in good stead over the rocky days of raising a house full of teenagers. It is one of my favorite passages in the Bible: *without love I am nothing.* I chose *Though I speak with the tongues* while in the process of composing *The Voice of the Holy Spirit*. It seemed to me to be an example of the Holy Spirit speaking a message of love and compassion through Paul.

Skoog You have a large amount of choral music in your repertoire: many short form choral works, unaccompanied compositions, and several large-form choral works written with orchestra. Do you have favorites from among these works; works you would especially like

us to consider, and if so, why?

Brubeck Three of my favorite larger works were recorded with the London Symphony and London Voices with Russell Gloyd conducting. These pieces are available on Telarc Records on an album titled *Classical Brubeck*. I chose those particular works because they are among my favorites and had never been recorded. I would like for choral conductors to take a closer look at my pieces set to poems of Langston Hughes. Individual pieces from the suite are published by Alfred Publishing and are frequently performed, but the entire suite has not been performed since its premier.

There are many short choral pieces, some sacred, some secular, now available for downloading on the Alfred Publications Web site. I enjoy the poems of Wendell Berry, and have set several to music that I think school and community choirs would find interesting.

Skoog Have publishers influenced or affected your work? Does the commercial sale of your choral works factor in to your writing in any way? Do you target certain groups or audiences in your writing, e.g., make it applicable to high school or church choirs?

Brubeck The commercial sale of my compositions does not enter into my musical decisions. However, when commissioned, I do think about the performers and their likely audience. Most of my choral and orchestral music has been composed on commissions, and I think I have written approximately 15 commissions for specific occasions. However, sometimes I simply like a text and set it.

When I was commissioned to write the Mass they specified that the music should be able to be performed by a church choir, school chorus, or a symphony orchestra and chorus. With such

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a commission, I do write with specific performing groups in mind. The *Four New England Pieces*, for example, was written specifically for the high school choir in our hometown, conducted by Elissa Getto. This does not mean they were restricted to high school repertoire, however. They have been sung by university and professional choirs, such as the Gregg Smith Singers.

Also, when I wrote the *Cannery Row Suite* for the Monterey Jazz Festival, I was very aware that it would be performed outdoors before a large jazz audience. The solos were written with specific singers in mind—Kurt Elling and Roberta Gambarini. However, it has since

been performed with operatic singers as soloists.

Sometimes I think in seasonal terms. For example, I have written five, fairly short Christmas pieces that Alfred is publishing this year, and I hope they will find their way into Christmas programs.

Canticles: In Praise of Mary, written on commission, was almost forgotten, then revived by a performance at Notre Dame. Now the Pacific Mozart Ensemble of Berkeley, California, is rehearsing it. They will perform it on their December program and record it in January.

Naturally, I hope that my music will be performed and I realize that some of my longer pieces require commitment and a

lot of rehearsal. But, I believe my music is accessible to any good choir willing to work. Consider *The Light in the Wilderness*. It was published by Shawnee Press with the encouragement of Ernie and Marjorie Farmer, and edited by a great choral conductor, Lara Hoggard. It is an example of a publisher and staff working successfully with a new and rather difficult, long (72 minute) choral piece with an unknown and untried choral composer. Many university choruses sang it. The number of performances was far more than I expected, and it was performed in the U.S., Australia and Europe. *The Gates of Justice*, also published by Shawnee Press, had good sales and



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many performances by university and community choirs, and it's still going on today. This encourages me to think that if I have that kind of cooperation from a publisher, I can have fairly good sales without changing the way I write.

My *Four New England Pieces* have had decent sales and are available through Alfred Publishing. The *Mass To Hope!* had to go into a second printing, and is regularly performed in the U.S. and Europe. I learned of a recent performance in a church just outside of Paris.

Oddly enough, two of the so-called "difficult" pieces have been presented in conjunction with jazz festivals. The *Mass* was performed in New Orleans at an opening of the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, and *The Gates of Justice* was part of the 50th anniversary of the Newport Jazz Festival. The reaction from a non-typical choral audience was wonderful. They were surprised by the music, and I was surprised by their enthusiastic reaction.

Off hand, I can't count the number of times I have performed with the

Cathedral Choir of the National Cathedral in Washington DC. This is one of the greatest church choirs in the country. But I wouldn't be surprised if a good high school or community chorus somewhere in the country has performed much of that same material. It all depends on devoted choral conductors and dedicated singers. An example of this that I can point to is a CD of my choral works that was produced by a great community chorus in Chattanooga, Tennessee, Philip Rice, music director. I am very proud of that album.

Church and school choirs all over the country perform my Mexican Christmas cantata *La Fiesta de la Posada* every year. For 12 years in a row, it was performed on the first Sunday in December at the 5th Ave. Presbyterian Church in New York.

The late Richard Westenburg, who conducted some of the Christmas programs at Fifth Ave Presbyterian in New York, also conducted his great professional choir, *Musica Sacra*, performing my music at Lincoln Center and Carnegie

Hall.

Skoog Many composers become frustrated that their more challenging works are not performed more often, or they feel that they need to lessen the difficulty level in order to be performed or heard. What message would you send to conductors/teachers of music in this regard?

Brubeck Beethoven didn't "water down" his *Ninth Symphony*. The soprano part in the chorus was considered impossible in his day. Sometimes you have to wait, and sometimes a work is completely forgotten. This is certainly true of some of the works by Charles Ives. I have had the experience of compositions lying on the shelf for 20 or 30 years after the premier, then suddenly rediscovered. *Canticles: In Praise of Mary* is a case in point. After the Notre Dame performance, there is new interest in the piece, and it is now being prepared for recording by the Pacific Mozart Ensemble.

Skoog Are you still accepting commissions? If so, how does one go about starting this process?

Brubeck The last two pieces I have written were done without commission simply because I liked the poems. Currently, I am working on a multi-media commission for orchestra with my son, Chris, as co-composer. Rather than a text for inspiration, this time it is Ansel Adams classic photographs of nature, which will be shown on a large screen over the orchestra. The music and the images together should enhance each other, and we hope we can create a beautiful experience both visually and musically. How such commissions come about remain a mystery. Somebody has an idea and approaches me, and if it strikes me as something I'd like to do, I do it.



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Table 1
A Comprehensive List of Choral Works by Dave Bruneck

Title	Publisher	Description	Voicing	Instrument
Psalm 23	Alfred		SATB	Piano
All My Hope	Alfred	from <i>To Hope! A Celebration</i>	SATB Div	Piano
Ash Wednesday	Alfred	from <i>Lenten Triptych</i>	SATB Div	Piano
Autumn In Our Town	Alfred	from <i>Four New England Pieces</i>	SATB Div	Piano
Beloved Son	Shawnee	Passion	SATB Div	Orchestra or Piano
Benediction	Alfred	from <i>Voice Of The Holy Spirit</i>	SATB	A Cappella
Bless These Ashes	Alfred	from <i>Lenten Triptych</i>	SATB	Piano
Boogie 1 AM	Alfred	Text by Langston Hughes	SATB Div	Piano
(A) Christmas Hymn	Alfred	Text by Richard Wilbur	SATB Div	A Cappella
Circles	Alfred	Text by Wendell Berry	SATB Div	Piano
(The) Commandments	Alfred		SATB Div	A Cappella
(The) Dream Keeper	Alfred	Text by Langston Hughes	SATB Div	Piano
Dream Of Freedom	Alfred	Text by Langston Hughes	SATB	Piano
Dreamer	Alfred	Text by Langston Hughes	SATB Div	Piano
Dusk	Alfred	Text by Langston Hughes	SATB Div	Piano
Earth Is Our Mother	Alfred		SATB Div Bar solo/Narr.	Piano/Opt Inst.
Easter	Alfred	from <i>Lenten Triptych</i>	SATB	Piano
Ev'ry Christmas I Hear Bells	Alfred	Text by Iola Brubeck	SATB Div	A Cappella
Festival Hall	Alfred		SATB Div	Piano
Forty Days	Shawnee	from <i>The Light In The Wilderness</i>	SATB Div	Piano
(The) Gates Of Justice	Shawnee	Oratorio	SATB Div	Chamber Orch or Piano
God's Love Made Visible	Shawnee	from <i>La Fiesta de la Posada</i>	SATB	Piano
Good Will To Women	Alfred	Text by Iola Brubeck	SATB	Piano
He Is Risen	Shawnee	from <i>Beloved Son</i>	SATB	Piano
Hear The Bells Ring	Alfred		SATB Div	Piano
Hold Fast To Dreams	Alfred	Text by Langston Hughes	SATB	Piano
How Does Your Garden Grow?	Alfred	Text by Langston Hughes	SATB Div	A Cappella
I Dream A World	Alfred	from <i>Four New England Pieces</i>	SATB	A Cappella
I Dream A World: Chorale	Alfred	Text by Langston Hughes	SATB	A Cappella
I Have A Little Shadow	Alfred	Text by Robert Louis Stevenson	SATB	A Cappella
In The Name Of The Father	Alfred	Fugue from <i>Voice Of The Holy Spirit</i>	SATB	A Cappella
In Time Of Silver Rain	Alfred	Fugue/Text by Langston Hughes	SATB	Piano
La Fiesta de la Posada	Shawnee	Christmas cantata	SATB Div	Orch or Piano/Mariachi
Let Not Your Heart Be Troubled	Shawnee	from <i>The Light In The Wilderness</i>	SATB Div	Piano
(The) Light In The Wilderness	Shawnee	Oratorio	SATB Div	Orchestra
Once When I Was Very Young	Alfred	from <i>Four New England Pieces</i>	SATB	A Cappella
Pange Lingua Variations	Alfred	Cantata	SATB Div	Piano or Brass/Perc
Psalm 120	Alfred	from <i>Joy In The Morning</i>	SATB Div	A Cappella

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Table 1 cont.

Title	Publisher	Description	Voicing	Instrument
Psalm 30	Alfred	from <i>Joy In The Morning</i>	SATB Div	Pno or Str Bass + Timp
Psalm 121	Alfred	from <i>Joy In The Morning</i>	SATB Div	Piano
Run, Run, Run To Bethlehem	Shawnee	from <i>La Fiesta de la Posada</i>	SATB Div	Piano
Sermon On The Mount	Shawnee	from <i>Light In The Wilderness</i>	SATB Div	Piano
Sleep, Holy Infant, Sleep	Shawnee	from <i>La Fiesta de la Posada</i>	SATB Div	Piano
They All Sang Yankee Doodle	Assoc. Music		SATB Div	Piano
This Is The Day	Alfred	easy version	SATB	A Cappella
Though I Speak With The Tongues	Alfred	from <i>Voice Of The Holy Spirit</i>	SATB Div	A Cappella
To Hope! A Celebration	Alfred	Mass	SATB Div	Orchestra or Piano
To Us Is Given	Alfred	from <i>Pange Lingua Variations</i>	SATB Div	Piano
To You	Alfred	Text by Langston Hughes	SATB	Piano
Truth	Alfred	Text by Robert Penn Warren	SATB Div	A Cappella
Truth Is Fallen	Shawnee	Cantata	SATB Div	Orch/Opt Rock Band
Two Chorales	Shawnee	from <i>Beloved Son</i>	SATB	A Cappella
Two Churches	Alfred	from <i>Four New England Pieces</i>	SATB Div	Piano
Voice Of The Holy Spirit	Shawnee	Oratorio	SATB Div	Orchestra
We Three Kings	Alfred		SATB Div	A Cappella
Why We Sing At Christmas	Alfred		2 pt. Men/Women Div	Pno/Opt Sleigh Bells

Pending Choral Publications

Are You Now Or Have You Ever Been A Democrat Or A Republican?			SATB	A Cappella
Quiet As The Moon		Text by Iona Brubeck	SATB	Piano
The Wheel		Text by Wendell Berry	SATB	Piano

Skoog A few years ago I presented a conference session titled, "The Choral Works of Dave Brubeck—Difficult but Doable." Some colleagues accused me of violating "truth in advertising," because, they said, the first part was accurate, but the latter was not. Those works were not considered performable by church and school choirs, even mainstream college choirs. Is that an accurate assessment? Are they, gener-

ally speaking, rather difficult to perform?

Brubeck There are high school and college choirs that have sung my works, even the longer and more difficult pieces such as *The Gates of Justice*. The choir at the University of the Pacific, under the direction of Edward Cetto, has performed many of my pieces. *Pange Lingua Variations* is one of the larger works that I think any good university

choir could perform. *Earth is Our Mother* was commissioned by and performed by the University of Northern Michigan under the direction of Floyd Slotterback. My choral works are singable if there is enough time to rehearse.

Upon hearing some of my work, I've been pleasantly surprised that what I had once imagined and heard only in my head was now actually being sung. At other times I have felt that the choir was

Table 1 cont.

Unpublished Choral Music

Title	Description	Voicing	Instrument
As The Moon Is To The Sun		SATB	A Cappella
Bridges Of Song		SATB	Piano
Canticles Of Mary		SATB Div	Orchestra
Credo / Crucifixus	Oratorio	SATB Div	A Cappella
I See Satie		SATB	Piano
In The Name Of The Father		SATB	Orchestra
It Hath Been Told Thee	Chorale from <i>Voice of the Holy Spirit</i>	SATB Div	Piano
Lonesome and Summer Song		SATB Div	Piano/Orch
Love Flows	from <i>The Real Ambassadors</i>	SATB or TTBB Div	Piano/Orch
Power Chorale and Fugue	From <i>God to Man</i>	SATB Div	A Cappella
Praise God For Sending The Light		SATB	Piano
(The) Real Ambassador		SATB	Orchestra
Regret		SATB/Divisi	A Cappella
This Is The Day		SATB Div	A Cappella
This Is The Day	National Cathedral Version	SATB	Piano
Upon This Rock	6/8 Version	SATB Div	Chamb. Orchestra
When The Lord Is Pleas'd	Chorale and Fugue	SATB Div	Piano
(The) Wind		SATB Div	A Cappella
Yes, We All Have Our Cross To Bear	Text by Robert Louis Stevenson	SATB Div	A Cappella

capable of doing better if they only had had more rehearsal time. Preparation is so important. A memorable experience for me was walking into a rehearsal in Moscow and hearing the Orloff choir singing my Mass in English with such heartfelt conviction. I knew that there would be a great performance. They were prepared!

Shortly after the premier of *The Light in the Wilderness*, I toured Europe with the University of Miami chorus from Oxford, Ohio, and the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra. The chorus sang *The Light* and the Beethoven *Ninth Symphony*. Some of the German critics were amazed at how well they per-

formed the Beethoven, and asked how could an American chorus singing in German enunciate and sing better than a German chorus singing in their own language? The answer was devotion and rehearsal time.

Sometimes the choir will have memorized the words and the music and do not use the choral books. This is rare. As a composer, when I look up to the stage and don't see choral books in their faces, I begin to relax. I know that the singers will be watching the conductor. Consequently there will be a more perfect, nuanced performance. The *Four New England Pieces* were originally written for high school choirs.

The Langston Hughes material, except for the solos, was written specifically for a youth choir in Princeton, New Jersey. Also, *The Circle* and *The Wheel*, settings of poems by Wendell Berry, have been sung by Nancy Wade's choir at Soddy-Daisy High School in Chattanooga. There are settings of *The Wind* and *I Have a Little Shadow* by Robert Louis Stevenson written specifically for youth choirs. Excerpts from the Mass can be done by most church or school choirs as well as sections from *La Fiesta de la Posada* or the chorales from *Beloved Son*. *Benediction* is sung every Sunday at Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago and was sung by the Wilton High

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School chorus. I have set several psalms published by Alfred that would be suitable for church service, and any of the Christmas pieces would be appropriate for school or church.

Skoog Since you are a renowned jazz pianist and studied composition with Darius Milhaud, would you describe these influences on you and your choral compositions? How is jazz an influence on your writing, and how much or how strongly did Milhaud affect your work in composition?

Brubeck When I was studying with Darius Milhaud, he assigned his students Bach chorales to re-harmonize and study. In our fugue assignments, we were told to write much in the style of Bach, using Bach's fundamental rules of fugue. One wonderful day Milhaud played for me one of the wildest pieces I had ever heard for a chorus. It was part of the *Medea Trilogy*, I think. Perhaps it was called *Orestes*. It's a rare recording, and I have not been able to locate it. Of course, we students were very aware of his opera *King David* that he had recently completed when I arrived at Mills. Even earlier than my study with Milhaud, I was struck by Stravinsky's *Symphony of the*

Psalms. Hearing these recordings made me want to get involved someday in writing for voices.

When I completed *The Light in the Wilderness*, Milhaud had already gone back to Paris and was teaching at the Paris Conservatory. I sent him a copy of the score. He wrote back "Very good. But why did you write the tenor part in the bass clef? "On my next pieces I changed to writing it in treble clef (most of the time), but the score of *The Light* remains as I had first written it.

Milhaud told me to never abandon my jazz background because that is what he considered the element that made a composer a more authentic American voice. Think about the most performed American composers and you have to come up with George Gershwin, Aaron Copland, Leonard Bernstein, and some colleagues of mine that have done wonderful works for chorus: Duke Ellington, Mary Lou Williams, Billy Taylor, George Shearing. Even going back to Charles Ives, one can hear the usage of jazz by an American composer. It's part of our language—it's American.

Skoog Do you have a particular approach to elements of composition that you would describe e.g., melody,

harmony, counterpoint, structure, instrumentation, music-text relationship, etc.? Or do you write essentially by artistic inspiration and leave the analysis to the theorists?

Brubeck My approach to composition is to "go with the flow." I'm essentially an improviser; so were Bach, Mozart and Beethoven. Basically, I work from the text, its mood and emotional content, and the rhythm of the words. If I can find a blank tape and a machine that works, I love to just improvise with the text in mind and see if something comes out that is worth saving. I seem to recall reading an anecdote (not corroborated) that Mozart was not so impressed with Beethoven's compositions when he first came on the scene. Mozart was rumored to have left the room unimpressed when Beethoven was playing some of his piano pieces. Later, Beethoven began improvising, and it was then that Mozart remarked, "This young man will make a great noise in the world." It was reported that young Beethoven's improvisation rather than his compositions that made an impression on Mozart. Even though this may be more fiction than fact, certainly composers of the period were expected to improvise, and anyone who could not would have been thought of in lesser regard.

My basic approach to melody is to sing the text until something seems right. Harmony grows usually from trying to sustain the emotion of the text. Structure usually grows organically as you continue composing, except when you are writing a chorale or fugue. Instrumentation—on some occasions I have used a string quartet, others a complete symphony orchestra, brass, and percussion (*Upon This Rock* needed strong instrumental support due to the performance situation in Candlestick Park, which is a huge stadium), a small chamber group to get a Native

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American sound for *Earth Is Our Mother*, sometimes piano/organ accompaniment, but my favorite is a cappella when all the inner voices can be heard clearly. Rhythm and meter are dictated by the text, its imagery and emotional content.

The text suggests the music most often, but occasionally the music suggests the text. *Lord, Lord*, from "The Gates of Justice" is an example of the latter. The music existed from an improvised minor blues, which suggested the text to lola.

Skoog Is there an ultimate mission or purpose to your choral music? What do you hope the musicians will come away with, or the audience as they leave the concert?

Brubeck I have had people from various choruses tell me, "I've heard these words all my life, but this is the first time I've really responded to the depth of the message." I had a Jewish college student tell me after singing *The Gates of Justice*, "Now, I have a better understanding of my own religious tradition." So maybe the mission is to teach and explore our religious heritage.

I have been told by a number of people who have gone through a medical crisis that my Mass had "healing" power. In performance, there are times when audience, singers, musicians, conductor, soloists, improvisers, all become "one." There have been times I have felt that we were levitating right through the roof of the church or concert hall. This is a very rare, transcendent experience, and I can remember clearly the places it has happened: Bolshoi Hall in Moscow, Bryn Mawr Church in Pennsylvania, at St. Stephens in Vienna, and in the old Berlin Konzerthaus. This kind of joy is rare. The audience being unified in thought and spirit is the greatest gift I can receive or give.

Skoog You have heard your music performed by choirs and orchestras across

the world. Is there anything you would like to share with us about how they should be performed, or, overall, what elements are needed to "get" the choral music of Dave Brubeck?

Brubeck I have been so fortunate to have some of the greatest choral conductors with great choirs perform my music. The Gregg Smith Singers, Richard Westenburg's *Musica Sacra*, the Roger Wagner Chorale, the Orloff Choir, the National Cathedral Choir, Baltimore Choral Arts, Pacific Mozart Ensemble, and many more university and community choirs with dedicated choral conductors such as yourself. My message to conductors who do not know my work is, "Be curious. Know that others have performed these works successfully. Be willing to accept a challenge and stretch the boundaries."

Sometimes directors will take rhythmic liberties. If I had the opportunity to make a suggestion to them I would say "Treat this section like you would treat

a passage of Bach, where the rhythm is constant." Realize that if Bach were alive today he most probably would be a fantastic jazz musician, because jazz musicians are so similar to Bach in their approach to music, from using the figured bass on. One must understand that coming from a jazz tradition, I compose with that concept. The rhythm does not speed up and slow down but usually remains a constant pulse, against which there may be juxtaposed other rhythms.

Skoog Do you have thoughts on the direction of choral music in our culture—concerns, accolades, a message or charge to administrators and conductors about choral music in our time?

Brubeck To choral conductors and organists, my message would be, "I wish you knew how grateful I am that you are performing my music." I am humbled by the performances of organists that are so advanced in improvisation. I am overwhelmed when I hear a great organist

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improvise a chorale and fugue. I'm so impressed by conductors with total recall of a score that I have submitted to them, their memory of what is written better than mine. Russell Gloyd, for example, knows my scores far better than I do, and so did Richard Westenburg, Erich Kunzel, Tom Hall, and many more. I am amazed at that ability and knowledge. With dedicated choral conductors in our colleges and universities who are willing to explore beyond the traditional choral repertoire, I think the future of choral music in America is a bright one. Their work is the foundation for building a choral tradition that will rival that of England and the rest of Europe.

Brubeck O.K. Let's turn the tables

—enough from me. You are a choral director who has conducted many of my works. What recommendations would you make to fellow conductors? Where should they start? And do you think the work that is necessary for a good performance rewarding enough to be worth the effort?

Skoog Russell Gloyd (Dave's conductor) has said, "... anyone taking on Dave's choral music is in for a world of hurt... and a world of reward" (paraphrased). This is succinctly and accurately stated. As a conductor who has performed several Brubeck pieces, I would underscore that a director wishing to do the more difficult works needs to allow enough rehearsal time to do them justice. That may not sound like a glowing endorsement from someone advocating the performance of his music; but as Russell said, the reward is well worth it.

Two Churches is an intriguing small work simultaneously invoking sounds of Baptist and Presbyterian Church hymns, depicting the experience one might have walking between them on a Sunday morning. This work contains fragments of various hymn-tunes, including: *Deep River*, *Go Tell it on the Mountain*, *Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen*, and *We Shall Overcome* woven into the overall fabric of the piece. *We Three Kings* is a marvelous choral-jazz setting of that popular hymn for Epiphany that contains a walking bass line and some surprising bi-tonality for real color. One could also extrapolate a movement from a major work such as *Our Father* from the Mass, *All My Hope* also from the Mass (a Gospel tune published separately) *Sleep Holy Infant* and *God's Love Made Visible* from *La Fiesta de la Posada* (published independently), *Benediction* from *Voice of the Holy Spirit*, or *Abba, Father* and *Weep Ye Waters* from *Beloved Son*, for examples.

For someone wishing to tackle a major work of Dave's, *La Fiesta de la Posada* would be ideal for a Christmas

piece. It is accessible, rhythmic, and is written to be staged—something of real appeal for a Christmas program. *To Hope* can be done as a concert mass, and includes a variety of soloists including cantors, orchestra (brass, percussion and strings), and hand bells, and contains a few more typical Brubeckian, jazz-like or Gospel movements. *Pange Lingua Variations* is an accessible major work for most choirs, and gives the director an opportunity to teach chant while engaging the singers in Dave's creative approach to it using modern harmonic language, contrapuntal techniques and development. If you are ready to roll up your sleeves and take on one of his major works with orchestra, look to *Light in the Wilderness or Beloved Son*; in this conductor's opinion, two marvelous major works of our time.

"Take Five" minutes (or more), and get to know his choral music; you will soon discover this rich, deep reservoir of repertoire that will enhance your programming and vitalize your rehearsals and concerts in ways you could not imagine. Yes, you are in for some hurt, but what great rewards await you, your musicians and audiences.

Most of Dave's choral music is available through Alfred Publications and Shawnee Press. His first pieces, *The Light in the Wilderness*, *The Gates of Justice* and *La Fiesta de la Posada* are published by Shawnee Press. Other unpublished works are also available. Inside this article is a complete list of choral works available by Dave Brubeck, and how to obtain them.

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