



↓ **ADLER Choral Works** • Richard K. Pugsley, cond. Gloria Dei Cantores • GLORIA DEI CANTORES 066
(49:10) Reviewed from a WAV download: 44.1 kHz/16-bit

Gloria Dei Cantores has been a fixture in the Boston-area choral community almost since shortly its founding in 1988. Based at the Church of the Transfiguration in Orleans, MA, where they continue to provide liturgical music, the choir has toured, concertized, and recorded extensively over the last several decades. The present recording is just the latest fruits of a long association with Samuel Adler, who also serves on the ensemble's advisory board; it is their second recording devoted completely to his music. Adler has occupied prominent place in American music since the 1950s as a prolific composer, a conductor, and a dedicated teacher; his orchestration textbook has become the standard one of its kind. For me, part of the appeal of Adler's music is its eclecticism. He is as comfortable with atonal and serial techniques as he is with Renaissance counterpoint, and he deploys a wide range of styles strategically and fluently. Throughout his output, though, Adler's music is consistent in its contrapuntal intricacy, rhythmic energy, and its emotional intensity.

The centerpiece of the program is *To Speak to Our Time*, Adler's meditation on *Kristallnacht*; since its 2018 premiere it has become one of his most well-known works. Scored for unaccompanied voices and two violins, the twenty-minute piece unfolds in four choral movements separated by violin interludes. The opening prelude is dissonant and ambiguous, and the two violinists meander through a jagged musical landscape with complete conviction. "Chor der Wandernden" is a powerful comment on the plight of refugees, given an appropriately anguished reading here. The German diction is clean throughout; the consonant placement is particularly impressive. The singers navigate disjunct lines with ease, and the soprano soloist weaves deftly through the spiky texture. A setting of Psalm 121 in Hebrew is more lyrical, and the choir adjust accordingly with a smoother sense of line. The second violin interlude is more tonal than the becoming progressively more stable before ending with a gentle chant melody. Again, the performance is thoroughly committed, providing a link with another psalm setting, this time in Latin. Adler's Psalm 111 uses several chant melodies, moving into bitonality that gives way to an improvisatory section that evokes extemporaneous praise. The choir handles this joyful chaos beautifully, embracing the uncertainties and offering a robust performance. The final movement is the only one that brings the choir and the violinists together in a kind of hopeful hymn that promises peace and hope. Like the rest of the piece, this movement is complex, musically, but Pugsley leads the musicians in a coherent, convincing performance.

Other works on the album include Adler's "Choral Trilogy," a triptych of which the final movement is given an especially buoyant reading. Adler's lush setting of Psalm 23 includes both Hebrew and English texts and was a gift to his sister. The choir's performance is flowing and cohesive, with carefully shaped phrases. A shimmering setting of "Amazing Grace" that is simultaneously Copland-esque and yet quintessentially Adler closes the album, sung gently and with deep humanity. The choir is consistently balanced, and the voices blend seamlessly, for the most part. Intonation is virtually always impeccable, no small feat in this complex music, and the choral sound is full and confident. Moreover, the choir is agile and responsive, allowing Pugsley to craft intensely musical performances that are full of subtle shading and pliable phrasing. This is a fine sample of Adler's choral music, and the performances are enthusiastic and polished.

James V. Maiello

Four stars. Polished, enthusiastic performances of Adler's complex choral music.



ADLER *A Hymn of Praise*^{2,5}. *Let Us Rejoice*. *My Beloved is Mine*. *Choral Trilogy*⁴. *Psalm 23*⁵. *To Speak to Our Time*^{1,3}. *How Sweet the Sound*⁵. □ Richard K. Pugsley, cond; ¹Sr. Diana Shannon (sop); ²Joshua Kanaga (ten); ³Julianne Lee, ³Lucia Linn (vn); ⁴Clara Gerdes, ⁵SharonRose Pfeiffer (org); Glorïae Dei Cantores □ GLORIAE DEI CANTORES 66

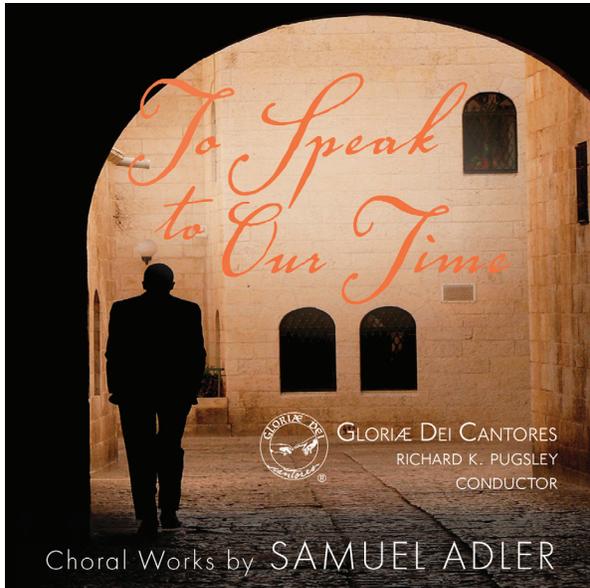
A new disc from Glorïae Dei Cantores (GDC), a marvelous choral ensemble based at the Church of the Transfiguration in Orleans, MA, surveys music by the American composer Samuel Adler (b. 1928). The major work on the release, *To Speak to Our Time*, also provides the disc's title. Scored for two violins and mixed chorus, *To Speak to Our Time* was commissioned by the Dresden Chamber Choir to commemorate the 80th anniversary of *Kristallnacht*. When *Kristallnacht* took place in 1938, Adler and his father, then living in Mannheim, Germany, barely escaped the Nazi attack. In *To Speak to Our Time*, Adler conveys "a message to society today of the plight of refugees worldwide [as] we must work for a world of peace." A Prelude and three Interludes, scored for the pair of violins, alternate with settings of a poem by Holocaust survivor Nelly Sachs (in German), *Psalm 121* (Hebrew), *Psalm 111* (Latin), and *Hymn 10*, paraphrased verses from *Isaiah 60:15-20* (English). Both the texts and their musical settings portray a journey from pain and hopelessness to a serenity achieved with God's loving intervention. *To Speak to Our Time* is representative of the Adler choral works and their performances by GDC. Adler's harmonic world is eclectic and flexible, designed to reflect and illuminate the texts. For example, both the Prelude and ensuing *The Choir of Wanderers* (the Sachs poem) explore atonality. Adler also turns to chromaticism and diatonic expression at various moments, sometimes within the same piece. Again, the controlling factor is the text and its dramatic import. But regardless of the harmonic setting, Adler's writing for the chorus is unfailingly beautiful, expressive, lyrical, and respectful of the human voice's potential and limits. And when performed by the voices of GDC, the impact is both moving and radiant.

The remaining works are all on a similar and gratifyingly high level. *A Hymn of Praise* (1957), premiered by a multi-faith choir of a thousand voices, is based on the Jewish chant, *Yigdal*. Adler composed *Let Us Rejoice* (from *Psalm 118:14-24*), scored for women's chorus and handbells, for his daughter's college graduation in 1988, and her alma mater's Mount Holyoke College Women's Glee Club. *My Beloved is Mine* (2013) was composed by Adler to commemorate GDC's 25th anniversary. As Adler comments: "The love of a man to his beloved or as in Christian theology, the love of Christ for His Church should, in this case, be interpreted as the love of a composer for an organization which has been so supportive of his work." Adler's *Choral Trilogy* served to commemorate the retirement of Edward Weaver, for 20 years the choirmaster and organist at Eastminster Presbyterian Church in Stone Mountain, GA. As per the Church's request, Adler set three of Weaver's favorite scriptures (*Psalm 22*, *Romans 8*, and *Psalm 149*), and gave considerable prominence to the organ. *Psalm 23* is a 90th birthday gift from Adler to his sister, Marianne. The concluding *How Sweet the Sound* is Adler's choral arrangement of *Amazing Grace*. Adler's publisher, Carl Fischer, commissioned the setting, with the request that it be in the spirit and style of Aaron Copland. Adler, a student of Copland's, achieves that goal, with a setting that evokes his teacher's arrangements of *Old American Songs*.

Throughout, the performances by GDC under the leadership of their Conductor/Director, Richard K. Pugsley, are exemplary for their tonal radiance, clear diction, and pristine ensemble. There is also an exuberance of spirit I find captivating. The joy of singing is apparent in every bar. The recording strikes an admirable balance of resonance and detail. Members of GDC provide the eloquent program notes. Texts and translations are also included. A marvelous disc in every respect. **Ken Meltzer**

5 Stars: Moving choral works by Samuel Adler, radiantly performed by Glorïae Dei Cantores

Apple Music



To Speak to Our Time:
Choral Works by SAMUEL ADLER

Richard K. Pugsley/
Gloriae Dei Cantores

CLASSICAL - 2022

Under Director Richard K. Pugsley, the US-based choir Gloriæ Dei Cantores has gained a reputation for its impeccable vocal blend as well as bold programming, including its recent championing of the music of Jewish composer Samuel Adler. Adler and his family escaped Nazi Germany in 1939, settling in the United States, where he went on to compose more than 400 works. European and American influences unite in his choral music, most notably in “Choral Trilogy”, an ambitious work for choir and organ that nods to both Herbert Howells and Adler’s teacher Aaron Copland. In “Psalm 23,” Adler sets Hebrew and English texts, acknowledging both his heritage and adopted home in music of mesmerizing beauty. “To Speak to Our Time,” commissioned for the 80th anniversary of Kristallnacht, brings the plight of refugees across the world into powerful focus.



ADLER A Hymn of Praise. Let Us Rejoice. My Beloved is Mine. Choral Trilogy. Psalm 23. To Speak to Our Time. How Sweet the Sound Richard K. Pugsley, cond; Gloriæ Dei Cantores
GLORIÆ DEI CANTORES 066 (SACD: 46:00)

Entitled *To Speak to Our Time*, this album of choral works of devotion speaks of composer Samuel Adler's core tenet that "Life is a Gift". After experiences at the hands of the Nazis at what is now known as "Kristallnacht," Adler and his family escaped Germany clutching a trunkful of music manuscripts.

Adler talks of the importance of setting sacred texts to him. He has worked closely with Gloriæ Dei Cantores for many years, and the conviction of their performances shines through. The texts celebrate the diversity of expression contained in the Biblical psalms, and also the joy. Certainly, the first two pieces (*A Hymn of Praise* and *Let Us Rejoice*) are decidedly celebrational, the latter encrusted with celestial-sounding handbells, while *My Beloved is Mine* (written to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Gloriæ Dei Cantores) introduces a sense of dialogue and transcendent beauty: particularly impressive here is the smoothness of the upper voices- legato.

The *Choral Trilogy* consists of "Why Have You Forsaken Me?"; "The Spirit Helps" and "Sing a new Song to God". Here the harmonic language becomes noticeably starker for the famous question "Why have you forsaken me" before "the Spirit helps us" (from Romans:8) furnishes some sort of answer. The idea here is that "nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God," words which seem to be questioned by the somewhat troubled harmonies. Rightly so, of course: as humans, we should question everything. A jubilant finale seems to banish any doubts ("Sing a new song unto God"), the rhythms here are sprightly and coupled with a real harmonic understanding throughout, particularly in how Adler uses different levels of dissonance to illuminate the text.

Interestingly, Adler sets Psalm 23 in both Hebrew and English. Hebrew is a mystical language in and of itself and as a result the music seems to attain ever more profound depths. Harmonies are deep and appealing, with the organ seeming to deepen the sense of mystery. Tuning from the choir is, as so often with this group, astonishingly pure. Adler's Psalm 23 is around five minutes; far longer is *To Speak to Our Time*, which is cast in eight movements, comprising an instrumental prelude, a "Chor der Wandernden," settings of Psalms 121 and 111, two Interludes and a final "Hymn 10". The piece was written for the 80th anniversary of *Kristallnacht*. The "Chor der Wandernden" is remarkable, with sparse choral lines and textures coupled with solo vocal lines creating a sense of disorientation. It is interesting to hear a dancing string Interlude thereafter whose lighter rhythms seem to bleed into Psalm 121. The second Interlude is a string song of lament, while the strings join the choir in the final "Hymn 10". Mirroring this is the way Adler's harmonic language itself seems a summation, or indeed a marrying, of consonance and dissonance. There is much beauty here, regardless of where one's beliefs might lie.

Finally, *How Sweet the Sound*; or, Adler's own setting of *Amazing Grace*. It is truly lovely, too. This is a disc for all lovers of choral music, and for all lovers of heartfelt compositions. Stunningly recorded, it is a sonic, mystical, treat. **Colin Clarke**

Five stars: This is a disc for all lovers of choral music, and for all lovers of heartfelt compositions



ADLER *To Speak to Our Time* • Glorïae Dei Cantores; Richard K. Pugsley, cond. • Naxos 2478756X (SACD; 46:20)

On March 4, 2022, Samuel Adler turned ninety-four years old. On April 15, 2022, Naxos will release *To Speak to Our Time*, an SACD which compiles pieces from sixty years of his composing career. Born in Mannheim, Germany, Adler came to America with his father in 1939; the story of their escape from the Nazis makes for fascinating reading. As the SACD booklet's notes relate, young Adler and his father found themselves inside their synagogue on Kristallnacht. As they collected sheet music in the loft of the synagogue, saving all that they could on that terrifying night, soldiers heard them from down below. It was the sudden collapse of the pipe organ that allowed Adler and his father to run and escape through an underground tunnel. His family took the last train out of Germany with their bags full of sheet music, paving the way for Adler to nurture his musical gifts in America.

The philosophy the mature Adler developed is that a composer should write "in the energy of his time." His mission has consistently been one of "healing or repairing our world so that by our life's work we would leave the world a better place when we depart from it." From what I know of Judaism, this seems a very Jewish—and admirable—aspiration.

At Boston University and Harvard, Adler studied with Aaron Copland and Walter Piston; the latter composer also taught Irving Fine, of the so-called "Boston school." (Just like Adler, Fine and his ilk who were Jewish experienced anti-Semitism—though the anti-Semitism they experienced was of that particularly American, "Ivy League" variety.) As much as one might want to put Adler into the category of "Boston school composer," it must be emphasized that (in keeping with his philosophy) his style does not sound like a throwback but rather fresh and timeless. Born Jewish, he would seem to be a fervent ecumenicist. I say this not only because of his stated mission but because the texts of several of his pieces are derived from the New Testament or from Christian hymns like "Amazing Grace." Then there are the organ-based accompaniments to pieces like "A Hymn of Praise," which naturally give them a "churchy" sound (the handbell accompaniment to "Let Us Rejoice" is very Presbyterian). Perhaps Adler's choice of Christian themes and style is a simple acknowledgement that since Christians outnumber Jews in America and worldwide, "to speak to our time" necessarily involves composing music to which Christians would relate. In any event, this is uplifting choral music written with the best of intentions, and it receives sterling performances by the Glorïae dei Cantores choir as conducted by Richard K. Pugsley. The recorded sound is luminous. *To Speak to Our Time* is a most welcome tribute to a fine composer and man. **Nicole De Sapio**

Five Stars: A Composer with a Unique and Positive Philosophy