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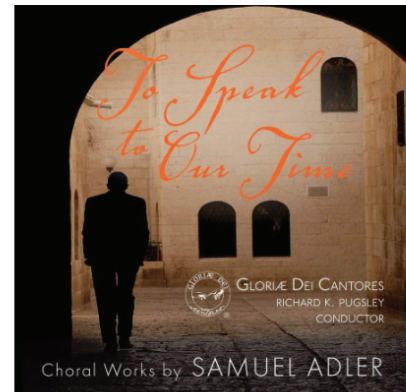
## ADLER To Speak To Our Time: Choral Works

Samuel Adler (b1928), who studied with Copland and Hindemith, taught for 63 years at the Juilliard and Eastman schools of music. Sixty of those years are represented on this album, including most notably the powerful title-piece, *To Speak to Our Time*, commissioned by the Dresden Chamber Choir for their remembrance concert on the 80th anniversary of Kristallnacht. The musical and emotional ghosts the topic raised for the composer, who grew up in the shadow of the Third Reich before his family escaped to America in 1939, take on new meaning in light of the Ukrainian invasion.

The 20-minute piece is scored unusually for a *cappella* choir and two violins, from which Adler has created music that stretches the familiar to express emotions that can be clearly understood from musical signals: dissonant, soaring choral lines and consoling, compassionate resolutions, woven through with strands of lyrical ecstasy and brief, enchanted solos. That its four choral movements are in different languages – Nelly Sachs's 'Chorus of the Wanderers' in German followed by Psalms in Hebrew, Latin and English – gives it a sad gravity. The singing is powerful, passionately sculpted and proud. The work's four short instrumental movements, providing abstract commentaries in the form of musical dialogues, are expertly played by Lucia Lin and Julianne Lee.

The unique St Cecilia organ at the Church of the Transfiguration on Cape Cod, its pipes located in suspended mahogany chambers lining the north and south sides, plays a key role, ubiquitous yet discreet, whether sounding glowing notes or more forceful phrases as signal posts. In *How sweet the sound*, a beautiful setting of 'Amazing grace', it illuminates the ending in a radiant embrace.

**Author:** Laurence Vittes



### ADLER To Speak To Our Time: Choral Works

A Hymn of Praise

Let Us Rejoice

My Beloved Is Mine

Choral Trilogy

Psalms 23

To Speak to Our Time

How Sweet the Sound

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SACD

Gloriae Dei Cantores GDCD 066

Stereo/Multichannel Hybrid

Classical - Vocal

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

Gloriae Dei Cantores

Richard K. Pugsley (conductor)

Review by Mark Werlin - Yesterday 02:11 pm

The very existence of the works on this album is a testimony to the resilience of the human spirit and the power of music to bridge divisions between the Jewish and Christian faiths.

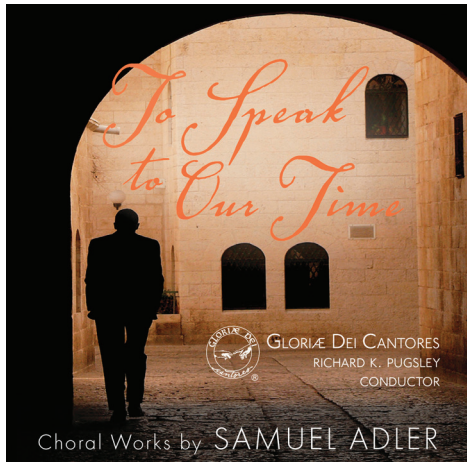
In his childhood in Mannheim, Germany, Samuel Adler witnessed an attack on his community's synagogue. The events of that night—Kristallnacht—prompted his family's escape from Europe and led him to a life dedicated to composing and teaching music in the US. It was Adler's particular gift for writing sacred choral music that brought him into fruitful collaboration with church choirs in the US and Europe. The shorter selections on "To Speak to Our Time" survey Adler's productions for commemorative occasions, and frame the lengthy title piece, which was premiered in 2018 by the Dresden (Frauenkirche) Chamber Choir.

The nine-part work, structured in segments for choir interspersed with interludes for two violins, incorporates texts in German, the language of Adler's childhood, Hebrew and Latin, the languages of Western liturgical music, and English, the language of his adopted home. A prelude for violins is followed by the first choral segment, a setting of the German-language poem "Chor der Wandernden" by the Jewish poet and Nobel laureate Nelly Sachs. The poem's final line (English translation) "Our death will lie like a threshold before your tightly shut doors!" echoes across the eight decades from 1938, the year of Kristallnacht, to 2018, the year of the work's premiere, to our present-day wars and upheavals that drive desperate refugees across borders. In its chromaticism and unresolved harmonies, Adler captures the unsettled mood of the mid-20th century; yet, over the course of nine movements, the composer finds a path through the darkness, towards the light of reconciliation and the possibility of redemption.

The emotional investment of Gloriae Dei Cantores and its conductor Richard K. Pugsley in this program of Samuel Adler's compositions is evident in these inspired performances. (It is rare that a music review can use that word in its original meaning.) The soprano solo in "Chor der Wandernden" ("O you guardians armed with flaming swords"), sung by Sr. Diana Shannon, conveys the universality of the refugees' suffering, and warns that such mistreatment will have consequences in future generations. In a sense, this performance recreates the dialogue between the Jewish author of the poem and the Christian writers of Sachs' generation. An omission from the otherwise excellent liner notes is that Nelly Sachs was saved from deportation to the concentration camps at the literal last moment through the intervention of her friend, the great Swedish writer Selma Lagerlöf.

## To Speak To Our Times – Choral Music by Samuel Adler – Gloriæ Dei Cantores

by Audiophile Audition | Aug 31, 2022 | Classical CD Reviews | 0 comments



*One of the best Adler discs available.*

**“To Speak to Our Time” = 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 – Gloriæ Dei Cantores/ Lucia Lin, Julianne Lee, v/ SharonRose Pfeiffer, Clara Gerdes. Org/ Richard K. Pugsley – Gloriæ Dei Cantores multichannel SACD GDCD 066, 49:10 \*\*\*\*\*.**

Few composers have had the ecumenical and orchestral/choral crossover like Samuel Adler, now 94 years old. German by birth, Jewish by faith, and American by chosen adopted country, his life traverses a large segment of the important, celebratory, and desperately tragic events of the 20th century, and part of the 21st. He has not confined himself to his native traditions; many ensembles of differing faith groups have sought him out for compositions, and few, I will wager, have come away disappointed.

This SACD gives us a wide variety of his stylistic proclivities, though curiously enough, it is difficult to pin him down as to how he was composing at any given period. Adler has a proclivity for writing in the mode he needs according to the text and his own feeling about the subject at hand.

*A Hymn of Praise*, based on the tune “Leoni,” familiar to Jewish and Christian traditions, is the oldest work here (1957). It is straightforward in approach, clearly hymnodic, with a slight alteration among verses according to the soloist(s) used. *Let Us Rejoice*, coming after *A Hymn of Praise* proves a bit jarring from the sudden use of a seven-person handbell choir. Of course, it could be argued that, aside from a Christmas album, *any* use of handbells would be startling, but here the effect is also wondrous in its intended result. For Adler marries the verses from Psalm 118 which Miriam sang when the Israelites were delivered out of Egypt, and no doubt many bells were heard that day. The piece was written for his daughter’s graduation from college in 1988.

*My Beloved is Mine* is a celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Gloriam Dei Cantores, in honor of the composer's collaborations with the ensemble, and reflective of the beauty of holiness, as the composer so states. The piece is transparent, uncomplicated, and affective, as is the biblical *Songs of Songs* that it seeks to interpret. *Choral Trilogy* is not as transparent, using modalities that are quite illuminative in the manner of Randall Thompson and Paul Hindemith's more benign works, two of the primary teachers that Adler encountered. The three movements are based on the words "Why have you forsaken me?" from Psalm 22, "The Spirit help us" from the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, and "Sing a new song to God" from Psalm 149. Each is a marvelous pedagogy in choral word interpretation, setting not a mood for the whole movement, but a mood for each declarative line of meaning.

The ever-beloved *Psalm 23* is a 90th birthday present for Adler's sister Marianne. The glories of the long musical line are emphasized here, with simple, though not always expected harmonies to that line, but the work alternates between harmonic richness and almost chant-like interspersions of unison singing. Add to that the sparse but effective intermittent commentary from the organ, and you have a unique take on what is certainly an overly familiar psalm.

Easily the most difficult, and emotionally challenging piece on this disc is *To Speak to Our Time*, composed and given for the eightieth anniversary remembrance concert of the infamous *Kristallnacht*, the horrid "night of broken glass," a pogrom against the Jews by the SS, civilians, and Hitler Youth in November of 1938. One does not expect cheery and jubilant music commemorating such an event, and one would be correct in finding none of that in this, one of Adler's greatest pieces. Yet the composer was not foolish enough to portray this event in the same way you might find in a soundtrack to a Nazi documentary. Instead, there is a progress from dismal yet reflective beginnings, to an apotheosis of hope at the end. The four movements are each preceded by a Prelude, then three Interludes, featuring two violins in various dispersions, each setting the stage for the choral pieces. The first is a poem by Nelly Sachs, "The Choir of Wanderers," speaking of the agonizing time the Jews had during World War II. What follows is one of the "psalms of ascent" which were sung upon pilgrimage to Jerusalem, in this case *Psalm 121* "I will lift up my eyes to the hills from which comes my help". *Psalm 111* appears next, a psalm of praise and supplication, finally capped by William Cooper's paraphrase of portions from the sixtieth chapter of the book of Isaiah, promising deliverance and freedom from oppression and war, and the only movement where the violins play simultaneously with the choir. Adler's purpose was to write a piece that draws attention to the plight of refugees worldwide.

Finally, *How Sweet the Sound* is a setting of the hymn *Amazing Grace*, done in an open interval, Copland-like soundscape, a lovely reinterpretation of this well-known hymn, and a fitting conclusion to a thoroughly enjoyable disc. Richard Pugsley has his famous choir in tiptop shape, easily (or they make it sound that way) navigating Adler's well-crafted choral creations. I must mention the superb surround sound, beautifully spaced, caught in the homebase Church of the Transfiguration in Orleans, Massachusetts. Also included is a first-class booklet with excellent notes, texts, and translations, rounding out a first-class production.

—Steven Ritter

Adler's "Choral Trilogy" sets three familiar Biblical passages, Psalm 22 and Psalm 149 from Hebrew scriptures, framing Romans, Chapter 8 from the New Testament. Here, as in "To Speak to Our Time", the text, vocal parts, and organ accompaniment are inextricably linked to the spiritual movement that guides the composition. Opening with the desolation of forsakenness and ending on cries of "hallelujah", this brief work encapsulates the faith experience common to all religions. The opening pieces, "A Hymn of Praise", "Let Us Rejoice", and "My Beloved is Mine", and the concluding "How Sweet the Sound" present the choir in glorious voice and jubilant spirits.

The recording, produced by conductor Richard K. Pugsley and Brad Michel, engineered by Dan Pfeiffer and Brad Michel, was made in the resonant acoustic of the Church of the Transfiguration, Orleans, Massachusetts. NativeDSD shows the original format as DXD; for those who prefer DXD, hi-res PCM, or higher-rate DSD files to physical SACDs, the album can be downloaded in those resolutions.

As on the ensemble's previous recording, *Pärt: Stabat Mater - Gloriæ Dei Cantores*, conductor Pugsley adroitly balances the density of the organ with the massed voices of the choir. I cannot offer a comparison to other interpretations; perhaps it is enough to say that these outstanding performances under Mr. Pugsley's direction feel completely sufficient, and in his grasp of the composer's intentions, definitive.

As a stereo-only reviewer, I confess to envying those who can enjoy this superbly recorded album in its full multichannel glory; organ pipes line the north and south walls of the church, providing a "surround" sound field to celebrants and audiences alike. All open-hearted music lovers will be rewarded with an inspiring listening experience.

For further listening: There are several recent recordings of Samuel Adler's music available from Presto Music in 24/96 resolution downloads and on CD. The 2018 Linn release "Samuel Adler: One Lives but Once" broadly surveys the scope of his symphonic and chamber works.

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Performance: ★★★★★  
Sonics (Stereo): ★★★★★





↓ **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

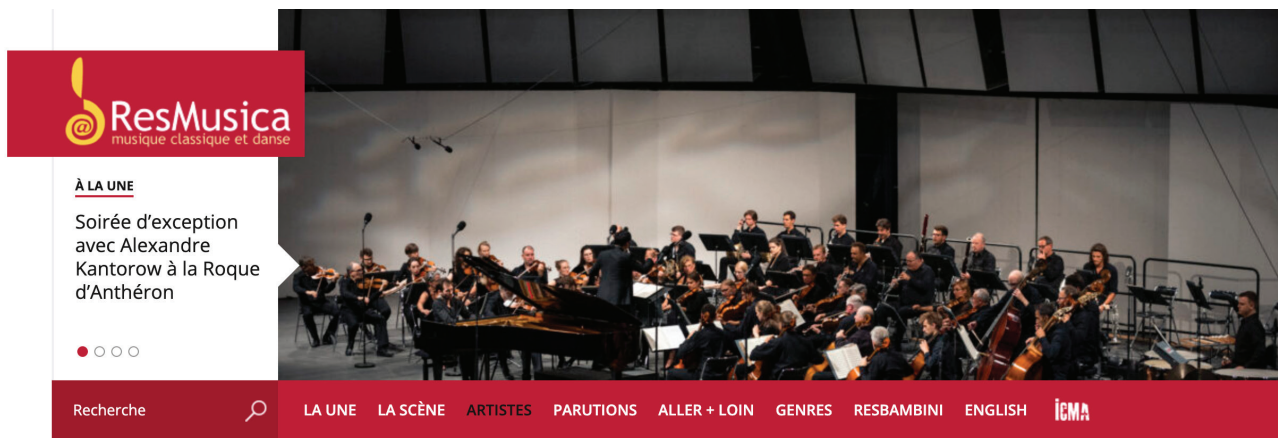
Gloria Dei Cantores has been a fixture in the Boston-area choral community almost since shortly its founding in 1988. Based at the Church of the Transfiguration in Orleans, MA, where they continue to provide liturgical music, the choir has toured, concertized, and recorded extensively over the last several 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.



## The vocal music of Samuel Adler, a shock wave, sublimated with skill by Glorïae Dei Cantores

August 1, 2022 by Frederic Muñoz

Samuel Adler occupies a place of choice among the composers of our time. His American musical life allowed him to experiment and develop all kinds of styles of the major characteristic currents of the XX<sup>e</sup> century. The musicians of Glorïae Dei Cantores are directed with conviction by conductor Richard K. Pugsley allowing us to enter the astonishing vocal music of the composer.

Known for his research in various musical fields including atonality or serialism, Samuel Adler's style emerges through the choice of very specific themes or rhythms often arranged randomly. This program of vocal pieces brings together a significant event of the composer's production in this field. The same title of the album "*Speaking to our time*" (*Speaking to our time*) places us well in a perspective of seduction to the listener.

The first piece *A Hymn of praise* is inscribed in the Anglo-Saxon vocal tradition in a tonal polyphony and charming, supported by the organ. We hear a solo verse just for the tenor Josua Kanaga. Then following, *Let Us Rejoice* explores other more difficult harmonic paths that give the work a tangy flavor that melts harmoniously into the generous acoustics of the Church of the Transfiguration in Orleans (Massachusetts, United States), the city where these musicians reside.

Later the author borrows passages from instrumental works to adapt them to the voices, as is the case from *My Beloved Is Mine*, which repeats the fragments of the second concerto for piano. *The Choral Trilogy* is very spiritual and is based on the texts of the Bible (Psalms 22 and 149 and an extra chapter of "Romans 8"). The choir dialogues with the solo organ, in an intense sound and delivers in a luminous and audaciously harmonic language that demands from the musicians a perfect mastery of musical discourse. The central part evokes the text from Romans - suddenly a climate of calm, by a choir sometimes at the limit of the murmur. The last part, set out like a fanfare, offers a Hallelujah where the voices and the organ combine their strength in a lively and sharp impact.

*Speaking to Our Time* represents the centerpiece of the album. Samuel Adler composed this a cappella work with the presence of two violins as Interludes between singing, again based on Psalms and Hymns, in eight sections. The composer mixes various languages including Latin, German, Hebrew and English, in a sign of peace and hope. The Interludes constitute a pair of string duos that propose an arid discourse, bordering on atonality. The choir comes alternately to comfort with its texts and melodies, more soothing or even reassuring. The last part brings together

the choir and the violins, the latter with their always tormented language, drawing the voices into a complex, dissonant and piercing dialogue. The CD ends with an indivisible sweetness with *How Sweet the Sound* representing the famous theme of *Amazing Grace*, an ancient popular melody from the 18th century. Samuel Adler expresses a musical tribute to Aaron Copland, of whom he was a pupil. He uses his language as closely as possible, nourished by serenity and plenitude and enveloped in the deep sonorities of the organ.

The members of *Gloriae Dei Cantores* are perfectly directed by Richard K. Pugsley and constitute an ideal group of musicians for such a repertoire. They all have an absolute mastery of their art, singers, violinists and organists, in the service of very demanding musical texts for the accuracy, the rhythms, and for the emotional impact that they arouse. Listening is warm, lively and inspiring, enough to make people love music that is often about discovery. Samuel Adler is one of the great American composers of the post-war period. This disc is a very beautiful reflection of his art.





***To Speak to Our Time: Choral Works by Samuel Adler***  
**Gloriae Dei Cantores / Richard K. Pugsley**

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## To Speak to Our Time: Choral Works by Samuel Adler Review by James Manheim [-]

Composer [Samuel Adler](#) was born into a Jewish family that fled Germany after Kristallnacht. He studied music in the U.S. and is sometimes classified with the "Boston school" of [Irving Fine](#) and others, but really his music is sui generis. It may include anything from the purest diatonicism to serial techniques. [Adler](#)'s choral music makes a good entrance point into his work in general, for one can hear the range of expressive purposes to which various musical styles may be put, set against texts that are themselves diverse. Some works, such as the closing How Sweet the Sound here (a re-setting of Amazing Grace), are nominally Christian, but in general, the music might be termed ecumenical in spirit. The centerpiece is the title work, with texts in German, Hebrew, Latin, and English, written to mark the 75th anniversary of Kristallnacht and first performed in Dresden. Beginning with a prelude in the general mode of the Second Viennese School, [Adler](#) deploys a host of styles in recounting the events from various perspectives. The choir Gloriae Dei Cantores and conductor Richard K. Pugsley specialize in sacred music with a broad, rounded American sound, and this music fits the group's talents. [Adler](#) has served on this choir's board, and this is its second album devoted to his music, but no one should think that any kind of quid pro quo was involved. This is quite simply a stunning album of American choral music, with superb sound from Massachusetts' Church of the Transfiguration.

# AMERICAN RECORD GUIDE

independent critics reviewing classical recordings and music in concert

## ADLER: Choral Pieces

To Speak to Our Time; Hymn of Praise; Why Have You Forsaken Me; The Spirit Helps Us; Sing a New Song to God; Psalm 23; How Sweet the Sound

Lucia Lin, Julianne Lee, v; Clara Gerdes, Sharon Rose Pfeiffer, org; Gloriæ Dei Cantores/  
Richard K. Pugsley – Gloriæ Dei 66 [SACD] 49 minutes

I have written for the Record Guide since 1993 and am pretty sure this is the first release I've been assigned devoted to the music of Samuel Adler (b 1928). It's about time! I've always liked Adler's music for its overall craftsmanship and for the elegance it conveys even when the harmonies grow thorny. You can hear this on display in *To Speak to Our Time*, a set of psalms punctuated by 5 interludes for 2 violins, which are played handsomely by a pair of fiddlers from the Boston Symphony. The music, though dissonant, never loses its poise.

Adler also writes colorfully for the organ, and I love it that the son of a synagogue cantor sounds as convincing setting St. Paul ("For I am convinced that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Jesus Christ") as he does rendering the 23rd Psalm in its original Hebrew. And if there is a lovelier arrangement of 'Amazing Grace,' I've yet to hear it.

The Cantores have grown into an excellent choir and they sing Adler's music like they mean it...The recording flatters the choir, the instruments (including the handbells in 'Let Us Rejoice'), and the composer's intentions. Mr. Adler deserved the best and he pretty much got it.

## GREENFIELD



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

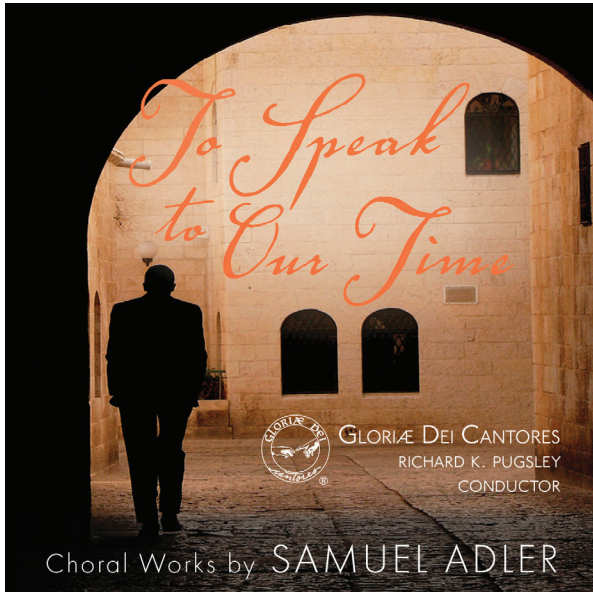
A new disc from Glorïae Dei Cantores (GDC), a marvelous choral ensemble based at the Church of the Transfiguration in Orleans, MA, surveys music by the American composer Samuel Adler (b. 1928). The major work on the release, *To Speak to Our Time*, also provides the disc's title. Scored for two violins and mixed chorus, *To Speak to Our Time* was commissioned by the Dresden Chamber Choir to commemorate the 80<sup>th</sup> 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 25<sup>th</sup> 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 90<sup>th</sup> 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.



# So Much Still to Say

## To Speak to Our Time

Choral Works by **Samuel Adler**

Gloriæ dei Cantores. \$13.50

Review by Christopher Hoh

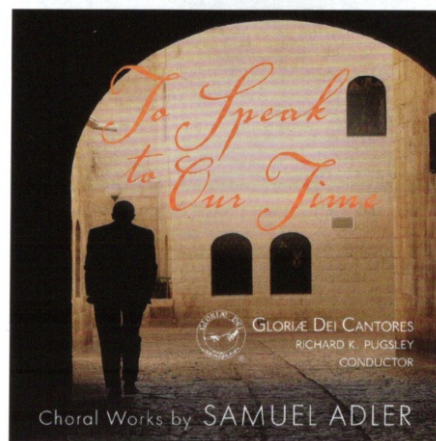
**T**hat Samuel Adler was a great composer was no revelation. Nor that he was a refugee from Nazi Germany. Nor that he headlined composition faculties at Eastman and Juilliard for decades. Nor that his hundreds of works transcended countries and religions. Nor even that he was a real mensch. But that he is composing prodigiously at age 94 — that was a surprise most pleasant. And he still has something to say.

In this album of choral works, Gloriæ Dei Cantores returns to territory the ensemble knows well. Its long love affair with the composer shows in fine, moving renditions. Richard K. Pugsley directs the forces with superb musical sense. “To Speak to Our Time,” the main work, presents eight movements for choir and two violins. Lucia Lin and Julianne Lee shine in violin

duets preceding each chorus, sometimes spare and angular, other times lyrical and lush.

“Chor Der Wandernden” (Chorus of the Wanderers) presents poet Nelly Sachs’s anguish in powerful, disturbing phrases, yet the refugees’ heavy tread and soul-crushing rejection is raised by soprano Diana Shannon’s bright, moving solos. “Psalm 121” (“My help comes from the Lord”) in Hebrew constitutes the next chorus. Its expansive music reassures in mostly homophonic sound while flowing with devotion and energy.

“Psalm 111” (“In you, Lord, have I trusted”) animates a particularly beautiful chorus through the Latin Vulgate text. Smooth unison lines recall chant origins, alternating with ravishing full-choir verses. In the final movement the violins join a grand chorus based on Isaiah 60 in William Cowper’s English versification (“Hear what ... the Lord hath spoken”). Its luminous music provides us the afflicted with a glorious promise of heaven. Throughout, the performers rise to the shifting demands of the music with a rich, confident sound.



Adler’s music is grounded in expanded 20th-century harmony, using crunches to move the music along rather than settling into today’s clichéd cluster chords; he maintains and develops melodic interest rather than holds static tones in suspended animation. It is not easy listening, but multi-layered musical activity suited to the multiple levels of meaning in the texts, deep and satisfying to my ear. Eight tracks of varied sacred anthems explore a range of moods and showcase the chorus in varied styles. The material, all in English and most accompanied, is ample for decent amateur choirs.

“Let Us Rejoice” pairs sopranos and altos with bells in lively celebration; the singers here sound particularly sweet. A tranquil “Psalm 23” begins in Hebrew, then turns to English; the choir in this emotes beautifully, whether on unison phrases or harmonized passages, under a masterful organ halo.

The album closes with a setting of “Amazing Grace” for choir and organ composed, as requested, as if Aaron Copland had written it. It’s a testament to Adler’s grace that he accepted the commission and delivered yet another gem. Again, Gloriæ Dei Cantores provides a sensitive, reverent performance. This is a recording I will listen to repeatedly and gladly give to others.

*Christopher Hoh is a composer/publisher and artistic consultant based in Arlington, Virginia. He is also a retired U.S. career diplomat and lifelong musician and concertgoer.*

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**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.

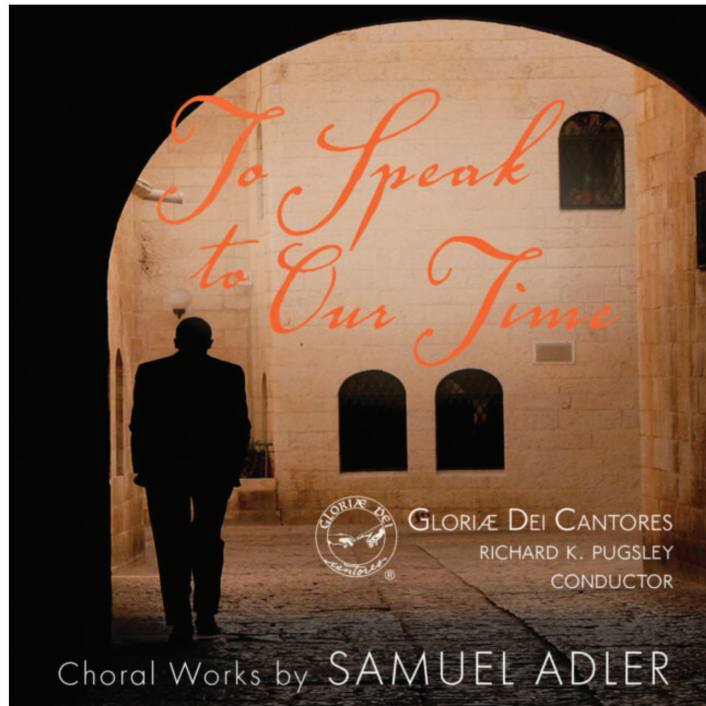
The *Choral Trilogy* consists of "Why Have You Forsaken Me?"; "The Spirit Helps" and "Sing a new Song to God". Here the harmonic language becomes noticeably starker for the famous question "Why have you forsaken me" before "the Spirit helps us" (from Romans:8) furnishes some sort of answer. The idea here is that "nothing shall be able to separate is 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 "Hymn10". 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

## Illuminating Truth & Beauty: The Choral Music of Samuel Adler



© December 8, 2022  
 ↳ Michael De Sapio  
 ↳ Arts & Culture Essays, Essays

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One of the ensemble’s frequent collaborators over the years has been composer Samuel Adler. Adler, who was born in 1928 and turned 94 this year, is something of a national treasure: a living link to the midcentury American musical “school” of Aaron Copland (who was among his teachers). He has particularly concentrated on sacred choral music, and the album *To Speak to Our Time* gathers together several of his pieces for choir and organ from a long career.

The centerpiece of the album is *To Speak to Our Time*, a cantata composed in 2018 for the eightieth anniversary of Kristallnacht, the infamous Nazi atrocity against the Jews. It is an event which Adler experienced firsthand.

The booklet notes to the CD recount the remarkable story of how he escaped Germany with his father on that very night in 1938. I could hardly improve upon the description:

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Adler's cantata has texts in four different languages: German, Hebrew, Latin, and English. What strikes you in sampling Adler's music, and his comments on it, is his sincere universality and ecumenical spirit. Born and raised Jewish and the son of a cantor, Adler worked for many years in Christian churches and he has set texts from both the Old and New Testaments. His *Choral Trilogy*, my favorite of the works on this album, sandwiches a text from Romans between two texts from the Psalms. There is a beautiful spiritual progression in both the texts and music of this triptych. The first movement sets "Why have you forsaken me," the words of Psalm 22 which Jesus appropriated on the Cross. The desolate mood of the opening of this movement gives way to an affirmation of divine authority at the end: "For dominion belongs to God, and He rules over all the nations." The second movement sets a well-known text from Romans, Chapter 8: "Our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us," providing a hopeful answer to the question posed in the opening movement. Finally, the last movement dances with the jubilant text of the penultimate Psalm: "Sing to the Lord a new song, sing His praises in the assembly of the righteous," with music that the CD booklet likens to a Jewish village dance.

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\*This essay was first published by *The Imaginative Conservative*, 17 September 2022.



### Michael De Sapio

Michael De Sapio is a writer and classical musician from Alexandria, Virginia. He attended The Catholic University of America and The Peabody Conservatory of Music. He writes Great Books study guides for the educational online resource SuperSummary, and his essays on religious and aesthetic topics have been featured in Fanfare and Touchstone, among other publications.

# **Gloriae Dei Cantores GD CD 066 Stereo/Multichannel Hybrid Classical - Vocal 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**

**Gloriae Dei Cantores**  
**Richard K. Pugsley (conductor)**

Coming from the Eastern Orthodox and Russian Orthodox choral traditions, Samuel Adler's compositions are, for me, something simultaneously familiar and entirely new. The opening piece on this disc, "A Hymn of Praise" is very familiar in its construction, hearkening back to my days in the US as a churchgoing Protestant, Episcopalian, and also in some of the more traditional Roman masses.

The rest of the pieces take the listener on quite the journey, and I went on it as well. The events of *Kristallnacht* were absolutely devastating, with 267 synagogues destroyed, seven thousand Jewish-run businesses damaged or destroyed and 30,000 Jewish men arrested and sent to the concentration camps all in a two-day period.

The "Night of Broken Glass" is a very appropriate metaphor to apply to the music of Samuel Adler on this disc, for in the selections offered here, the style and feel of most of the compositions is, to put it simply, *shattered music*, music that might well be the way one's soul feels prayer in the most discordant and frightening of times. Prayer may remain, but most of us lack the ability to be at absolute peace while all of life and worldly stability is ripped away...

In such moments, the music of the soul is not peaceful, even while it may remain consistent with prayer and the continuing effort to be faithful in such adversity. In expressing this state, the overall recording *A Hymn of Praise* is a great success. The question for this reviewer became that of how well the choir and musicians were able to interpret the incredibly complex emotion and spirit that Samuel Adler committed to paper in these works.

Shattered music is difficult to reproduce; to be able to sing in dissonance and hold it steady is no mean feat. As the CD begins, we 'go light' but it isn't long before we begin to experience what is going to dominate the recording later. In the title track, one finds what appears to be the first touch of plaintive "cracked beauty" in the soloist's intonation. The choir and organ are beautifully balanced...

*Let Us Rejoice* features glass bells which are beautifully recorded – a wonderful encompassing stereo field. However, dissonance begins to feature more prominently as the singing proceeds.

*My Beloved is Mine* features quite beautiful ensemble singing. Excellent choral diction. A cappella singing with very interesting modern interval leaps – Beautiful resolution on ending.

*The Choral Trilogy* launches us into dissonant singing in earnest, and for me the question in the review was about execution. The trilogy is strongly representative of the modern school of choral singing, and the choir carries it off superbly well.



*Psalm 23* continues in the modern style, tritonal at times, but quite a bit more gentle than the Trilogy. This work is sung in Hebrew and in English...This certainly shows Samuel Adler's expertise in this sort of sound, familiar to many listeners and singers of choral music in the West.

*To Speak to our Time* is a set of seven instrumental and choral works that bring us into the heart of the Kristallnacht atrocity itself. Everything about it is bitter, sad, dissonant, and again, shattered music, absolutely conveying in sound what the experience for Mr. Adler and those near and dear to him was.

By the time *To Speak to our Time* ends, the listener will have been on a harrowing musical journey indeed. So then, *How Sweet the Sound*, an organ-choir setting of *Amazing Grace* is indeed a sweet sound. The voicing is more in line with the familiar harmonization of this beloved hymn, but it is far richer, carrying forth the memory of the events into the grace and quiet after the catastrophe. It is interesting to me that Adler honed in on a Christian hymn to express this relief and conclusion to an awful point in Jewish history. The performance is flawless, and indeed, a very welcome and satisfying resolution to a harrowing and difficult musical journey.

This recording contained much that is unfamiliar to my ears and musical experience. While I claim significant classical training, it is precisely that – my orchestral repertoire is largely in the Classical and Romantic periods, and my choral repertoire is shaped by the Byzantine and Russian / Italian choral traditions. Therefore, this was almost entirely new listening for me, and I would say it was *necessary* listening, to show where the frontiers are.

The thematic material in this recording is not easy...It is an intense, deliberate journey through a very dark period in history, and it is a deeply personal composition that is, quite frankly, brilliant and fascinating. I highly recommend it, and give great credit to Gloria Dei Cantores, its director and producer Richard K. Pugsley, and sound engineer Dan Pfeiffer...for producing a truly excellent recording...The journey you will take in this music is no easy road, but you may recognize in your own heart and soul much of what Samuel Adler has expressed in such an exquisite fashion.

Seraphim Hanisch  
Producer/Sound Engineer  
Moscow, Russia

Samuel Adler – To Speak To Our Time  
Gloriae Dei Cantores; Richard K. Pugsley  
Gloriae Dei Cantores GD CD 066  
([gdcrecordings.com/new-release-samueladler](http://gdcrecordings.com/new-release-samueladler))

With over 400 published works to his name, Samuel Adler is a composer who is difficult to fit into a single category or niche. This recording focuses specifically on Adler's religious choral music and how the composer's versatility and wide-ranging style take us on a journey blending contemporary musical techniques with the influence of his Jewish heritage. Adler was born in Mannheim, Germany, where his father was a highly respected synagogue cantor and liturgical composer. Within a year after the nationally orchestrated pogrom known as Kristallnacht, the Adler family emigrated to America, where the elder Adler obtained a position as a cantor in Massachusetts and Samuel began demonstrating his musical talents. He became his father's choir director when he was only 13 and remained at that post until he began his university studies. During that early period, he began composing liturgical settings, at first under his father's influence and soon developing his own style. From the very beginning of this recording, the opening A Hymn of Praise demonstrates this Jewish influence, setting the text to a traditional Yigdal melody commonly known as the hymn tune LEONI. The remaining texts, taken from the Psalms and Old Testament, recount God's goodness on the journey of life and through the hills, valleys and mountaintop, and every emotion from pain to joy, disappointment to elation and sorrow to hope. The musical settings of these texts are a delight to the ears, wonderfully rich and robust, and brought to life with energy and joy by Gloriae Dei Cantores and their director Richard K. Pugsley.

*Matthew Whitfield*

## TransCentury Communications

### TONES OF TODAY

Samuel Adler: *To Speak to Our Time*; *A Hymn of Praise*; *Let Us Rejoice*; *My Beloved Is Mine*; *Choral Trilogy*; *Psalms 23*; *How Sweet the Sound*. Gloriæ Dei Cantores conducted by Richard K. Pugsley. GDC Recordings. \$19.99 (SACD).

Here are recordings that rapidly dispel any notion of “contemporary classical music” being all of a type. In fact, while some of the works heard on these releases will certainly fit most listeners’ expectations of avant-garde music – for better or worse – one of the discs will surprise audiences with the extent to which it is steeped in distinctly old-fashioned and very moving and meaningful approaches to sound and emotional communication. Indeed, the choral music of Samuel Adler, although it often partakes of rhythmic and harmonic techniques developed in the 20th century and persisting into the 21st, quite deliberately puts the communicative potential of words first and foremost so as to draw the audience into a sound world filled with meaning and expressiveness. The newest recording of Adler’s music by the splendid Gloriæ Dei Cantores vocal ensemble is nowhere clearer in this regard than in the eight sections of *To Speak to Our Time*, a work commissioned for the 80th anniversary of Kristallnacht (November 9-10, 1938) – a time when Adler and his father barely escaped the Nazis, taking with them bags filled with sheet music. The horrors of the depredations of that night are modulated (pretty much literally) in Adler’s work, which dwells not on fear and terror but on overcoming adversity and, even while mourning, finding a way to look ahead to the future and above toward God. *To Speak to Our Time* includes settings of two Psalms (Nos. 111 and 121) among its movements, and the work’s totality ranges through emotions from pain (expressed using some notable dissonance) to affirmation and hope. Under Richard K. Pugsley, Gloriæ Dei Cantores attains and sustains remarkable sensitivity in interpreting Adler’s music, whose instrumental interludes heighten the emotive elements of the choral material even further. Adler is well aware of the ensemble’s quality and sensitivity: another work on the new GDC Recordings disc, *My Beloved Is Mine*, was written specifically to celebrate Adler’s relationship with the chorus, on the occasion of Gloriæ Dei Cantores’ 25th anniversary (2013). The remaining works on this very well-recorded SACD express many of the same themes as *To Speak to Our Time*, but in more-compressed form. *A Hymn of Praise* is a forthright affirmation of the goodness of God; *Let Us Rejoice* has a uniquely exuberant sound, thanks to scoring for women’s voices and handbells; *Psalms 23*, set in both Hebrew and English, is given an especially comforting setting for its familiar words. Also here is the more-extended *Choral Trilogy*, whose three parts move from the well-known lament about a believer fearing being forsaken by God to, in the last movement, a praise-filled affirmation of God’s essential goodness and worthiness to be celebrated with great joy. The final piece on this disc is a quieter and, in its own way, even more moving celebration: *How Sweet the Sound* is Adler’s setting of *Amazing Grace*, and it is filled with a sense of uplift that permeates words and music alike. To be sure, modern vocal music, especially modern sacred vocal music, is not to all tastes, so this disc is somewhat self-limited in audience reach by the very nature of its contents. But it is certainly not limited by its sonic accessibility and the tremendous attentiveness to detailed expressiveness brought to the music by composer and performers alike. Indeed, the main complaint about the recording by those who will find it gorgeously captivating in sound and meaning will be that, at less than 50 minutes, it is simply too short.



## Illuminating Truth & Beauty: The Choral Music of Samuel Adler

By Michael De Sapio | September 17th, 2022 | Categories: Audio/Video, Michael De Sapio, Music, Senior Contributors

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The centerpiece of the album is *To Speak to Our Time*, a cantata composed in 2018 for the eightieth anniversary of Kristallnacht, the infamous Nazi atrocity against the Jews. It is an event which Adler experienced firsthand. The booklet notes to the CD recount the remarkable story of how he escaped Germany with his father on that very night in 1938. I could hardly improve upon the description:

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**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