

"OF SACRED TIME AND SEASONS"

A Jazz Cantata

Presented at

Temple Beth Elohim
Eighth Avenue and Garfield Place
Brooklyn, New York

Friday Evening, November 2, 1973

as a Memorial Tribute

to

CYNTHIA R. ROFFMAN

Lyrics:
Daniel Polish

Music:
Jonathan Klein

Voices: Beth Harrington
Doug Lees

Instruments: Sal Spicola
Jaxon Stock
Michael Goodrick
Steve Swallow
Ted Seibs
Jonathan Klein

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by a memorial gift of Miriam and David Klein.

OF SACRED TIME AND SEASONS

Daniel Polish

Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote:

"Judaism is a religion of time aiming at the sanctification of time.... Judaism teaches us to be attached to holiness in time, to be attached to sacred events, to learn how to consecrate sanctuaries that emerge from the magnificent stream of the year.... Jewish ritual may be characterized as architecture of time.... The main themes of faith lie in the realm of time.

To us Jews, God is universal. He is not confined to any one natural phenomenon. And he is not confined to any one place. For us, God is Melech Ha'Olam - Master of the cosmos. He rules all creation. He is everywhere. But Olam has another dimension. It also means eternal, it evokes a sense of the timeless, and the timely.

For we know of a special arena of the holy -- the arena of time.

Tonight we shall look for the holy in time,

We shall find the sacred in the cycle of the year.

The tradition prescribes a special prayer be read at every evening service. And the pious read it daily. It tells of the coming on of evening. But it points to God the fashioner of time. It tells of God's artistry in fashioning the day and the days. God the maker of hours and of seasons. The craftsman of light and dark.

As we begin the journey through the year, we praise God, Hama'ariv aravim, the bringer-on of evening.

(antiphonal Ma'ariv aravim: Hebrew/English)

Song: 1-Hama'ariv Aravim

O God You are Blessed

Ruler of the world

Who makes the evening come

by His word

Who opens heaven's gates

with understanding

Text

Who orders the stars in their night watches

by His will

Adonai Tseva'ot -- The Lord of Hosts

is His name

God living and enduring

rule over us forever

O God you are Blessed

Who brings on evening

(Musical interlude)

It is fall. The leaves robe the trees in majestic purple and crimson. The season of growth ends, and the season of harvest begins

the season of reaping

the season of gathering in

For Jews, too, it is a time of ending and beginning

a time of gathering in

and a time of majesty

Yamin Noraim: The Days of Awe, the time of review and anticipation.

The old year is ended

The book of the past is closed

Our actions are accounted

our deeds yielding the harvest

of their consequences

And we come before God the King

to examine what we have been

to confess where we have

fallen short

to pledge ourselves to better

In the time ahead

On Rosh Hashanah we make a new beginning

On Yom Kippur we pray that that beginning

will be more bountiful in righteousness

than the last

On Yom Kippur, man comes before his fashioner

with a knowledge of his frame:

Song 2-You Are the Mark

I am so little

and You are so much

I am so frail

and you so beyond fragility

I yield to expediencies

You - beyond the moment

I so often miss the mark

You, You are the mark

On Yom Kippur, man is called before God to atone

to tell of his short-comings

But there is a story

a lovely story

a shocking story

of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev

Reb Levi Yitzchak mounted his pulpit one Yom Kippur

he stood before God.

Before him

a people buffeted by adversity

drowned in sorrow

a people all too familiar with want
with deprivation
with fear

Beyond him - the Soul of the universe

the Master of mercies

But this year Reb Levi did not repent

this year Reb Levi demanded

that God repent

that God himself look at what He had done

to his Jews:

Song 3-Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev

I Reb Levi

Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev

Son of Sarah of Berdichev

I

Come to address You God

Master of the cosmos God

And I say

Master, when You talk

to whom do You talk?

only Amcha - Israel your people.

And when You command

whom do You Command?

only Amcha

Are there not other peoples

Amorites, and Perizites, Mideanites, and Ishmaelites

in days of yore

English, and French, Russian and Polish

in our time.

But them You do not address
them You do not command
only us

We must be special to you
You must look on us with love
And it is only us

Who glorify and magnify and sanctify your name
The Russians bless their czar
The English bless their King
But we and we alone bless You our God
Why is it then O God

that in every age
and in every place
Your people come to grief
are visited with anger
are tormented by hate
are expelled,
condemned,
and killed

Why is it that we
we Your chosen few
know want
and fear
and grief

So now I say to You O God
master of the cosmos God
That I shall not leave this spot
shall hold my place

but not my tongue
Until You make T'shuvah
until You Yourself atone
until You shall call a halt
to all the sorrow
and sadness
and sighs.

Until You treat this people
as if it were Your own
the hearer of Your words
the object of Your love
the speaker of Your praise
Glorified and magnified and sanctified be Your name

The story ends
Did Levi Yitzchak feel that God atoned
Did he accept God's t'shuvah
and forgive Him

Or is he standing still
on some holy Bimah
In some sacred place
standing
and waiting
and praying that God atone for the hurts of His people

(Musical Interlude) Song 4-Interlude

Winter - a time of fear and hope
From earliest times man has felt terror at the strange
unseen forces of the dark

Our Rabbis tell a story

When God created our ancestor Adam

His work was done in the morning

Night came and dark

and Adam fell into a wail

of terror and despair

Here I have lived just one short day

and now it's all over

Only the rising sun solaced his grief

and he learned that night

is not the end

only another aspect of life

But perhaps some of the terror remains for us

his children

Perhaps that is why we say the Shma

when we lie down to sleep

Just as we are told to do

in the last moment of life itself.

The dark frightens us

And winter is the time of the great dark

the days grow shorter

and dark comes on earlier

It is time of gloom

as we retreat to our houses

and ward off the lengthening shadows

But it is also a time of hope

For even as the days seem to be yielding

before the forces of night

we know that eventually
the tide of battle will change
and the light will prevail
In Chanukah we share this elemental conflict
As we light more and ever more lights
we express a confidence
in the triumph of light over darkness
So, too, the story of the Maccabees is a story of fear and hope
the dark despair of the people
subjected to tyrannical rule
yields to the bright hope
of the triumph of the forces of right
In the realms of both nature and history
One will holds sway
And we sing praises to HaTzur
The Rock
The Rock upon which creation rests
the Rock of our enduring hope
the Rock of our salvation

Song 5-Ma'oz Tzur Yeshuati

Ma'oz tzur Yeshuati
L'cha Na'eh l'shabe'ach
Tikon beIt t'filati
V'sham todah n'zabe'ach
Mitzur ham'nabe'ach
oz agmor
b'shir mizmor
chanukat hamizbe'ach

Mighty Rock of salvation
I rejoice in praising You
Who saved the overwhelmed nation
And now that the battle's through
We'll right the house of prayer
so Your presence can be felt there
And when we're done
our songs as one
Shall rise in dedication

In every age and every place
Your people have known woe
But your mighty saving grace
Turned aside the foe
And through time we've learned
That our existence has been earned
Not by might
But by right
We are shielded in Your embrace

(Repeat Hebrew)

(Musical interlude—variations on Ma'oz tzur theme.)

1. It is the middle of the year
2. Intermission. Intermission everybody.
3. Showtime. Showtime
1. Yes Showtime
2. Bring on the Clowns.

Purim is not a holiday that makes a lot of sense
Just a few weeks after Chanukah

it seems to tell the Chanukah story all over again
The Jews are jeopardized
the protagonists persevere
and the villain is vanquished
No one really takes the story literally
And it is a little silly

Song 6-Here's a Scary Story

O here's a scary story
and it happened long ago
It may strike you as gorey
but I think you ought to know
Of how the vizier of King Ahashueras
did his darnedest to impair us
and almost did ensnare us
until fate luckily did spare us
And it was he who chance brought low

Now Ahashueras was the king of a hundred twenty-seven lands
and the future of his subjects really rested in his hands
He caused Haman to be exalted
as everyone must know
And when Haman passed the people halted
and bowed themselves down low
and conducted themselves just so
resting chin upon the toe
In respect for his commands

Everyone that is with the omission
of our hero noble Mordechai
Who said with your permission
I'll just stand and look him in the eye

For I bow to God alone
and I would have to atone
if it were to be known
or if somebody had shown
I had revered Haman on the sly
Well that damaged Haman's self-esteem
and he said when I am through
I will rid this whole regime
of its last remaining Jew
Then he pleaded with the king
and asked for a simple thing
which his friendship ought to bring
Just give me
the signet ring
So I can write a law or two
Now the King initialed a decree
while he was in a royal haze
Than Haman would be free
in completely legal ways
to posit on the Jewish population
a bit of neat eradication
without any hesitation
be done with that wretched nation
But he ignored Esther's limpid gaze
When Mordechai - on him be peace
heard of this threat to Jewish life

He lamented to his niece

who was also Ahashueras' wife

"help me Esther, help, help, me Esther"

she agreed to do what she was able

and in the style of oriental fable

spread a lovely dinner table

then when Haman became unstable

She begged Ahashueras for surcease

Now the story ends with pleasure

unless Haman is your name

And the people always treasure

how Haman finally earned his fame

He built gallows for our destruction

but there ensued a mighty ruction

and the end of the production

was they used the same construction

to catch that rogue in his own game.

And the darkness does yield to light

and death to life

Nature seems reborn in the spring

The earth breaks out of its shackles

buds appear on the trees

and flowers fight through the debris

of fall's leaves

a green mantle spreads over creation

the joyous sound of birds is heard again

and among the shepherds spring lambs

begin to skip about

The earth is vibrant
as if creation itself were singing the praises
of God.

Song 7-Darkness Does Yield to Light

Long ago, in another place
our people too went from death to life
We too threw off shackles
as we came out of Egypt
Free men after generations of slavery
Israel was born again
Given new life - in the spring

The event was more than a fleeting moment
In the expanse of history
The exodus and the slavery that yielded to it
are the forge of the Jewish spirit
The soul of the people was shaped
between the hammer and the rock
of that hard place

The Torah reverberates with the lessons
of yetziat mitzraim -
the great going forth of the Jewish people:

I am the Lord your God who brought you up out of the land
of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

For I am the Lord that brought you up out of the land of Egypt
to be your God. You shall therefore be holy as I your God
am holy

The stranger that sojourns with you shall be to you as one of
your own, and you shall love him as yourself for
you were strangers in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord

A stranger you shall not oppress

for you know the heart of the stranger

seeing that you were strangers in the land of Egypt

If your brother should become poor and without means

then you shall uphold him

and enable him to live beside you

I am the Lord your God who brought you forth out of the land

of Egypt

to give you what you have

and to be your God

Observe the Sabbath day to keep it holy as the Lord your God

commanded you

Six days shall you labor

but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God

And you shall remember

that you were slaves in the land of Egypt

And the Lord your God brought you out from there

with a mighty hand

and an outstretched arm

Therefore the Lord your God commanded you

to keep the Sabbath day.

Spring ripens to harvest

to Shavuot

the festival of Ingathering

the feast of our fullness

as we reaped the Torah at Sinai

and beyond - to summer

Summer - the season of heat

heat that enlivens

and that enervates

and it brings the awful month of Av

and tisha b'Av the ninth day of the month of Av

fire which sanctifies the other holidays

is here a symbol of consuming destruction

In the summer heat

we remember the flames which devoured the Temple

leveled the sacred city of Jerusalem

and sent the people into exile

Tradition has commemorated this ninth of Av

with the words of Lamentations

Song 8-Ninth of Av

How does the city sit deserted

she that was full of people

How she is like a widow

she who was great among the nations

She who was like a ruler

is now like a slave

Remember O Lord

what has become of us

Look upon our disgrace

Our promised inheritance

has been turned over to strangers

Our ancestral home

to those we do not know

We have become like orphans

without a father

our mothers like widows

We have to pay money to drink our own water

our own wood is sold to us

Our necks ache from the yoke

our backs from ceaseless labor

All the sins of our fathers and their fathers

are visited on us

We are slaves to slaves

and there is no one to save us from them

We risk our lives to get food

Our skin is scorched by the furnace of famine

Our young women are ravished in our cities

Our young men hanged in the courtyard

Our elders are disgraced

they have ceased sitting in council

Young people no longer make merry

Any joy has been stopped

celebration turned to mourning

For all this our heart sighs

for all this our eyes dim

Mount Zion is the prowling ground of foxes

But You O God

You are enthroned forever

You rule in every generation

Will You forget us forever

foresaking us to the end of days.

Turn us O God to You

and we shall be turned

Renew our days as of old

Unless You have utterly cut us off

and are unendingly angry at us.

Like the glass shattered at the end of the wedding

The Temple falls to ruin

at the end of the year.

The year begins with the majesty of the Yamin Nora'im

God is enthroned in glory

It ends with the destruction of His palace

We are left in despair

yet it is a hopeful despair

We look to the new enthronement

to the new beginning

As time begins anew

(Musical interlude)

Song 9-Bless This Year

O Lord our God

Bless this year

Cause all its yield

to be for the good

Satisfy us with Your goodness

Bless our year

May it be in the number

of the good years

O Lord You are Blessed

Who blesses the year

Amen

RABBI DANIEL F. POLISH

Rabbi Polish received his B.A. in Philosophy from Northwestern University in 1964. He was ordained at the Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati, Ohio in 1967 where he received his B.H.L. and M.A.H.L. degrees.

In September, 1967, Rabbi Polish entered the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences at Harvard University where he is currently working on his doctoral thesis.

Rabbi Polish has taught at Harvard and Tufts Universities and lectured at Boston University and Brandeis College.

Rabbi Polish is currently the Associate Director to INTER/MET, a national inter-denominational training center for clergy, in Washington DC. He also serves as Rabbi of Temple Beth Ami in Potomac, Maryland.

Rabbi Polish is married to the former Lorretta Breslow. They are the parents of a three year old son, Jonathan.

JONATHAN KLEIN

Jonathan Klein, the composer, is a 1970 graduate of Brown University. For three years with the faculty of the Berklee College of Music, Mr. Klein is now working as a free-lance composer, arranger, and performer in the Boston area.

As a member of NFTY at Temple Emanuel in Worcester, Massachusetts, headed by his father, Rabbi Joseph Klein, Mr. Klein composed "Hear O Israel", a Sabbath Service in Jazz. This work was also performed at Temple Beth Elohim as well as at several other congregations.