



# PRESS RELEASE

Karen P. Thomas, Artistic Director and Conductor

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SEATTLE PRO MUSICA PRESENTS

## Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms*

The acoustic grandeur of St. James Cathedral is ideal for Leonard Bernstein's beloved *Chichester Psalms*, evocative settings of Hebrew psalms for choir, harp, organ and percussion. This evening of American music for the cathedral also includes Randall Thompson's ground-breaking *The Peaceable Kingdom* and exciting new works by American composers, including local composers from the Pacific Northwest. Seattle Pro Musica's second concert in our NEA-funded American Masterpieces season spans the 1930s up through the 21<sup>st</sup> century, chronicling the rise of choral music's popularity in the United States, where 28.5 million people regularly sing in choral ensembles.\* (See page 2 for additional concert details.)

**Friday, March 9, 2007**                      **8:15 pm**  
**Saturday, March 10, 2007**              **8:00 pm**  
St. James Cathedral | 9<sup>th</sup> & Marion, Seattle

### Ticket Information

Single tickets range in price from \$15 to \$23.

For more information call Seattle Pro Musica at **(206) 781-2766** or go to **[www.seattlepromusica.org](http://www.seattlepromusica.org)** for online ordering.

Seattle Pro Musica | 2006-2007 American Masterpieces Season | supported in part by The National Endowment for the Arts, ArtsFund, The Seattle Foundation, The Boeing Company, the Washington State Arts Commission, 4Culture, and City of Seattle, Office of Arts & Cultural Affairs.

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\* According to a 2003 study published by Chorus America, [www.chorusamerica.org](http://www.chorusamerica.org)

The March 9 & 10 concerts feature two important 20<sup>th</sup>-century American works which speak eloquently of humanity's capacity for compassion and tolerance on the one hand, and aggression and conflict on the other hand - **Leonard Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms*** and **Randall Thompson's *The Peaceable Kingdom***. *Chichester Psalms* is one of Bernstein's most popular and beloved pieces, filled with his trademark lively rhythms, asymmetrical meters, angular melodies, surprising accents and use of speech rhythm in song. The fluidity with which Bernstein moves between concert music and vernacular idioms such as jazz, blues, and the Broadway musical creates an indelibly American musical style. Our performances feature boy soprano Theo Floor, organist Joseph Adam, harpist Naomi Kato, and percussionist Rob Tucker.

*Chichester Psalms* was commissioned in 1965 by Dr. William Hussey, dean of Chichester Cathedral, who noted to Bernstein in a letter that "many of us would be delighted if there was a hint of *West Side Story* about the music." Bernstein obliged by including music that he removed from *West Side Story* and the aborted musical *The Skin of Our Teeth*, giving the work a decidedly Broadway sound. Bernstein admitted this to Hussey in a letter in May 1965: "It is quite popular in feeling . . . and it has an old-fashioned sweetness along with its more violent moments." The violence Bernstein refers to is his musical depiction of nations at war in the second movement (music originally intended for *West Side Story*), which is contrasted with the final peaceful moments of the last movement: "Behold how good and pleasant it is, for brethren to dwell together in unity." Thus the over-arching theme of *Chichester Psalms* shows the contrasts inherent in the human condition – aggression, conflict and inhumanity as opposed to compassion, understanding and tolerance – the same depiction of human nature which Randall Thompson portrayed in a different musical idiom in his *The Peaceable Kingdom*.

**Randall Thompson** is recognized as one of the finest composers of American choral music – his choral music was more widely performed than that of any other American composer up to his time. During his career he combined both teaching and composing, serving as director of the Curtis Institute of Music as well as a professor at his alma mater, Harvard University. His students included both Samuel Barber and Leonard Bernstein. Thompson's 1935 large-scale a cappella choral work, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, was inspired by the painting of the same name by the American primitive painter Edward Hicks. Thompson was also moved by the biblical passage portrayed in the painting (Isaiah, 11:6-9), which begins: "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the wolf and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them." Thompson chose passages from the book of Isaiah and constructed his imposing choral cycle based on the dramatic narrative of the texts. *The Peaceable Kingdom* has become an American classic and a moving examination of human nature, conflict and reconciliation.

Also on the program are works from the standard repertory of American choral music, as well as newer works by current American composers. **Samuel Barber's** well-loved **Agnus Dei** is recognizable to most audiences as a transcription of the *Adagio for Strings*, which in turn is a transcription (made by the composer, at the request of Toscanini) of the second movement of Barber's *String Quartet in B minor*. The work is familiar to most listeners as the *Adagio for Strings*, and as such has tapped deep into the national psyche – it was performed at the funerals of John F. Kennedy and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and on many other occasions of mourning.

Among the newer works on the concert are pieces by Northwest composers **Gregory Youtz** (on the faculty of Pacific Lutheran University), Seattle Pro Musica's conductor **Karen P. Thomas**, **Frank Ferko** from the Bay Area and **Janika Vandervelde** from Minneapolis. These composers are each represented by works composed on texts by the 12<sup>th</sup> century abbess and poet Hildegard von Bingen, each composer using a different compositional style to express the ecstatic visions of the poet.

Contemporary composers **Kevin Siegfried** and **Harold Owen** each contribute arrangements of traditional American songs from the Shaker and Shape-note traditions, including a gospel-style arrangement of the perennial favorite, *Amazing grace*.

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