

Gilead Mishory

Psalm – for eight male voices and string quartet

The motivation for this composition originated from Celan's poem "Psalm", which portrays a theological view of human "death-life" and the desire for a compassionate God in spite of his nonexistence.

The incredibly powerful, profound text moves – in the historical and religious perspective – among several associative levels. Celan's poem inspired me to create a musical counterpart to his type of speech-song recitation (German). Motifs which remind one of Jewish prayer particles (i.e. microtonal elements) stand side-by-side with the Christian choral tradition (Praetorius' "Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming"). In the course of this piece, the string quartet acts as an "anti-community". It plays a type of wordless shadow of the prayer – at times struggling with the spoken text of the choir, but also taking over the role as the church choir. The choir weave which opens and closes the piece, on the other hand, sounds similar to a prayer group of Jewish men. In this weave the eight male singers are free to choose from a list of syllables and to use them in an improvising way. The syllables originally belong to the text of a Hebrew psalm but they are intentionally put out of order so that a type of "anti-psalm" is created.

Performance duration: c. 9 minutes

Another version of this piece makes up the central, second movement of the string quartet "Psalm" based on three poems by Celan.