

A WORD ABOUT 'MUSICAL MIDRASH'

[The JUBAL'S LYRE Hypothesis]

In this concert, you will hear Psalms 27 and 30 sung in Hebrew, English, Latin, German, French and Venetian Italian. The provenances of the musical settings range wide: they include, for example, 16th century Flanders and 20th century Minnesota.

Such a polyglot presentation of psalms is a fitting way to honor one of the psalmist's own injunctions:

"Praise the Lord all ye nations!" [psalm 117, verse 1]

But there is another reason for such a presentation...

Jewish literary tradition has characteristically sought to understand and illuminate its texts by collecting and juxtaposing diverse interpretations that have flourished around them. Jewish tradition calls this enterprise "midrash". The idea is that the whole truth about a text, never fully to be understood perhaps, dwells at the convergence point of the various interpretations, sometimes apparently incompatible, that the text allows or inspires.

Now it has often been said that a translation of a text into another language must necessarily be an interpretation, and the same could be said of setting a text to music:

Setting a text to music is one way to interpret and understand the text.

Now, if several settings of the same text, in different languages and various styles, are brought together in concert, does it perhaps follow that the text will be heard as the object of a lively, creative investigation, a kind of "**musical midrash**"? And that the text will be illuminated thereby, better understood and appreciated? That, at any rate, is what you might call the JUBAL'S LYRE hypothesis.

