




FLEEING WAR,  
COMPOSING PEACE  
THE EVOLUTION OF JEAN BERGER  
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Jean Berger (1909-2002) was a leading figure in American choral music in the latter half of the twentieth century. Both as a musician and person, Berger seemed to personify cosmopolitanism. His name was French, his music was influenced by the South American sounds he encountered during a year in Brazil, and within his adopted homeland he was both a successful composer and a highly regarded teacher and lecturer on the choral art. Few people are aware, however, of the details of Berger's origins: he was born into an orthodox Jewish family in Germany, under a different name, and was later persecuted by the Nazis. Yet that narrative had a dramatic impact on the course of Berger's life and the eclectic character of his music.

This article examines Berger's evolution as a choral composer, particularly the effect of the Nazis' rise to power and World War II on his life and work. Two war-era compositions, *In a Time of Pestilence* and *Vision of Peace*, will be analyzed in detail as exemplar of the connection between Berger's biography and compositional syntax.

# FLEEING WAR, COMPOSING PEACE

## Early Life and Education

Jean Berger was born in 1909 in Hamm, Westphalia, as Artur Schlossberg. (Artur adopted the name “Jean Berger” in 1934. This article refers to “Artur” until 1934 and to “Berger” thereafter, demarcating his youth in Germany from his adult years as a refugee.) Artur’s parents were Orthodox Jews who immigrated to Germany—his mother from Poland, his father from Austria. His father was conscripted into the Austrian army during World War I. When the war ended, the Schlossbergs settled in the city of Mannheim and opened a furniture store.<sup>1</sup> As a child in Mannheim, Artur was exposed to theatre, literature, and music, taking his first piano lessons with Else Landmann. Else’s husband, Arno Landmann, was cantor at Mannheim’s Christuskirche and introduced Artur to Baroque-era organ literature and choral repertoire.<sup>2</sup> As a teenager, Artur read books about music, studied orchestral scores, and composed chamber music for the Schlossberg family’s private use. But Artur was generally more captivated by languages and literature than music, so he decided to study philology and medieval French at the University of Heidelberg.<sup>3</sup>

In 1928, intending to attend a presentation by his advisor, Artur went to the wrong lecture hall and acci-

dentally attended a lecture by the musicologist Heinrich Bessler on the works of Pérotin. In a self-described state of “amazement and wonder” at what he heard there, Artur abandoned philology and turned to musicology, eventually studying under Bessler.<sup>4</sup> Artur’s primary area of study was the Italian Baroque; in 1932 he completed his dissertation, “The Italian Sonata for Several Instruments in the 17th Century.”<sup>5</sup> Bessler was pleased with Artur’s work and promised him a musicology position at Heidelberg as soon as it became available. Meanwhile, Artur took a job as *répétiteur* and assistant conductor to Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt at the Hessian State Theater in Darmstadt.<sup>6</sup>

## Flight from the Nazis

During the first three months of 1933, the Nazi Party successfully seized control of the German government. On January 30, German President Paul von Hindenburg appointed Adolf Hitler as Chancellor. In February, Chancellor Hitler and the Nazis successfully blamed a fire in the Reichstag legislative chambers on an attempted (though imagined) Communist takeover. Prompted by the panic that followed, von Hindenburg signed the *Reichstagsbrandverordnung* (“Reichstag Fire Decree”), giving the government unprecedented powers and suspending most civil liberties. Weeks later, under pressure from the Nazis and von Hindenburg, the Reichstag passed the Enabling Act, granting Hitler authority to pass laws without the Reichstag’s approval.<sup>7</sup>

Outright persecution of Jews began immediately after the Nazis wrested control of the government, and Artur quickly experienced such abuse. In March 1933, he and several young colleagues at the Hessian State Theater had received permission to mount their own production of Monteverdi’s *L’incoronazione di Poppea* in the Kleine Haus, the smaller of the facility’s theaters.<sup>8</sup> During rehearsals for the production, and not long after the Enabling Act’s passage, Artur was attacked by members of the Nazi *Sturmabteilung* (SA), forerunner to the *Schutzstaffel* (SS):

While I was playing piano for a dance rehearsal, four brown-shirted SA men walked in, brandished their Leuger pistols at my face and, using

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appropriate language of which “Jew swine” was the least offensive, threw me out of the Hessische Landestheater. I was unconscious for a while, then picked myself up, apparently without any really serious injuries.<sup>9</sup>

A few days later, Bessler called Artur to a late-night meeting to tell him that, under the new political circumstances, he would not support Artur’s dissertation for publication. Bessler had joined the Nazis. The two men never spoke again.<sup>10</sup>

These personal events and the broader horrors of the war that followed turned Artur’s “flaming passion” for all things German into a “flaming hatred.”<sup>11</sup> He resolved to leave Germany immediately, and by early April 1933 had said farewell to his family in Mannheim and fled to Paris. Artur made a meager living there performing as a pianist and accompanist. While accompanying a vocalist in Bois-Colombes in 1934, the emcee for the performance refused to announce Artur’s name. There were veterans of World War I in the audience, tensions with Germany were rising, and “Artur Schlossberg” sounded much too German. After some quick thinking, Artur took the stage as Jean Berger and shortly thereafter adopted this stage name permanently.<sup>12</sup>

Berger gradually settled into his new life in Paris. By the mid-1930s he had become known as an accompanist and had broadened his work to include reviewing books and concerts, as well as some editing, arranging, and composing. Berger’s first published composition dates from this period—a “strict, ‘classical’ twelve-tone song” à la Schoenberg on a Charles Baudelaire text, *De Profundis Clamavi*<sup>13</sup>—as does his burgeoning interest in choral music. In 1935, Berger started a small chamber choir of factory workers for whom he arranged a number of French folk songs. Shortly thereafter, he entered and won a choral composition contest in Zurich with *Le Sang des Autres*, a setting of an anti-war poem by the poet René Arcos.<sup>14</sup>

The decision to set such a “powerfully antimilitaristic” text suggests that events in Germany were not far from the composer’s thoughts.<sup>15</sup> Berger’s other activities at the time bear this out. In 1936, Berger took part in a political protest ignited by German forces entering the Rhineland, and also cofounded a workers’ theatre (for which he served as composer) that presented “overtly anti-German



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programs.”<sup>16</sup> In November 1938, Berger’s parents were among the victims of *Kristallnacht*, the now infamous series of violent attacks on Jewish citizens, businesses, and synagogues. During the attacks, the Schlossbergs took refuge with their former maid and her husband on the uppermost floor of their apartment building. The next day they fled Germany for Palestine, where their daughter Claire had already relocated after spending three years in Paris with Berger.<sup>17</sup> In 1939, as Nazi forces continued to advance toward France, Berger decided to leave Europe altogether. He secured a one-year (non-citizen) passport and visa and on May 19 departed for Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.<sup>18</sup>

## Berger in the Americas

Though Berger remained in Rio for just over a year, Brazilian music and culture had a lasting impact on him. He later described how a fellow pianist helped him learn the “particular rhythm that to them [Brazilians] is as natural as breathing.”<sup>19</sup> Berger’s first position in Rio was a five-month engagement as a vocal coach and accompanist with the Opéra-Comique at the Teatro Municipal. That position led to similar engagements and connections with important Brazilian figures such as composer Heitor Villa-Lobos, conductor-composer Oscar Lorenzo Fernández, and socialite Helena Figner. Figner wanted to become a professional singer and hired Berger as her personal

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accompanist. In November 1940, following a year of difficulties with his passport and visa, Berger left Brazil with Figner on a performance tour to New York City.<sup>20</sup>

By March 1941, Berger had resolved to take up permanent residence in the United States. He spoke little English but had some relatives living in New York, and the “professional opportunity and a more familiar style of life” appealed to him.<sup>21</sup> Just as in Brazil, Berger landed quickly on his feet, professionally speaking. Within months he was acquainted with several significant musicians, including singers Alice Tully and Garfield Swift, and John Finley Williamson, founder of the Westminster Choir and Westminster Choir College.<sup>22</sup> Williamson and the Westminster Choir were about to embark on a tour to South America; Williamson wanted to meet with Berger to discuss “suitable repertoire and the like” for the trip.<sup>23</sup> In anticipation of the meeting, Berger wrote a choral piece to present to Williamson. He found Jorge de Lima’s “Salmo” in the New York Public Library and in a single day crafted the *Brazilian Psalm* on Lima’s text. Williamson loved the piece and asked his contacts at G. Schirmer to publish it immediately.<sup>24</sup> This was not the last time Berger’s experiences in Brazil furthered his compositional career. He would spend two years working for CBS and NBC, arranging Brazilian music for radio broadcasts.<sup>25</sup>

Yet even this third relocation to the United States could not free Berger from the shadow of Germany and the escalating war. On December 7, 1941, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor and America entered the conflict. Since Berger was a German immigrant (having never established citizenship in either Brazil or France), according to US law he was now an enemy alien and subject to deportation. Berger quickly obtained resident status and was drafted by the US Army less than a year later. He was assigned to an army band based at Fort Dix, New Jersey, to help the director develop a “Latin American sound.”<sup>26</sup> Four months later, Berger was honorably discharged to work for the Office of War Information, who needed his fluency with languages, particularly Portuguese.<sup>27</sup> In August 1943, he officially became a US citizen and applied for transfer to the performance division of the USO (United Service Organizations). Berger was assigned to a troupe with five other performers, including Rita Holzer, whom he would later marry.<sup>28</sup> In autumn 1944, the small

troupe embarked on an overseas tour, playing engagements in military hospitals for wounded soldiers. It was during one such engagement in Oxford 1945 that Berger wrote the choral work *In a Time of Pestilence*.<sup>29</sup>

## *In a Time of Pestilence and Vision of Peace*

*In a Time of Pestilence* is a setting of the poem “Litany in a Time of Plague” by sixteenth-century English poet Thomas Nashe (1567-c.1601). Nashe was a satirist and playwright; the poem was contained within the play *A Pleasant Comedy Called Summer’s Last Will and Testament*, performed for the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1592 and published in 1600.<sup>30</sup> The poem is a commentary on the inevitability of death. The plague referred to in the title and second stanza of the poem is not a specific malady but rather a common experience of life in sixteenth-century England: plagues, like death itself, were dangerous and unstoppable enemies immune to race, class, or socioeconomic status.

Berger’s setting of the poem is faithful to its content while taking substantial liberties with its structure (Figure 1). He eliminates the third and fourth stanzas altogether and separates the first two verses of the initial stanza from the rest, effectively creating a new first stanza. He fills out this new stanza with a series of chromatic sighs on the syllable “Ah” and repetitions of “Adieu, farewell.” Berger uses this sixteen-measure stanza as both an introduction and a refrain, reusing portions of it on three occasions and bringing it back once almost in its entirety (mm. 164-174). The opening sighing figure in the soprano solo (Figure 2) also serves as a melodic motive, coming back in different guises with various texts.

What is most unusual about the refrain Berger constructs is that the poem already has a refrain that concludes each stanza: “I am sick, I must die / Lord, have mercy on us!” But Berger undermines that refrain, setting it differently almost every time the text occurs. The effect of these decisions shifts the textual emphasis away from sickness, death, and a plea for mercy toward a focus on death alone. Perhaps that is why Berger changed the title of the piece from “Plague” to “Pestilence.” While plague is directly associated with illness, pestilence can be more

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*Litany in a Time of Plague*, Thomas Nashe

Adieu, farewell earth's bliss,  
This world uncertain is:  
Fond are life's lustful joys,  
Death proves them all but toys.  
None from his darts can fly:  
I am sick, I must die.

Lord have mercy on us!

Rich men, trust not in wealth,  
Gold cannot buy you health;  
Physic himself must fade,  
All things to end are made;  
The plague full swift goes by:  
I am sick, I must die.

Lord have mercy on us!

[ Beauty is but a flower,  
Which wrinkles will devour;  
Brightness falls from the air,  
Queens have died young and fair,  
Dust hath closèd Helen's eye:  
I am sick, I must die.  
Lord have mercy on us! ]

[ Strength stoops unto the grave,  
Worms feed on Hector brave,  
Swords may not fight with fate,  
Earth still holds ope her gate.  
Come, come, the bells do cry,  
I am sick, I must die.

Lord have mercy on us! ]

Wit with his wantonness  
Tasteth death's bitterness;  
Hell's executioner  
Hath no ears for to hear  
What vain art can reply.  
I am sick, I must die.

Lord, have mercy on us!

Haste therefore each degree  
To welcome destiny;  
Heaven is our heritage  
Earth but a player's stage,  
Mount we unto the sky:  
I am sick, I must die.

Lord have mercy on us!

[ ] = omissions by Berger  
*Italics* = additions by Berger  
Underline = alterations by Berger

*In a Time of Pestilence*, adapted by Jean Berger

*Ah, Adieu, adieu, Ah, Adieu, farewell, Ah...*  
Adieu, farewell earth's bliss,  
This world uncertain is:  
*Ah, adieu, farewell, farewell, earth's bliss,*  
*Ah, Adieu, adieu, Ah, Adieu, farewell, Ah...*

Fond are life's lustful joys,  
Death proves them all but toys.  
None from his darts can fly:  
I am sick, I must die.

Lord have mercy on us!

*Ah, Adieu, adieu, Ah, Adieu, farewell, Ah...*

Rich men, trust not in wealth,  
Gold cannot buy your health;  
Physique himself must fade,  
All things to end are made;  
The plague full swift goes by:  
I am sick, I must die.

Lord have mercy on us!

*Ah, Adieu, adieu, Ah, Adieu, farewell, Ah...*

Wit with his wantonness  
Tasteth death's bitterness;  
Hell's executioner  
Hath no ears for to hear  
What vain art can reply.  
I am sick, I must die.

Lord, have mercy on us!

Haste therefore each degree  
To welcome destiny;  
Heaven is our heritage  
Earth but a player's stage,  
*Haste, Haste, Haste, Haste, Haste,*  
Mount we unto the sky:  
I am sick, I must die.

Lord have mercy on us!

*Ah, Adieu, adieu, Ah, Adieu, farewell, Ah...*  
*Adieu, farewell earth's bliss,*  
*This world uncertain is:*  
*Ah, adieu, farewell, farewell, earth's bliss.*

*Fond are life's lustful joys,*  
*Death proves them all but toys.*  
*None from his darts can fly:*  
*I am sick, I must die.*

*Ah, Ah, Ah, etc. Lord, Lord, etc.*  
*Lord, have mercy on us, etc.*

Figure 1. Text Comparison: *In a Time of Plague/Pestilence*.

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broadly defined as anything devastating or malicious. Pestilence is also frequently associated with the blight of war on human and natural life.

These conflicting refrains—one that is musically constructed and one that is textually present but musically ignored—contribute to the feeling that *In a Time of Pestilence* has an elusive structure and no discernible form. Furthering the sense of ambiguity, Berger employs a variety of tempi (there are at least nine different tempo markings,

not including returns to previous tempi), meter signatures, key areas, and textures (antiphonal sections, solo lines, and homophonic versus imitative passages). The harmonic shifts between parallel fourths, parallel fifths, and heavy chromaticism create a bold aural contrast. The aggregate of all these diverse characteristics is an overwhelming sense of musical chaos—like the chaos that pestilence and war leave in their wake. The only stability is death and the mournful refrain of sighs and adieus that accompany it.

Musical score for Jean Berger's *In a Time of Pestilence*, measures 1–6. The score is for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Alto parts. It begins with a *Moderato* tempo marking (♩ = 50) and a forte (*f*) dynamic. The Soprano part starts with a long, sustained note "Ah" under a slur. The Tenor part enters with a melodic line and the lyrics "A - dieu, a - dieu". The Alto part enters with the lyrics "A - dieu, fare -". The score continues with various dynamics (*f*, *mf*, *p*) and includes a section starting at measure 4 with a 5-measure phrase and a 3-measure phrase. The lyrics "well" and "A - dieu, fare - well earth's bliss" are also present.

Figure 2. Jean Berger, *In a Time of Pestilence*, mm. 1–6.

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Considering the text of *In a Time of Pestilence*, the jarring and violent way in which Berger sets it, and the circumstances of the composition, it seems likely that this work reflects Berger's own feelings about World War II and the devastation he witnessed.

If the anti-war sentiment of *In a Time of Pestilence* is merely implied, in Berger's later work, *Vision of Peace*, it

is explicit. In 1948, three years after his USO tour to war-torn England, Berger was commissioned by conductor T. B. Lawrence and the Fleet Street Choir of London to write a piece for the choir's use. Lawrence had discovered Berger's *Brazilian Psalm* two years prior and had programmed it with the ensemble.<sup>31</sup> For this new work, Berger's first choral commission, he turned to the biblical book of Isaiah for

## Berger and Religion

Artur Schlossberg's childhood had been "steeped in Orthodox Judaism."<sup>1</sup> As an adolescent he participated in the Youth Congregation, a Jewish alternative to the German *Jugendbewegung*, founded by liberal rabbi Max Gruenewald in 1925.<sup>2</sup> Yet a "gradual but unstoppable detachment" from the religion of his birth had already begun:

I even remember the first stirrings of doubt when, during the...Yom Kippur service the first stab of disbelief struck. I was twelve or thirteen years old yet I recall vividly at perhaps the twelfth repetition of the words "ss'lakh lanu" [sic] ("forgive us our sin of..."), the inner little voice which kept asking: "To whom are you talking...?" From that day on it was a long, painful, gradual process of detachment from my religious roots.<sup>3</sup>

By the time he arrived in the United States in 1940, Berger had "severed himself from all Jewish traditions," with the exception of fasting on Yom Kippur, which he gave up in the 1950s.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, he retained a strong cultural attachment to Judaism throughout his life:

While I no longer consider myself a Jew—in the truest sense of the word—I am aware of the monumental heritage that Judaism represents. I know Hebrew well enough to spend many hours reading the Old Testament in the original [language]. Even though the words of the Hebrew tradition no longer correspond to a religious stirring in me, I sense them in my soul...<sup>5</sup>

I do admire the genius of the Jewish tradition which has erected this edifice of a faith which, from its beginnings, was unique among mankind.<sup>6</sup>

Berger's relationship to Christianity was similarly complex. From a young age, the cultural history of Western

Europe—particularly the relationship between Christianity, literature, music, and architecture—had a significant impact on him.<sup>7</sup> In later years he articulated his attraction to Christianity as a composer, describing the "insatiable urge for an ever renewed musical substance" that is intrinsic to the Christian liturgical framework.<sup>8</sup> This "insatiable urge" resulted in many sacred compositions from Berger's hand, beginning with the motets requested by Augsburg Publishing House in 1959 (Berger did not consider *Brazilian Psalm* or, presumably, his other early works to be sacred in nature despite their texts).<sup>9</sup> Myriad commissions followed, from both church-affiliated publishers and individual congregations.

Berger deeply appreciated the openness and welcome he experienced in American churches, and even felt a personal connection to many New Testament passages (including the parables and the Magnificat).<sup>10</sup> However, he never considered himself Christian and would not set some traditional liturgical texts: "I would not set to music words which are totally alien to my formation, texts for example such as 'Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto': neither the Son of God nor the Holy Spirit belong to my world."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Berger, *Memories, Musings, and Meanderings*, 67, 12 December 1991.

<sup>2</sup> Geidl, "A Biographical Chronology," 3-4.

<sup>3</sup> Berger, *Memories, Musings, and Meanderings*, 68, 12 December 1991.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 49, 24 November 1991.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 73-74, 15 December 1991.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 118, 25 February 1992.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 68, 12 December 1991.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 69, 12 December 1991.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 120, 4 March 1992.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 74, 15 December 1991.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

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inspiration. Rather than using a single passage, Berger pulled together a number of verses spanning the entire book, freely combining and altering them in five musical movements that offer a poignant and personal commentary on war and peace (Figure 3).

Structurally, the first movement of *Vision of Peace* bears a marked resemblance to *In a Time of Pestilence*. Both pieces

feature mixed meter, numerous tempo changes, and persistent parallel fourths. Just as in the earlier work, Berger begins *Vision of Peace* with a series of haunting sighs on the syllable “Ah,” gradually giving way to the first line of text (Figure 4). From this opening motive, the melodic material for the remainder of the movement develops. The sigh figure returns three times in abbreviated form

I.  
Ah....  
My dwelling is removed  
and is carried away from me as a shepherd's tent.  
My country is desolate,  
my cities are burned with fire.  
The highways lie waste, no one passeth by the road.  
The grass is withered away, there is no green thing.  
The land mourneth and languisheth.

(*Isaiah 37:12, 1:7, 33:8, 15:6, 33:9*)

II.  
Woe to them that destroy  
and they were not destroyed.  
Woe to them that despise  
and they were not despised.  
Their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity,  
desolation and destruction are in their paths!  
The way of peace they know not,  
and there is no justice in their doings.  
When they have ceased to despise,  
they shall be despised.  
The fire shall burn them,  
and their fire shall not be quenched.  
When they have made an end of destroying,  
they shall be destroyed!  
Woe to them!

(*Isaiah 3:9, 33:1, 59:7-8, 33:1, 47:14, 33:1, 3:9*)

III.  
Ah....  
My dwelling is removed.  
Ah....

(*Isaiah 37:12*)

IV.  
Let all the nations be gathered together  
and let the peoples be assembled!  
Come near, ye nations, to hear;  
assemble yourselves and come,  
and hearken, ye peoples!  
Cry aloud, lift up your voice like a trumpet.  
Give ear, all ye lands afar off,  
let the earth hear, and  
Peace, peace to him that is far off!  
Peace, peace to him that is near!

(*Isaiah 43:9, 34:1, 45:20, 58:1, 8:9, 34:1, 57:19*)

V.  
Violence shall no more be heard in the land,  
wasting nor destruction within the borders;  
The land that was desolation  
and the dry land shall be glad;  
the desert shall rejoice and blossom as a rose.  
A man shall be more precious than gold  
And my people shall abide in the beauty of peace.  
They shall not build and another inhabit,  
they shall not plant and another eat.  
They shall not labor in vain.  
They shall build houses and inhabit them.  
There shall be peace.  
Nation shall not lift up sword against nation!  
And the ransomed shall return,  
and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads.  
They shall obtain gladness and joy,  
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

(*Isaiah 60:18, 35:1, 13:12, 32:18, 65:21-22, 2:4, 35:10*)

**Figure 3.** Text of *Vision of Peace*.

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and a fourth time in its entirety (mm. 45-56). The musical affect is haunting and unstable, perfectly depicting the bleakness of the text, which describes a war-ravaged landscape from the viewpoint of an exile or refugee. The final return of the sigh motive gradually fades and slows into three measures of octave B-naturals in the soprano and alto voices before gently dissolving into a *morendo*

marking (m. 70) that closes the movement.

The second movement's series of "woes" pronounces a harsh judgment on all those who wage war. Here Berger's harmonic language is chromatic and angular, emphasizing the righteous anger of the text from the very first notes: open fifths on G and D, marked *fortissimo* with an accent, and set high in the tessitura for all voices (Figure 5).

Andante, non troppo lento (♩ = 92)

pp

Ah Ah

pp

Ah Ah

Molto più lento (♩ = 69)

mf

Ah Ah

mf

Ah

mf

And is

And is

And is

And is

mf

My dwell-ing is re - moved

Figure 4. Jean Berger, *Vision of Peace*, Movement I, mm. 1–12.

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Each recurrence of the word “woe” is identically scored and similarly marked. Likewise, dynamic markings in the second movement are consistently loud, ranging from *mezzo-forte* to *fortissimo*. The tempo is fast (quarter note = 152) and steady, without the numerous fluctuations that mark the other movements. The only exception comes in the movement’s final measures. In measure 160, having sequentially repeated the text “Woe to them” three times, Berger alters the fourth and final restatement (Figure 6). He marks the tempo *Molto largo*, accents every word, and revoices the chord on “woe,” making it a  $G^6$  chord with an additional high B in the soprano. The dynamic here

begins *fortissimo* followed by a long crescendo with the indication *tutta forza* (“full force”).

The second movement leads directly into the third movement via an *attacca subito* marking (Figure 6). The third movement is a brief, seventeen-measure recapitulation of the first movement (see Figure 4), incorporating only the chromatic sighing figures and a single recurrence of the text, “My dwelling is removed.” The quiet, haunting emptiness of this music is even more pronounced in contrast to the second movement’s force and energy. The third movement ends identically to the first, except for an F-sharp added to the octave B-naturals as the *morendo*

71 *Allegro non troppo* (♩ = 152)

S  
Woe to them that de-destroy, And they were not de-destroyed—

A  
Woe to them that de-destroy, And they were not de-destroyed—

T  
Woe to them that de-destroy, were not de-destroyed—

B  
Woe to them that de-destroy, And they were not de-destroyed—

77

S  
Woe to them that de-spise, And they were not de-spised.

A  
Woe to them that de-spise, And they were not de-spised.

T  
Woe to them that de-spise, were not de-spised.

B  
Woe to them that de-spise, And they were not de-spised.

**Figure 5.** Jean Berger, *Vision of Peace*, Movement II, mm. 71–82.

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begins.

These first three movements of *Vision of Peace* are almost a complete composition unto themselves. The rounded binary form (A-B-A') Berger employs is an emo-

tional and a musical structure: The refugee's lament over the devastation of war leads to righteous anger and condemnation of the war-makers until collapsing, exhausted, into lament once again. Given this narrative, the commis-

The image displays a musical score for a choral work. The first system, starting at measure 157, is for four voices: Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The tempo is marked '(♩ = ♩) Molto largo'. The lyrics are 'Woe to them, Woe to them, Woe to them, Woe to them.' The dynamics range from *mf sub.* to *ff*, with markings for *molto*, *tutta forza*, and *attacca subito*. The second system, starting at measure 164, is for Soprano 1 (S1), Soprano 2 (S2), and Alto (A). The tempo is 'Andante non troppo lento (Come Prima)'. The lyrics are 'Ah' and 'Ah'. The dynamics are marked *p*. The third system, starting at measure 168, is for Soprano 1 (S1), Soprano 2 (S2), and Alto (A). The lyrics are 'Ah' and 'Ah'. The dynamics are marked *p*.

**Figure 6.** Jean Berger, *Vision of Peace*, Movement II (conclusion), mm. 157–163, and Movement III (beginning), mm. 164–170.

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sioning party for *Vision of Peace*, and the British audience who would have heard the premiere, it seems logical to posit that Berger drew upon his own feelings and wartime experiences for inspiration—just as with *In a Time of Pestilence*. While in London on his USO tour, Berger witnessed a modern version of Isaiah’s “cities burned with fire” and the desolation caused by the German Blitz of 1940 and 1941. That his native country was responsible for this devastation was certainly not lost on him. It is no coincidence, then, that Berger changed the pronouns in *Vision of Peace* from second to first person—“my country is

desolate,” “my cities burned with fire” as opposed to the biblical “your country,” “your cities.” The story that *Vision of Peace* relates is simultaneously personal and universal. The horrors of war affect all people alike.

If the first three movements of *Vision of Peace* are a musical and narrative unit lamenting the horrors of war, the final two movements comprise a single unit rejoicing in the prospect of peace. Both movements are strikingly different from their predecessors. The fourth movement is almost entirely homophonic, beginning and ending with a trumpet-like fanfare and declamatory speech rhythm

181 *Poco allegro* (♩ = 132)

S *f* Let all the na - tions be gath - ered to - geth - er, And let the peo - ples be as - sem - bled!

A *f* Let all the na - tions be gath - ered to - geth - er, And let the peo - ples be as - sem - bled!

T *f* Let all the na - tions be gath - ered to - geth - er, And let the peo - ples be as - sem - bled!

B *f* Let all the na - tions be gath - ered to - geth - er, And let the peo - ples be as - sem - bled!

185

S *f* Let all the na - tions be gath - ered to - geth - er, And let the peo - ples be as - sem - bled! Come

A *f* Let all the na - tions be gath - ered to - geth - er, And let the peo - ples be as - sem - bled! Come

T *f* Let all the na - tions be gath - ered to - geth - er, And let the peo - ples be as - sem - bled! Come

B *f* Let all the na - tions be gath - ered to - geth - er, And let the peo - ples be as - sem - bled! Come

Figure 7. Jean Berger, *Vision of Peace*, Movement IV, mm. 181–188.

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that calls all nations and peoples to gather and hear its message of peace (Figure 7).<sup>32</sup> That message begins with two loud statements of the word “peace,” fading into a treble quartet that sustains the word at a *pianissimo* dynamic (mm. 207-210). The gentler statements win out, and the full choir proceeds softly with the remainder of the text, “Peace to him that is far off and peace to him that is near” (Figure 8).

The fanfare returns to close the fourth movement, leading directly into the ethereal fifth movement. Here an alto soloist joins the choir in a sinuous and enchanting

meditation on what a world at peace might look like: “And the ransomed shall return / And everlasting joy shall be upon their heads / They shall obtain gladness and joy / And sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” These four lines, repeated several times, are set in one tremendous crescendo-decrescendo that simultaneously grows and diminishes in its texture (Figure 9). The last thirty measures of *Vision of Peace* serve as the fulcrum of the work’s message, a message central both to Isaiah’s vision and Berger’s: that a land destroyed by war and violence would know peace, and that those dwelling in exile would find

211 *Più vivo* (♩ = 120)  
*p*

S Peace, peace to him that is far off, Peace, peace to him that is  
A Peace, peace to him that is far off, Peace, peace to him that is  
T Peace, peace to him that is far off, Peace, peace to him that is  
B Peace, peace to him that is far off, Peace, peace to him that is

219  
S near! Peace to him that is far off, and peace to him that is near!  
A near! Peace to him that is far off, and peace to him that is near!  
T near! Peace to him that is far off, and peace to him that is near!  
B near! Peace to him that is far off, and peace to him that is near!

Figure 8. Jean Berger, *Vision of Peace*, Movement IV, mm. 211 – 225.

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stability and a home.

## Becoming a “Choral Man”

Berger had found his own home, if not yet his own stability, in the United States. He returned from his USO tour in 1946 and for two years resumed his life as it had been prior to the war—performing, composing, accom-

panying, and continually looking for work to make ends meet. But in 1948 all that began to change. After meeting the chair of the music department at Middlebury College in Vermont, Berger accepted a position teaching musicology and piano. Five years later, the college would add chapel organist and choir director to his teaching load, giving him the opportunity to compose for his own ensemble.<sup>33</sup>

As previously mentioned, Berger received the commission for *Vision of Peace* in 1948, but it was his *Brazilian Psalm*

[Moderato]

298 *mp*

S And the ran - somed shall re - turn, — And ev - er - last - ing joy shall

T *mp* And the ran - somed shall re - turn, — And ev - er - last - ing joy shall

301

S be up - on their heads. — They shall ob - tain glad - ness and joy, —

T be up - on their heads. — *pp* And

304

S *ppp* (m)

A *pp* Ah — *ppp* (m)

T sor - row and sigh - ing shall flee a - way. — (m)

B *ppp* (m)

Figure 9. Jean Berger, *Vision of Peace*, Movement V (conclusion), mm. 298–307.

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that had a bigger impact that year. Although John Finley Williamson had convinced G. Schirmer to publish *Brazilian Psalm* in 1941, the Westminster Choir never performed it: Their tour to South America had been cancelled due to the escalating war, and the score was shelved.<sup>34</sup> For seven years it remained unperformed in the United States and sold few copies until its discovery by Olaf Christiansen, the conductor of the St. Olaf Choir.<sup>35</sup> Christiansen programmed the piece in 1948 and later “separated the second half, largely based on the word ‘Alleluia’ from the body of the score and added it to the choir’s programs.”<sup>36</sup> Performed in this fashion, *Brazilian Psalm* became a staple of the St. Olaf Choir’s repertoire for several years.<sup>37</sup> Christiansen included it on the choir’s 1950 touring program, and the piece was enormously successful:

The response to the *Psalm* was immediate and

enthusiastic, and almost overnight the name Berger appeared on programs throughout the country. Greatly encouraged by Christiansen’s support as well as by the interest shown by other conductors and a wide audience, Berger began to turn his attention more seriously and eventually almost exclusively to choral music.<sup>38</sup>

While this description may sound hyperbolic, it is not. Berger himself claims that commission requests began to pour in, and he became “‘a choral man’ overnight.”<sup>39</sup>

Relationships with publishers other than G. Schirmer developed during the 1950s. The Boston-based R. D. Row Music Company picked up *In a Time of Pestilence* in 1953. In 1959, Augsburg Publishing House (publisher of the St. Olaf Choral Series) contacted Berger and asked him to write new sacred works for their catalog. Berger agreed,



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and at his request the music editor at Augsburg sent two prospective texts, both from the Old Testament.<sup>40</sup> This correspondence was the beginning of a long and fruitful relationship that would result in numerous best-selling motets, including *The Eyes of All Wait Upon Thee*, *A Rose Touched by the Sun's Warm Rays*, and *I to the Hills Lift Up My Eyes*.<sup>41</sup> Although Berger founded his own publishing house in 1964, John Sheppard Press, he continued to publish choral works with Augsburg and other publishers.<sup>42</sup>

Throughout the 1960s, Berger's involvement with choral music continued to grow. Late in 1959, he accepted a two-year position at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; although the position was on the musicology faculty, by 1960 he was also placed in charge of the university's DMA program in choral studies.<sup>43</sup> Thanks to Warner Imig, Berger assumed a nearly identical position—overseeing the choral DMA and teaching musicology—at the University of Colorado Boulder in 1961.<sup>44</sup> In addition to his ever-increasing compositional work, Berger began to guest conduct his pieces and to write and speak about choral music.<sup>45</sup> These activities, as well as the management of John Sheppard Press, would occupy Berger full time after his resignation from UC-Boulder in 1969. With other composers like Randall Thompson and Cecil Effinger, Berger became part of the first generation of American choral composers to achieve an almost cultish popularity. He continued to compose, conduct, and ruminate on the importance of the choral art until his death in 2002.

## Defining a Musical Language and a Life

It is difficult to define Berger's musical syntax, largely because of his numerous musical influences and his eclectic approach to composition. Early in his life Berger had experimented with serialism but quickly abandoned it, convinced that it was not “the road to [compositional] salvation” and that tonality was still very much alive.<sup>46</sup> W. Douglas Pritchard, a doctoral student of Berger's at UC-Boulder and a former faculty member at the University of Arizona and Iowa State University, described four primary musical influences, presumably delineated by Berger himself: folk songs from the Alsace-Lorraine provinces; South American melodic and rhythmic devices;

the modal harmonies of sacred polyphonic music (both Christian and Jewish); and Berger's studies as a musicologist.<sup>47</sup> To that list should also be added the tonality and style characteristics of the *Les Six* composers—especially Arthur Honegger—and American popular music of the 1930s and 1940s. Berger frequently wrote about the transformation he experienced after hearing Duke Ellington's band in Paris, and later, Gershwin's “Summertime” from *Porgy and Bess*.<sup>48</sup> Elements of all of these influences can be variously observed in Berger's works. Gerald Lynn Moore, in a doctoral dissertation analyzing Berger's choral oeuvre, called him a “conservative contemporary” or neo-classical composer, since Berger's overall use of harmony, melody, rhythm and counterpoint have their roots in the common practice period.<sup>49</sup>

But of equal importance to Berger's musical syntax was his exposure to and involvement with amateur choruses in the United States. His long correspondence with music critic Henry Pleasants depicts a growing fascination with the vitality of amateur music-making, coinciding with a marked distaste for the German distinction between “serious music” (*ernste Musik*) and “entertainment music” (*Unterhaltungsmusik*). Consider Berger's description of conducting an Ohio honor choir in 1970:

Instead of performing *Sing Ye*, the first motet of Bach, for double choir, in concert, I suggested that we make a “workshop” experience of it and so we did. The honors choir, some 80 kids...formed Chorus I, the “adults,” i.e. choral directors from all over Ohio, some 110, formed Chorus II...I made some *musikwissenschaftliche* [musicological] remarks to the gang...and then we sang. No stopping, no interruption, from A to Z, with, yes, some wrong notes and yes, a pretty rough manner of interpretation but all this was unimportant. When we were done, there was a moment's silence, and then the 190 or so stood up in their pews, and clapped their hands off. Applauded whom? What? What I had been doing was no more than wave my arms around. Applauded themselves? And came by, tears in eyes, young and old, gee that was great. No concert, but music.

... You know, as I do, that no such thing could happen in Germany, France, Italy, possibly not in Britain. It


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can and does here. It involved people to the very core of their soul.<sup>50</sup>

This anecdote hints at another of Berger's musical opinions: That the formal "concert experience" born in nineteenth-century Europe had devolved into a pseudo-religious rite, full of ritual action but devoid of spiritual or emotional meaning. Where, then, could such meaning be found? Only at that point where a society's cultural climate enabled the creation of a vital musical aesthetic connected to the cultural forces at work in that society. Berger called this the "living idiom" of music, and he found it not in academia or the symphony hall but rather in the fusion of popular and classical styles that existed in the amateur choral singing of the United States. The modern composer, from Berger's perspective, was not called to be a "god" whose music was realized by performers for the edification of a passive audience but rather to be a collaborator with performers and listeners in an interpersonal musical venture.<sup>51</sup>

Jean Berger believed that a composer should be a man of his time, and that statement certainly applies to his own career.<sup>52</sup> His adult life brought him into contact with many of the prominent people and movements within the twentieth-century musical landscape, shaping him into a composer who was cosmopolitan yet deeply rooted in the

culture of his adopted homeland. It is a historical irony that this musical evolution resulted from Berger's frantic flight from Germany in 1933, a chapter of his biography that few people now remember. But Berger himself may have appreciated such forgetfulness—or, at least, appreciated that his Jewish heritage and refugee status did not matter much to people in the United States. As he wrote in his autobiography:

I have no illusions about America. We are not angels in this country.... But in the U.S., to be different or to disagree does not necessarily engender hostility. This is what sets America apart from the Western world in general and is not merely something that sounds effective in a politician's speech: minor little incidents notwithstanding, I have felt accepted from the beginning, not only with my music, but I, the person.<sup>53</sup> 

*Note:* This article is adapted from the author's DMA document: Zebulon M. Highben, "World War II and Its Impact on Sacred Choral Music: The Lives and Works of Hugo Distler, Jean Berger, and Heinz Werner Zimmermann" (DMA document, Michigan State University, 2012), 27-48.

## Choral Works of Jean Berger Discussed in This Article

Title	Date of Composition (Publication)	Voicing	Publisher
Le Sang des Autres	1936 (1937)	SATB	Editions Henn (Geneva, POP)
Brazilian Psalm	1941 (1941)	SATB divisi	G. Schirmer
In a Time of Pestilence	1945 (1953)	SATB divisi	R. D. Row (POP)
Vision of Peace	1948 (1949)	SATB divisi	Broude Brothers
The Eyes of All Wait Upon Thee	(1959)	SATB	Augsburg
A Rose Touched by the Sun's Warm Rays	(1962)	SATB	Augsburg
I to the Hills Lift Up Mine Eyes	(1978)	SATB	Augsburg

For a complete list of Berger's works, see the American Music Research Center's online guide to the Jean Berger Collection (compositions are listed on pages 5 through 22): <http://www.colorado.edu/amrc/collections/berger-jean>

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## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Very little biographical information about Jean Berger has been published. He has no entry in the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* and only a brief mention in the *Oxford Dictionary of Music*. The notable exception is Linda L. Geidl, "Jean Berger (1909-2002): A Biographical Chronology," *American Music Research Center Journal* 18 (2010): 1-37. Geidl, a former student of Berger's, draws upon his two unpublished autobiographies, numerous correspondences, and various other sources to create a reliable timeline of Berger's life. The first and third sections of this article draw largely upon her fine work.
- <sup>2</sup> Geidl identifies Arno Landmann as principal organist at the Christuskirche. According to the church's website, Landmann was cantor (i.e. director of music, including organ and conducting duties) there from 1911 to 1943. See <http://www.christuskirche.org/geschichte>.
- <sup>3</sup> Geidl, "A Biographical Chronology," 3-4.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>7</sup> The major events in the Nazis' rise to power, the persecution of the Jews, and World War II are well documented in an interactive timeline on the website of the US Holocaust Memorial Museum. See <http://www.ushmm.org/learn/timeline-of-events>.
- <sup>8</sup> Jean Berger, "Composer Meets Critic, Part Two: Selected Excerpts of the Jean Berger/Henry Pleasants Correspondence 1971-1981," *American Music Research Center Journal* 18 (2010): 58. See also Geidl, "A Biographical Chronology," 5-6.
- <sup>9</sup> Jean Berger, *Memories, Musings, and Meanderings*, unpublished memoir (1991-1993): 8, 28 October 1991. *Memories, Musings, and Meanderings* is a typescript found in the American Music Research Center's Jean Berger Collection. The pages of *Memories, Musings, and Meanderings* are not reliably numbered, though each entry is dated. Dates will be cited in addition to page references. I am indebted to Eric Harbeson of the AMRC for making this memoir available to me.
- <sup>10</sup> Artur's dissertation was finally published in 1935 after his father paid for its publication, and his PhD was mailed to him. See Geidl, "A Biographical Chronology," 6.
- <sup>11</sup> Geidl, "A Biographical Chronology," 6. Berger wrote, "The border was crossed at Saarbruecken. Once out of Germany, I spat out of the window. Goodbye to the Vaterland." *Memories, Musings, and Meanderings*, 8, 28 October 1991.
- <sup>12</sup> Geidl, "A Biographical Chronology," 6-7.
- <sup>13</sup> Jean Berger, "Composer Meets Critic: Selected Excerpts of the Jean Berger/Henry Pleasants Correspondence," *American Music Research Center Journal* 10 (2000): 11. See also Geidl, "A Biographical Chronology," 6-7.
- <sup>14</sup> The contest was sponsored by the Häusermannsche Gesang-Verlein. Berger wrote "...the jury had unanimously rejected my score but...an ex-officio member of the jury named Arthur Honegger had insisted that it be given a first prize." Berger also mentions that some months later, he met Honegger at a concert of Maurice Ravel's music, where Honegger encouraged him to continue composing. See Berger, *Memories, Musings, and Meanderings*, 21, 7 November 1991; and Geidl, "A Biographical Chronology," 7-8.
- <sup>15</sup> Berger, *Memories, Musings, and Meanderings*, 20, 7 November 1991.
- <sup>16</sup> Geidl, "A Biographical Chronology," 7.
- <sup>17</sup> Berger, *Memories, Musings, and Meanderings*, 38, 22 November 1991. Claire Schlossberg arrived in Paris shortly after Berger himself and left there in 1936.
- <sup>18</sup> This decision was fortuitously timed, since Paris was taken by the Germans just over a year later. In 1944, Berger paid a visit to his former Parisian home, where he was told by the concierge there that the Gestapo "had come for me at 2 AM within 48 hours of the occupation of Paris in [June] 1940." *Memories, Musings, and Meanderings*, 20, 7 November 1991.
- <sup>19</sup> Geidl, "A Biographical Chronology," 9. The quote appears to be Berger's, but an exact citation is not provided.
- <sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-11.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>23</sup> Berger, *Memories, Musings, and Meanderings*, 51, 24 November 1991.
- <sup>24</sup> Berger, *Memories, Musings, and Meanderings*, 51, 24 November 1991. See also Carol A. Hess, "Jean Berger: A 'Good Neighbor' in the United States," *American Music Research Center Journal* 18 (2010): 48; and Geidl, "A Biographical Chronology," 10.
- <sup>25</sup> Hess, "A 'Good Neighbor,'" 43-44.
- <sup>26</sup> Geidl, "A Biographical Chronology," 11.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.
- <sup>30</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, ed., *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Eighth edition, Volume 1* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2006): 1232-33.
- <sup>31</sup> Geidl, "A Biographical Chronology," 12. In *Memories, Musings, and Meanderings*, 21, 7 November 1991, Berger says that the Fleet Street Choir also performed his *Le Sang des Autres* in an English translation, *Other Men's Blood*.
- <sup>32</sup> W. Douglas Pritchard compares the declamatory speech style of this movement to Monteverdi's *Sfogava Fon Le Stelle* and claims that Berger admitted the influence of Monteverdi in his compositions. See W. Douglas Pritchard, "The Choral Style of

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Jean Berger," *American Choral Review* 8, no. 1 (1965): 4-5.

<sup>33</sup> Geidl, "A Biographical Chronology," 13-15.

<sup>34</sup> Hess, "A 'Good Neighbor,'" 48. Berger wrote, "As it turned out, the 'Brazilian Psalm' was more than even the Westminster Choir of 1941 could handle. After a number of rehearsals, it was shelved, I stood in a corner, covered my head in shame and promised to do better next time." *Memories, Musings, and Meanderings*, 51, 24 November 1991.

<sup>35</sup> Pritchard, "The Choral Style of Jean Berger," 4. Numerous other sources, including *Memories, Musings, and Meanderings*, cite the St. Olaf Choir's 1948 performance as the first US performance of *Brazilian Psalm*. The earlier performance by the Fleet Street Choir was probably the first European performance of the work; how and when the piece traveled overseas is not entirely clear.

<sup>36</sup> Berger, *Memories, Musings, and Meanderings*, 51, 24 November 1991.

<sup>37</sup> Similarly, there is a tradition amongst Lutheran college choirs of performing only the last two movements of *Vision of Peace* in concert. It is likely this tradition began with Olaf Christiansen.

<sup>38</sup> Pritchard, "The Choral Style of Jean Berger," 4.

<sup>39</sup> Berger, *Memories, Musings, and Meanderings*, 51, 24 November 1991.

<sup>40</sup> Berger, *Memories, Musings, and Meanderings*, 120, 4 March 1992.

<sup>41</sup> According to Berger, *The Eyes of All Wait Upon Thee* became so successful that "in a relatively short time after its publication, Miss [Ruth] Olson [of Augsburg] wrote to tell me that *The Eyes of All* had outsold Augsburg's all time best-seller, *Beautiful Savior*, in the setting of F. Melius Christiansen." Berger, *Memories, Musings, and Meanderings*, 120, 4 March 1992.

<sup>42</sup> "John Sheppard," i.e. "John Shepherd," the English translation of

Jean Berger.

<sup>43</sup> Geidl, "A Biographical Chronology," 16. Geidl points out that one of Berger's DMA students at Urbana-Champaign was Kenneth Jennings, who would succeed Olaf Christiansen as conductor of the St. Olaf Choir.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> See Geidl, "A Biographical Chronology," 18-32, and both "Composer Meets Critic" compilations, which frequently describe Berger's various choral activities.

<sup>46</sup> Berger, "Composer Meets Critic," 11.

<sup>47</sup> See Pritchard, "The Choral Style of Jean Berger," 4. Presumably this last item refers to the medieval music he studied under Heinrich Bessler, who was an expert in that area, and/or the Baroque-era music he explored on his own.

<sup>48</sup> See Berger, "Composer Meets Critic," 11; Geidl, "A Biographical Chronology," 6, 10; Pritchard, "The Choral Style of Jean Berger," 4.

<sup>49</sup> Gerald Lynn Moore, "A Musical Analysis of Selected Choral Compositions of Jean Berger," (Ed.D. dissertation: University of Oklahoma, 1970), 233ff.

<sup>50</sup> Berger, "Composer Meets Critic," 20.

<sup>51</sup> This ideological position can be glimpsed throughout the Berger/Pleasant's correspondence, and in Pritchard's article. For the most thorough and detailed exposition, however, see Jean Berger, "The Composer of Choral Music in Our Time," *Response in Worship, Music, and the Arts* 8, no. 3 (1967): 138-145.

<sup>52</sup> Berger, "The Composer of Choral Music," 145.

<sup>53</sup> Berger, *Memories, Musings, and Meanderings*, 120, 4 March 1992.



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