



THE MUSIC: ORIGINAL COMPOSITIONS

TERRACES OF LIGHT

An oratorio based on the Tablet of Carmel by Bahá'u'lláh

When Norwegian composer Lasse Thoresen was commissioned in 1998 by the Bahá'í World Centre to write music for the official opening of the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb on Mount Carmel in Haifa, Israel, during May 2001, he was challenged to create a piece of music befitting the grandeur, beauty, joy, and drama of a great event—focussing on the suffering and triumph of a Prophet of God, while at the same time full, melodious, and accessible to the public.

Seeking inspiration from the sacred scriptures of the Bahá'í Faith, Mr. Thoresen was drawn to the Tablet of Carmel, written by Bahá'u'lláh in 1890 during one of His visits to this holy mountain. Bahá'ís regard the Tablet as the charter for the establishment of the Faith's spiritual and administrative center. Written in the form of a dialogue between God and the mountain, the Tablet lends itself to interpretation as an oratorio, a musical work based on a sacred theme with different singers representing different characters.

The text personifies Mount Carmel as a female character longing for reunion with her Lord. God, through His Prophet, represented as a male character, comforts her and announces the establishment of His Seat upon the mountain, a center from which spiritual forces will flow out to the world. God addresses the mountain in powerful and poetic language, saying, “Call out to Zion, O Carmel, and announce the joyful tidings: He that was hidden from mortal eyes is come!” Carmel represents not only the physical mountain, but also the renewal of man's relationship to God. The soloists' voices recreate this dialogue, while the solos are interwoven with choral passages, fanfares, and orchestral interludes.

The Shrine of the Báb, the burial place of the Prophet-Herald of the Bahá'í Faith and the focal center of the terraced gardens on Mount Carmel, is referred to as “the celestial Kaaba round which have circled in adoration the favoured of God, the pure in heart, and the company of the most exalted angels.” The Tablet states, “Ere long will God sail His Ark upon thee,” a reference to the establishment of the Seat of the Universal House of Justice, supreme governing body of the Bahá'í Faith, in close proximity to the Shrine.

The score was written for three vocal soloists — soprano, tenor, and baritone — solo violin, symphony orchestra, and an 80-voice choir. Its single uninterrupted movement runs just over 30 minutes and has five distinct parts that coincide with the five main sections of the Tablet. The fourth, climactic section of the piece is designed to accompany the gradual lighting of the Terraces and of the Shrine of the Báb.

O QUEEN OF CARMEL!

A symphonic composition in three movements

This symphonic composition by Tolib Shahidi, a composer from Tajikistan, was commissioned by the Universal House of Justice in 1998 for the Opening of the Terraces of the Shrine of the Báb in May 2001.

It is based on a eulogy by Shoghi Effendi to “the Queen of Carmel”—the Shrine of the Báb—which begins, “Upon thee, O queen of Carmel, be the purest, the most tender salutations, the fairest, the most gracious blessings!”

The composition consists of three movements. In the first, a child’s voice recites the text over a slightly oriental lyrical carpet created by a sound reminiscent of a santour.

The second movement, entitled “O Queen of Carmel!,” opens with a fanfare of trumpets and kettledrums. A tenor solo sings the text in an attitude of humility. The melancholy oriental theme of the middle section, performed in a style evoking the folk music of Iran and Tajikistan, is gradually transformed into one of heroism and rejoicing.

The mood of the opening of the third movement, “Blessed, immeasurably Blessed,” is soft and tragic. The soprano takes the lead and is eventually joined by the tenor soloist. The tone brightens to one of hope at the end.

Throughout the piece, moments of sorrow and tragedy are sweetened by the sublime vision of the Queen of Carmel surrounded by beautiful flowers and gardens. This combination suggests both the calamity and victory that featured so prominently in the mission of the Báb. The duration of the entire composition is approximately 15 minutes.