

LEO SOWERBY
Forsaken of Man

New World Records 80394

WILLIAM FERRIS CHORALE

In October 1954 Leo Sowerby received a hastily penned note from his good friend and fellow composer, Samuel Barber: "[Fritz] Reiner is doing a big chorus number of mine in March in Chicago and I wish I knew how to write for choir the way you do, damn it; so please come and help me to correct the mistakes!" Sowerby (1895-1968) had written the first of his nearly 200 choral scores at the age of fifteen, and his final composition, when he was seventy-three, was an anthem for choir. *Forsaken of Man* (1939) thus stands near the midpoint of his career.

On an afternoon early in February of 1935, Leo Sowerby had just finished practicing for an organ recital he was about to give at the University of Chicago's Rockefeller Chapel, when Edward Borgers, a 19-year-old junior at the University, approached, asking the composer to look at an opera libretto he had written. "I never write opera," Sowerby said, with his characteristic brusqueness. Nevertheless, he thrust the manuscript into his briefcase. This was the inauspicious beginning of a friendship that eventually produced two cantatas, *Forsaken of Man* (1939) and *Christ Reborn* (1950).

Late in 1938 Sowerby suggested to Borgers that they collaborate on a cantata for performance on Good Friday. By that time, Borgers had completed degrees in both music and English, with a special interest in drama. The two men worked out the cantata together, although Borgers was by then teaching in northern Michigan, while Sowerby continued to work in Chicago.

The libretto of *Forsaken of Man* generally follows the Gospel of Matthew's account, but with liberal insertions from the other three gospels. Dr. Borgers chose the selections from the Gospels, and then wrote the chorus's role, as commentary on the story.

Forsaken of Man is divided into four parts, with a brief Prologue and Epilogue. Although this is unusual for a cantata, the form has precedent in both drama and opera. In all four parts, which are approximately equal in length, the title of the work is the governing motive. In Part I, the disciples implicitly forsake Jesus, in their failure to understand his teachings. In Parts II and III, Jesus is rejected first by Judas, then by Peter and the other disciples. Finally, in Part IV, "all the people" turn against Jesus as he is brought before them by Pilate and led off to be crucified. The climax of Part IV and the entire cantata evoke the ultimate despair in Jesus' final cry from the cross: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

Sowerby's music underscores the painful progression from misunderstanding to actual desertion by one traitorous disciple, the group of trusted disciples, the masses and, as it seemed in the agony of crucifixion, possibly even by God.

The Prologue remains solidly in the key of D minor, despite the use of chromaticism. Part I progresses through several related keys by way of orderly modulations. In the next two parts the modulations are increasingly adventurous, and travel to more distant keys. Key signatures are omitted entirely in Part IV, and there are sections of tonal ambiguity. Only at Jesus' final cry, however, is tonality itself abandoned. After a dramatic pause, it is restored in the Epilogue.

The dramatic story is propelled by the Evangelist, a role given to a tenor (as in J.S. Bach's St. Matthew and St. John Passions). The Evangelist stands outside the action, narrating in the past tense, mostly in a declamatory, recitative style. The action itself is in the present tense, and is carried mainly by seven soloists, each playing the role of a specific character in the Biblical accounts. Of these, the major role by far is that of Jesus, assigned to a baritone (again paralleling Bach's Passions).

The chorus has a twofold role: Within the action it is called upon for various group scenes--an argument among the disciples; a council of priests and Pharisees; and the mob at Jesus' trial and crucifixion. The chorus also stands outside the action; in words created by the librettist, it reflects on the larger meaning of the events taking place and, by implication, invites the listener to do so. The Epilogue involves the listener directly, as the chorus asks three questions. A quiet organ coda continues the minor mode of the Epilogue, as if awaiting a response. Only in the final measure is there a glimmer of hope, as the work is allowed slowly to resolve to a major chord.

As is characteristic of Sowerby's choral compositions, the music of *Forsaken of Man* is always subordinate to the text. Phrase structures, melodic lines, harmonic progressions and larger formal considerations all serve the libretto. Imitative counterpoint is introduced to dramatize the text, for example, in the strict canon written for the argument among the disciples in Part I and the canonic murmuring of the disciples ("Lord, is it I?") in Part II.

The most conspicuous features of Sowerby's music are his singular harmonic structures and progressions, even while remaining within the bounds of tonality. Sowerby's natural musical language is counterpoint, but the voice-leading of the individual horizontal melodic lines is not adjusted in order to produce traditional vertical harmonies. Chordal structures follow one another in a manner that defies easy analysis. Yet one familiar with his writing can hear that the seemingly discordant notes are in fact resolved in their individual melodic lines, although those resolutions may be greatly delayed.

Forsaken of Man received two simultaneous first performances on Good Friday evening, March 22, 1940. One was at St. James' Episcopal Church in Chicago, with Leo Sowerby as organist-choirmaster, and the other in that city's Hyde Park Methodist Church, under the direction of Mrs. Mary Ruth Craven. The work is dedicated to the Right Reverend George Craig Stewart, then Episcopal Bishop of Chicago and long-time friend of the composer.

—Ronald M. Huntington

Ronald M. Huntington, *Professor of Philosophy and Religion at Chapman College and an organist-choirmaster, has recently completed a biography of Leo Sowerby.*

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Choral Music of Leo Sowerby. Trinity Church Choir. Gothic Records.

Organ Music of Leo Sowerby. Catherine Crozier, organ. Delos D 3075.

Organ Music of Leo Sowerby. William Whitehead, organ. Resmiranda 8004.

Piano Works. Gail Quillman, piano. New World 80376.

Trio in C-Sharp Minor; Trio for Violin, Violoncello and Pianoforte. La Musica Gioiosa Trio. New World 80365.

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Forsaken of Man

Text by Edward Borgers, and from the Gospels

1- *Prologue*

Chorus

On a cross between two thieves they have nailed a man: The Son of man, and yet forsaken of mankind. For all have failed him and come short of the glory of God.

2- *Part I*

The Hope of Jesus

Evangelist

And his disciples come unto him, and he taught them, saying:

Jesus

Ye are the salt of the earth: but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted? it is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and trodden under foot of men. Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Chorus

But they cannot understand the Kingdom of the Spirit. Each dreams himself a monarch; vain, pompous, and rich. None sees the path of loneliness and pain.

Jesus

I must go unto Jerusalem and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.

Chorus

Be it far from thee, Lord, this shall not be unto thee. Thou shalt rather sit upon a golden throne, clothed in scarlet and fine linen. All nations shall fear thee and bow down before thee; wealth and glory shall pour in upon thee, King of kings and Lord of lords!

Jesus

If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.

Evangelist

And as they were going to Capernaum, contention rose among them.

Chorus

Master, decide, who shall be greatest of all among us? Who shall sit upon thy right hand, and who upon they left? Master, decide, which of us shall judge the nations? Whom of us shall the angels serve? In the kingdom to come, whose throne shall be set above the others?

Evangelist

And he saith unto them,

Jesus

If any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all.

Evangelist

And he took a child, and set him in the midst of them, and when he had taken him in his arms, he said unto them,

Jesus

Whosoever shall receive one of such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but Him that sent me.

*3- Part II**The Traitor***Chorus**

The multitudes cry, Hosanna, and seek to make him king. Gently he doth refuse them. He knoweth the frailty of worldly glory, that these now wildly cheering voices will soon demand his death; that they who love him most of all are yet too weak, too human for the fiery trial.

Evangelist

Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odor of the ointment. Then saith one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot,

Judas

To what purpose is this waste? Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?

Evangelist

This he said, not that he cared for the poor; but because he was a thief, and had the bag; and bare what was put therein. Then saith Jesus,

Jesus

Let her alone: against the day of my burying hath she kept this. For the poor always ye have with you; but me ye have not always.

Evangelist

Then gathered the chief priests and Pharisees a council.

Chorus

What shall we do? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and our nation.

Caiaphas

It is expedient that one man should die for the people, that the whole nation perish not.

Chorus

Let it be Jesus! Let Jesus die for the nation. We must take him subtly and kill him. But not on the feast day, lest there be an uproar among the people.

Judas

What will ye give me, and I will deliver him unto you?

Chorus

Why, who are you?

Judas

I am one of the twelve, Judas Iscariot.

Evangelist

And they covenanted with him for thirty pieces of silver. And from that time he sought opportunity to betray him. And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover. Now when the even was come, he sat down with the twelve, and as they did eat, he said,

Jesus

Verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me.

Evangelist

And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto him,

Chorus

Lord, is it I?

Evangelist

And he answered and said,

Jesus

He that dippeth his hand with me in the dish, the same shall betray me. The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born.

Evangelist

Then Judas, which betrayed him, answered and said,

Judas

Master, is it I?

Evangelist

He said unto him,

Jesus

Thou hast said. That thou doest, do quickly.

Evangelist

And he went immediately out, and it was night.

4- Part III

The Deserters

Chorus

Hour of fate, hour of doom. Heaven and hell tonight will battle for mankind. Through the cold shadows hurries a traitor; in an upper room the Master speaks with those he loves:

Jesus

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. All ye shall be offended because of me this night, for it is written, I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered.

Evangelist

But Peter said unto him,

Peter Although all shall be offended, yet will not I.

Evangelist

And Jesus saith unto him,

Jesus

Verily I say unto thee, that in this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice.

Evangelist

But he spake the more vehemently,

Peter

If I should die with thee, I will not deny thee in any wise.

Evangelist

Likewise also said they all. Then cometh Jesus with them unto a place called Gethsemane, and saith unto his disciples,

Jesus

Sit ye here, while I go and pray yonder.

Evangelist

And he took Peter, and James, and John. Then saith he unto them,

Jesus

My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here and watch with me.

Evangelist

And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying,

Jesus

O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt.

Evangelist

And he cometh unto the disciples, and findeth them asleep, and saith unto Peter,

Jesus

What, could ye not watch with me one hour?

Evangelist

He went away the second time, and prayed, saying,

Jesus

O my Father, if this cup cannot pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done.

Evangelist

And he came and found them asleep again: for their eyes were heavy. And he left them, and prayed the third time, saying the same words. Then cometh he to his disciples.

Chorus

Sleep on now, disciples three, take your rest; behold the hour is at hand, and the Son of man is betrayed into the hand of sinners. Behold he is at hand, that doth betray the Lord.

Evangelist

Behold, a multitude, and he that was called Judas went before them, and drew near unto Jesus to kiss him. But Jesus saith unto him,

Jesus

Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss?

Evangelist

Then all the disciples forsook him and fled. And they that laid hold on Jesus led him away to Caiaphas, the high priest, where the scribes and elders were assembled. Now Peter sat without in the palace: and a damsel came unto him, saying,

Damsel

Thou also was with Jesus of Galilee.

Evangelist

But he denied before them all, saying,

Peter

I know not what thou sayest.

Evangelist

And when he was come out into the porch, another maid saw him, and said unto them that were there,

Maid

This fellow was also with Jesus of Nazareth.

Evangelist

And again he denied with an oath,

Peter

I do not know the man.

Evangelist

And after a while came unto him they that stood by, and said unto Peter,

Chorus

Surely thou also art one of them; for thy speech betrayeth thee.

Evangelist

Then began he to curse and to swear, saying,

Peter

I do not know the man.

Evangelist

And immediately the cock crew, and Peter remembered the words of Jesus,

Chorus

Before the cock crew, thou shalt deny me thrice.

Evangelist

And he went out, and wept bitterly.

5- Part IV

The Death of Jesus

Chorus

Where now are the glad Hosannas? where now the confident disciples? where now their Lord and master? where now the kingdom of their dreams? Into the darkness all have fled. Terror pursueth them; hope hath deserted them. No hidden corner of the night is so black as their despair.

Evangelist

An Pilate said unto the people,

Pilate

I have found no fault in this man touching those things whereof ye accuse him. I will therefore chastise him, and release him.

Evangelist

And they cried out all at once, saying,

Chorus

Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas!

Evangelist

And Pilate said,

Pilate

What shall I do then with Jesus?

Chorus

Crucify him.

Pilate

Why, what evil hath he done?

Chorus

Crucify him.

Evangelist

When Pilate saw that he could prevail nothing, he took water, and washed his hands before the multitude, saying

Pilate

I am innocent of the blood of this just person, see ye to it.

Evangelist

Then answered all the people, and said,

Chorus

His blood be on us, and our children.

Evangelist

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus, and stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand; and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying,

Chorus

Hail, King of the Jews!

Evangelist

And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head. And after they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him. And when they were come to a place called Golgotha, they gave him vinegar to drink, mingled with gall. And they crucified him. And sitting down, they watched him there; and set up over his head his accusation, written,

Chorus

This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.

Evangelists

And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, and saying,

Chorus

Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross.

Evangelist

Likewise also the chief priests, mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said,

Chorus

He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the king of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.

Evangelist

Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice,

Jesus

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

*6- Epilogue***Chorus**

He cries aloud for the world that hears him not. He cries aloud. Will men pass by him carelessly, or pause but to mock? Is this night of agony to be a sacrifice in vain? He cries aloud! Who will heed his cry, this Man upon the Cross?

Bruce Hall (Jesus) has appeared extensively on opera, concert, and recital stages in Europe and the United States. He has performed with the Cologne, Stuttgart, and Netherlands opera companies, as well as with the Seattle, Chattanooga, Michigan, and Art park operas. Equally at home on the concert stage, Hall has been heard as soloist with the Aspen and Meadow Brook music festivals, and with the Detroit, Tucson, Honolulu, and North Carolina symphony orchestras.

John Vorrasi (Evangelist) is well-known to Chicago audiences through his many appearances as soloist with the William Ferris Chorale. He has given first performances of many new works, often with the composers as his accompanists. Vorrasi made his European debut at the 1986 Aldeburgh Festival and was a featured soloist in the 1982 Spoleto Festival USA. His recitals have been broadcast by Radio Vaticana and the BBC as well as on radio stations throughout the United States.

Alicia Clark (Damsel) is a graduate of the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music. She has performed with the Cincinnati May Festival and Grant Park Symphony choruses. **Judith Compton** (Maid) has been a member of the William Ferris Chorale since 1979. Among her solo credits are the Chicago premiere of Ned Rorem's *Homer* and Darius Milhaud's *The Two Cities*. **Matthew Greenberg** (Pilate) performed with the choruses of the Opera Theatre of Saint Louis and the Lyric Opera Center for American Artists. He sang with the Santa Fe Desert Chorale and is currently a member of the Chicago Symphony Chorus. **Paul Grizzell** (Peter) has sung leading roles with the Chicago Opera Theatre and Chamber Opera Chicago. He has recorded with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra under conductors James Levine and George Solti. **Thomas Potter** (Caiaphas, Judas) served as an apprentice with the Des Moines Metro opera after completing his degree at DePauw University. He has performed with the Chicago Opera Theatre and is a member of the Chicago Symphony Chorus.

Thomas Weisflog made his debut with the William Ferris Chorale in 1979 performing Sowerby's *Forsaken of Man*; and has been the ensemble's official organist and accompanist since 1983. He has appeared as soloist with the Chicago Symphony on numerous occasions, most recently in the *Glagolithic Mass* by Leos Janacek, under the direction of Michael Tilson Thomas. He is in great demand as a recitalist and his concerts have been broadcast by National Public Radio.

William Ferris, founder and director of the Chorale, was born and trained in Chicago. His compositions have been performed by major American orchestras, including the Chicago Symphony, premiered at Britain's Aldeburgh Festival, and broadcast worldwide by the BBC. He studied composition with Leo Sowerby and completed and orchestrated Sowerby's last major work, *La Corona*. Ferris was the first American composer to teach at the Vatican; he received a Papal knighthood in 1989 for his contributions to the musical arts.

The William Ferris Chorale was founded in 1971 with a goal of promoting the music of our time. Introducing concertgoers to significant contemporary works with the composer in residence has become a Chorale hallmark. Gian Carlo Menotti, Ned Rorem, William Schuman, Dominick Argento, Vincent Persichetti, William Mathias, David Diamond, and John Corigliano have been among the Chorale's guests. Hailed both nationally and internationally, the fifty-member ensemble has been an eloquent champion of the contemporary composer.

Soprano

Alicia Clark
Patricia Crusius

Nancy Greco
Pamela Jacob
Sally Krueger

Laura McDermott
Virginia Picken
Susan Russell

Maureen Sauer, S.N.D.
Donna Kaye Simonton
Grace Stauskas
Michelle Thomas
Susan Wolz
Marcia Wunderlich
Nancy Young

Alto

Gertrude Arndt
Kathy Bigley
Patricia Brayley
Judith Compton
Elizabeth Hay
Lois Hobart

Eva Kielpinski
Susan Neighbor
Jeanne Neuhaus
Pamela Pettibone
Karen Remington
Valerie Schneider
Sara Stevenson

Tenor

Benjamin Beach
Andrew Frankel
Jerry Jelsema
Bartholomew Niechaj
Vincent Rideout
Gilbert Schumm

Bass

Randall Buescher
Gerald Chalupka
Charles Fiori
Matthew Greenberg
Gerald Holbrook
John King
Richard Link
Arthur Osteen
Mark Peterson
Thomas Potter
Philip Skeris
Robert Stanley
Michael Teolis

Leo Sowerby

Forsaken of Man

Text by Edward Borgers, and from the gospels

- 1- Prologue (3:25)
- 2- Part I The Hope of Jesus (12:38)
- 3- Part II The Traitor (14:04)
- 4- Part III The Deserters (17:44)
- 5- Part IV The Death of Jesus (13:10)
- 6- Epilogue (4:40)

Jesus - Bruce Hall
Evangelist - John Vorrasi
Caiaphas, Judas - Thomas Potter
Peter - Paul Grizzell
Pilate - Matthew Greenberg
Damsel - Alicia Clark
Maid - Judith Compton

Thomas Weisflog, organ
William Ferris Chorale
William Ferris, conductor

This recording is dedicated to the memory of Ellen Gleason Conklin and Clarence Robert Conklin.

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