

Alexander Massey

Nachamu Nachamu Nigun

(for 1 or 2 voices, & piano)



Shir Publications

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Nachamu Nachamu

Nigun

The music for this came to me in the week of *Tisha B'Av* (the 9th of the month of *Av*), the day that marks many sadnesses for the Jewish people - the date it is said that the Israelites failed to enter the Promised Land and began their 40 years wandering in the wilderness, the destruction of both Temples in ancient times (656 years apart), the expulsion from England (1290), the expulsion from Spain (1492), and the deportation of the Jews from the Warsaw Ghetto to the death camp Treblinka (1942).

The Shabbat that follows this date is *Nachamu Shabbat*, the first of 7 sabbaths of 'consolation'. The *haftarah* reading (i.e. reading from books of the Prophets) from Isaiah 40:1 begins with the words *Nachamu, nachamu* 'be comforted, be comforted'. The Rabbis of the 2nd century interpreted the repetition as responses to the destruction of the First, and then Second Temple. But for me, it is also much more personal. When we suffer a deep loss, the greatest comfort comes from those who understand that nothing can compensate, diminish or repair that loss; it is total and devastating, and our only salvation is to feel and meet that loss directly. There is a second kind of comfort, a healing, that can come, when we manage to embrace the ever-unfolding new possibilities of life, and accept that new growth and nourishment are attainable. The loss remains, but so also does hope.

To commemorate the date of *Tisha B'Av*, the number 9 is embedded in the structure of this piece. Each phrase consists of 9 bars. The piece has 3 phrases: 3 phrases of 9 bars makes 27 bars, and the sum of these two digits (2+7) makes 9; a performance with the music repeated lasts 54 bars; the sum of the digits (5+4) again makes 9. The first phrase (bb 1-9) has 32 notes, the second (bb 10-18) has 33 notes, and the third (bb 19-27) has 34 notes, embedding the principle of slow and inevitable growth and forward movement (and making 99 notes in all). Singing the piece through twice, i.e. repeating the music, represents the repetition of *nachamu* at the beginning of Isaiah 40:1. As with all my compositions that encode symbolism through numbers, other structural features or word painting, the intellectual ideas always play a secondary role to the emotional content of the music.

Because of its blend of sadness and hope, and the context in which I wrote this piece, it seemed fitting to associate it with remembrance, which in my mind is about both honouring the past, and opening to the present and future - fitting themes for *Tisha B'Av*, a *Yizkor* (memorial) service, or *yahrzeit* (anniversary of a death). Its ultimate intent is one of love, consolation and healing.

Performance notes:

1. This *nigun* does not have to be sung metronomically, and has a gestural quality.
2. The singer(s) should aim to convey each 9 bar section as a whole statement.

Nachamu, Nachamu Nigun

Music: Alexander Massey

Broadly ♩ = 40

mp Yai lai yai-lai lai

mp Yai lai yai-lai lai

Piano

7 yai la-la-lai la-la-lai yai la-la-lai lai la-la lai lai ya-lai lai ya-la

7 yai la-la-lai la-la-lai yai lai lai la-la lai lai yai lai

Pno.

Nachamu, Nachamu Nigun

12

lai lai lai ya-la-lai yai lai lai ya-lai lai yai la-la-lai

12

lai lai lai lai yai lai yai lai lai yai la-la-lai

Pno.

17

ya-la-lai yai la-la-lai lai la-la lai lai la-lai lai ya-lai lai yai lai

17

ya-la-lai yai la-la-lai lai la-la lai lai la-lai lai ya-lai lai yai

Pno.

22

la-la-lai *mf* yai lai ya-la-lai lai yai lai ya-la-lai yai lai lai yai

22

lai *mf* yai lai yai lai lai yai lai lai yai yai

Pno.

Nachamu, Nachamu Nigun

27 Fm




la - la - lai lai la - la lai lai ya-lai lai la - la lai yai lai la-la-lai

lai lai lai lai ya-lai lai la - la lai yai lai lai

Pno.

32



32

32

rit.

Pno.