

David Lang the writings
Cappella Amsterdam Daniel Reuss

# David Lang (b. 1957)

# the writings

1 again (after ecclesiastes) 5.	. 58
2 if I am silent (after the book of esther) 8.	. 03
3 for love is strong (after the song of songs)	. 41
4 where you go (after the book of ruth) 10	. 13
5 solitary (after the book of lamentations) 12.	. 43
6 again (changed return) 6.	00

Cappella Amsterdam Daniel Reuss, conductor

### Cappella Amsterdam

Sopranos	Tenors
Sanda Audere	Jon Etxabe Arzuago
Aldona Bartnik	Mattijs Hoogendijk
Elisabeth Blom	William Knight
Martha Bosch	Adriaan de Koster
Marijke van der Harst	Joost van Velzen
Maria Köpcke	Diederik Rooker

#### Altos

Sabine van der Heijden Mieke van Laren Dorien Lievers Hebe de Champeaux Suzanne Verburg Eline Welle

#### Basses

Erks Jan Dekker Jan Douwes Harry van der Kamp Gulian van Nierop Nathan Tax Johan Vermeer







Total playing time:

55. 43



























In 2005 I wrote a piece based on a few lines from the book of ecclesiastes. It is called again (after ecclesiastes) and both the writing of it and the thinking about it were very powerful experiences for me. One of the most powerful was the recognition that this Old Testament book has a liturgical function, that it is read publicly in many Jewish congregations in conjunction with the fall harvest holiday Sukkot. Somehow it seemed very poignant to me that Judaism might link together such a dark and philosophical text with a joyous religious festival celebrating abundance. I asked my rabbi about it and he encouraged me to look at the other Old Testament writings that have been incorporated into the Jewish liturgical year. So I did.

The Hebrew Bible is divided into three parts — The Five Books of Moses, The Prophets, and The Writings — and of course all of these texts play a role in Jewish worship. Over the centuries,

however, five books in particular from The Writings became associated with particular holidays, and it is possible to chart the course of a year following them: Ecclesiastes, Esther, the Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations. It seems to me that the point of connecting each book to its holiday is that these books are very human, very personal. Much of religion is mysterious and unknowable, but these books are all about people and their emotional lives - life and death, courage, love, companionship, regret. Incredibly, some of these books don't mention God or religion or spirituality at all; rather, they underline what is human in us, and what is universal. One way to think of these five writings together is as a catalog of human emotions, repeating endlessly, year after

I thought that if I took some of the language that seemed most universal in each of these writings and set it to music I might be able to make my own emotional

































catalog, and that I would be able to use the music to get to the humanity that is at the core of these very human texts.

the writings begins and ends with the movement again (after ecclesiastes). The score instructs the performers to sing it differently, the second time it is sung. The cycle, like the year, may repeat, but never exactly.

The complete set of the writings and the movement if I am silent, taken from the book of esther, were co-commissioned by the Carnegie Hall Corporation and the Nederlands Kamerkoor and were premiered on 20 March 2019 in Zankel Hall. NY, by the combined forces of Theatre of Voices and the Yale Voxtet, Paul Hillier conducting.

The other movements were premiered over the course of 14 years:

again (after ecclesiastes) was written for the Cerddorion Vocal Ensemble and

premiered in 2005, conducted by Kristina Boerger. for love is strong was written for Paul Hillier and Ars Nova Copenhagen and premiered in 2008. where you go was written for the 75th anniversary of the Tanglewood Music Center and premiered in 2015, with an ensemble of their opera fellows, conducted by Ruth Reinhardt. solitary was written for Cappella Amsterdam and premiered in 2016, conducted by Daniel Reuss.

#### David Lang

One of the fundamental tensions in David Lang's music is between process and beauty, and nowhere is this more taut and poetic than in his works for voices. The processes are not only musical: they start at the moment he selects the texts. The works in this collection all set words found in the Old Testament, but always subjected to a kind of curation both automatic and poetic. Many sacred texts are only recited once a year, giving them a sense of occasion and an especial emotional charge. The composer's own notes indicate a specific preoccupation with usage: he describes the original texts as having a function, playing a role, being a catalog. The texts, when subjected to a curatorial process (as in for love is strong, which is basically a list of all of the similes found in the Song of Songs), take on their own poetry when set to music, almost as if the process of cutting out three quarters of the text invites the music to imagine those limbs regrowing.

Oftentimes, the austerity of David's vocal writing allows for a more fluid and romantic emotional expression than one might expect. This is particularly evident in the beginning of if I am silent, where the initial expression of the text is sung in a spoken rhythm, a little cell based on a minor scale: "if I am" points up, and "silent" points down. When it repeats, after a fashion, suddenly splinter cells disrupt the grid, working almost as if in their own tempo; David sets these secondary and tertiary lines in a smiliar up/down relationship, but here, the ratios are expanded: what was once a scale is now a little scaffolding of harmonic and expressive possibility.

David and I both live in Manhattan, which, for the most part, is composed of a grid with consistent proportions. There are little unexpected variations in the grid, creating little surprising vistas, but for the most part, it's a consistent shape, arguably a boring way to organize a city,

































in stark contrast to the joyful chaos of London or Rome. Four times a year, the sunsets and sunrises align perfectly with the east-west streets, creating an effect called "Manhattanhenge," a moment of primal and surreal beauty. It's only because of the grid, of the process, that such a beauty becomes possible, with hundreds of people blocking traffic after a day's routines to take a picture of something unexpectedly shimmering. David's music works this way, where the text choices are sometimes lists, sometimes subtle filters applied to an Old Testament text, with their implied routines, cycles, and functions. He creates a sort of musical grid, with simple rhythms and an enormous patience with repetition. Scrolling through the sheet music itself is disorienting, because many of the pages resemble one another: a kind of visual symmetry. Then, through an act of cunning artistry — a slower descant above the texture, a sudden tumescence of density of sound, a single voice making

a quietly ecstatic incantation — he makes us realize that the grid has been aligned with something divine the whole time. It's an inimitable effect, and one powerfully on display in this collection of choral works.

#### Nico Muhly





























#### again (after ecclesiastes)

people come and people go the earth goes on and on

the sun rises, the sun sets it rushes to where it rises again

the wind blows round, round and round it stops, it blows again

all the rivers run to the sea but the sea is never full

from where the rivers run they run again

these things make me so tired I can't speak, I can't see, I can't hear

what happened before will happen again I forgot it all before I will forget it all again

#### if I am silent (after the book of esther)

If I am silent I cannot think that I will be saved if I am silent

If I am silent help will come from somewhere else but not for me if I am silent

everything I have everything I am everything I know everything I feel

maybe everything I have I have for such a time as this

#### for love is strong (after the song of songs)

for love is strong

like wine like oil, pouring like wine like the tents of Kedar

like the curtains of Solomon like one who wanders by the flocks

like women

like the horses of Pharaoh's chariots like perfume in the vineyards of Engedi

like doves' eyes like the rose of Sharon like the lily of the valleys like the lily among thorns

like the apple tree among all other trees like leaping upon the mountains

like skipping upon the hills

for love is strong

like a roe

like a young hart

like my dove

like the foxes

like the little foxes

like our vines

like tender grapes

like a roe

like a young hart

like the roes

like the hinds of the field

like pillars of smoke

like silver like gold

like love, for the daughters of Jerusalem

like doves' eyes

like a flock of goats

like a flock of sheep that are newly shorn

like a thread of scarlet like a pomegranate

like the tower of David, where hang the

shields of mighty men

like two young roes, which feed among

the lilies

10





























for love is strong

like the mountain of myrrh like the hill of frankincense

like one chain of your neck

like wine

like all spices

like the honeycomb like honey and milk

like the smell of Lebanon

like a garden enclosed like a spring shut up

like a fountain sealed

like a fountain of gardens

like a well of living waters like streams from Lebanon

like my garden

like the spices thereof

like his garden

like his pleasant fruits

like my garden

like my myrrh

like my spice like my honeycomb

like my honey

like my wine

like my milk

like my dove

like myrrh

like my fingers with sweet smelling myrrh

for love is strong

like another beloved

like women

like another beloved like ten thousand

like the most fine gold

like a raven

like the eyes of doves

like a bed of spices

like sweet flowers

like lilies, dropping sweet smelling myrrh

like gold rings set with beryl

like bright ivory overlaid with sapphires

like pillars of marble

like fine gold

like Lebanon, excellent as the cedars

like women

like his garden

like the beds of spices

like the gardens

like lilies.

like the lilies

like Tirzah

like Jerusalem

like an army with banners

like a flock of goats

like a flock of sheep

like a piece of a pomegranate

like my dove

like the morning

like the moon

like the sun

like an army with banners

like chariots

like the clash of two armies

like iewels

like a worker's skillful hands

like a round goblet

like new wheat set about with lilies

like two young roes

like a tower of ivory

like ponds

like the tower of Lebanon, looking towards

Damascus

like Carmel

like purple

like a palm tree

like clusters of grapes

like the palm tree

like the boughs thereof

like clusters of the vine

like apples

like the best wine, that goes down sweet,

causing the lips of sleepers to speak

like my brother, who sucked my mother's

breasts

like the juice of my pomegranate

like a seal upon your heart

like a seal upon your arm

for love is strong

like death

like the grave

like coals of fire, with a vehement flame

like a wall

like a door

like a wall













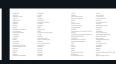






















like towers like my vineyard, which is mine like a roe like a young hart upon the mountains of

spices

#### where you go (after the book of ruth)

where you go where you stay where you live where you die

don't make me leave you don't make me turn away from you don't make me go

where you go I will go where you stay I will stay where you live I will live where you die I will die

don't make me leave you I will never leave you don't make me turn away from you I will never turn away from you don't make me go I will never go

solitary (after the book of lamentations)

solitary

pasture-less running on exhausted

in flight from the hunter

bereaved I remember

the life that was mine enslaved

bitter now

there is no one left to help me weeping

comfortless grievous betrayed unclean exiled despised naked oppressed endlessly enslaved moaning restless ashamed overtaken filthy

endlessly downfallen mourning deserted with no one to console me crying out the life that was mine is now someone else's grief stricken

brought low crying out suffering starving despised alone seared by fire captive

without relief of any kind deep into my bones

like deer entangled



































comfortless

troubled

crying out

sick at heart

enveloped in darkness

wicked

turned back desolated endlessly in misery chained weighed down weakened

powerless cast down forgotten rejected crushed pitiless

like grapes in a winepress swallowed up my crying eyes broken

streaming with tears brought down to the ground,

comfortless cut off courageless powerless shocked without protection caught in a flaming fire beaten

unconsoled devoured

surrounded the aim of every arrow

an unclean, filthy thing swallowed up abandoned by my lovers destroyed distressed mourning churning moaning restless wrecked bereaved destroyed inside me, it is like death forgotten

ruined dejected

sunk into the ground destroyed and broken

lawless blind

eyes all cried out everything churning empty of emotion

wounded

fainting away in the streets of the city

starving

fainting away in the streets of the city

gasping my last breath

comfortless

downfall as vast as the sea unhealed and unhealable

futile guilty mocked hissed jeered

destroyed without pity

gloated over

my tears stream down

in rivers

day and night! no rest for me no rest for my eyes

crying out

my heart poured out

like water

fainting from hunger

tormented starving slaughtered

lying on the ground in the middle of the streets

fallen by the sword killed in anger

slaughtered without pity

my terrors

from every direction

inescapable destroyed afflicted beaten

walking in darkness and not in light

alone

again and again, all day

































skin rubbed raw flesh worn away bones broken besieged and surrounded

bitter and hard living in darkness like the dead

walled in no escape

weighed down with chains

when I  $\operatorname{cry}$   $\operatorname{out}$ 

when I plead for help no one can hear

my way is blocked

there's no way forward

hunted broken

torn to pieces

stunned

every archer aims at me

every arrow finds me

pierced mocked

taunted, all day long filled with bitterness

drunken on bitterness teeth broken pressed down into the ashes so far from peace I have forgotten what it is my strength is gone

my only hope is you

words and music by David Lang www.davidlangmusic.com

#### **Publisher credit:**

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## Acknowledgements

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This album was recorded at the Pieterskerk Utrecht, Netherlands, on 30 November, 1 and 2 December 2020



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