



Psalm 138 for Mixed Choir and Chamber Ensemble

This work was commissioned by Carolina Voices to create music inspired by The Dead Sea Scrolls exhibition at Discovery Place, February-May, 2006. The text is taken from Psalm 138, included in the Great Psalm Scroll (11Q5), one of thirteen scrolls to be featured in The Dead Sea Scrolls exhibition.

Carolina Voices was awarded the 2005 McColl Award by the Arts and Science Council of Charlotte/Mecklenburg. The award, established in 2001 to honor Hugh McColl, Jr. and his wife Jane for their significant role in advancing arts, science and history in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, is a \$25,000 grant presented each year to an ASC Affiliate for the creation of new work. This is the first known concert setting of music to the original text of exhibited scrolls.

Composer's note:

Psalm 138 is one of the 41 psalms included in the Psalms Scroll (11Q5) featured in the Dead Sea Scroll exhibit.

It is scored for chorus SATB, flute, oboe, clarinet, horn, violin, cello, bass, harp and percussion.

The text closely follows standard versions. Like most psalms it is a song of praise, devotion and thanksgiving.

For this musical setting the eight verses were divided into five sections, with the second verse omitted. Each verse is introduced in Hebrew, then English.

I. O Lord with all my Heart. The English statement of the words is entirely in 5/8 time signature, and the melodies are based on the Phrygian modal scale, both common elements of Middle Eastern music.

II. On the Day I Called, is a setting of the third verse. It features a repeated, "calling" figure in the harp and a choral response.

III. This section follows without pause and includes verses 4 and 5. This is the most energetic movement. The "**Kings of the Earth,**" are suggested by an eight-part choral cluster of tones which then proceeds to a vigorous hymn of praise, in 7/8 time.

IV. The fourth movement is the most solemn and devotional, based on verses 6 and 7.

Each verse is heard first in Hebrew then in English. It is mostly acapella except for few interjections from the harp.

V. The final movement is inspired by the traditions of Middle Eastern dance. After a brief introduction the instrumental ensemble spins out a series of swirling and intertwining melodic figures over a repeating rhythmic scheme, while the chorus intones longer chant-like phrases.