



'You are the Light of the World!'

*The first performance of
Nancy Galbraith's cantata 'God of Justice',
reviewed by CARSON COOMAN*

American composer Nancy Galbraith (born 1951) (whose chamber music CD I reviewed in *Music & Vision* last year) has recently written a new large-scale cantata, which was presented in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA, in a gala world première. This work was commissioned by the Sisters of Divine Providence (a Roman Catholic religious order) in celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Providence Family Support Center, an organization which provides child-care and parenting counseling to families in need in the city of Pittsburgh.

The texts for *God of Justice* come from a variety of sources, including 'The Beatitudes' from the Gospel of Matthew in the Bible and the Hebrew text *Gates of Prayer*. The Beatitudes provide the basic structure for the ten movements of the work into which the other texts are inserted as commentary. Excerpts from 'Economic Justice for All', a 'pastoral letter on Catholic social teaching in America', provide the narrated commentary, expertly read by Paul Johnston.

The work begins with the sounds of 'ancient gongs', creating an otherworldly, almost Middle Eastern flavor. Out of this texture, the choral and instrumental voices begin to intertwine. This gong texture returns throughout the work at key moments. The work proceeds with a series of choral movements, featuring the soloists and choir together and in alternation -- with small bits of narration between movements.



Nancy Galbraith. Photo © Amy Rogers

Throughout, Galbraith uses the two boy soprano soloists as 'voices of purity', sometimes presenting the same texts as the adult choir in simpler terms. The orchestra, consisting of winds, brass, percussion, cello, double bass, synthesizer, piano, and organ created a large array of evocative textures. The lack of upper strings gave a tremendous focus to the mezzo-soprano and boy soprano solo voices.

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