THEODORE BIKEL

The Poetry and Prophecy of the Old Testament

The Creation · The Expulsion from Paradise · Lamentation of Jeremiah
By the Rivers of Babylon (Psalm 137) · Vision of Isaiah · Song of Songs

Original Symphonic Setting Composed and Conducted by Don Seltzer
"Sing unto the Lord a new song; for He hath done marvellous things" — thus read the words of the psalm; words, incidentally, with which the last passage on this record begins. The words are not without significance. For some three thousand years we have been singing unto the Lord a “new song"; for it was new each time and its newness always overwhelming in its impact. The pious Jew — and indeed the observant Gentile — have never ceased to marvel at the wonder of the Word and at the miracle of rediscovery each time they repeated it. Even the less pious will freely admit that the beauty, the awesomeness, the poetic precision and the majesty of the Bible are — if nothing else — an ennobling literary experience.

For myself, I shall state unashamedly that the words of the Old Testament are more than mere beauty of literature; more than a means of prayer too — for if they were just that, then I would never have allowed myself to use them, even reverently, in a performer’s medium. But to me, the words of the Bible are not the words of silent reverence, they do not command the hushed tones of man’s prostration before God. On the contrary, they are the sound of the trumpet, the sound of “timbrel and dance,” of the “psaltery and the harp.” of the “loud-sounding, the clanging cymbals;” they are the Lord’s voice directed to Man and commanding him to spread the Word further and further, proclaiming it loudly and with pride.

Thus I allow myself to say the words of the Bible in the fashion in which I have heard them in my heart and mind for many years, not only in speech but with music; and the music forming not merely a background but an integral part of the “new song,” which is as old as man’s remembrance. Withal, I do so with trepidation and humility; for the Scriptures are to me a most sacred heirloom. But an heirloom not to be shut away in an attic to rust; rather to be admired and used frequently, with care and with joy.

Dov Seltzer, my friend and collaborator, needed no lengthy huddles or conferences with me in order to create the music for this album. We both speak the same language, not only literally but artistically. Thus the fusion of speech and music came from our natural understanding of each other, and most importantly, from a similarity of feeling we both harbor for the poetry of the Bible. I am deeply grateful to a fate that has allowed me to work with an artist of his caliber and thus to deepen our friendship.

A few words about the English translations used and about the “Song of Songs” in particular. Since the Old Testament has been translated into English on various occasions, I have relied on several versions so as to present the best possible translations of each of the diverse passages. Thus you will find that the English text is drawn from the King James Version, the Jewish Family Bible (London 1884), and the Soncino edition.

As to the “Song of Songs," which is a suite in three parts, taking up most of the second side of the album, I wish to offer the following comment in explanation of the order of the verses. If you are very familiar with the text, you will notice that the verses, though left unaltered, have been switched around in sequence. I was moved to do so by an article I had read some years ago regarding the literary values of the “Song of Songs.” The author of that article propounded the theory that the work had been intended as a dramatic poem, depicting 1) a love story between a shepherd and a shepherdess, 2) the abduction of the girl by the king, and 3) her escape from the palace and reunification with her beloved. He argued that the story in its original form was quite uncomplimentary to King Solomon; and that the rabbis, in deference to the image of Solomon the Wise, had jumbled up the order of verses to retain this somewhat secular work among the Scriptures. I do not wish to enter into the pros and cons about the validity of this theory. Suffice it to say that it intrigued me greatly and that careful study of the “Song of Songs” bore out the likelihood of two male protagonists in the story instead of just one; that is to say, the “king” and the “shepherd” use imagery different enough one from the other to lend weight to the assumption that we are indeed dealing with two different personages.

And so I sat down to re-shuffle the order of verses — not altering the text itself in any way — resulting in the version that is before you. Some passages had to be cut, though they fitted perfectly, for brevity imposed by the physical time limit of a record, nothing more. And we asked Miss Marian Seldes to read Shulammith, not for the sake of theatricality, but in order to stress the contrast and enhance the beauty of the verses. Hebrew has a distinction between male and female forms of address, English does not. And moreover, I am gratified and pleased to hear Marianne’s voice rather than my own read these verses.

HE CREATION

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light, and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And He called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters. And it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.

And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called He Seas: and God saw that it was good. And He said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind. And it was so, and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the third day.

And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and for years. And it was so. And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: and He made the stars. And God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.

And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after its kind: and God saw that it was good.
And the evening and the morning were the fifth day.

And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so, and God saw that it was good.

Then God said, Let us make man; in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them.

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth. And it was so.

And God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good.

And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.

And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made.

And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because in it He had rested from all His work which God had created.

The Expulsion from Paradise

And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat:

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

But when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her, and he did eat.

And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.

And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?

And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.

And He said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?

And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.

And the Lord God said unto the woman: What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.

And the Lord God said unto the serpent: Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life:

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman; and between thy seed and her seed: it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

Unto the woman He said: I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.

And unto Adam He said: Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life:

Thorns and thistles shalt it bring forth to thee; and dust shalt thou eat the herb of the field:

In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground, for out of it wast thou taken: dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever:

Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken.

So He drove out the man; and He placed at the east of the garden of Eden, Angels, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the tree of life.

Flametation of Jeremiah

Cursed be the day wherein I was born: let not the day wherein my mother bore me be blessed.

Cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man-child is born unto thee; making him very glad.

And let that man be as the cities which the Lord overthroweth, and repents not: and let him hear the cry in the morning, and the shouting at noon-tide;

Because he slew me not from the womb, or that my mother might have been my grave, and her womb to be always great with me.

Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labour and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?

By the Rivers of Babylon

(Psalm 137)

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion.

We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof.

For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.

How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?

If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.

If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth; if I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy.

Remember, O Lord, the children of Edom in the day of Jerusalem, whom said, Rase it, rase it, even to the foundation thereof.

O daughter of Babylon, who art to be destroyed; happy shall he be that rewardeth thee as thou hast served us.

Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones.

The Vision of Isaiah

In the year that King Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple.

Above it stood the Seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.

And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory.

And the posts of the door moved at the voice of Him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke.
Then said I, Woe is me, for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; and mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts.

Then flew one of the Seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar:

And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.

And I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me.

And He said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes: lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed.

Then said I, Lord, how long?

And He answered, Until the cities be wasted without inhabitant, and the houses without man, and the land be utterly desolate.

And the Lord have removed men far away, and there be a great forsaking in the midst of the land.

But yet in it shall be a tenth, and it shall return as a teit tree, and as an oak, whose substance is in them, when they cast their leaves: so the holy seed shall be the substance within them.

And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone:

The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land;

The fig-tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines in blossom give forth their fragrance.

Arise my love, my fair one, and come away.

O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the covert of the cliff; let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.

SHULAMMIT

I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.

As a lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.

As an apple-tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons.

THE SHEPHERD

Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair; thine eyes are as doves behind thy veil; thy hair is as a flock of goats, that trail down from Mount Gilboa.

Thy teeth are like a flock of ewes all shaped alike, which are come up from the washing; whereof all are paired, and none faileth among them.

Thy lips are like a thread of scarlet, and thy mouth is comely; thy temples are like a pomegranate split open behind thy veil.

Thy neck is like the tower of David builded with turrets, whereon there hang a thousand shields, all the armour of the mighty men.

Thy breasts are like two fawns that are twins of a gazelle, which feed among the lilies.

Thou art all fair, my love; and there is no spot in thee.

Thou hast ravished my heart, my sister, my bride; thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes, with one head of thy necklace.

A garden shut up is my sister, my bride; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.

SHULAMMIT

Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his precious fruits.

THE SHEPHERD

Take us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vineyards; for our vineyards are in blossom.

SHULAMMIT

Solomon had a vineyard at Baalhamon; he gave over the vineyard unto keepers; every one for the fruit thereof brought in a thousand pieces of silver.

I went down into the garden to look at the green plants of the valley, to see whether the vine budded, and the pomegranates were in flower.

Who is this that cometh up out of the wilderness like pillars of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and frankincense, with all powders of the merchant?

Behold, it is the litter of Solomon; three-score mighty men are about it, of the mighty men of Israel.

They all handle the sword, and are expert in war; every man hath his sword upon his thigh because of dread in the night.

King Solomon made himself a palanquin of the wood of Lebanon.

He made the pillars thereof of silver, the top thereof of gold, the seat of it purple, the inside thereof being inlaid with love, from the daughters of Jerusalem.

THE KING

Return, return, O Shulammit; return, return, that we may look upon thee.

SHULAMMIT

What will ye see in Shulammit? As it were a dance of two warring camps?

THE KING

How beautiful are thy steps in sandals, O prince’s daughter; the roundings of thy thighs are like the links of a chain, the work of the hands of a skilled workman.

Thy navel is like a round goblet, wherein no mingled wine is wanting; thy belly is like a heap of wheat set about with lilies.

Thy two breasts are like two fawns that are twins of a gazelle.

Thy neck is as a tower of ivory; thine eyes as the pools of Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim; thy nose is like the tower of Lebanon which looketh toward Damascus.

Thy head upon thee is like Carmel, and the hair of thy head like purple; thy king is held captive in the tresses thereof.

How fair and how pleasant art thou, O love, for delights!

SHULAMMIT

I am my beloved’s, and his desire is toward me.

THE KING

This thy stature is like to a palm-tree, and thy breasts to clusters of grapes.

I said, I will climb up into the palm-tree, I will
take hold of the branches thereof: and let thy breasts be as clusters of the vine, and the smell of thy countenance like apples;
And the roof of thy mouth like the best wine, that glideth down smoothly for my beloved, moving gently the lips of those that are asleep.

**SHULAMMIT**

Before I was aware, my soul set me upon the chariots of my princely people. The king hath brought me into his chambers;
He hath brought me to the banqueting-house, and his banner over me is love.

**THE KING**

Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners.
O, Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have overcome me.
There are threescore queens, and fourscore concubines, and maidens without number.
My dove, my undefiled is but one; she is the only one of her mother, she is the choice one of her that bore her. The daughters saw her, and called her happy; yea, the queens and the concubines, and they praised her.

**SHULAMMIT**

I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtseys of Solomon.
Look not upon me, that I am swarthy, that the sun hath tanned me.
My mother's sons were incensed against me: they made me keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept.

**THE KING**

I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles, and by the hinds of the field, that ye awaken not, nor stir up my love, until it please.

**SHULAMMIT**

I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if ye find my beloved, what will ye tell him? That I am sick for love.

**THE KING**

What is thy beloved more than another beloved, O thou fairest among women? What is thy beloved more than another beloved, that thou dost so adjure us?

**SHULAMMIT**

My beloved is white and ruddy, pre-eminent above ten thousand.

**THE KING**

Whither is thy beloved gone, O thou fairest among women?

**SHULAMMIT**

My beloved is gone down to his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies.
When I should find thee without, I would kiss thee; yea, and none would despise me.
I would lead thee, and bring thee into my mother's house, that thou mightest instruct me: I would cause thee to drink of spiced wine of the juice of my pomegranate.
His left hand should be under my head, and his right hand should embrace me.

**THE KING**

I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the gazelles, and by the hinds of the field, that ye awaken not, nor stir up my love, until it please.

**SHULAMMIT**

By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not.
I sought him, but I could not find him.
I called him, but he gave me no answer.
I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways. I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not.
The watchmen that go about the city found me: Saw ye him whom my soul loveth?
The watchmen that go about the city found me; they smote me, they wounded me; the keepers of the walls took away my mantle from me.
Searce had I passed from them, when I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me.
His mouth is most sweet: yea, he is altogether lovely.
This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.
Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm: for love is strong as death; its passion cruel as the grave: the flashes thereof are flashes of fire, a very flame of the Lord.

**THE SHEPHERD**

Come with me from Lebanon, my bride, with me from Lebanon: look from the top of Amana, from the top of Senir and Hermon, from the lions' dens, from the mountains of the leopards.

**SHULAMMIT**

I am a wall, and my breasts are the towers thereof: then was I in his eyes as one that found peace.

**THE SHEPHERD**

Thy lips, O my bride, drop honey: honey and milk are under thy tongue; and the smell of thy garments is like the smell of Lebanon.

**SHULAMMIT**

Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field: let us lodge in the villages.
Let us get up early to the vineyards; let us see whether the vine hath budded, whether the vineblossom be opened, and the pomegranates be in flower; there will I give thee my love.

**THE SHEPHERD**

I am come into my garden, my sister, my bride: I have gathered my myrrh with my spice: I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk.

**SHULAMMIT**

My beloved is mine, and I am his: that feedeth among the lilies.
Until the day breathe, and the shadows flee away, turn, my beloved, and be thou like a gazelle or a young hart upon the mountains of spices.

**PSALMS 98 AND 150**

O sing unto the Lord a new song: for He hath done marvellous things: His right hand and His holy arm, hath gotten Him the victory.
Shout unto the Lord, all the earth: break forth loudly, and sing praises.
Sing unto the Lord with the harp: with the harp, and the voice of a psalm.
With trumpets and sound of cornet make a joyful noise before the Lord, the King.
Let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.
Let the floods clap their hands: let the hills be joyful together, before the Lord;
Hallelujah. Praise God in His sanctuary: praise Him in the firmament of His power.
Praise Him for His mighty acts: praise Him according to His abundant greatness.
Praise Him with the blast of the horn: praise Him with the psaltery and the harp.
Praise Him with the timbrel and dance: praise Him with stringed instruments and the pipe.
Praise Him with the loud-sounding cymbals; with the clanging cymbals, praise Him.
Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord,
The magnificent words of the Scriptures have stirred men's souls for time out of mind. In this recording, Theodore Bikel's vivid interpretation of the Old Testament's poetry and prophecy gives new dimension to them.

The sacred text becomes genuinely alive as he reads with all the zeal and passion of its inspired creators.

When Mr. Bikel narrates The Creation and The Expulsion from Paradise, the listener can feel, almost painfully, the awesome might of the Lord. In A Lamentation of Jeremiah, By the Rivers of Babylon and The Vision of Isaiah, the burning affirmations of the prophets are etched deeply into consciousness.

The tender and moving Song of Songs, in which Marian Seldes as Shulammith joins Mr. Bikel in a beautiful reading, is a psalm to God's miracle of love between man and woman. Finally, in Psalms 98 and 150 ("Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord"), the universality and the glory of God are joyously realized.

The musical score — composed, orchestrated and conducted by Dov Seltzer — captures the spirit and texture of the holy words. Its Near Eastern overtones flow from the very background of the prophets themselves. Mr. Seltzer's music could easily stand by itself as a major composition.

Mr. Bikel, Mr. Seltzer and Miss Seldes have fashioned from the wonderous poetry and prophecy of the Old Testament a work of art which will long be cherished by people of all faiths.

THEODORE BIKEL is a man of many talents. He is famed for his abilities as actor, folksinger, guitarist, linguist, dialectician, raconteur, writer, and master showman.

He starred on Broadway in The Sound of Music, The Rope Dancers, The Lark and Tonight in Samarkand, and he has played diversified roles in twenty motion pictures, including such films as The Defiant Ones, A Dog of Flanders, The Enemy Below, The Angry Hills, Fraulein and The Blue Angel. He has essayed leads on every major dramatic network television show.

As a folksinger, Mr. Bikel (whose book, Folksongs and Footnotes, went into its fourth printing shortly after publication) has performed in concert halls throughout the world. He previously recorded eleven bestselling LPs for ELEKTRA. This is his first non-singing album.

DOV SELTZER is one of the three performing members of the widely-heralded Oranim Zabar Israeli Troupe. He writes and arranges most of the material for the group. He has also composed a number of chamber music pieces which have frequently been presented by well-known artists. Among his other achievements are musical scores for four documentary films about life in Israel.

Mr. Seltzer studied at the Haifa Conservatory and the Mannes College of Music in New York City. He and his wife, singer Gena Gill, have been in the United States since 1954. The Oranim (consisting of Mr. Seltzer, Miss Gill and Michael Kagan) make frequent personal appearances in this country and overseas. They have recorded six highly acclaimed ELEKTRA albums.

MARIAN SELDES is a familiar figure on the Broadway scene. She has appeared with Judith Anderson in Tower Beyond Tragedy and Come of Age; with John Gregud in Crime and Punishment; with Katharine Cornell in That Lady; and in such other productions as The Chalk Garden, The High Ground and Medea.

Miss Seldes, daughter of renowned author and critic Gilbert Seldes, also has performed in three motion pictures: The Big Fisherman, A Light in the Forest and The Lonely Night (a documentary on mental health).

production supervisor — JAC HOLZMAN / engineering — MARK ABRAMSON & MARIO MIZZARO (Sonomofon Schallplatten, Vienna) / editing — MARK ABRAMSON / cover design — WILLIAM S. HARVEY / cover photo — ANTONY DI GESC

SYMPHONIC SETTINGS COMPOSED BY DOV SELTZER (Galko Music, Inc. ASCAP)