

Mantra Cantata

for SATB Chorus and Orchestra

Nov. 16, '08—Nov. 25, '09 (with two months doing other things)
Duration: about 32 minutes Cover photo: Kusum Sarovara, near Vrindavana
In memory of my sister Akanda, and my guru Neem Karoli Baba

Program Notes

I started chanting mantras in about 1971, just before my first attempts at composition. This powerful practice is central to my spiritual life, and inspires much of my music, both instrumental and vocal. For some time I have intended to write a large work based on my experiences with personal chanting, as well as sankirtan (congregational chanting), but wanted to wait until I had experience and opportunities for possible performance.

My own attention span is rather long, and I enjoy many classical compositions lasting well over an hour. However our modern times, and performance realities, dictate more modest lengths. The three movements of this cantata could be augmented in the future should more length be acceptable; or, maybe I'll write another to use for a double Bill.

The first movement, **Om Jaya Jagadish Hare**, uses the text to the *Universal Aarti*. In Hinduism, Aarti is a short ceremony in reverence to a deity or guru with a sung prayer and lighted lamps of clarified butter.

The second movement uses the simple mantra **Sri Ram Jai Ram Jai Jai Ram**, pronounced *Shree Raam, Jay...* It means "Honored (or Radiant) Rama, Victorious Rama." The double "aa" is as in "father".

The third movement is a setting of the **Hanuman Chalisa**, a poem by Tulsidas in forty verses in praise of Hanuman, the monkey devotee of Sri Rama. This is in the Avadhi dialect of Hindi.

Performance Notes

I have included a Sanskrit/Hindi pronunciation guide for use with the lyrics printed before the score, which include diacritic marks to ensure complete information on how the words sound when spoken by European scholars. I use an anglicized spelling in the score and vocal part; this simplified pronunciation is appropriate outside of India.

In every meter change, except where indicated otherwise, the duration of notes remain the same.

It is characteristic of sankirtan to keep things simple. I have limited the chorus to SATB, with one very brief exception in the **Hanuman Chalisa** where each voice splits in two (mm. 281-284). In the absence of choral forces, four singers could use amplification. For this case at the split, the upper three voices should take the upper part and the bass should sing the lower part. In any appropriate passage, the section can be replaced by a soloist at the discretion of the choral director. The current pattern of solo passages is as suggested by Rodney Wynkoop, conductor of the premiere performance on October 21, 2012.

While there are challenges to performers, any good college orchestra should be able to perform this piece. Professionals will find plenty to keep them busy.

The double bass part has excursions below low E. In all my orchestral scores, I write notes down to low C with the same notes included an octave higher in case the bassist does not have an extension or fifth string. It is important for this piece that some basses can play the lower notes.