

CHORAL JOURNAL

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Tribute to an American Icon:
Remembering Alice Parker



lowing text:

O Mary, O Martha
O Mary ring dem bells.
I hear arch angels a-rockin' Jersuaelm,
I hear arch angels a-ringin' dem bells.
Church getting' higher! (Rockin' Jersuaelm!)
(Ringin dem bells.)
Listen to the lambs! (Rockin' Jersuaelm!)
(Ringin dem bells.)
New Jerusalem! (Rockin' Jersuaelm!)
(Ringin dem bells.)

This marked and steady piece has three short sections with repeated materials (ABC ABC AB), making it easy to memorize. It features a soprano or tenor solo, juxtaposed with a syncopated, segmented choral accompaniment—often featuring quarter drag triplets—giving the music a confident character. Parts come together homophonically on the words, “ringin’ dem bells,” for exciting cadences. Typical of the genre, there is frequent call-and-response. Soprano and alto parts sing a range of a fifth, making them quite accessible. While the tenor and bass parts divide, it is only for one measure in the A sections. Conductors may wish to add altos to the tenor split and/or tenors to the bass split. *Rockin’ Jerusalem* is well suited for small or developing ensembles due to its limited range and ability for memorization and is a powerful work by this important composer.

In his book *American Negro Songs*, referenced earlier, John W. Work III has provided valuable descriptive, musical, cultural, and historical information about the works in this collection, that those programming or performing the work should read and discuss as part of the learning process for this work.

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Kiddush

Music by Kurt Weill

Traditional Hebrew text

SATB with divisi, baritone solo (cantor), organ (4:20)

Schott Music

The image shows the beginning of the musical score for 'Kiddush'. It features five staves: a Cantor staff (soprano clef), a Soprano staff (soprano clef), an Alto staff (soprano clef), a Tenor staff (tenor clef), and a Bass staff (bass clef). The Cantor staff begins with a treble clef and a key signature of one flat. The vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) all begin with a half note G4. The organ accompaniment (Bass staff) begins with a quarter note G4, followed by a quarter note F4, and then a quarter note E4. The music is in 4/4 time.

German-born American composer Kurt Weill was popular in the early twentieth century, particularly for his musical theatre works, including *The Threepenny Opera*. He infuses the Shabbat liturgy with jazz elements in his setting of *Kiddush*. *Kiddush*, meaning “sanctification,” offers a warm, inviting blessing of the Sabbath meal over a cup of wine, before the Hamotzi (blessing over the challah). The text of the Friday evening *Kiddush* begins with a recitation from Genesis 2:1-3, recalling the completion of creation. The Jewish Shabbat is a response to God’s day of rest following creation. Weill’s mellow, entrancing setting of the text implores the listener to heed God’s commandment to “keep holy the Sabbath” and abstain from work. In this setting, the cantor (or soloist) recites the prayer with accompaniment from the choir and organ, featuring jazz progressions throughout.

Much of the cantor’s melody and the choral parts are driven by a smooth, triplet theme that reappears throughout the piece, with cadences to the tonic from a IV⁷ chord. The organ accompaniment is intricate and chromatic in places where it is the only voice accompanying the cantor. The choral parts are quite accessible, while the cantor and organ parts are best suited to virtuosic performers. *Kiddush* is appropriate for both concert and worship settings.

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