

Lobgesang (Symphony-Cantata), Op. 52

(Symphony No. 2 in B-Flat Major)

Felix Mendelssohn (1809–1847)

Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra conducted by Nicholas Chalmers

AfriArts Chorus (Chorusmaster: Siphosethu Anthony Gxako)

VOX Cape Town (Director: John Woodland)

Nobulumko Mngxekeza (soprano), Siphamandla Moyake (soprano), Jason Atherton (tenor)
Zorada Temmingh (organ)

Described by its composer as a “symphony-cantata”, *Lobgesang* is a thrilling fusion of orchestral and sacred vocal music that was written by Mendelssohn in 1840 to mark the 400th anniversary of Gutenberg’s printing press. It was first performed in St Thomas Church in Leipzig, where Johann Sebastian Bach had served as music director. Reflecting both Bach’s influence and Mendelssohn’s role in reviving his music, the work unfolds across twelve movements—three orchestral and nine vocal—and traces a symbolic journey from darkness into light.

Following the model of the Ninth Symphony by Beethoven, yet going further in its emphasis on choral writing, *Lobgesang* (“Hymn of Praise”) opens with a noble trombone fanfare that recurs throughout, lending unity and grandeur, before giving way to a lighter scherzo and a lyrical slow movement. The entry of the voices marks a turning point, as the opening motto returns in a proclamation from Psalm 150—“Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord”—leading into a sequence of contrasting vocal movements, including a dramatic tenor plea, “Watchman, is the night soon past?”, answered with radiant assurance by soprano and chorus. A familiar chorale, “Now thank we all our God”, grounds the work in shared tradition, and the symphony-cantata ultimately culminates in a brilliant choral finale in which the voices and orchestra unite in a triumphant expression of praise.

1. SINFONIA: *Maestoso con moto – Allegretto un poco agitato – Adagio religioso*

2. CHORUS AND SOPRANO SOLO

Alles, was Odem hat, lobe den Herrn.

(Psalm 150)

Lobt den Herrn mit Saitenspiel,
lobt ihn mit eurem Liede.

(Psalm 33)

Und alles Fleisch lobe seinen heiligen Namen.

(Psalm 145)

Lobe den Herrn, meine Seele,
und was in mir ist, seinen heiligen Namen.

Lobe den Herrn, meine Seele,
und vergiß es nicht, was er dir Gutes getan.

(Psalm 103)

3. TENOR RECITATIVE AND ARIA

Saget es, die ihr erlöst seid durch den Herrn,
die er aus der Not errettet hat,
aus schwerer Trübsal, aus Schmach und Banden,
die ihr gefangen im Dunkel waret,
alle, die er erlöst hat aus der Not.

Saget es! Danket ihm und rühmet seine Güte!

(Psalm 107)

Er zählet unsre Tränen in der Zeit der Not,
er tröstet die Betrübten mit seinem Wort.

(Psalm 56)

Saget es! Danket ihm und rühmet seine Güte!

4. CHORUS

Saget es, die ihr erlöset seid von dem Herrn
aus aller Trübsal.

Er zählet unsere Tränen in der Zeit der Not.

Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord.

*Praise the Lord upon stringed instruments:
praise him with your song.*

And let all flesh praise his holy Name.

*Praise the Lord, O my soul:
and all that is within me, praise his holy Name.*

*Praise the Lord, O my soul:
and forget not all his benefits.*

*Let them give thanks who are redeemed of the Lord,
whom he hath delivered out of trouble,
of severe tribulation, of shame and bondage,
who were held captive in the darkness,
all which he hath redeemed from distress.
Proclaim it! Give thanks unto him and praise ye his goodness!*

*He numbers our tears in our time of need:
he comforts the afflicted with his Word.*

Proclaim it! Give thanks unto him and praise ye his goodness!

*Proclaim it, that you are redeemed of the Lord
out of all tribulation.*

He numbers our tears in our time of need.

5. SOPRANO DUET AND CHORUS

Ich harrete des Herrn, und er neigte sich zu mir
und hörte mein Flehn.

Wohl dem, der seine Hoffnung setzt auf den Herrn!

Wohl dem, der seine Hoffnung setzt auf ihn!

(Psalm 40)

6. TENOR ARIA AND RECITATIVE

Stricke des Todes hatten uns umfängen,
und Angst der Hölle hatte uns getroffen.

Wir wandelten in Finsternis.

(Psalm 116)

Er aber spricht: Wache auf, der du schläfst!
Stehe auf von den Toten! Ich will dich erleuchten.

(Ephesians 5:14)

Wir riefen in der Finsternis:

Hüter, ist die Nacht bald hin?

Der Hüter aber sprach:

Wenn der Morgen schon kommt,

so wird es doch Nacht sein;

wenn ihr schon fraget, so werdet ihr doch wiederkommen
und wieder fragen: Hüter, ist die Nacht bald hin?

(Isaiah 21:11–12)

7. CHORUS

Die Nacht ist vergangen, der Tag aber herbeigekommen.

So laßt uns ablegen die Werke der Finsternis,

und anlegen die Waffen des Lichts,

und ergreifen die Waffen des Lichts.

(Romans 13:12)

8. CHORALE

Nun danket alle Gott mit Herzen, Mund und Händen,
der sich in aller Not will gnädig zu uns wenden,
der so viel Gutes tut, von Kindesbeinen an
uns hielt in seiner Hut und allen wohlgetan.
Lob, Ehr’ und Preis sei Gott, dem Vater und dem Sohne,
und seinem heil’gen Geist im höchsten Himmelsthron.

Lob dem dreiein’gen Gott, der Nacht und Dunkel schied
von Licht und Morgenrot, ihm danket unser Lied.

(Martin Rinckart, “Evangelisches Kirchengesangbuch”, 1636)

9. DUET FOR SOPRANO AND TENOR

Drum sing ich mit meinem Liede ewig dein Lob,
du treuer Gott!

Und danke dir für alles Gute, das du an mir getan.

Und wandl’ ich in der Nacht und tiefem Dunkel

und die Feinde umher stellen mir nach,

so rufe ich an den Namen des Herrn,

und er errettet mich nach seiner Güte.

10. CHORUS

Ihr Völker! Bringet her dem Herrn Ehre und Macht!

Ihr Könige! Bringet her dem Herrn Ehre und Macht!

Der Himmel bringe her dem Herrn Ehre und Macht!

Die Erde bringe her dem Herrn Ehre und Macht!

(Psalm 96)

Alles danke dem Herrn!

Danket dem Herrn und rühmt seinen Namen

und preiset seine Herrlichkeit.

(I Chronicles 16:8–10)

Alles, was Odem hat, lobe den Herrn. Halleluja!

(Psalm 150)

*I waited patiently for the Lord: and he inclined unto me,
and heard my cry.*

Blessed is the man that hath set his hope in the Lord!

Blessed is the man that hath set his hope in him!

*The snares of death encompassed us round about:
and the pains of hell had hold upon us.*

We wandered in darkness.

*Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest!
Arise from the dead! I will give you light.*

We called out in the darkness:

Watchman, is the night soon past?

The watchman said:

The morning cometh,

and also the night;

and if you will enquire, you will return

and enquire again: Watchman, is the night soon past?

The night is past, the day is at hand.

Let us therefore cast off the works of darkness,

and put on the armour of light,

and take up the armour of light.

*Now thank we all our God with hearts and hands and voices,
who in all adversity will be merciful unto us,
who does so much good, who from childhood on
has kept us in his care and helped us all.*

*Praise, honour and glory be to God, the Father and the Son,
and to his Holy Spirit on heaven’s highest throne.
Praise to God, Three in One, who divided night and darkness
from light and dawn; let our song give thanks unto him.*

*Therefore will I sing thy praises with my song forever,
thou true God!*

And thank thee for all the good thou hast done me.

Though I wander in night and darkness deep,

and enemies beset me all around,

I will call upon the Name of the Lord,

and he will save me in his loving-kindness.

Ye peoples! Give unto the Lord glory and strength!

Ye kings! Give unto the Lord glory and strength!

Let the heavens give unto the Lord glory and strength!

Let the earth give unto the Lord glory and strength!

Let all give thanks unto the Lord!

Give thanks unto the Lord and call upon his Name

and praise his glory.

Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. Hallelujah!