

Gerald Cohen

Avshalom B'ni V'ni
(Avshalom, My Son, My Son)

For solo voice and piano

(2021)

PERUSAL SCORE

Composer's program note:

The narration of the life of King David is one of the masterpieces of narration in the Hebrew Bible, with David presented as a complex and flawed human being, and with much emotional subtlety in the development of him and those around him. This scene comes at the climax of the story in II Samuel, of his son's Avshalom's revolt against him. David, on hearing of the victory against the rebellion, and the death of his son, is stricken with grief, and can do nothing but cry out "Avshalom, my son, my son! Would that I had died instead of you!"

This lament has had many musical settings, both solo and choral, over several centuries. In my setting, I decided to expand upon this famous line, and to include the dramatic context of the scene leading to David's outcry. The aria itself, of David's outburst, is based on the melody to which the Book of Samuel is chanted in the synagogue when it is part of a biblical reading. However, that basic melody is really used as a taking-off place for ever more wild melismas as David expresses his anguish, and then moving to a final quiet desolate lament.

The composition was composed for countertenor Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen and pianist Ronny Michael Greenberg, and given its premiere in San Francisco in September 2022. While written for the special quality of the countertenor voice, and for Aryeh Nussbaum Cohen in particular, it can also be performed by mezzo-soprano or baritone singers.

Text and Translation:

SCENE:

V'David yoshev bein sh'nei hash'arim, vayelech hatzofe el gag hashaar el hachoma, vayisa et einav vayar, v'hine ish ratz l'vado.

Vayikra hatzofe vayaged lamelech, vayomer lamelech: "Im l'vado b'sora b'fiv."

V'hine hakushi ba vayomer hakushi: "Yitbase adoni hamelech ki sh'fatcha Adonai hayom miyad kol hakamim alecha."

Vayomer hamelech el hakushi: "Hashalom lanar l'Avshalom?" Vayomer hakushi: "Yiyu chanaar oyvey adoni hamelech, v'chol asher kamu alecha l'ra-ah."

Vayirgaz hamelech, vayaal al aliyot hashaar vavevk, v'cho amar b'lecho:

ARIA:

"B'ni Avshalom, b'ni v'ni Avshalom! Mi yiten muti ani tachtecha, Avshalom, b'ni v'ni!"

V'hamelech laat et panav, vayizak hamelech kol gadol: B'ni Avshalom, Avshalom, b'ni v'ni!"

And David was sitting between the gates, and the lookout went up on the roof of the gate on the wall, and he raised his eyes and saw, and, look, a man was running alone.

And the lookout called and told the king, and the king said, "If he's alone, there are tidings in his mouth." And, look, the Cushite had come and the Cushite said, "Let my lord the king receive these tidings—that the Lord has done for you justice against all who rose against you."

And the king said to the Cushite, "Is it well with the lad Avshalom?" And the Cushite said, "May the enemies of my lord the king be like the lad, and all who have risen against you for evil!"

And the king was shaken. And he went up to the upper room over the gate and he wept, and thus he said as he went:

"My son, Avshalom! My son, my son, Avshalom! Would that I had died instead of you! Avshalom, my son, my son!"

And the king covered his face, and the king cried out in a loud voice, "My son, Avshalom! Avshalom, my son, my son!"

Avshalom B'ni V'ni

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Freely, quasi recitative $\text{♩} = 70$ *And David was sitting between the gates,*
mf

Voice

V'-Da-vid yo-shev bein sh' - nei ha-sh'-a-rim,

Piano

mf

Leg. (Let blur/sustain all notes with pedal)

*Leg. 10 **

3 *and the lookout went up on the roof of the gate on the wall*

Voice

va - ye-lech ha-tzo - fe el gag ha - sha - ar el ha-cho-ma,

Pno.

*Leg. 10 **

*Leg. 10 **

6 *and he raised his eyes and saw,*

Voice

va - yi - sa et et nav va - yar, v' - hi - ne

Pno.

*Leg. 10 **

*Leg. 10 **

*Leg. 10 **

8 *and, look, a man was running alone.* **Much faster** $\text{♩} = 120$ (Tempo II)

Voice

ish ratz l'-va - do.

Pno.

mp

*Leg. **

Tempo I ♩ = 70

11 *f* And the lookout called and told the king,
Va - yik - ra ha - tzo - fe va - ya - ged la -

Pno. *cresc.* *f*

Tempo II ♩ = 120

Tempo I ♩ = 70

14 and the king said, "If he's alone, there are tidings in his mouth."
me - lech, va - yo - mer ha - me - lech. Im l' - va - do b' - so - ra b' -

Pno.

Tempo II ♩ = 120

Tempo I ♩ = 70

17 *mp* And, look, the Cushite had come and the Cushite said,
fiv. V' - hi - ne ha - ku - shi — ba va - yo - mer ha - ku - shi:

Pno. *mf* *f*

*See note below

20 *f* "Let my lord the king receive these tidings— that the Lord has done for you justice
Yit - ba - ser a - do - ni ha - me - lech ki sh' - fat - cha A - do - nai ha - yom mi - yad

Pno.

* The rolled chords on last beat of 19 and upbeat of 20 should be played with an energetic but not fast roll, quasi 32nd notes, so each note is heard clearly. Take a little extra time here if needed.

24

against all who rose against you."

And the king said to the Cushite,

—kol ha-ka-mim a - le - cha. Va-yo-mer ha - me-lech — el ha-ku - shi: Ha-sha-

p (slow roll) *ff* *sub. p* (not rolled)

29

"Is it well with the lad Absalom?"

And the Cushite said, Somewhat faster ♩ = 88

lom — ha-sha-lom la - na-ar l' - Av - sha - om? Va-yo-mer ha-ku-shi: Yih-

f

33

"May the enemies of my lord the king be like the lad,

and all who have risen against you for evil!"

yu cha-na-ar — v' - choy a - do - ni — ha-me-lech, v' - chol a-sheer ka-mu a-le-cha l' - ra-

accel.

Tempo II ♩ = 120

36

ah!

ff

39

Slower, halting ♩ = 60

On each pair of rh 8th notes:
Accent the first of the two notes (in *p*)
and decres. to the second note

Pno.

p *f*

ped. (Let blur/sustain all notes with pedal)

43

And the king was shaken.

And he went up to the upper room over the gate

Pno.

Va-yir-gaz ha - me-lech, va - ya - al al a - li - yat ha-sha - ar

p

46

ped.

and he went, and thus he said as he went:

rit.

p

Pno.

va - yevk. v' - cho a-mar b' - lech - to: B' -

(no accents on the 8th notes)

ped.

Lamenting, fairly slow ♩ = 70

51

My son, Avshalom

Pno.

ni Av-sha - lom B' - ni Av-sha -

p

*

56

lom B' - ni v' -

Pno.

Ped. * Ped.

59 *My son, my son, Avshalom*

ni Av-sha - lom B' -

Pno.

Ped. *

62 *cresc.*

ni Av - sha -

Pno.

cresc. Ped. *

64

lom B' - ni v' - ni v' -

Pno.

Ped. * Ped.

66 *mf*
ni hi hi hi Av-sha - lom
Pno. *mf*
* *Red.*

68 *f*
Av - sha -
Pno. *f*
*

70 lom
(Sustain all notes of the arpeggio)
Pno. *Red.*

71 b' - ni B' -
Pno. *Red.* *

72

ni v'-ni v'-ni Av - sha -

Pno.

74

lom Mi yi -

Pno.

76

a tempo *mf* Would that I had died
ten mu ti Mi yi -

mp *legato* *trios*

Pno.

With Ped.

79

p Would that I had died instead of you!
ten mu-ti a - ni Mi yi - ten mu-ti a-ni tach-

Pno.

82

te - cha — Av-sha - lom Av-sha - lom b' -

p

Pno.

85

ni b'-ni v' - ni

Pno.

A little faster, agitated ♩ = 84

87

mf And the king covered his face

cresc.

v' - h - me - lech — la - at — et pa-nav — va - yiz -

p *cresc.*

Pno.

Rapid continuous figures on these notes, at least as fast as 32nd notes, in random order, varying as much as possible, so basically sounds like a blur without a repeating pattern

With Ped.

and the king cried out in a loud voice:

91

cresc.

ak ha-me - lech kol ga - dol:

cresc.

Pno.

Tempo I ♩ = 70

ff My son, Avshalom!

93

Musical notation for vocal line, measures 93-94. Includes lyrics: B' - ni Av - sha -

(Sustain all notes of the arpeggio)

Pno.

Piano accompaniment for measures 93-94. Includes dynamic marking *ff* and a *Rec.* (Recitativo) section.

95

Musical notation for vocal line, measures 95-96. Includes lyrics: lom Av - sha -

Pno.

Piano accompaniment for measures 95-96.

96

Musical notation for vocal line, measures 96-97. Includes lyrics: lom b' - ni v' - ni Av - sha -

Pno.

Piano accompaniment for measures 96-97. Includes a *Rec.* section.

97

Musical notation for vocal line, measures 97-98. Includes lyrics: lom Av - sha - and dynamic marking *dim.*

Pno.

Piano accompaniment for measures 97-98.

98

lom — Av — sha —

dim.

3 3 3

Pno.

99

lom — Ha-sha-lom ha-sha-lom — l'—

rit. *a tempo* *mp* *pp* *mp*

pp

ped.

Pno.

102

na-ar — l'— na-ar — l'— Av-sha — lom —

rit. *p*

With Ped.

Pno.

106

B' — ni — Av-sha — lom —

p

simile: sustain both notes in the r.h. downstem figure throughout this passage to the end

Pno.

111

B' - ni v'-ni ³ Av - sha - lom Mi yi -

Pno.

116

ten mu - ti a - ni tach - te - cha Mi yi - ten mu -

Pno.

121

ti a - ni tach te - cha Av - sha - lom

mf

Pno.

125

Av-sha - lom Av - sha - lom

p

Pno.

129

p

Av - sha - lom b' - ni

Pno.

133

pp

b' - ni b' -

Pno.

(Hold sustained C in voice as long as possible, then let the final Bb be cut off quickly. Piano should hold the final chord after the voice cut-off)

136

ni

pp *ppp*

Pno.