

# AWAKE NORTH WIND

BY BRUCE CHALMER

A setting of Song of Songs 4:16-5:1

for string quartet, flute, and SATB voices

*for Judy Alexander*

## PERFORMERS

Violins: Fran Pepperman-Taylor, Laura Siegle

Viola: Roy Feldman

Cello: Wendy Valastro

Flute: David Edleson

Sopranos: Tina Scharf, Hannah Weiss

Altos: Amity Baker, Dayna Lorenz

Tenors: David Edleson, Jason Lorenz

Basses, Mike Brown, Bruce Chalmer

Telestreaming and house sound

by

David Punia and David Wright



Marc Chagall: Song of Songs

Premiere Performance

5783 ד' תמוז June 23, 2023

Temple Sinai

South Burlington, Vermont

## NOTES FROM THE COMPOSER

This piece began with a dream I had in the winter of 2003. A whitetail doe was standing in a clearing, and as I approached the clearing from the surrounding woods she turned and looked at me. And somehow I knew in that moment that the doe was dying, and neither she nor I could change that. I awoke that morning filled with such sadness that it was beautiful. Later that day I began to write a piece for string quartet and flute, trying to express some of that sadness and beauty. The introductory section with the flute solo comes from that day, and the first part of the main theme followed soon after.

Then I got stuck in measure 24. In the second part of the theme, I had modulated through several keys, and couldn't figure out how to get home to the key of the first part of the theme again without musically jumping off a cliff. There just didn't seem to be a graceful way back. So I just let it sit.

Soon after that dream I met Judy Alexander, and my life took a delightful turn I never could have imagined. A couple months later, I was at Judy's apartment, diddling on a soprano recorder she happened to have lying around, and suddenly the way home from measure 24 was clear. As it turned out, being with Judy was my way home in more ways than musically!

I didn't finish the piece for years. Then in 2015, I was looking to set some verses from Song of Songs for SATB voices in hopes that Social Band would perform it, and I realized that my old composition fit the text. So I created a voice-only version and showed it to Amity Baker, Social Band's artistic director. She determined that it was "too sexy for Social Band."

But it's not too sexy for Temple Sinai! When Judy retired and the temple started planning her retirement celebration, I revisited and expanded the piece, and the result is the piece we're performing this evening. (And while it may be too sexy for Social Band itself, I'm happy to point out that Amity, Mike Brown, and Tina Scharf, all members of Social Band, are graciously participating in this performance.)

Song of Songs is the quintessential expression of love: erotic, romantic, and spiritual. The Mishnah cites Rabbi Akiva as saying, "For the whole world is not as worthy as the day on which the Song of Songs was given to Israel; for all the writings are holy, but the Song of Songs is the holy of holies." Judy is my Song of Songs, and I dedicate this piece to her.

## SONG OF SONGS 4:16-5:1

עֹרֵי צָפוֹן וּבֹאֵי תִמְנָן הִפְיַחֵי גַּנִּי יִזְלוּ בְּשִׁמְיִי

Awake north wind, and come, O south, blow upon my garden that its spices may flow out.

יָבֹא דֹדִי לְגַנּוֹ וַיֹּאכַל פְּרֵי מִגְדָּיו:

Let my lover come into his garden, let him eat of its sumptuous fruits.

בָּאתִי לְגַנִּי אֶחָתִי כְלָהּ אֶרִיתִי מִוְרֵי עֵם-בְּשָׁמִי

I am come into my garden, my sister, my bride, I have gathered my myrrh with my spice.

אֶכְלָתִי יַעֲרִי עֵם-דְּבַשִּׁי שְׁתִּיתִי יַיִן עֵם-חֶלְבִּי

I have eaten my comb with my honey, I have savored my wine with my milk.

אֶכְלוּ רַעִים שְׁתוּ וְשִׁכְרוּ דֹדִים:

Eat, O friends! Drink, and carouse, O lovers!

(trans. B. Chalmer)