# Christoph Schönherr

# Hezekiah

# Oratorio based on the words of the Old Testament

Full score · Part 1



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for soli, choir and orchestra

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#### Scoring:

Hezekiah (baritone), Isaiah (bass), Field Commander, the deputy of king Sennacherib (baritone), Messenger of Isaiah (soprano), Maid (soprano), Narrator (tenor)

Choir S(S) A(A) T(T) B(B)

Flute, soprano saxophone, alto saxophone (1 player); 2 trumpets/flugelhorn, trombone, strings, piano/keyboard, contrabass/bass guitar; drum set, 2 timpani, soprano glockenspiel, triangle, crotales, chimes, claves, latin percussion (2 players)

Duration: ca. 85 min.

II Carus 28.104/50

#### Foreword

Remarks concerning the content

The oratorio deals with the ancient Jewish King Hezekiah (d. 697 BC). The libretto is based on two texts from the Old Testament, from the Second Book of Kings (2 Kings 18:13 – 2 Kings 20) and from Isaiah 38:1–22.

In 702 BC, Sennacherib, the King of Assyria, laid siege to Jerusalem. His emissaries attempted to instigate the Jewish people to rise against their king by all manner of temptations. The king of the Assyrians challenged King Hezekiah to capitulate, but Hezekiah did not surrender; he trusted in his God and prayed to Him for assistance. God came to his aid by destroying the Assyrian siege army. The means of this destruction are historically not unequivocally explained.

The second part of the oratorio begins with the destruction of the Assyrian army. King Hezekiah falls dangerously ill and prays to God that he need not die yet. He points out that even under extreme threat, he has always trusted in his God and remained devout at all times, whereupon the prophet Isaiah announces that God has answered Hezekiah's prayers and that he may live a further fifteen years. In disbelief, Hezekiah asks how he may recognize that God will truly fulfill this promise of healing. The prophet Isaiah delivers God's reply: As a sign of this promise, Hezekiah may choose whether the shadow on the staircase which leads from his palace up to the temple should move ten degrees forward or ten degrees back. Based on the concept current at the time - that the sun revolves around the earth - Hezekiah asks the seemingly impossible: that the shadow should withdraw ten degrees, so that the temple stands in the morning sun once more. In a wonderfully poetic manner, Hezekiah's return from the shadow kingdom of death into the light-filled realm of life is symbolically portrayed here. After God lets the shadow indeed withdraw and Hezekiah recovers his health a few days later, the latter draws the conclusion "For the dead, they cannot praise you, but alone, they who live will praise you as I do today." It is we the living, and not the dead, who praise and worship God. In the oratorio, the choir takes up this song of praise, extoling the power of God which extends to the living. This so-called choral conclusion, praising God after miraculous salvation, is a long-standing Biblical tradition.

#### Remarks concerning the composition

The composition is steeped in Baroque and Romantic oratorio tradition; it is thus formally related to Bach's techniques of recitative and of "turba" [= crowd] choruses and particularly to Mendelssohn's oratorios. The oratorio *Hezekiah* can thus be regarded as a bridging composition, connecting as it does the traditional composition techniques with the harmonies and grooves of popular music of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. The somber and sorrowful narrative that is presented in the oratorio is musically portrayed by means of many stylistic characteristics of the blues, in particular the frequent use of 6/8 and 12/8 meter. Thus, the introduction opens in 6/8 meter and, together with the final chorus "For the dead, they cannot praise

you," forms both a narrative framework and a stylistic bracket for the entire composition.

In the Biblical text model, no provision is made for the role of the choir, so the texts for the choruses had to be supplemented. In general, the choir plays the role of "The people of Hezekiah," commenting on the events in the form of turba choruses. In No. 6d, for example, the chorus is literally "swinged at" by the Field Commander's promise "We are promised a land ... ," dreaming, by means of a fugue, of entering into a paradisiacal country. In No. 25, an eight-part movement, the choir delineates one of the most impressive Biblical passages: "And the Lord made again the shadow go back ten steps on the stairs of Ahaz." Beginning in instrumental darkness (cellos and double bass), an ascending choral cluster is built up in ten steps, together with a soprano glockenspiel, that culminates in a sundrenched C7(#11) chord. This chord, which was already heard in No. 24, represents the miracle which reveals itself in the retreat of the shadow. The announcement of significant Divine decisions (Pronouncement of the Lord) is also at times taken over by the choir. Only in No. 13b "Jerusalem" does the choir change sides, as it were, to appear as "Messengers of the King of Assyria," Hezekiah's adversary.

The orchestra, which provides both accompaniment and commentary, consists of a traditional ensemble of string instruments and a "small big band" consisting of a rhythm group and four wind players. In No. 16 "The Night in the Assyrian camp," which opens the second part of the oratorio, it even continues the narrative thread alone: the destruction of the Assyrian siege army is portrayed by entirely instrumental music. Two further purely instrumental numbers – No. 8 and No. 18 – fulfill a structuring function. In No. 23b "I have heard your prayer," in which Isaiah announces that God will rescue not only Hezekiah, but also Jerusalem from the Assyrian king, the orchestra comments on the events by referring to thematic material from No. 15d, the final chorus of the first part: "He will not come into this town." The funk groove used here, with its harsh back beats, is also used in several other expressive movements. Latin grooves are almost never used on account of the somber subject matter of the libretto. The conciliatory final chorus No. 27 "For the dead, they cannot praise you" is an exception. Hezekiah continues the thought expressed by the text "..., but alone, they who live will praise you as I do today!" The choir expands on this with the words "And therefore we will sing and will play as long as we live in the house of the Lord, in the house of our God." Even though the final chorus opens in C minor as a blues in 6/8 meter, the "groove" and the key mutate during the course of the movement into a Samba in the eponymous major key.

The solo parts were derived from the Biblical text, especially from the dramatically structured narrative form in the Second Book of Kings. Hezekiah's true antagonist – Sennacherib, the King of the Assyrians – appears in the libretto only through his representative, the Field Commander (solo baritone). In addition to the characters Hezekiah (baritone)

and Isaiah (bass), there is a narrator – a tenor, in the tradition of oratorio evangelists. The two female roles are Isaiah's messenger and the Maid, both sopranos. The latter has no counterpart in the Biblical source text but belongs to Hezekiah's people from the aspect of text content. She questions the great firmness of faith of her king and, in so doing, seems to represent the religious doubts of our present time.

Hamburg, January 2013 Christoph Schönherr Translation: David Kosviner

#### Hezekiah

Text: Gert Wilhelm and Christoph Schönherr according to 2 Kings 18:13 – 2 Kings 20 and Isaiah 38:1–22

#### Characters

**Hezekiah** (baritone), the King of Judah with the chamberlain Eliakim, the state scribe Shebna and the chancellor Joah;

Maid (soprano), handmaiden from the people of Judah

Sennacherib, the Great King of Assyria, with his emissaries:

The **Field Commander** (baritone), his leader of the negotiations with the general and the chief officer

Isaiah (bass), prophet of the Lord; Messenger of Isaiah (soprano) Narrator (tenor)

#### PART 1

- *No. 1* **Introduction** (instrumental)
- No. 2a Narrator: In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah Sennacherib, the King of Assyria came up against the walled cities of Judah and took them all! Therefore King Hezekiah sent carriers to the King of Assyria and let them say:
- No. 2b Choir (Hezekiah's messengers): I have done wrong but stop attacking me. What you will put on me that I will suffer
- No. 2c Narrator: There the King of Assyria obligated the King Hezekiah to deliver three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold.
- No. 2d **Choir** (the people of Hezekiah): Three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of pure gold!
- No. 3a Narrator: Yet the King of Assyria sent his general and his chief officer and his field commander with a very strong force from Lachish to the King Hezekiah in Jerusalem.
- No. 3b **Choir** (the people of Hezekiah): They made their way up and shortly they were near of Jerusalem.
- No. 3c Narrator: And when they arrived there they took up their position by the stream of the higher pool which is nearby the highway of the washerman's field. They sent for Hezekiah. Thereupon only the chamberlain Eliakim the son of Hilkiah came out to them with Shebna the scribe and Joah who joined him. The field commander told them what they should do:
- No. 4a **Field Commander**: Tell Hezekiah now: Thus says the great king of Assyria: What is this confidence, this hope where in you trust? You think but these are only words in vain you have a counsel for the war? Now, to whom are you looking for support, that you rebel against me? Look now, do you really trust upon this bruised and

- broken reed, upon Egypt, that reed on which if a man will lean on it, it will pierce him through his hand?
- No. 4b **Choir** (the people of Hezekiah): But Egypt, a bruised and broken reed, and it will pierce us through our hand? So will the Pharaoh really kill us?
- No. 4c **Field Commander**: For so is the Pharaoh, the king of Egypt to all who put their faith in him.

**Choir** (the people of Hezekiah): Should Hezekiah then our leader not put his faith in Pharaoh?

**Field Commander**: But if you also want to answer me: "Our hope is on the Lord our God." Then consider this: Is it not he of all, whose highplaces and altars Hezekiah took away? He commanded Judah and Jerusalem: Only this altar in Jerusalem you should worship.

- No. 5a Narrator: Then said Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, Shebna and Joah to the field commander:
- No. 5b Male Choir (Hezekiah's messengers): Speak to your servants in the Syrian language for we can understand. But never speak Judean with us in the ears of the crowd that is there on the wall!
- No. 5c **Field Commander**: Has my master sent me to you and your king to say these words? Oh, has my master not also sent me to the men seated on the wall to say these words? Ho, to the men on the wall for they are those that must eat their own dung and drink their own piss with you?
- No. 6a Narrator: Then the field commander stood, cried with a loud voice in Judean and spoke:
- No. 6b **Field Commander**: Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria! Thus speaks the great king: Hezekiah shall not deceive you, for in him for you there is no salvation! For thus speaks the great king, the king of Assyria: Run over to me! Then ev'ry one can eat from his own wine and take the fruit of his figtree and ev'ry man can drink the water of his own cistern!
- No. 6c **Choir** (the people of Hezekiah): Could there be an end of the starving for us? What then counts the word of the great king, the king of Assyria?
- No. 6d **Field Commander**: The king of Assyria speaks: I will come and take you away to a land, it's like your own land, to a land of grain and wine, of bread and winegardens, a land full of olivetrees and honey!

Choir (the people of Hezekiah): We are promised a land full of grain and wine, of bread and winegardens. He will take us to a land where the oil giving trees cast shadow on us, and where the honey flows! What a land with grain and wine! Where the honey flows? And where shall we find knowledge that we can have faith in him? Will he not rather kill us all?

Field Commander: No, you shall all stay alive and not be murdered!

No. 7a **Field Commander**: The king of Assyria tells you: Listen not to Hezekiah now, for he deceives you when he says: The Lord will be our rescue. And has of all gods of the nations delivered at all just one of the hand of the king of Assyria his land? Who of all Gods of the nations delivered just one single man from my hand at all? And so the Lord shall keep Jerusalem from falling into my hand?

IV Carus 28.104/50

No. 7b Narrator: The people kept still and gave him no answer, for the commandment of Hezekiah was: "You shall not answer him!"

#### No. 8 Instrumental I

No. 9 Narrator: Then Eliakim, Shebna and Joah, the recorder came to Hezekiah. They had disrupted their clothing and reported to him now of the words of the field commander. But when Hezekiah heard that, he also disrupted his clothing and covered himself in a mourning garment and betook himself to the house of the Lord.

#### Choir (the people of Hezekiah): O Jahve! No. 10

No. 11a Narrator: So Hezekiah sent the chamberlain Eliakim, the scribe, called Shebna and the elders of the priests covered in mourning garments to Isaiah, the prophet, the son of Amoz and they said unto him:

Choir (the legation of Hezekiah): A day of hardship, a No. 11b day of beating, a day of blasphemy is the present day whom his Lord, the King of Assyria, has sent to vilify the living God! Perhaps he punishes the words that the Lord, our God has heard. So then lift up your prayer for the rest that is still left here.

#### No. 12 Narrator: So Isaiah told them:

Isaiah: This you shall say to him who is your master: Thus speaks the Lord: Be not afraid of the mockery which you have heard. Be not afraid of the mockery which the servants of the king have thrust out against me! Be not afraid of the mockery which the servants of Assyria have thrust out against me! Look now, I will put a spirit into him, and a rumour will come to his ears and he will go back to his land. I will cause him to fall by the sword in his own land!

No. 13a Narrator: The field commander went back and found the king of Assyria at war against Libnah. Then he sent messengers again to Hezekiah with the order to announce to him:

No. 13b Field Commander: Jerusalem will be given in the of my king!

> **Choir** (the messengers of the king of Assyria): will fall into the hands of Assyria!

Field Commander: Your God. faith shall not give you a falr not fall.

Choir: Jerusalem will

Original evil. gernindert. No. 14a Narrator: Hezekia. messengers temple ar before H

No. 14b He od of all the peoples of ne heaven and the earth!

.ekiah): You have created the

Jown, Lord, your ear and hear! Open

w down, Lord, your ear and hear! Open your

mezekiah: Lord, hear the menaces of Sennacherib, the words he utters to derise the living god! Of a truth, oh Lord, the kings of Assyria have destroyed the nations and their countries! They have cast their gods into the

Choir: They have cast their gods into the fire!

Hezekiah: For, they were no gods at all!

Choir: They were no gods at all, only fabric of hands of men!

Hezekiah: Yes, only fabric of hands of men, of wood and stone that could be destroyed. Now therefore Lord, our God, give us salvation from his hands, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone are God!

Choir: Lord, our God, give us salvation from his hands, that all the kingdoms of the earth may know that you alone are God!

No. 15a Narrator: Then sent Isaiah to Hezekia' what the God of Israel says:

Messenger of Isaiah: I have heard to me about Sennacherib, the now the word that the Lo

No. 15b Choir (the saying of you blasphemed? vou whom have you ? 'Gair of Israel! You Just as wi ave dried the rivers of of come to your potently they were ears nerb on the field and pin ps, which has withered i now bluster against me, stwii к through your nose and my turn you back by the way that

> is year eat what grows of itself and next springs of the same but it is the springs of the same but is the sam sow and harvest, plant winegardens and eat the .cs thereof. For from Jerusalem there will go forth a emnant, being a band of survivors from Mount Zion. The zeal of the Lord shall do this. Therefore says the Lord about the king of Assyria:

الام. 15d **Choir** (the people of Hezekiah: Sentence of the Lord): He will not come into this town, nor shoot an arrow there, nor conquer our city walls! The way he came, he must return. Into this town he will not get!

#### PART 2

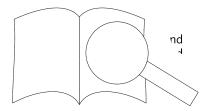
**Instrumental II** (The Night in the Assyrian Camp) No. 16

No. 17 Choir, spoken (the people of Hezekiah): In that night the angel of the Lord went out. He struck dead in the assyrian camp one hundred and eighty five thousand men! Behold they we

No. 18 Instrumental III

No. 19a Narrator: In thos Isaiah the prophe said:

No. 19b Isaiah: Thus spea you will die! For



No. 20 Narrator: Then Hezekiah turned his face toward the wall and prayed to God:

> Hezekiah: Oh Lord, remember now, how I have walked with a perfect heart. I have only done what has appealed to you.

Narrator: And Hezekiah wept sore.

- No. 21 Maid: Hezekiah, my king, wherefrom do you take all your faith in God? He let you fall ill. Is that a token of his kindness? Why then all this harm between the fringes of the sea up to the heights of Lebanon? Destruction and war! Why does God allow this? Hezekiah, tell me, wherefrom do you still take your faith in this God?
- Hezekiah: To the gates of the grave must I go in the No. 22 quiet of my days, in the quiet of my days. I intended though to stay alive longer.

Choir (the people of Hezekiah): He must go to the gates of the realm of the dead, in the quiet of his days!

Hezekiah: Now I shall not see the Lord in the land of the living. I won't see men again with those that live in the world.

Choir: With us that live in the world!

Hezekiah: And my cottage is pulled down and taken away from me like a shepherd's tent.

Choir: And his cottage is pulled down and taken away from him like a shepherd's tent.

Hezekiah: My life is rolled up like a linenworker's thread. He cuts me off from the frame. Day and night you give me up: Until morning I cry for help, but he will break my bones like a lion!

Choir: The Lord will break his bones like a lion. Until morning he cries for help, day and night you give h

Hezekiah: Lord, I am oppressed, take up my

Choir: Lord, he is oppressed. Take up h

Hezekiah: What shall I say and what is done it! Without a rest I'm turning, oh, in t of my soul. Lord, let me be w

Choir: Lord, let him be

No. 23a Narrator: Isaiah gone out past God came to

No. 23b Isaiah fath/

ه of David, your ave seen your tears. aird day you shall go ., add to your days of life Jeliver you and this city out

.sked Isaiah:

at is to be the sign, that the Lord will ell and that I shall go up into the house of

.n: This sign shall you have of the Lord, that the d, your God what He has spoken, He will also do: Shall the shadow go foreward ten steps or go back ten

Hezekiah: For the shadow it is easy to go forward ten steps. O nay, but let the shadow go backward ten steps.

- Choir (the people of Hezekiah): And the Lord made No. 25 again the shadow go back ten steps on the stairs of Ahaz up to the temple. And the house of the Lord appeared anew in the light of the morning.
- **Narrator**: Hezekiah, the king of Judah praised the Lord: No. 26

Hezekiah: Look now, for comfort I was trembling. But you to my soul have attended, that it was not spoiled, for you cast all my sins behind your back!

No. 27 **Hezekiah**: For the dead, they cannot praise you, neither death can praise you and those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your truth.

> **Choir** (the people of Hezekiah): For the dead they cannot praise you, neither death can praise you go down to the pit cannot hope for

Hezekiah: ... but alone, they wh I do today!

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The following performance Full score (Carus 28.10 complete orchestral m

German Version (Hisk) Full score (Carus 28.10 complete orchestral m

Available on CD with Jazzchoir and instrume conducted by Christop.

<sup>ւ</sup>Իis work: **/53)**: ٥. ١ د actt.

### PART 1

### No. 1 Introduction

Christoph Schönherr (\*1952) Text: Gert Wilhelm and Christoph Schönherr















## No. 2a (Narrator) In the fourteenth year





## No. 2b (Choir) I have done wrong















No. 2c (Narrator) There the King of Assyria obligated





## No. 2d (Choir) Three hundred talents of silver





























## No. 3a (Narrator) Yet the King of Assyria sent



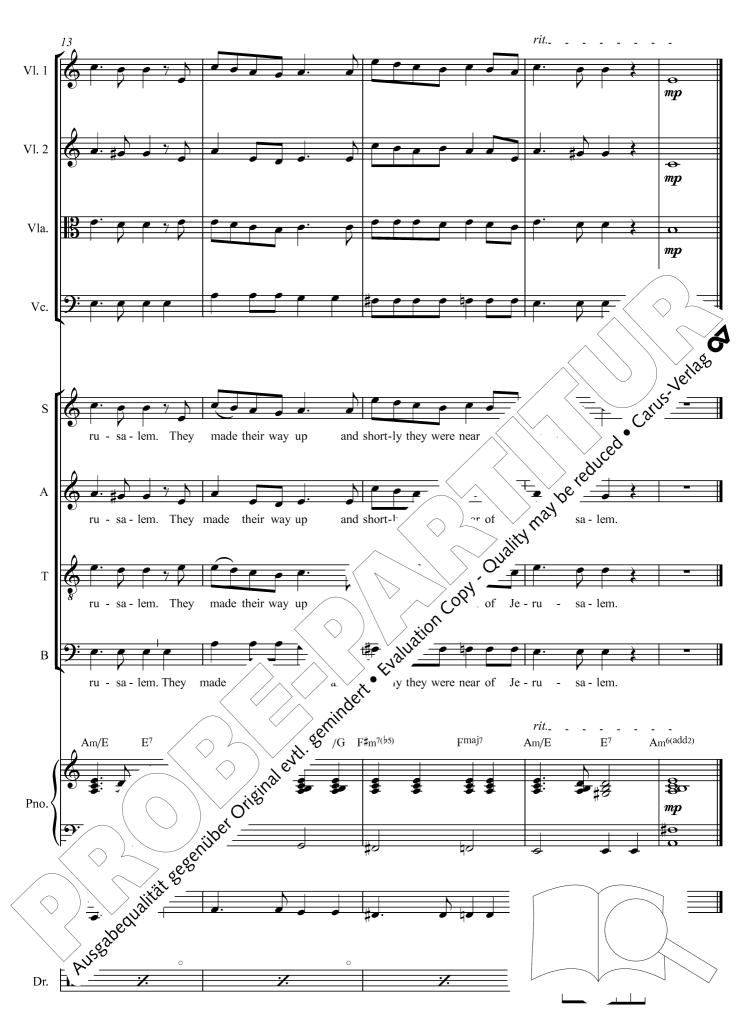


# No. 3b (Choir) They made their way up







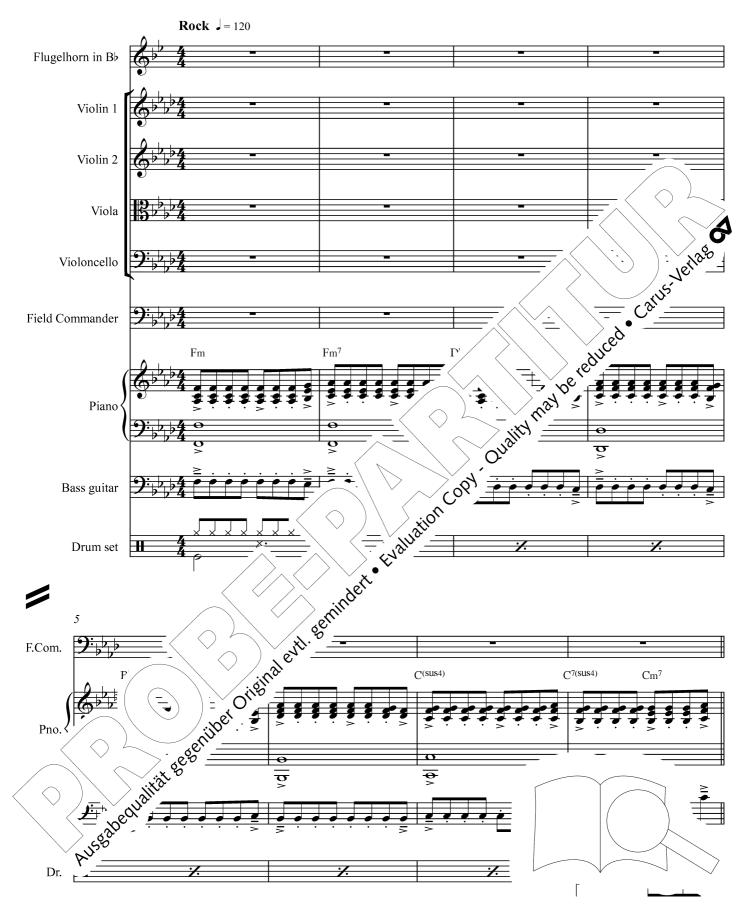


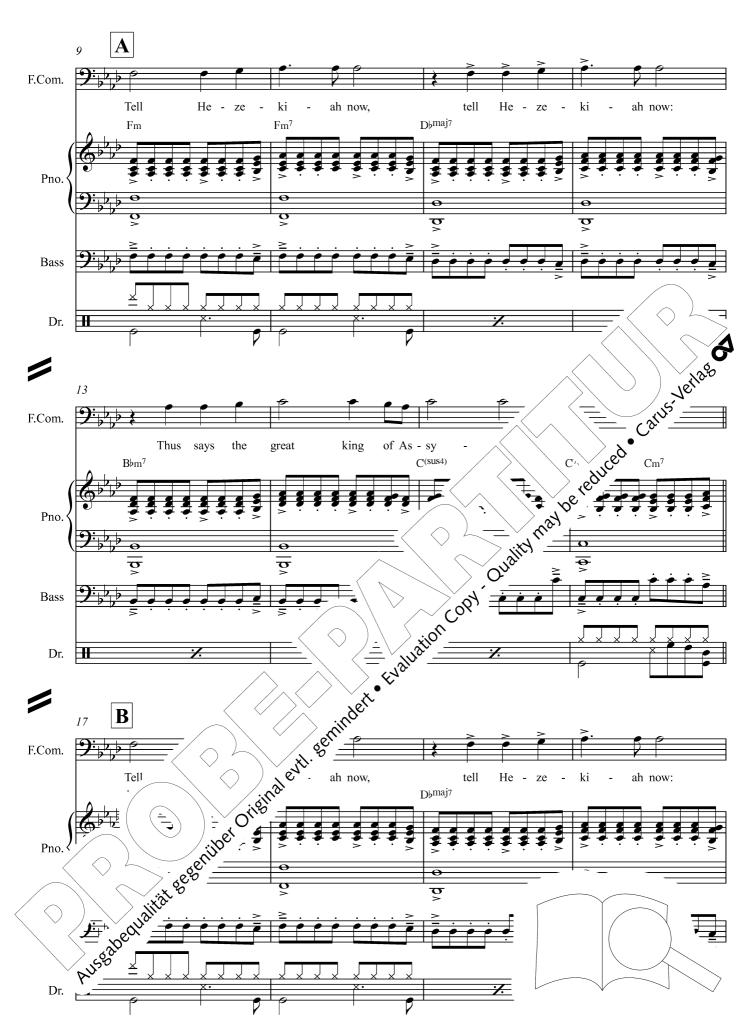
No. 3c (Narrator) And when they arrived there





# No. 4a (Field Commander) Tell Hezekiah now





















### No. 4b (Choir) But Egypt – a bruised and broken reed?







#### No. 4c (Field Commander and Choir) For so is the Pharaoh















#### No. 5a (Narrator) Then said Eliakim









### No. 5c (Field Commander) Has my master sent me















No. 6c (Choir) Could there be an end of the starving

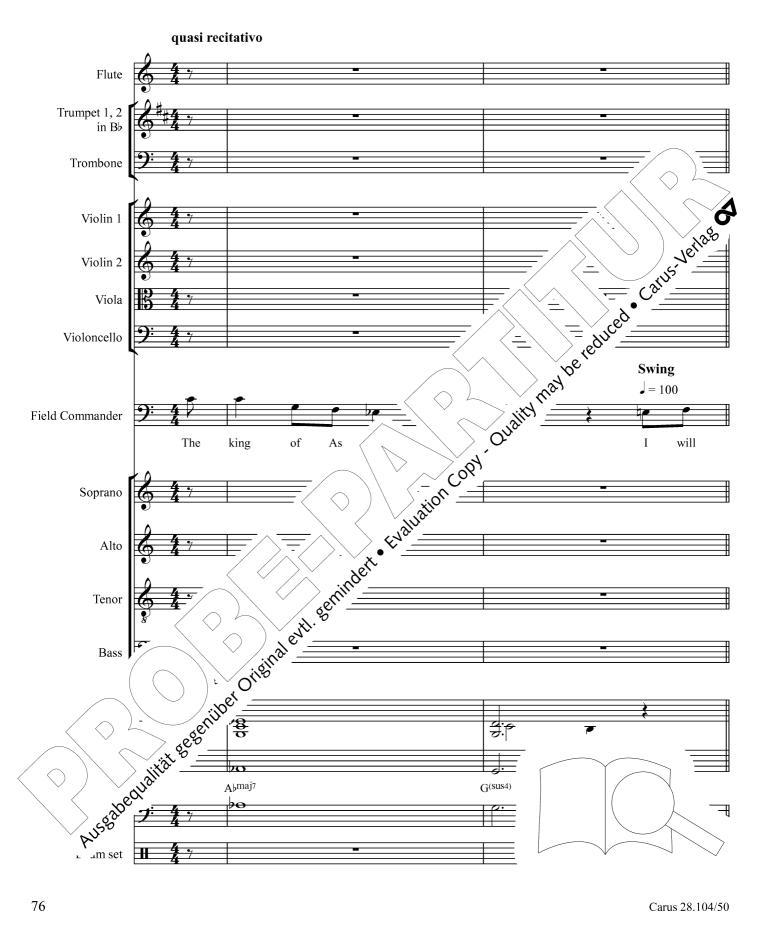








## No. 6d (Field Commander and Choir) The King of Assyria speaks



76



























## No. 7a (Field Commander) The King of Assyria tells you













## No. 7b (Narrator) The people kept still



## No. 8 Instrumental I















No. 9 (Narrator) Then Eliakim, Shebna and Joah







No. 10 Prayer (Choir: O Jahve)



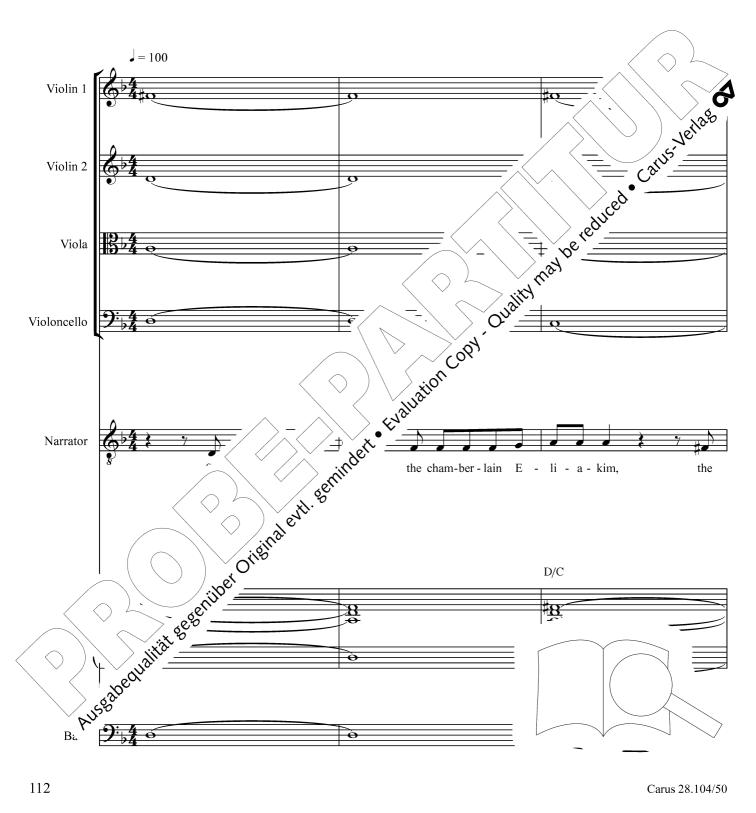








## No. 11a (Narrator) So Hezekiah sent





## No. 11b (Choir) A Day of Hardship

























No. 12 (Narrator and Isaiah) Be not afraid

























No. 13a (Narrator) The Field Commander went back



## No. 13b (Field Commander and Choir) Jerusalem

























No. 14a (Narrator) Hezekiah took the letter





No. 14b (Hezekiah and Choir) Lord, God of Israel



















































## No. 15a (Narrator and messenger of Isaiah) Then sent Isaiah





No. 15b (Choir) Sennacherib, who have you blasphemed





















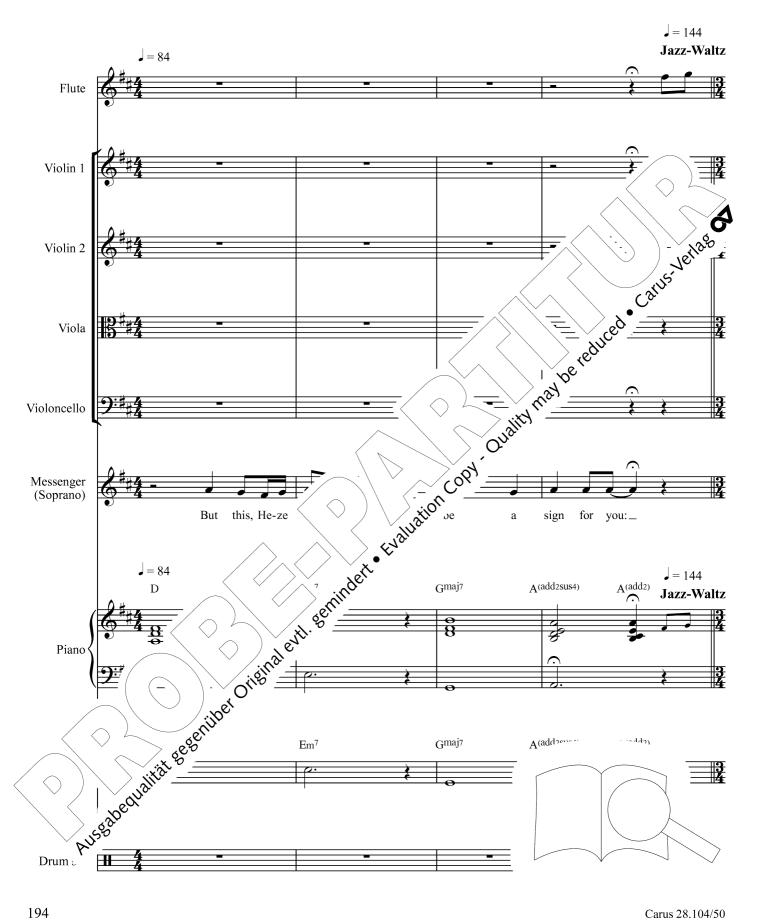








No. 15c (Messenger of Isaiah) But this, Hezekiah

























No. 15d (Choir) He will not come into this town







































