



Young People's Chorus of New York City™

Broadcast Listening Guide

Michael Gordon

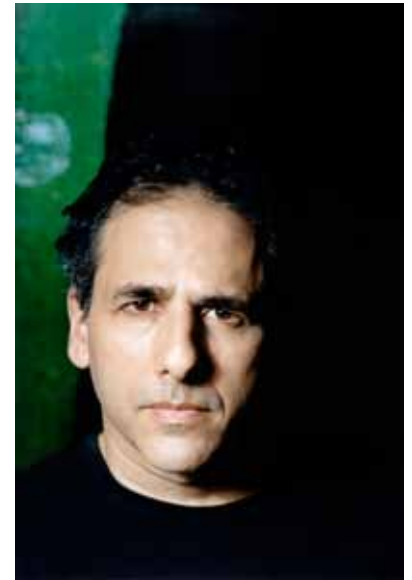
"Exalted"

BACKGROUND:

The Young People's Chorus of New York City launched Radio Radiance™, a collaborative partnership with WNYC New York Public Radio and American Public Media (APM), in 2008. Radio Radiance™ turns YPC's award-winning Transient Glory® Commissioning Series three-dimensional, taking it from stage to radio to cyberspace. Transient Glory® was created in 2000 to commission the country's most eminent composers to write new music and expand the traditional youth chorus repertoire. Radio Radiance™ takes this series and expands it with 21st century technology. Its mission is to develop new audiences for new music by commissioning and performing choral works written or performed specifically for radio, digital media, and the web. This listening guide was created to enrich the experience of listening and heighten one's appreciation of the music.

Radio Radiance™ began as a regional program in New York City, broadcasting performances locally on WNYC New York Public Radio. Podcasts created from these performances and composer interviews were then broadcasted nationally on APM's "Performance Today" in over 90 cities across the country. It is now a national program implemented by other choirs, whose performances are broadcasted by many local stations, with listening guides being utilized in several public schools nationwide.

For more information, please visit www.ypc.org





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National Standards for Music and the Blueprints for Teaching and Learning in the Arts

This listening guide for teachers provides lessons that meet National Standards for Music Education and address all five strands of the Blueprint for Teaching and Learning in the Arts in New York City. These guides are available online at YPC's website, and are accompanied by podcasts that feature the music and in-depth interviews with each composer by WNYC host John Schaefer. We hope that by connecting the music to as many subjects as possible, you will open doors and inspire young students to aim high and dream big, just as we try to do at YPC.

By using this lesson plan, your students will be utilizing the national standards for music education:

- 6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music
- 8. Understanding relationships between music, other arts and disciplines outside the arts
- 9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture. and enjoy music making with an enriched and challenging repertoire.

The Blueprint is a guide for arts educators in New York City public schools that defines five strands of learning: making music; music literacy; making connections; cultural resources; and careers and lifelong learning. We encourage teachers to pick up the fifth strand and discuss with your students how these lessons may inspire them to either pursue music further, or perhaps become poets or astrophysicists.

Each lesson has several sections. The first two provide teachers rudimentary background information on the composer and the music. The "listening to" section offers points of entry to enable teachers to help their students understand and appreciate the music. "Making connections" connects the music to other disciplines, and "Activities" will get students more engaged and appreciate the richness of this experience. Every teacher can modify the lesson according to his or her students' background and abilities, and can add further activities as time and inspiration allow.





Young People's Chorus of New York City™

Exalted

Michael Gordon

Michael Gordon's music merges subtle rhythmic invention with incredible power embodying, in the words of The New Yorker's Alex Ross, "the fury of punk rock, the nervous brilliance of free jazz and the intransigence of classical modernism." Over the past 25 years, has produced a strikingly diverse body of work, ranging from large-scale pieces for high-energy ensembles to major orchestral commissions to works conceived for the recording studio, and numerous collaborations with artists in other media. Co-founder and co-artistic director of the internationally renowned Bang on a Can Marathon, Michael Gordon was born in Miami Beach and holds a Bachelor of Arts from New York University and a Masters of Music from the Yale School of Music.

"Exalted"

Michael Gordon's music merges subtle rhythmic invention with incredible power. Co-commissioned by the Young People's Chorus of New York City™ and the Kronos Quartet in 2010, Michael Gordon began work on a very different piece. But soon after the death of his father, he set it aside and wrote Exalted, the English translation of the first word of the Mourner's Kaddish, one of the most important and central prayers in the Jewish liturgy written 2500 years ago in Aramaic, the language spoken at that time. The text of Exalted, a lament in memory of Mr. Gordon's father, consists entirely of the Kaddish's first four words--Yi-ga-dal, v'yis ka-dash, sh'may, and ra-bo.

In this lesson, students will:

- Learn the use of vocal technique to express emotion.
- Discuss and understand aspects Jewish culture.
- Understand and express emotions constructively and creatively, using the literary device of the metaphor.
- Discuss the importance of empathy and sympathy.



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Listening to *Exalted*

The Mourner's Kaddish is used in services for people who have lost a father, mother, brother, sister or child. While the music may sound mournful, the text itself is an ecstatic praise of God, and there is no reference to death at all. The text, therefore, seems to skim the surface of the music and provides a powerful juxtaposition: the acceptance of our mortal fate, coupled with a willful surrender to the power and grace of an almighty being. *Exalted* begins with a downward glissando, which sounds like sighing and lamenting. It is first heard in the lower strings in the very first measure of the piece, then again when the voices enter. A glissando is a rapid ascending or descending of the scale in which every chromatic pitch is heard. A glissando with the voice is known as a portamento or glide. With the use of glissando, there are hints of sorrow in the beginning of *Exalted*, and then the emotion becomes more explicit and intense as the piece ends. The composer used this technique to express how he felt about the loss of his father. The downward vocals, therefore, imitate the sound of lamentation.

The piece also is a kind of rhythmic journey. The string quartet begins the piece with a driving rhythmic motive of sixteenth notes that carries throughout the entire work. The chorus enters with treble singers in their upper range divided into three parts, each group performing in a canon a beat apart. They eventually become more staggered, and then the low voices come in staggered as well. Listen to how the vocal groups link and divide. You hear the sound as if it were traveling around. The composer wanted to create a spatial feeling to the sound—as if the mourner is being enveloped not only in lamentation but in consolation as well.



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History and Geography

The Mourner's Kaddish

The mourner's Kaddish is one of the types of Kaddish prayers and is central to the Jewish culture. It expresses the mourner's love of God and acceptance of God's will, even while the mourner is feeling great loss and sorrow over the death of a loved one. Ten Jewish adults, called a minyan, are required for reciting the Kaddish. In orthodox congregations, only males can recite it. The Mourner's Kaddish is recited by children (sons only, in orthodox congregations) for their parents for eleven months, and by the immediate family for a brother, sister, son, daughter and wife for thirty days. The Mourner's Kaddish is also recited on the anniversary of the death of the mourned family member. The prayer begins with "Magnified and glorified is His great name." The text is from an ancient Aramaic poem. Aramaic was the language spoken at the time the prayer was written (7BC-7AD).

Jewish belief in the afterlife

The Talmud is a central text of Judaism, which is regarded as the religion, philosophy and way of life of Jewish people. It contains scholarly discussions of Jewish law, ethics, philosophy, customs and history. According to the Talmud, when a soul departs from this world there are steps in which the soul says goodbye. The first time is when it leaves the body. It is a heavy kind of goodbye, because the soul is still connected to the body, but not enough to give the body life. The second good-bye comes after seven days, when the soul and the body are getting a little more distant. After thirty days, the soul somehow goes up to heaven, and for eleven months the soul is judged. This is the time when people who are closest to the person who left the world recite the Kaddish. Each time the Kaddish is recited, it gives the soul a tremendous amount of positive energy. It will find its own paradise depending on the amount of good the person has practiced on earth.



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History and Geography

Aramaic

This language was the vernacular, or ordinary spoken language, of the Near East from about 7th century BC until the 7th century AD, when it was largely replaced by Arabic. Aramaic was the main language of the Persian, Babylonian and Assyrian empires and it became extremely widespread, spoken from the Mediterranean coast to the borders of India. After Alexander the Great destroyed the Persian Empire, Aramaic ceased to be the official language of any major state, but it continued to be spoken widely. It then split into different dialects, and eventually became the script of many nations in the Middle East. Aramaic was once the main language of the Jews and appears in some of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Although it's one of the oldest languages in the world, it is still used in liturgical services by Christian communities in Syria, Lebanon and Iraq. It is also spoken by a few people in Iraq, Turkey, Iran, Armenia, Georgia and Syria. Aramaic influenced the evolution of writing in South Asia and Central Asia, including the Mongolian and Manchurian dialects. As you can see, Aramaic was a kind of "nexus" in the history of writing in Asia. It gave birth to writing systems used by vastly different nations in drastically different geographical locations.

You can find further information about the Aramaic language by visiting:
<http://www.peshitta.org/initial/aramaic.html>



Activities

Activity 1

Look at a map and locate the Middle East and India. Can you find Israel, Palestine, Iraq, and Turkey? By looking at these states, you can imagine how widespread the influence of Aramaic was. Look at an ancient map and try to see where the Persian, Babylonian and Assyrian empires used to be. Which countries are in these regions now? Can you imagine how old their cultures might be, and what they all have in common today?

Activity 2 - Expressing emotions

Exalted is an expression of very intense, even painful emotions. Listen to the music and write down a few words to describe how you feel as you listen to it.

Have you ever felt sad? Why? Describe the events that made you feel sad. What sounds would you associate with sadness? Are there nature sounds that seem sad, like the rustle of the wind, or the howl of a storm?

Activity 3 - Using metaphors

Can you think of an object that can represent sadness? What about a sound? A metaphor is a literary figure of speech that uses an image, story or an object to represent a something abstract or intangible, such as an emotion, quality or idea. Sometimes we can express our emotions better by representing them with metaphors, and sometimes people can understand us better if we do!

What is the opposite of sad? How can you represent this emotion?

Activity 4

Empathy is when you are able to recognize and sometimes share feelings like sadness or joy with another person. Sympathy is when you feel you understand, or when you try to understand, what another person is feeling.

If somebody is feeling sad or has lost a loved one, what would you do? What kind of words will you say?

Empathy and sympathy are often interchangeable, but one thing is certain: it is important for us to learn how to empathize and sympathize with others, because it gives you a sense of affinity, or connectedness, with them. Besides, you never know when you'll need it yourself.