

*(The following is an article which appeared in the Wilton Congregational Church Newsletter - **The Open Door** - following the events of September 11, 2001...)*

“ALLELUIA” THROUGH GRITTED TEETH

There are many things that seemed important before September 11, 2001, but afterward just slipped away to the category of insignificance, even triviality. Music was not one of them. Never have I been so aware of the power of music to move us, to help us grieve, to speak for us when we could no longer utter words of sanity. Nor have I ever been so aware of the inner conflict of wanting to believe that God is omnipotent, being afraid that He is not, wanting to curse Him for what has happened, and yet wanting to praise the God who has comforted us and has brought us through thus far. And yes, the desperation of wanting to know *why* that wakes us in the night. What have we done to deserve this? Is God punishing us, as Jerry Falwell said?

Nothing I have found to read has had as great an impact on me in dealing with these issues as has music, particularly the hymns. One of the hymns chosen for our first prayer service on September 13 was “Our God, Our Help in Ages Past.” We were not alone in choosing it. Time and again I heard that hymn and others we have sung during this crisis being broadcast on the radio from other prayer services across the country. The hymns have become so important to us that Brigitta and I have found ourselves agonizing over exactly which ones to use and how to place them so that they have the greatest impact. Of course, the one closest to all of our hearts right now is “America, the Beautiful,” which does not speak only of America’s beauty and perfection, but also asks God to “mend our every flaw.” Can you sing it, or even recite it, without choking up? I cannot.

While the Broadway shows had to be cancelled in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy because people were too grief-stricken to seek entertainment, there was a sold-out performance of *Ein Deutes Requiem* by Johannes Brahms at Avery Fisher Hall that week. It replaced what was to have been a gala opening of the Philharmonic’s new season. That powerful work was nurturing to those in attendance.

When I was in high school I sang in the mixed chorus and one of the pieces we performed was the famous “Alleluia” by Randall Thompson. Since that time I have sat through many excruciating performances of it and so have never programmed it for any of my choirs. It is long, slow, a cappella, (i.e. no accompaniment is to be used), in a minor key, difficult to keep on pitch, and so morose that it is hard to sustain the mood. The text consists of a single word: *Alleluia*. I knew that it had been written during the time of World War II and that it had been sung at Tanglewood. Now I understand. An “Alleluia” through gritted teeth. I will praise you even though I do not understand, even though I am in so much pain that I cannot speak, and no longer know how to pray.

Linda Lanier-Keosaian
Minister of Music