

SKIDMORE CHORUS



NGUZO SABA SUITE, OP.41
GLENN E. BURLEIGH

CHICHESTER PSALMS
LEONARD BERNSTEIN

*Behold how good
And how pleasant it is
For people to dwell
Together in unity*

Notes

Glenn E. Burleigh: *Nguzo Saba Suite*, Op. 41

Nguzo Saba Suite by Glenn E. Burleigh (1949-2007) is a vivid choral celebration of the Seven Principles that form the foundation of Kwanzaa.

Composed in 1988, the suite distills each principle into a compact musical vignette, allowing Burleigh to explore unity, self-determination, collective responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith through his distinctive blend of gospel harmony, classical technique, and rhythmic verve. His writing invites the choir into a sonic world where African diasporic musical traditions are not merely referenced but honoured as living practice.

Burleigh approached the writing of his *Nguzo Saba Suite* with sensitivity to both the cultural foundations of Kwanzaa and the diverse traditions from which he himself came. In the notes at the beginning of the *Nguzo Saba* score, Dr. James Benjamin Kinchen, Jr. puts it as such, “While [Karenga] envisioned it as a non-religious celebration, [he] hoped that celebrants would infuse it with their own personal values and family traditions. Composer Glenn Burleigh has done just that, explaining that he has approached the writing of both music and text... as an African American man who is very much a Christian.” Consequently, Burleigh’s text choices are mostly sacred, often drawing directly from biblical excerpts. For the purposes of the performance this evening, I’ve adjusted some of the text to reflect a more secular and non-patriarchal understanding.

Burleigh’s score radiates hope, but it never forgets the struggle. Each movement embodies the tension between aspiration and reality, between inherited wounds and a future imagined through shared values. Much the same as Dr. Karenga envisioned Kwanzaa as an occasion to rebuild dignity and belonging, the suite’s emotional arc functions similarly: healing becomes a communal act, and music becomes a vehicle through which a fractured people imagine themselves whole.

Leonard Bernstein: *Chichester Psalms*

Chichester Psalms by Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990) is one of the rare works in the choral canon that marries exuberant rhythmic brilliance with a profound sense of spiritual tenderness. Written in 1965 for the Southern Cathedrals Festival in England, the piece sets Hebrew psalm texts with Bernstein’s unmistakable theatrical flair.

One of the most discussed features of the work is Bernstein’s instruction (written in the score) that the Psalm 23 solo in the second movement “must not be sung by a woman,” but by a boy soprano or male alto. His reasoning was tied to the narrative function of the solo: he wanted the voice heard as the young shepherd David himself, singing before he became king. In other words, the treble line was meant to evoke not just innocence, but the biblical boyhood of a specific figure from the Hebrew Bible. That was 1965. In practice, Bernstein later conducted multiple performances with cisgender women singing the solo (among them a

1977 performance with the Israel Philharmonic, featuring soprano Mimi Lerner). His own interpretation revealed a more flexible musical imagination than the rigidity of the printed instruction. Today, the standard performance practice across professional, collegiate, and community ensembles is to cast the soloist whose voice and musicality best serve the dramatic and expressive contours of the movement, regardless of gender identity. What matters, ultimately, is not the gender of the singer but the quality of the sound and emotional depth they can inhabit: vulnerable, clear, and grounded in the expressive arc of Psalm 23.

For this concert, we present *Chichester Psalms* in its chamber version for organ, harp, and percussion; an arrangement Bernstein himself prepared. This scoring reveals something intimate: a clarity of texture in which the text, rhythmic drive, and choral character are exposed. The harp becomes almost symbolic of little David playing his kinnor (lyre), while the organ provides harmonic architecture, and the single percussionist injects the unmistakable pulse that anchors the outer movements.

Listening Through the Three Movements

Movement 1.

A jubilant mix of Psalm 108 and Psalm 100 bursts forth with energetic, shifting meters in the opening, eventually leading to a consistent 7 pattern. Bernstein fuses Hebrew liturgical tradition with his theatrical rhythmic language, creating a movement that at the same time dances and enkindles awe. See if you can pinpoint the moment we enter into the heavenly gates.

Movement 2.

Psalm 23 is carried by the treble soloist over a gentle harp figure, offering tranquil clarity. This serenity is echoed and supported by the sopranos and altos and then subsequently, and repeatedly, interrupted by the lower voices' fierce declamation of Psalm 2. Bernstein stages a dialogue between innocence and turmoil, allowing neither to fully dominate.

Movement 3.

The work ends with Psalms 131 and 133 in a more reflective, centred tone. The vocals move together in canon, before coming together in unison. We hear 4 solo voices singing out in sequence before the entire ensemble ends the work with simplicity and calm, singing the central theme of this concert, and text we've already heard in *Nguzo Saba*: "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for [people] to dwell together in unity."

Connecting the Works

Placing Burleigh's *Nguzo Saba Suite* alongside Bernstein's *Chichester Psalms* creates a dialogue about community, identity, and the pursuit of peace. Both works respond to social turbulence by turning toward foundational principles: for Burleigh, the Seven Principles rooted in Black cultural resilience;

for Bernstein, psalm texts that have grounded Jewish communities across millennia. Both composers write from worlds marked by injustice and upheaval, yet neither chooses despair. Instead, they turn to music as a place where ethical imagination can flourish. Burleigh leans into collective uplift as a pathway to liberation; Bernstein leans into a spiritual language that insists peace is still possible. Both pieces harness choral sound not merely to describe community, but to enact it: voices rising in unity, tension, argument, comfort, and ultimately, hope.

The Historical Roots of Kwanzaa: A Cultural Response to Crisis

Kwanzaa emerged in 1966 during one of the most volatile periods in twentieth-century American history. Its creation cannot be understood apart from the social, political, and psychological fractures laid bare by the Civil Rights Movement, the persistence of segregationist violence, and the intensifying mistrust between Black communities and state institutions. The holiday was conceived as an antidote to cultural disturbance and an intentional effort to rebuild identity, healing, and communal self-regard among African Americans.

The most widely agreed upon catalyst for its creation was the Watts Uprising of August 1965. Watts, a predominantly Black neighbourhood in Los Angeles, had already endured years of discriminatory housing policies, chronic unemployment, aggressive policing, and municipal neglect. On August 11, a Black motorist was stopped on suspicion of driving under the influence. As officers engaged the driver and his family members, bystanders gathered, tempers rose, and the situation quickly became volatile. The altercation escalated into a physical confrontation between residents and police. What followed was a six day eruption of long-simmering anger at systemic injustice.

The rebellion left thirty-four people dead, over a thousand injured, and massive property destruction. What lingered more profoundly though, was a sense of rupture and divide. It became clear that peaceful protest, legal appeals, and gradualist reforms were not adequately addressing the systemic and social distress Black communities were facing. There was both grief and a growing recognition that cultural repair within the Black community had to accompany political change.

In response, Dr. Maulana Karenga (b. 1941), then a young scholar and activist associated with the Black Liberation movement, sought to craft a holiday that wasn't rooted in commercialism or religious faith, but rather in cultural reorientation. He recognized that Black communities did not need repair because they were deficient, but rather that the community needed help healing from what had been taken from them over centuries. He looked to African philosophies, particularly Pan-Africanist models of communal ethics, and distilled them into seven guiding principles:



the Nguzo Saba (*nguzo* translates to principle or foundation, while *saba* translates to the number seven).

Karenga argued that African Americans, severed from ancestral traditions through enslavement and generations of forced assimilation, needed a framework that honoured African heritage, restored dignity, and encouraged self-determination.

Kwanzaa, therefore, was not imagined as a replacement for Christmas or any religious observance. Instead, it functioned as a cultural re-grounding A way to assert identity when dominant and hierarchal social narratives denied it.



Kwanzaa is observed each night from December 26 to January 1, with each evening dedicated to one of the Seven Principles. For every principle, a specific candle-lighting sequence is performed on the kinara, the traditional Kwanzaa candelabra.

1. Umoja (oo-MO-ja meaning *unity*)
2. Kujichagulia (koo-jee-cha-goo-LEE-ah meaning *self-determination*)
3. Ujima (oo-JEE-ma meaning collective work and responsibility)
4. Ujamaa (oo-ja-MAH meaning *cooperative economics*)
5. Nia (NEE-uh meaning *purpose*)
6. Kumba (koo-OOM-bah meaning *creativity*)
7. Imani (ih-MAH-nee meaning *faith*)

This historical backdrop gives Glenn E. Burleigh's *Nguzo Saba Suite* a deeper resonance. Burleigh is not simply setting principles to music; he is participating in the broader project of reclaiming cultural memory. The suite becomes, in its own way, an extension of that 1960s effort to transform grief into vision and adversity into collective resolve.

A Note on Not Wearing Black

You may notice we're not in traditional all-black concert attire tonight. That choice is intentional. We've decided to test reserving black clothing for occasions that truly call for it; this concert didn't feel like one of them (you'll likely see us back in blacks for next term's presentation of Mozart's *Requiem*).

At the same time, we recognize that not everyone has easy access to formal black attire, and removing that expectation makes participation more comfortable and inclusive for everyone. And, as it turns out, wearing less black has had absolutely no effect on our singing. The music is unchanged, and we get to show a bit more of our own identities through colour.

Program

Nguzo Saba Suite, Op. 41

Glenn E Burleigh

- I. Umoja (Unity)
- II. Kujichagulia (Self-Determination)
- III. Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility)
Adam Jaggernaut '28, baritone
- IV. Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics)
- V. Nia (Purpose)
- VI. Kuumba (Creativity)
- VII. Imani (Faith)

Chichester Psalms

Leonard Bernstein

- I. Psalm 108, vs. 2
Psalm 100
- II. Psalm 23
Dylan Dreizen '28, mezzo-soprano
Psalm 2, vs. 1-4
- III. Psalm 131
Natalie Goeks '27, soprano
Anna Staltari '28, soprano
Derrick Palmer '29, tenor
Aiden Weiland '29, baritone
- Psalm 133, vs. 1



THIS MAN'S GOT

UNFINISHED *business*



COME SING

MOZART'S REQUIEM

Featuring these two bangers



Dies irae
(Day of Wrath)



Lacrimosa
(Weeping)

Enrol in Skidmore Chorus MP 288 for Spring 2026!

Texts

Nguzo Saba Suite

I. Umoja

Umoja, Unity.
Behold how good
And how pleasant it is
For brothers and sisters
To dwell together in unity.

Behold how good
And how pleasant it is
For all the sisters and brothers
To live in unity, umoja.

Got to get together
With my brother.
We need umoja.
Got to get together
With my sister
We need umoja.

No more mothers against daughters.
No more fathers against sons.

Stop that fighting and lend a hand.
Stop backbiting and
Help your fellow man.

II. Kujichagulia

Kujichagulia.
Now that I have been set free,
I will be all I can be.
I can do all things,
my faith is driving me.
I am determined.

Can't hold me back no longer.

I can soar on eagle's wings,
Through faith I can do all things.
I will reach my goal somehow,
Nothing can stop me now.
I am determined.

III. Ujima

Ujima.
It takes a village to raise a child.
The "Son" is going down, pick him up.
The "Son" is going down, lend a hand.
Not just father or mother,
Not just sister or brother;
It takes a village to make a man.

The "Son" is going down, bow your head.
The "Son" keeps going down shamefully.
He is imprisoned in the body,
Imprisoned in the mind.
It takes a village to set him free.

Look up, and sing ujima,
You hav a helping hand.
Be strongs, and sing ujima,
You hav a promised land.

Be at one with each other,
With yourself be reconciled.
We are your village, you are our child.
Your dreams are our dreams,
Your tears are our tears.
Your laughter makes us happy.
Our love will drive away your fears.

The "Son" is rising up,
Watch him soar.
Rising high on eagle's wings forevermore.
All you needed was a hand
For you to reach your promised land.
We are your village,
You are our child.

It takes a village to raise a child.

IV. Ujamaa

Ujamaa.

Work while it is day,
When the night cometh,
No one can work.

Share the wealth with your brother.
Share the wealth with your
sisters and brothers.

Bring a tenth to the Lord's house,
So that there will be meat in the house
For your sons and your daughters.

V. Nia

Why was I born?
Was I born to feed hungry children,
Or to give shelter to the homeless?
Was I born to be my brother's keeper,
companion to the lonely?

I was born to love
And lead with all my heart,
My soul, my mind, and strength.
If I love God, I can love all.
This is my purpose. Nia.

Why was I born?
Was I born to preach the Gospel,
Or to care for aging parents?
Was I born to help the single mother,
Or council the prisoner?

I was born to love
And lead with all my heart,
My soul, my mind, and strength.
If I love god, I can love all.
If I love all, I can love god.
This is my purpose.
This is why I sing my song.
Nia.

VI. Kuumba

Elohim,
Fountain of Creativity.
Kuumba, "Kumbayah"
Create in me a clear heart, O god,
And renew me in me a right spirit.

How can I make the lonely child
With tears in his eyes stop crying?
When infirmity comes, how can
I make the withering man stop dying?

Kuumba. Creativity comes from you.

Help me teach the illiterate man
How to read, how to write.
Help me teach all the children to
Join in the fight,
Without fighting each other.

Kuumba. Creativity comes from you, lord.
Kuumba. Please show us what to do, lord.
Kuumba. Creativity comes from you, lord.

Show me how to save the drowning
Man on the drug.
He is hungry, and homeless, and helpless,
And hopelessly in despair.
Show me how to rebuild all
The run down houses,
And how to encourage the hungry,
The homeless, the helpless, the hopeless,
Who don't seem to care.

How can I bring joy to the longly heart?
How can I give the man who has lost his job
A brand new start?

Kuumba. Creativity comes from you, lord.
Come by here, lord.
Kuumba. Show us what to do, lord.
Kuumba, "Kumbayah"

VII. Imani

Imani.

Lift every voice and sing about Imani.
Sing a song full of the faith,
Full of the hope.

I believe in the triune creator.
I believe in the eternal word.
I believe in the power of the spirit.

Substance of things hoped for,
Evidence of things not seen.
Without faith, it's impossible to heal the soul.

Abraham, Issac, and Jacob,
And Sarah, and Joshua all had Imani.
Martin said "we will survive."
Jesse said "keep hope alive"

Nelson was jailed.
Mandela was jailed.
Yet his mission prevailed.
How we love our Mother Africa.
Deep in our hearts, Imani.
We do believe.
We do believe we shall overcome.
We have already come this far by faith.

Although we say "let freedom ring,
let it ring with liberty and justice for all"
I must wonder in my mind,
As I ponder in my heart,
Do we really mean for all?

Imani. Nguzo Saba.

Stop that fighting and lend a hand.
We need Umoja.

Stop backbiting and help your fellow man.
We need Kujichagulia.

Got to get together with my brother.
We need Ujima.

Got to get together with my sister.
We need Ujamma.

Got to get together with my brother.
We need Kuumba.

Got to get together with my sister
And brother.
We need Nia.
Imani.

Celebrate the Kwanzaa
Nguzo Saba.

Chichester Psalms

Part I

Urah, hanevel, v'chiner!
A-irah shahar!

Hariu l'Adonai kol haarets.
Iv'du et Adonai b'simha.
Bo-u l'fanav bir'nanah.
D'u ki Adonai Hu Elohim.
Hu asanu, v'lo anahnu.
Amo v'tson mar'ito.
Bo-u sh'arav b'todah,
Hatseirotav bit'hilah,
Hodu lo, bar'chu sh'mo.
Ki tov Adonai, l'olam has'do,
V'ad dor vador emunato.

Part II

Adonai ro-i, lo ehsar.
Bin'ot deshe yarbitseini,
Al mei m'nuhot y'nahaleini,
Naf'shi y'shovev,
Yan'heini b'ma'aglei tsedek,
L'ma'an sh'mo.
Gam ki eilech
B'gei tsalmavet,
Lo ira ra,
Ki Atah imadi.
Shiv't'cha umishan'techa
Hemah y'nahamuni.
Ta'aroch l'fanai shulchan
Neged tsor'rai
Dishanta vashemen roshi
Cosi r'vayah.
Ach tov vahesed
Yird'funi kol y'mei hayai
V'shav'ti b'veit Adonai
L'orech yamim.

Lamah rag'shu goyim
Ul'umim yeh'gu rik?
Yit'yats'vu malchei erets,
V'roznim nos'du yahad
Al Adonai v'al m'shiho.
N'natkah et mos'roteimo,
Yoshev bashamayim
Yis'hak, Adonai
Yil'ag lamo!

Psalm 108, verse 2
Awake, psaltery and harp!
I will rouse the dawn!

Psalm 100
Make a joyful noise unto the Lord all ye lands.
Serve the Lord with gladness.
Come before his presence with singing.
Know ye that the Lord, He is God.
It is He that hath made us, and not we ourselves
We are His people and the sheep of His pasture.
Enter into His gates with thanksgiving,
And into His courts with praise.
Be thankful unto Him, and bless His name.
For the Lord is good, His mercy is everlasting.
And His truth endureth to all generations.

Psalm 23
The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures,
He leadeth me beside the still waters,
He restoreth my soul,
He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness,
For His name's sake.
Yea, though I walk
Through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
For Thou art with me.
Thy rod and Thy staff
They comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me
In the presence of mine enemies,
Thou annointest my head with oil,
My cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy
Shall follow me all the days of my life,
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord
Forever.

Psalm 2, verses 1-4
Why do the nations rage,
And the people imagine a vain thing
The kings of the earth set themselves,
And the rulers take counsel together
Against the Lord and against His anointed.
Saying, let us break their bonds asunder,
He that sitteth in the heavens
Shall laugh, and the Lord
Shall have them in derision!

Part III

Adonai, Adonai,
Lo gavah libi,
V'lo ramu einai,
V'lo hilachti
Big'dolot uv'niflaot
Mimeni.
Im lo shiviti
V'domam'ti,
Naf'shi k'gamul alei imo,
Kagamul alai naf'shi.
Yahel Yis'rael el Adonai
Me'atah v'ad olam.

Hineh mah tov,
Umah nayim,
Shevet ahim
Gam yahad.

Psalm 131
Lord, Lord,
My heart is not haughty,
Nor mine eyes lofty,
Neither do I exercise myself
In great matters or in things
Too wonderful for me to understand.
Surely I have calmed
And quieted myself,
As a child that is weaned of his mother,
My soul is even as a weaned child.
Let Israel hope in the Lord
From henceforth and forever.

Psalm 133, verse 1
Behold how good,
And how pleasant it is,
For brethren to dwell
Together in unity.

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Skidmore College Chorus, Spring '25

Floyd Ricketts, *conductor*

Angelique Scully, *collaborative pianist*

Guest Artists

Dylan Dreizen '28, mezzo-soprano

Rebecca Ehren, organ

Jason Emmond, electric bass

Robert Halek, percussion

Elizabeth Huntley, harp

Adam Jaggernaut '28, baritone

Sopranos

Jamie Becker

Alysha Bigelow

Barbara Chellis

Áine Fitzgibbon

Natalie Goeks

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