

More About ALLELUIA

In the summer of 1988, I had just moved from Austin to Albuquerque. On a neighborhood walk, I came across Trinity United Methodist Church just a few blocks from home. I had been a member of the choir at a large United Methodist church in Austin, but I was not expecting to find a comparable one in Albuquerque, so although Trinity looked like a fairly small church, I went inside and introduced myself.

Soon I was a member of a choir that was less than half the size of my previous one, but I felt very much at home there. The director was a lady named Janice who did a good enough job keeping us on task, but the real force in the choir was the church organist, Florence Irene Smith Hageman, or "Grandma FISH" to her friends. She had a very strong personality, but in a good way. She was never intimidating or overbearing, but she knew how to get what she wanted, as I was soon to find out.

One day after I had been with the choir for less than a year, Florence called me aside and said, "Janice is leaving to take a job in Santa Fe. We need to find a new director." She was the one who would be in charge of the search, and I didn't know why she was sharing this with me, as all my musical contacts were in the very different world of school bands. Then she continued, "and I want you to do it."

Fast forward 3 years to the spring of 1992. Although I had sung in church and college choirs for years, directing one was totally out of my element, but I did my best to live up to Florence's expectations. She was a good mentor to me, and somehow with her help and my experience as a band director, I had been able to pull it off. But then, after having been in failing health for several months, Florence passed away at the age of 78, and I was left piloting a ship that no longer had a rudder.

But life goes on, and so did I, staying in the position for several more years before at last being able to turn over the helm to someone more qualified and retreat back to my comfortable seat in the tenor section.

One of Florence's lasting legacies was an ecumenical service with a nearby synagogue every year on Thanksgiving Day. She was the organist for both congregations and had single-handedly set up that wonderful tradition. At the Thanksgiving service that year, our combined choirs--plus that of the Korean church that shared our building--sang this **Alleluia** that I composed for the occasion in her memory. The cantor of the synagogue insisted that we sing it as "Hallelujah," as that is more ecumenical than "Alleluia," so that is how we sang it.

Beginning in a plainchant-like unison and then quickly spreading into parts, it was inspired by Randall Thompson's famous 1940 **Alleluia**. Like that work, this is not a joyous paean, but a more introspective interpretation, appropriate for the occasion. I even sneaked a subtle nod to Thompson's work into mine.