URBS BEATA
Composed by John Sanders (1933 – 2003)

A Cantata for Alto soloist, SATB choir, Solo Cello, Brass Ensemble, Percussion and Organ.
Libretto : Reverend Jonathan Hadfield (compiled from original, biblical and patristic sources)

Commissioned by the Three Choirs Festival Committee for performance in Gloucester Cathedral on Friday 24th August 2001 and based on an idea by William Armiger.

First Performance: James Bowman : Counter-tenor
Rachele Howgigo : Solo Cello
Solo Trio: Philip Collins (alto)
Mark Davies (tenor)
William Armiger (baritone)
Solo Treble: Edward Brech
Solo Baritone: Christopher Monk
Organist: Ian Bell
The Three Cathedral Choirs of Gloucester, Hereford, and Worcester.
Conductor : Adrian Lucas.

(The Cantata was created in a way which would make it both attractive to perform and, in terms of finance, readily accessible to a wide range of choral groups.

It does, however, require a countertenor soloist of some character and stage presence !)
It would make up about half of a concert programme.

Forces required: Choirs SATB with divisions; alto/countertenor soloist; soloists from the choir (Trio: ATB; Treble and Bass)
Organ; solo cello; 3 trumpets; 3 trombones; tuba; timpani; percussion ( 1 player ) – bass drum, side drum, cymbals, suspended cymbal, whip, gong, tubular bells.

The work is in ten movements:
1: Birth of Order from Chaos
2: The Primal Vision – the Hymn of the First Hierarchy.
3: The Fall of Satan and of Man
4: The Consequences
5: The Divine Image – Dimmed but not Destroyed
   a: The Song of Western Atheism
   b: The Song of Eastern Religion
6: The Finest Crack – the Jewish People
7: The Prophecy
8: The Medicine
9: The Resurrection
10: Urbs Beata – The Vision

John Sanders wrote the following note:
Much of the music is based on a sequence of 12 semitones first heard in No 1, representing the Birth of Order from Chaos. This sequence of notes (call it a ‘tone-row’ if you wish), appears in most of the movements in various guises and keys. Sometimes it is used to build chords, sometimes to create melodic passages for voice or cello, and in No 5(a) part of it becomes a Passacaglia – the duet between Alto and Cello soloists. So much for mechanics !.

The prime function of the music is to enhance the meaning and atmosphere of the words. In that sense it could be described as ‘film music’! Finding the right libretto took well over a year, but when Jonathan Hadfield gave me his text I immediately felt it had the right mixture of mysticism and realism to spark off the alchemy of inspiration.
Urbs Beata - The Vision

John Sanders (1933 - 2003)

Copyright © Janet Sanders 2012
home of the righteous, and mansion of the high-est King

home of the righteous, and mansion of the high-est King

home of the righteous, and mansion of the high-est King

home of the righteous, and mansion of the high-est King

home of the righteous, and mansion of the high-est King

home of the righteous, and mansion of the high-est King

home of the righteous, and mansion of the high-est King