

Great Sacred Music

Sunday, August 1, 2021

Joseph Parry, with descant by Richard Marlow: Jesu, Lover of my soul
Choir of Trinity College, Cambridge, Richard Marlow
text by Charles Wesley (1707-1788); set to Parry's tune, "Aberystwyth"

Richard Goodenough: Psalm 81, "Sing we merrily unto God"
Choir of King's College, Cambridge, Sir David Willcocks

Tomas Luis de Victoria: Lux aeterna
Magnificat, Philip Cave

The text "Jesu, Lover of my soul" was written by Charles Wesley (1707-1788) and is set to Parry's tune "Aberystwyth". Psalm 81 bears the dedication "To the chief Musician upon Gittith, A Psalm of Asaph." Some scholars think that Spanish composer Tomás Luis de Victoria (1548-1611) studied with Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina in Rome. In any event Victoria is considered to be one of the greatest composers of the 16th century.

Edmund Rubbra: Magnificat in A flat
Choir of St. John's College, Cambridge, Christopher Robinson

J.S. Bach: Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring
Todd Wilson, organ
The Aeolian-Skinner organ, Cathedral of St. Philip, Atlanta

English composer Edmund Rubbra (1901-1986) studied with Gustav Holst and was a lecturer at Oxford University. "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring" is one of the most recognizable pieces in the instrumental and choral repertoire.

Commentary: Dan Locklair

Dan Locklair: Ave Verum Corpus
Sospiri, Christopher Watson

Richard Dering: Ave verum corpus
Cambridge Singers, John Rutter

Dan Locklair's comments on his composition, Ave verum corpus: "My motet for a cappella SATB chorus, Ave Verum Corpus (Hail, True Body), was composed in the autumn of 2010. It is warmly dedicated to my former Wake Forest University student – now colleague and friend – Andrew Clark, in celebration of his first academic year (2010-2011) as Director of Choral Activities at Harvard University." English composer Richard Dering (1580-1630) spent much of his life in the Netherlands where he could practise his Roman Catholic faith with impunity. The Latin translates as "Hail, true body".

Horatio Parker: Light's Glittering Morn

St. Olaf Choir, Anton Armstrong
John Ferguson, organ

Samuel Barber: Agnus Dei
Choir of Trinity College, Cambridge, Richard Marlow

Johann Speth: Toccata VI
Heinrich Hamm, organ
The c1741 Gabler organ in The Basilica of Weingarten

"Light's Glittering Morn" is a translation of the 7th-century Latin hymn "Aurora lucis rutilat" by John Mason Neale. Samuel Barber arranged the Adagio movement of his 1936 string quartet for SATB chorus in 1967. Barber used the text to the "Agnus Dei" portion of the Mass and scored the music in the visually terrifying key of B flat minor. South German organist and composer Johann Speth (1664-c.1719) was organist at the Cathedral in Augsburg.

J.S. Bach: Cantata 105, "Herr, gehe nicht ins Gericht mit deinem Knecht"
Bach Collegium Japan, Masaaki Suzuki
Miah Persson, soprano; Robin Blaze, countertenor
Makoto Sakurada, tenor; Peter Kooy, bass-baritone

The German translates as "Enter not into judgement with Thy servant, O Lord." This cantata was first performed on July 25, 1723 in Leipzig. Craig Smith states that this cantata is "a meditation on Christian faith and redemption. From instrumental and vocal canons in the opening chorus, to the trembling and doubt of the soprano aria that leads to promised redemption and blissful acceptance, to the divine assurance of the final chorale, BWV 105 serves as a reminder that salvation is everlasting."

Daniel E. Gawthrop: The Promises of Isaiah the Prophet
The Renaissance Men

The composer writes: "With texts taken from the writings of Isaiah, this major work for unaccompanied TTBB chorus is conceived as an artistic response to The Lamentations of Jeremiah the Prophet by Thomas Tallis. Jeremiah's mourning over the destruction of Jerusalem is heartfelt and appropriate, but is not "the end of the story" for Christian believers. The great Old Testament writer Isaiah left many prophetic promises of great joy to come, and it is from these utterances that the composer has drawn the text for this work. Though this piece makes a great companion piece to the Tallis Lamentations, it is intended as a standalone work, suitable for use either in concert or in worship." Renaissance Men is a men's vocal ensemble based in the Boston area.

Giovanni Battista Pergolesi: Salve Regina
Montreal Sinfonietta, Charles Dutoit
June Anderson, soprano; Cecilia Bartoli, mezzo-soprano

Giovanni Battista Pergolesi (1710-1736) was another one of those musical geniuses who died at far too young an age. He was primarily known as a composer of comic operas. But he also wrote church music which has stood the test of time. His setting of the 13th century meditation "Stabat Mater" by Jacoponus is still widely performed.

Louis Vierne: Messe solennelle, Op 16

Choirs of Notre-Dame Cathedral, Paris, Jehan Revert
Pierre Cochereau and Jacques Marichal, organ

“The Messe solennelle op. 16 for mixed choir and two organs by Louis Vierne was composed in 1899. At its world premiere in St. Sulpice in December 1901 Charles-Marie Widor played the main organ and Vierne the choir organ. The work belongs to the highlights of the late Romantic organ masses and more-over is comfortable for the choir to sing.” Source: Carus-Verlag

Charles-Marie Widor: Mass, Op. 36 (for two choirs and organs)
Les Petits Chanteurs du Mont-Royal; Les Chantres musiciens, Gilbert Patenaude
Vincent Boucher, grand organ; Jonathan Oldengarm, choir organ

There are not many masses written for two choirs and two organs. Widor’s short, concise offering takes a back seat to the needs of the liturgy. The Agnus Dei is especially beautiful.

César Franck: Chorale No. 3 in A minor
Peter Hurford, organ
1888 Cavaille-Coll organ in the Basilica of Saint Sernin, Toulouse, France

Cesar Franck wrote three chorales for organ. These are lengthy, rather elaborate musical compositions as opposed to the chorale prelude form which is much shorter.

John Rutter: Mass of the Children
Choir of Clare College, Cambridge; Farnham Youth Choir; Clare Chamber Ensemble
Timothy Brown
Angharad Gruffydd-Jones, soprano; Jeremy Huw Williams, baritone
James McVinnie, organ

The first performance of John Rutter’s Mass of the Children was on February 13, 2003, at Carnegie Hall in New York. The composer writes: "I had always wanted to write a work combining children’s choir with adult performers, not only because I find the sound of children’s voices irresistible but also because I wanted to repay a debt. As a boy soprano in my school choir I had been thrilled whenever our choir took part in adult works with children’s choir parts, such as the Mahler Third Symphony and the Britten War Requiem, and years later I remembered this experience and wanted to write something that would give children a similar opportunity to perform alongside adult professionals"

Herbert Howells: Te Deum (Collegium Regale)
Choir of King's College, Cambridge; King's Voices; Britten Sinfonia, Sir Stephen Cleobury

English composer Herbert Howells wrote his setting of the morning canticles entitled Collegium Regale for King’s College, Cambridge in 1945 for his friend Boris Ord.