

Great Sacred Music

Sunday, July 18, 2021

Charles Villiers Stanford: Psalm 150, Laudate Dominum
Choir of Clare College, Cambridge, Graham Ross
Eleanor Carter, organ

Richard Webster: O God, our help in ages past
Advent Press Choir, brass and percussion, Richard Webster
Thomas G. Whittemore, organ

Giovanni Gabrieli: Exaudi me Domine
Huelgas Ensemble, Paul van Nevel

The chant for Psalm 150 composed by Sir Charles Villiers Stanford (1852-1924) is a classic. It captures the exuberance of that great shout of praise. Richard Webster's arrangement of "O God, our help in ages past" is one of 45 hymn arrangements Webster has written. "Exaudi me, Domine" is a Responsory from the Mass for the Dead.

William Cornysh: Ave Maria, mater dei
Binchois Consort, Andrew Kirkman

Ralph Vaughan Williams: Antiphon from Five Mystical Songs
Corydon Singers, English Chamber Orchestra, Matthew Best

Orlando Gibbons: If ye be risen again with Christ
The Choir of Saint Thomas Church, New York City, John Scott
Christian Lane, organ

Not much is known about English composer William Cornysh (1465-1523). Several of his choral compositions appear in the Eton Choirbook. "Antiphon" is one of Five Mystical Songs which Vaughan Williams wrote for the Three Choirs Festival in 1911. English composer Orlando Gibbons (1583-1625) was a chorister in the Choir of King's College, Cambridge. He was Organist of Westminster Abbey when he died at age 41.

Commentary: David Chalmers

Leo Sowerby: Great is the Lord
Gloriae Dei Cantores, Elizabeth Patterson

Jean Mouton: Adjutorium nostrum
Capilla Flamenca; La Caccia

Dr. Leo Sowerby (1895-1968) was considered by most Episcopal church musicians to be the unofficial Dean of American Church Music. Jean Mouton (1459-1522) the French court composer is tied to the Venetian school through his pupil Adrian Willaert. The Latin is "Adjutorium nostrum in nomine domini" and translates as "Our help is in the name of the Lord."

John Rutter: A Gaelic Blessing
Cambridge Singers; City of London Sinfonia, John Rutter

Louis Vierne: Carillon de Westminster, Op. 54 No. 6 (from Pieces de fantaisie)
John Longhurst, organ
1948 Aeolian-Skinner organ in the Mormon Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, Utah

The hallmarks of English composer John Rutter's music are its accessibility and beautiful melodies. "A Gaelic Blessing" was commissioned by the Chancel Choir of First United Methodist Church in Omaha, Nebraska, for their conductor Mel Olson. Vierne's Carillon de Westminster was the composer's response to Henry Willis' theme for an improvisation. Willis didn't realize that Vierne was blind. When he hummed the theme based on the Westminster chime apparently either Willis didn't hum the tune correctly or Vierne didn't hear it. That's why the chime is not quite right. Whether this is rumor or the truth is something which we shall let the musicologists debate.

J.S. Bach: Cantata 107, "Was willst du dich betrüben"
Holland Boys' Choir; Netherlands Bach Collegium, Pieter Jan Leusink
Ruth Holton, soprano; Sytse Buwalde, alto
Nico van der Meel, tenor; Bas Ramselaar, bass

The German title of this cantata translates as "Why are you distressed?" The late Craig Smith notes: "This is a cantata that gets stronger and stronger as it goes on. This tune with the original words was the subject of one of Bach's greatest organ chorale preludes BWV 658, published in the 18 Leipzig Chorales. It clearly engages him ever more progressively here."

Antonio Vivaldi: Dixit Dominus, RV 595
The King's Consort and Choir, Robert King
Susan Gritton, soprano; Catrin Wyn-Davies, soprano
Catherine Denley, mezzo-soprano; Charles Daniels, tenor
Neal Davies, bass; Michael George, baritone

Scholars have not determined for what occasion this rather grand work was written. But they think that it was composed for a festival sometime after 1720. While Vivaldi's Gloria is much better known, Dixit Dominus is every bit as splendid in its scoring and style.

Felix Mendelssohn: Sonata in A, Op. 65 No. 3
Andrew Scanlon, organ
The Perkins & Wells Memorial Organ, C.B. Fisk Op. 126, 2005, St. Paul's Episcopal Church,
Greenville, North Carolina

German composer Felix Mendelssohn wrote six sonatas for organ which have become staples of an organist's repertoire.

Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber: Requiem a 15 in A
Choir and Orchestra of De Nederlandse Bachvereniging, Gustav Leonhardt
Marta Almajano, soprano; Mieke van der Sluis, soprano
John Elwes, tenor; Mark Padmore, tenor
Frans Huijts, baritone; Harry van der

Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber (1644-1704) was a musician at the Cathedral in Salzburg. Scholars seem to think that his Requiem for 15 voices was written for the funeral of his employer, Archbishop Maximilian of Salzburg.

Esteban Salas: Requiem Mass

Exaudi Choir of Cuba; Benedictine Monks of Santo Domingo De Silos, María Felicia Pérez
Christian Mouyen, organ

Cuban composer Esteban Salas y Castro (1725-1803) is but one of dozens of Latin American composers who flourished during the Baroque era following the conquest by Spain.

Anton Bruckner: Mass No. 2 in E minor for choir and winds

Saarbrücken Chamber Choir; Mannheim Chamber Philharmonic, Georg Grun

While he is best known for his large-scale symphonies, Austrian composer Anton Bruckner was a church organist at the beginning of his career. He wrote many fine sacred choral works including this Mass in E minor. This was commissioned for the opening of The votive chapel in the Linz Cathedral and first performed in 1869.

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina: Stabat Mater

Tallis Scholars, Peter Phillips

The Tallis Scholars recorded Palestrina's setting of the 13th-century text, "Stabat Mater", in the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome in February 1994.

Andre Raison: Offerte du Cinquieme Ton, "Le vive-le-roy des Parisiens"

Pierre Bardon, organ

1772 Isnard organ at St. Maximin-en-Provence

French organ builder Jean-Esprit Isnard (1707–1781) taught Jean-Pierre Cavaillé, who was the grandfather of the celebrated organ builder Aristide Cavaillé-Coll.