

The Choral Arts Society of Washington  
Norman Scribner, Artistic Director

**CHORAL MUSIC 101**  
**A Guided Tour Through Norman's Choral Playlist**

Sunday, November 14, 2010 at 4:00pm  
Rachel M. Schlesinger Concert Hall and Arts Center  
Northern Virginia Community College, Alexandria Campus

**NOTES ON THE PROGRAM**

By Wayne D. Shirley, © 2010 W.D.S.  
(As of 10/18/2010 – Subject to Change)

Norman Scribner and Deborah Lamberton are the principal commentators for today's program. These printed notes serve merely as a way of quickly giving some orientation, and a way of saving the commentators from some dry as dust details. And they serve to give early arrivers something to read. (The occasional parenthetical remarks at the end throw in a fact or opinion which will, I hope, make these notes slightly less skeletal without getting in the way of the commentary.)

Plainsong Sequence, Mode 1 – Ascribed to Wipo (c. 1030)  
**Victimae Paschali**

The words of "Victimae Paschali," the Gregorian sequence for Easter, are usually ascribed to a Wipo of Burgundy (died about 1050; his name appears in some sources as "Wigbert"). The wonderful, flexible tune is also attributed to Wipo/Wigbert, but with a larger question mark.

William Byrd (c.1540–1623)  
**I will not leave you comfortless**

William Byrd's five-voice motet *I Will Not Leave You Comfortless* was published (in Latin, as *Non Vos Relinquam Orphanos*) in 1607 in Byrd's second set of *Gradualia*. Though its text is from Jesus' words to the disciples at the last supper as reported in John 14, Byrd labels his motet as being for the feast of Pentecost. (The composer intersperses Jesus' words with Alleluias. This is not padding: the motet represents the faithful reflecting on Christ's words and responding with their own word of rejoicing.)

Claudio Monteverdi (c.1567–1643)  
**Sancta Maria** (from *Vespers of 1610*)

Claudio Monteverdi's *Vespers of the Blessed Virgin* were published in 1610 in Venice. Published along with them was a six-voice mass of impeccable late-Renaissance craftsmanship; the *Vespers* themselves, however, were clearly a product of the new century, employing many of the techniques which had made Monteverdi a controversial figure in his day.

The *Vespers* remain controversial even now, but in another sense. They contain settings of several texts not part of the standard literature for a set of Marian Vespers, and some modern scholars have suggested that "Vespers" was a catchall title for a miscellaneous collection of sacred pieces which happened to have, along with much other music, all the psalm-settings necessary for a Marian vesper service. (Today's piece is one of the ones duly read out of the Vesper service by the exclusionists.) Other scholars leapt to the defense of the *Vespers* as a unitary work, performable with no more sense of its being a miscellany than the Bach B Minor Mass (whose unity has also been questioned by a leading scholar; but that's another story). Now the *Vespers* is generally acknowledged to be a single multiple-movement work, the earliest large-scale choral-orchestral work to have a secure place in the concert repertory.

The Sonata sopra Sancta Maria is basically an instrumental work for eight instruments (two keyed trumpets, two trombones, two violins, a viola, and an instrument which may be trombone or viola) and continuo. Over this instrumental movement the sopranos intone, eleven times in all, a bit of chant from the Litany of the Saints. (For this listener at least Monteverdi's Sonata bears an eerie resemblance to the Ride to the Abyss from Hector Berlioz' *The Damnation of Faust*. In both of them women reiterate in unison a bit of chant over what is essentially a driving orchestral movement. But Berlioz could not have known the Monteverdi.)

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)

**Gloria in excelsis Deo** (from *Mass in B Minor*)

J. S. Bach sent the manuscript of the Kyrie and Gloria of the B Minor Mass to Dresden in 1733, as part of a bid to become the Kapellmeister of the Dresden court. We're fairly sure that the Kyrie and Gloria were in fact performed at Dresden: at any rate Bach was declared Court Composer (not necessarily an exclusive title, as Kapellmeister was) in 1736. The remainder of the B Minor Mass was written later, sometimes recycling music from Bach's sacred cantatas (by no means to trivialize this music: think of the Crucifixus and the Agnus Dei of the B Minor Mass.)

The "Gloria" of the Catholic liturgy is a moderately lengthy text: its setting in the B Minor Mass encompasses eight or nine movements, depending on the numbering system used by the particular edition. We are doing only the movement (or the two movements, depending on the edition) which comprise Bach's setting of the greetings from the Heavenly Host to the shepherds from the Christmas story according to Luke. This section by itself is also referred to as the Gloria.

(Later in life Bach recycled the portion of the Mass we are singing as a Christmas cantata – Cantata No. 191 – adding a doxology to the music of the Domine Deus and the Cum

Sancto Spiritu from the Mass. So Bach himself didn't mind detaching the music of the angelic greeting from its immediate context in the setting of the liturgical Gloria.)

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732–1809)  
**Agnus Dei** (from *Missa in tempore belli*)

The *Mass in Time of War* (*Missa in tempore belli*), written in 1796, is the second of the final six mass settings Haydn wrote, approximately once a year, during the years 1796–1802. We are performing the last section of the Mass, the Agnus Dei, which ends with the words "dona nobis pacem." (The war which gives this mass its title was not, in 1796, being fought in Haydn's Austria itself: it was being fought in the parts of Italy which were then under Austrian rule. In March, 1796, the young Napoleon Bonaparte took over the French army in Italy and led it to a series of victories which eventually – in 1797, after the completion of tonight's Haydn mass – led it into Austria itself, indeed almost to the gates of Vienna.)

Ludwig van Beethoven (c.1770–1827)  
**Agnus Dei** (from *Missa Solemnis*)

In 1796, the year of Haydn's *Mass in Time of War*, Beethoven may well have seen the French army under Napoleon as a force for freedom, bringing Liberty, Equality, and Brotherhood to an Italy under foreign rule. But by 1818–1824, when he wrote his *Missa Solemnis*, Beethoven had not only been thoroughly cured of his early admiration for Napoleon: he had experienced war firsthand during 1805 and 1809, two years in which the French army occupied Vienna. The Dona Nobis Pacem of the *Missa Solemnis*, the movement we are performing today bears the heading "Prayer for inner and outer peace": for freedom from war as well as for inner tranquility

(Commentators have sometimes complained that the cheery trumpet-and-drum music which suggests the sounds of war in this movement are inadequate to explain the panic they summon forth in soloists, chorus and orchestra. But it was just such cheery sounds that you heard as the enemy marched toward your village with the intent of burning it to the ground.)

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)  
**Lebeslieder Walzer** (Numbers 1, 2, 4, 8, 7)

Johannes Brahms wrote two sets of *Liebeslieder Walzer*: opus 52, published in 1869, and the *Neue Liebeslieder*, opus 65, published in 1875. Both sets were originally for four vocal soloists and piano four-hands, an ensemble ideal for family music-making. Brahms did, however, score nine of the *Liebeslieder* for choral voices (their music unchanged from the original version) and chamber orchestra. The five of these arrangements we are doing today are all from opus 52.

(The texts of both sets of *Liebeslieder* are from Georg Friedrich Daumer's *Polydora*, a collection of folksong texts from many lands in German translation. The one exception is the final piece of opus 65, which sets a short Goethe poem which sums up the half-playful, half-serious mood of the waltzes in general. Goethe's text runs as follows in rough translation:

Now, enough, ye muses! You have tried in vain to portray  
How grief and happiness alternate in a lover's breast.  
You cannot heal the wounds made by love,  
But only you can assuage them.)

Richard Wagner (1813–1883)

**Pilgrim's Chorus** (from *Tannhäuser*)

Richard Wagner's *Tannhäuser*, first performed in 1845 in Dresden, takes place in thirteenth-century Germany. Early in Act III the pilgrims (tenors and basses – no soprano and alto pilgrims here) whom we have seen departing for Rome in Act I return, singing of their joy at returning to their homeland and of the salvation which they have found in Rome. The hymn is first heard in the distance, offstage, swells to a fortissimo as the pilgrims cross the stage, and then diminishes as it leaves the stage. (It takes much less time to diminish than it did to swell. As the pilgrims cross the stage, the two onstage principals – and, we hope, the audience – realize that Tannhäuser is not among them: his sins have not been forgiven.)

Igor Stravinsky (1882–1971)

**Kyrie and Sanctus** (from *Mass*)

Igor Stravinsky wrote his Mass from 1944–1948, completing it just after his ballet *Orpheus*. His next completed work would be *The Rake's Progress*. The Mass is scored for a small chorus and "double wind quintet" – specifically two oboes, English horn, two bassoons, two trumpets, and three trombones. Stravinsky specifies that children's voices should be used for the soprano and alto parts. (He had specified the same earlier for his *Symphony of Psalms*, though in the case of that work he specified that women could be used in the chorus if no sufficient children's choir could be found.) Nonetheless for over sixty years the Mass has been sung convincingly by standard SATB chamber choruses, as it is being sung today.

(Stravinsky explained his decision to use children's voices for the soprano and alto parts in a letter to Nadia Boulanger apologizing for a less-than-perfect recording of the Mass he was sending her: "I do not say that these children have been ideally trained, but, even so, I prefer their timbre to that of the female voice, which is always too passionate for liturgical chant." One wishes he could hear present-day chamber choirs.)

John Tavener (b.1944)

**Little Lamb**

William Blake's *The Lamb* is almost certainly the English-language poem most often set in simple four-part choral harmony. John Tavener's *The Lamb* was written in 1982 "for Simon's 3rd birthday," as the dedication tells us. Tavener has said that the piece came to him "spontaneous and complete" as he was reading Blake's poem. He has also said "...symbolism in the use of chords appears in *The Lamb* – there's a joy/sorrow chord in it, on the word 'Lamb,' which I was to use many times later." (The chord appears on the word "Lamb" in the next-to-last line of each verse.)

(The "Simon" of the dedication is Tavener's nephew. It somehow seemed heartless to look up a last name for a three-year-old: let him remain "Simon" for these notes.)

Carl Orff (1895–1982)

**Dulcissime, Ave Formosissima and O Fortuna** (from *Carmina Burana*)

Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*, a setting of Latin secular poems from the famous mediaeval anthology, was first performed in 1937. We are doing the final three sections: a brief ecstatic exclamation by the solo soprano, a not-much-longer burst of choral rejoicing in praise of "Venus generosa" and a return to the opening music of the *Carmina* with its invocation of the relentless turning of the wheel of fortune.

Morten Lauridsen (b.1943)

**Introitus** (from *Lux Aeterna*)

The Introitus from Morton Lauridsen's *Lux Aeterna*, written in 1997, is the most recent work on tonight's program. Lauridsen's *Lux Aeterna* sets a series of Latin liturgical texts which make reference to the light of heaven: the Introitus, the first movement of the piece, sets the Introit – the opening text – of the Roman Catholic Mass for the Dead. (*Lux Aeterna* is scored for an orchestra sparing of wind instruments – one each of flute, oboe, clarinet, bassoon and trombone, a pair of horns – and a full, rich string orchestra: a good combination for an orchestra meant to accompany a work for large chorus.)

## FAST FACTS

### Eras of Music History

#### RENAISSANCE (1400–1600)

**Famous Composers:** William Byrd, Orlando Lassus, Giovanni Palestrina

**Familiar Composition:** *Ein feste Burg (A Mighty Fortress is Our God)* by Martin Luther

**Cocktail Conversation:** William Byrd and Thomas Tallis had a monopoly on the printing of music in England that lasted twenty-one years.

#### BAROQUE (1600–1750)

**Famous Composers:** Johann Sebastian Bach, George Frideric Handel, Antonio Vivaldi  
**Familiar Composition:** "Hallelujah Chorus" from *Messiah* by George Frideric Handel  
**Cocktail Conversation:** Bach's *Minuet in G major* was the basis for the The Toys' 1965 hit *A Lover's Concerto*.

#### **CLASSICAL (1750–1827)**

**Famous Composers:** Joseph Haydn, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Ludwig van Beethoven  
**Familiar Composition:** *Für Elise* by Ludwig van Beethoven  
**Cocktail Conversation:** Even though it was invented in the early 1700's, the piano became popular during the Classical Era.

#### **ROMANTIC (1827–1914)**

**Famous Composers:** Robert Schumann, Frederic Chopin, Richard Wagner  
**Familiar Composition:** *1812 Overture* by Piotr Tchaikovsky  
**Cocktail Conversation:** Richard Wagner married Franz Liszt's daughter, Cosima, in 1870.

#### **CONTEMPORARY (1914–present)**

**Famous Composers:** Leonard Bernstein, John Rutter, Morten Lauridsen  
**Familiar Composition:** "O Fortuna" from *Carmina Burana* by Carl Orff  
**Cocktail Conversation:** Morten Lauridsen is a professor of music composition at the University of Southern California.