

BENNINGTON COLLEGE
VOCAL CHAMBER ENSEMBLE PRESENTS:

O Magnum Mysterium:
Mysteries of Sacred Music - old and new
Kerry Ryer-Parke, Director
Maria Elmer, piano

Wednesday, December 4, 2013, 8:00PM

Processional from A Ceremony of Carols Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)
(Gregorian antiphon to the Magnificat at Second Vespers of Christmas)

Written in 1942 while Britten was returning to England by sea from New York, *A Ceremony of Carols* combines the reassurance of Gregorian chant and ancient texts with uneasy harmonies that reflect the constant danger of submarine attack during the wartime journey. During the voyage Britten tried to recreate from memory scores that had been confiscated by American customs agents, who feared they contained coded messages. What began as a harp concerto eventually became a masterpiece for treble chorus and harp, here arranged by Britten for mixed chorus and piano.

*Hodie Christus natus est
Hodie Salvator apparuit
Hodie in terra canunt Angeli
Laetantur Archangeli
Hodie exsultant justi, dicentes:
Gloria in excelsis Deo, Alleluia*

*Today Christ is born
Today the Savior appeared
Today on Earth the Angels sing
Archangels rejoice
Today the righteous rejoice, saying:
Glory to God in the highest, Alleluia*

Diadeb Sacred Song from the Svaneti region of Georgia

The rich polyphonic tradition of Georgian music may have its roots in early Western chant that changed after long isolation in the mountainous regions between Europe and Asia.

*Glory to God
May God help us with his kindness
It's raining and snowing everywhere
But with our God it's always sunny
So we are protected with his power*

Soloists: Erin Wells, Dane Whitman

Alle Psallite cum Luya anonymous motet, 13th century

This motet begins with the "burden" or ground and inserts progressively longer and more descriptive "tropes" of text between the syllables of the word "Alleluya".

*Alle [psallite cum] luya
Alle [concrepando psallite cum] luya
Alle [cordevoto Deo toto, psallite cum] luya
Alleluya*

*Alle [sing with] luya
Alle [resounding loudly sing with] luya
Alle [with heart devoted all to God sing with] luya
Alleluya*

Barechu Salamone Rossi (1570-1630)

Barechu is the traditional invocation to prayer chanted in the Jewish liturgy as part of every evening and morning worship service. Rossi was contemporary of Monteverdi and was an influence on madrigal composers such as Thomas Weelkes.

*Bless the Lord who is to be praised.
Praised be the Lord who is blessed for all eternity.*

O Magnum Mysterium Tomas Luis de Victoria (1548-1611)

Victoria was born in Avila, Spain, but moved to Rome to study music, possibly with Palestrina. He was ordained as a priest and worked for many years as a composer in Rome. In *O Magnum Mysterium*, which he eventually extended into a larger work, Victoria used imitation, polyphonic and homophonic writing, text painting, duets and trios with quick changes of mood and meter to create a motet that is a jewel of the Renaissance period, full of Spanish mysticism and religious intensity.

*O magnum mysterium,
Et admirabile sacramentum,
Ut animalia viderent dominum natum,
Jacentem in praesepio;
Beata Virgo,
Cujus viscera meruerunt portare
Dominum Christum.
Alleluia.*

*O great mystery,
and wonderful sacrament,
the animals should see the new-born Lord,
lying in a manger;
Blessed Virgin
whose worthy flesh carries
the Lord Christ.
Alleluia.*

Gaudetemedieval hymn, arr. M. Neaum

Originating as a monophonic hymn, two other parts were added at some later point, interspersed with solo verses. In 1973, a version of *Gaudete* became the first song in Latin ever to be a hit single in England.

Refrain:

Gaudete! gaudete! Christus est natus ex Maria Virgine: Gaudete!

Rejoice, rejoice! Christ is born of the Virgin Mary: Rejoice!

Verses:

*Tempus ad est gratiae, Hoc quod optabamus;
Carmina laeticiae Devote redamus.
Deus homo factus est, Natura mirante;
Mundus renovatus est, A Christo regnante.
Ezechiellis porta Clausa per transitur;
Unde lux est orta, Salus in venit.
Ergo nostra concio Psallat iam in lustro;
Benedicat Domino: Salus Regi nostro.*

*The time of grace has come, this that we have desired;
Verses of joy, Let us devoutly return.
God has become man, Nature marveling;
The world has been renewed, by the reigning Christ.
The closed gate of Ezechiel is passed through;
Whence the light is born, Salvation is found.
Therefore let our gathering, Now sing in brightness
Let it give praise to the Lord: Greeting to our King.*

Soloists: Alex Allmark, Julius Fuentes, Emily Vaias, Chris Beatley, Ze'eva Berman, Brooke O'Donnell

Percussion: Tobin Bartolo, Ginger Zimmerman

A Christmas Round John Tavener (1944-2013)

After making an early splash with his cantata *The Whale* in 1968 and recorded by the Beatles' Apple label, the late John Tavener became fascinated with Greek and Russian Orthodox mysticism. Much of his music is based on Russian and Greek Orthodox chant tones.

Translation from the Greek:

Today the Virgin bears a child whose birth cannot be borne.

Soloists: Katherine Colbert, Micaela Evans, Ze'eva Berman

Handbell: Julius Fuentes

The Lamb John Tavener

Text: William Blake

Here Tavener uses modern elements of serialism: inversion, retrograde and bitonality are used within a very simple framework to create a modern carol that both comforts and challenges the ear.

*Little lamb, who made thee?
Dost thou know who made thee,
Gave thee life, and bid thee feed
By the stream and o'er the mead;
Gave thee clothing of delight,
Softest clothing, woolly, bright;
Gave thee such a tender voice,
Making all the vales rejoice?
Little lamb, who made thee?
Dost thou know who made thee?*

*Little lamb, I'll tell thee;
Little lamb, I'll tell thee:
He is called by thy name,
For He calls Himself a Lamb.
He is meek, and He is mild,
He became a little child.
I a child, and thou a lamb,
We are called by His name.
Little lamb, God bless thee!
Little lamb, God bless thee!*

O Magnum MysteriumMorten Lauridsen (b.1943)

Morten Lauridsen, of Danish extraction but raised in Oregon, has been called "the only mystic American composer" and his sacred works for choir are some of the most commonly programmed all over the world. His *O Magnum*, while referencing chant and Renaissance style, is a more meditative setting than the Victoria.

Dodi Li **Nira Chen** (b.1924)

Text: Song of Solomon

Israeli composer Nira Chen has set one of the most popular texts, the Song of Solomon. Although it is a modern setting, it still preserves the antiphonal call-and-response feel of the ancient psalms.

*My beloved is mine and I am his,
The shepherd [grazing his flock] among the lilies.
Who is this, rising up from the desert? Who is she, rising up?
Perfumed with myrrh and frankincense.
You have captured my heart, my sister, my bride.
You have captured my heart, my bride.
Awaken, north wind, and come, south wind.*

Soloists: Ze'eva Berman, Julius Fuentes, Micaela Evans

The Little Babe from A Ceremony of Carols **Benjamin Britten**

Text: Robert Southwell (1561-1595)

*This little Babe so few days old is come to rifle Satan's fold;
All hell doth at his presence quake though he himself for cold do shake;
For in this weak unarmèd wise the gates of hell he will surprise.*

*With tears he fights and wins the field, his naked breast stands for a shield;
His battering shot are babish cries, his arrows looks of weeping eyes,
His martial ensigns Cold and Need and feeble Flesh his warrior's steed.*

*His camp is pitchèd in a stall, his bulwark but a broken wall;
The crib his trench, haystacks his stakes; of shepherds he his muster makes;
And thus, as sure his foe to wound, the angels' trump alarum sound.*

*My soul, with Christ join thou in fight, stick to the tents that he hath pight. (pitched)
Within his crib is surest ward, this little Babe will be thy guard. I
f thou wilt foil thy foes with joy, then flit not from this heavenly Boy!*

Stars **Eriks Esenvalds** (b.1977)

Eriks Esenvalds is a young composer from Latvia whose works are being increasingly programmed by choirs all over the world. His use of tuned wine glasses adds to the sense of mystery in Sara Teasdale's text (adapted):

*Alone in the night on a dark hill
With pines around me spicy and still,
And a heaven full of stars over my head,
White and topaz and misty red;
Myriads with beating hearts of fire
That eons cannot vex or tire;
The dome of heaven
Like a great hill,
And myriads with beating hearts of fire,
Heaven full of stars.
I know I am honored to be witness
Of so much majesty.*

Tuned Wineglasses: Katherine Colbert, Ginger Zimmerman, Emily Vaias,
Dominic Romano, Chris Beatley,

Recessional from A Ceremony of Carols **Benjamin Britten** (1913-1976)

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