



## Sounds of the Season

Sunday, December 22, 2019

Program Notes by Dr. Mary Jane Ayers

Some of the joyful music for our concert, *Sounds of the Season*, will be familiar to Christmas lovers. Other pieces may not be quite as familiar, but you can increase your enjoyment of them by increasing your knowledge about who wrote them and how they were written.

Pinkham's *Christmas Cantata (Sinfonia Sacra)* (1958), is about 10 minutes in length, and is written in Latin for chorus with brass ensemble and organ. Composer Daniel Pinkham (1923-2006), was a composer, organist, and harpsichordist. He taught at Boston Conservatory and then at the New England Conservatory of Music. Pinkham once said, "the single event that changed my life was a concert by the Trapp Family Singers in 1939 (he was 16), right after they had escaped from Germany. Here, suddenly, I was hearing clarity, simplicity. It shaped my whole outlook (about composition)."

*Christmas Cantata* is structured in four contrasting sections. The introductory section begins with the expression mark 'Maestoso' (perform majestically). The chorus asks (in Latin), "What did you see, shepherds? Tell. Tell us who has appeared." In the next section, marked 'Allegro molto ritmico' (fast and rhythmic—listen for the change of tempo) the rhythms and text move with incredible energy and variable meters, drawing the listener into the excitement of the shepherds' answer: "We saw a chorus of angels praising God. Hallelujah."

In the 'Adagio' (slow) section, a solo instrumental voice plays above the sound of a single low D held by the organ pedal, which suggests 'Medieval' mysticism. That D, sustained throughout, is called (appropriately) a *pedal point*, which means that when contrasting harmonies are sung or played above it, the constant and unchanging D creates an harmonic tension that beautifully illuminates the text: "O great mystery and wondrous sacrament, that animals should see the Lord, lying in a manger. Blessed is the Virgin whose womb was worthy to bear Christ."

The final section, marked 'Allegro' (lively), is a highly energized song of praise with three short verses that contrast with a repeated chorus. This section starts softly and builds to a glorious finale, perfectly expressing the text: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill toward men. Come before him in joy. Know that the Lord He is God; He hath made us, and not we ourselves. Hallelujah."

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*Eja! Eja!* includes a lovely soprano solo which will be sung by Sarasota soprano Adelaide Boedecker. Ms. Boedecker made her professional debut at age 17 with the Sarasota Opera, playing the character Barbarina, the daughter of the gardener in Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro*. She received her collegiate training at the University of Florida and Eastman School of Music. Ms. Boedecker is now a rising professional opera singer who performs nationwide.

A dual citizen of the United States and Canada, composer James Grant lives and works in Oxtongue Lake, Ontario, in the summer months and on Siesta Key in the winter, along with his wife, fine-art photographer Elizabeth Siegfried. For nearly four decades he has been commissioned by individuals, choruses, chamber ensembles, and orchestras who have performed his music throughout the world. On Sunday, April 19, 2020, his new work *Listen to the Earth*, commissioned by the Choral Artists of Sarasota, will have its world premiere in Sarasota in celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Earth Day.

While we await that highly anticipated celebration, we have the pleasure of hearing Mr. Grant's exciting and unusual Christmas work *Eja! Eja!* (Oh joy! Oh joy!), written for timpani, soprano solo, large chorus, and orchestra. The original work was commissioned in 2004 by the Choral Arts Society of Washington, and dedicated to them and their conductor, the late Norman Scribner. The work was rearranged this year by the composer for the Choral Artists of Sarasota, using brass quintet, percussion, harp, and organ. It is newly dedicated to The Choral Artists and to Joseph Holt, Artistic Director.

For his texts, Composer Grant chose two brief Latin antiphons (responses sung before or after a Psalm or Canticle), *Mirabile mysterium* and *Hodie Christus natus est*, poetry from 18<sup>th</sup> Century hymnist and student of mysticism John Byrom, and additional poetry from 19<sup>th</sup> Century poet Alfred, Lord Tennyson.

Musically, this work is harmonically complex, with challenging rhythms and meter changes. For example, the soprano solo has eleven changes of meter in eleven measures, from 3/4, to 5/4, to 3/4, to 5/4, to 3/4, to 3/8, to 4/4, to 3/4, to 7/8, to 4/4, to 3/4! But why, you ask? Rather than requiring the words to fit into a predetermined and uniform beat or pulse, the composer is responding to the natural rhythm of the words, the way an actor might adjust the rhythm of the words of a monolog to give it clarity and make it sound more like natural speech.

For this work, the chorus is divided into six vocal parts, three designated "Hi" and three "Lo." In the beginning the soloist sings what is almost a prayer, "Rise, happy morn, rise, holy morn, Draw forth the cheerful day from night..." When the chorus takes over, it is for the musically challenging but sweet poem in English that starts, "Christians awake! Salute the happy Morn Whereon the Savior of the world was born..." Next there are rhythmic and harmonic fireworks for the Latin text, "A wonderful mystery is revealed today; God has become man. Oh joy! Joy!" The English poetry resumes for "Then to the watchful Shepherds it was told..." set purely and relatively simply. When the Latin text reappears, composer James Grant ignites musical fireworks to the end!

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You will note that several compositions on this concert were arranged by Julian Wachner (b. 1969), who is an American composer, conductor, and keyboardist. Since 2011, he has served as the Director of Music and the Arts at Trinity Wall Street in New York City, conducting the Choir of Trinity Wall Street,

the Trinity Baroque Orchestra, and NOVUS NY. Wachner has recorded five albums with these ensembles, primarily for the Musica Omnia label. Since 2008, he has also served as the Director of The Washington Chorus (Washington, DC). In March 2018, Wachner was named Artistic Director of the Grand Rapids Bach Festival, an affiliate of the Grand Rapids Symphony, in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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The other prominent composer/arranger on this concert is Daniel T. Moe (1927-2012). Dr. Moe was a major educational force in conducting and choral literature, having developed distinguished graduate programs in those specialties at the University of Iowa. He served as Professor of Music at Oberlin Conservatory of Music for 20 years until 1992. Hailed by New Yorker music critic Andrew Porter as the "dean of choral conductors," Dr. Moe brought nearly every landmark choral-orchestral work in the repertoire to performance, ranging from Bach's *Passion According to St. John* to the Britten *War Requiem*. His work drew him into the nation's great concert halls including Carnegie Hall, Town Hall, the Kennedy Center, and Lincoln Center, where he twice served as consulting conductor for the International University Choral Festival. Moe was the longtime Composer-in-Residence at the Church of the Redeemer in Sarasota and was the husband of Redeemer's current Choirmaster/Organist Ann Stephenson-Moe, who is a Board Member for the Choral Artists of Sarasota. In addition, for 21 years Dr. Moe was the much-beloved Music Director (retired in '06) for Key Chorale and served as Adjunct Professor of Music at New College in Sarasota, where he conducted the choirs of New College. Daniel also served as director of Gloria Musicae (now the Choral Artists of Sarasota) for a season in the 1990s.