

Great Sacred Music

Sunday, December 20, 2020

English traditional: There is no rose of such virtue
Monteverdi Choir, Sir John Eliot Gardiner

Nicholas Ludford: Ave cujus conceptio
Blue Heron, Scott Metcalfe
(Ludford, English c. 1490-1557)

Franz Biebl: Ave Maria
Chanticleer

The Marian Christmas carol "There is no rose of such virtue" dates from the 15th-century. Blue Heron is a Boston-based choral ensemble which was founded in 1999. Scott Metcalfe is its director.

Sergei Rachmaninoff: Ave Maria, Hexapsaume from Vespers, Op. 37
St. Petersburg Choir, Vladislav Tchernouchenko

Biebl wrote his setting of the "Ave Maria" for a double men's chorus in 1964. Sergei Rachmaninoff wrote The Vespers (or The All-Night Vigil as it correctly titled) in 1915. We are told that he gave the manuscript to his teacher Sergei Taneyev to review. Taneyev returned it to Rachmaninoff with not one correction recognizing as he did the greatness of this work.

Commentary: The Reverend Canon Jean Vail

John Rutter: Nativity Carol
Choir of Clare College, Cambridge; The Dmitri Ensemble, Graham Ross

Giovanni Gabrieli: O magnum mysterium
Choir of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, Geoffrey Webber

John Rutter's Nativity Carol is one of his earliest works, dating from 1963. Gabrieli's setting of "O magnum mysterium" was published in a collection of motets in 1587.

Sir Arnold Bax: I sing of a maiden
The Rodolfus Choir, Ralph Allwood

Richard Dirksen: A Child my Choice
Washington National Cathedral Choir, Richard W. Dirksen

Louis Claude D'Aquin: Noël, Grand jeu et duo
James Moeser, organ
The Metzler Organ in Johanneskirche, Freiburg, Germany

Ralph Allwood was Director of Music at Eton College for 26 years. He founded The Rodolfus Choir in 1984. Richard Dirksen (1921-2003) was Canon Precentor at the Cathedral Church of Saints Peter and Paul in Washington, DC from 1977 until 1991. Organist Dr. James Moeser (1939-) was the ninth Chancellor of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

George Frideric Handel: Messiah
Les Arts Florissants, William Christie

Barbara Schlick, soprano I; Sandrine Piau, soprano II
Andreas Scholl, alto; Mark Padmore, tenor
Nathan Berg, bass; Tommy Williams, soprano, as the Angel

German-born English composer George Frideric Handel composed his oratorio Messiah in 1741 for modest musical forces. In the 19th and 20th centuries the fashion was to perform it with enormous orchestras and choruses. The version which we shall hear this morning reverts to the kind of early music performance practice which might be more a

J.S. Bach: Cantata 110, "Unser Mund sei voll Lachens"
Monteverdi Choir; English Baroque Soloists, Sir John Eliot Gardiner

The German translates as "May our mouth be full of laughter". The cantata was first performed in Leipzig on Dec. 25, 1725. Simon Crouch writes: "You will probably immediately recognise the opening chorus of cantata BWV 110 for the very good reason that it is an adaptation of the first movement of the very well known and popular D-major overture BWV 1069. And what an adaptation! If you want a simple demonstration of Bach's skill in adapting a piece of music written for one context to fit a new context then this is it. The choral part starts at the 9/8 allegro and had the original overture been lost, you might never suspect its independent existence, so seamless is the adaptation."