

Great Sacred Music

Sunday, December 27, 2020

William Selby: Ode for the New Year
Early Music New York, Frederick Renz

Giovanni Felice Sances: Ave maris stella
Duke Vespers Ensemble; Mallarme Chamber, Players
Brian Schmidt
Julianna Emanski, soprano; Elizabeth Knight, alto; Christopher Jacobson, organ

Francis Poulenc: O magnum mysterium
King's Singers

Wikipedia states: “William Selby (1738–1798 was an early American composer, organist and choirmaster. Born in England, he emigrated to Boston, Massachusetts. In 1774 he became the organist at Trinity Church, Newport. Three years later, Selby became organist at King’s Chapel in Boston where he organized the first colonial music festival.” Italian Baroque composer Giovanni Sances (1600-1679) was highly regarded in his day as a composer of sacred music, chamber works and even an occasional opera or two. Francis Poulenc (1899-1963) wrote this beautiful Christmas motet in 1952 after he returned to Catholicism. It is one of four motets he composed for the season.

John Rutter Christ is the morning star
The Cambridge Singers; Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, John Rutter
An Advent carol written in 2013

Francisco Guerrero: Pastores loquebantur
The Sixteen, Harry Christophers

"Christ is the morning star" was written in 2013 for Clare College Choir and Graham Ross.
Pastores loquebantur is a setting of the Matins Responsory for Christmas, Luke 2:8-16.

Commentary: Matthew Ottman

Franz Biebl: Ave Maria
Chanticleer

Michael Praetorius: Puer natus in Bethlehem
Taverner Consort, Choir & Players, Andrew Parrott
Emma Kirkby, soprano; Nigel Rogers, tenor; David Thomas, bass

Bob Chilcott: The Shepherd's Carol
Choir of St. John's College, Cambridge, Andrew Nethsingha

Biebl wrote his setting of the “Ave Maria” for a double men’s chorus in 1964. From ChoralWiki: “Praetorius published twenty volumes of music, most of it intended for use in Lutheran church services. This stirring setting of Puer natus in Bethlehem, one of several settings that he published of this chorale, comes from Praetorius’ 1619 collection, Polyhymnia Caduceatrix et Panegyrica

("Polyhymnia – the Muse of sacred poetry – Herald and Praise-giver"), which contains some of his largest-scale works, for up to 21 voices or instruments, arranged in up to 6 choirs. The piece is in 12 parts: 3 solo voices, a 4-part choir, 4-part strings and basso continuo, and shows off Praetorius' fascination with both rhythmic and ensemble variation, revealing a delight in playing with tonal colour and texture. The verses, in Latin, are interspersed with a ritornello, in German. The composer suggests that the congregation should sing verses of the chorale to a simple setting, at the end of each half." Bob Chilcott (1955-) wrote "The Shepherd's Carol" for Stephen Cleobury and the King's College Choir.

Lucrezia Vizzana: Paratum cor meum; Protector noster; Ave stella matutina
Musica Secreta

J.S. Bach: In dulci jubilo, BWV 729
Richard Marlow, organ
1976 Metzler organ in Trinity College, Cambridge

Lucrezia Vizzana (1590-1662) was an Italian nun who spent her most of her life in a convent in Bologna. Richard Marlow (1939-2013) was Fellow and Director of Music at Trinity College, Cambridge from 1968-2006.

J.S. Bach: Cantata 133, "Ich freue mich in dir"
Holland Boys' Choir; Netherlands Bach Collegium, Pieter Jan Leusink
Ruth Holton, soprano; Sytse Buwalde, alto; Knut Schoch, tenor; Bas Ramselaar, bass

Cantata 133 was first performed in Leipzig during Christmastide 1724. Given that Bach's choristers would have sung many services on consecutive days, it is worth noting how he gives his choir a rest in this cantata for the third day of Christmas. The lion's share of the vocal work is borne by the alto and soprano soloists.

Benjamin Britten: Christ's Nativity
Holst Singers, Stephen Layton

Christ's Nativity dates from 1931 when Britten was 18 years old.

J.S. Bach: Toccata, Adagio and Fugue in C, BWV 564
Michael Farris, organ
Fisk organ Opus 101 in Caruth Auditorium, Southern Methodist University, Dallas

A graduate of the Eastman School of Music, University of Rochester, Southern Methodist University and Indiana University, Michael Farris (1957-1999) was highly-acclaimed as a recitalist.

Hector Berlioz: L'Enfance du Christ, Op. 25
La Chapelle Royale; Collegium Vocale; Orchestra of the Champs Elysees, Philippe Herreweghe
Veronique Gens, soprano, as the Virgin Mary; Paul Agnew, tenor, narrator
Olivier Lallouette, baritone, Joseph; Laurent Naouri, bass-baritone, Herod
Frederic Caton, bass-baritone, the family father

From ClassicFM: "One evening in 1850 Berlioz found himself at a party where everyone was playing cards. As this was something he particularly disliked, his friend Pierre Duc asked him to inscribe his album: I take a piece of paper and scribble a few staves on which a four-part andantino for organ

appears. It seems to have a rustic character and to suggest a naïve mystical feeling. So I at once think of writing appropriate words for it. The organ piece disappears and becomes a chorus of shepherds in Bethlehem bidding farewell to the child Jesus as the Holy Family leaves for Egypt. Such was the origin of the sacred trilogy *L'enfance du Christ*; from the germ of a few bars of organ music sprang the full completed work in three parts."

Felix Mendelssohn: Hark! The Herald Angels Sing
Virgil Fox, organ
Aeolian-Skinner organ in Riverside Church, New York City

Organist Virgil Fox (1912-1980) was famous for his heavy organ concerts in the 1970s.