

Great Sacred Music Sunday, March 7, 2021

William Horsley: There is a green hill far away
Choir of Liverpool Cathedral, David Poulter

Gregorian chant: Antiphon and Benedictus: Factum est
Gloriae Dei Cantores Schola
Wayne Schuman, cantor

Don Carlo Gesualdo: O vos omnes
BBC Singers, Bo Holton

English composer William Horsley (1774-1858) was Organist of the Asylum for Female Orphans from 1802-1854. His tune "Horsley" for the text "There is a green hill far away" dates from 1844. Cecil Frances Alexander wrote this much-loved hymn in 1848. It is published in some 568 hymnals. Based in Orleans, Massachusetts, Gloriae Dei Cantores Schola specializes in Gregorian chant. "O vos omnes" (All you who pass by) is a responsory commonly sung during Holy Week.

Daniel E. Gawthrop: Return Unto Thy Rest
Utah State University Chamber Singers, Cory Evans

Sir Edward Elgar: Lux aeterna
Choir of St. John's, Elora, Noel Edison

Max Reger: Ave Maria, Op. 80, No. 5
Robert Benjamin Dobey, organ
2001 Schoenstein & Co organ Opus 138 in Grace Episcopal Church, Sheboygan, MI

Daniel Gawthrop (1949-) is an American composer of choral and organ music. Over the years he has been commissioned to write more than one hundred original works. Lux aeterna is an antiphon which follows the Agnus Dei in the Latin Requiem Mass. This version uses the music of Nimrod from Elgar's Enigma Variations. Max Reger's organ music terrifies most organists with pages thick with notes. While this lovely "Ave Maria" doesn't quite fall into that category, it is composed in the rather forbidding key of D flat minor.

Commentary: The Rev. Elizabeth Marie Melchionna

W.A. Mozart: Ergo interest, K. 143
Academy of Ancient Music, Christopher Hogwood
Emma Kirkby, soprano

John Rutter: Open thou mine eyes
Atlanta Sacred Chorale, Eric Nelson

Mozart's "Ergo interest" dates from 1770 when he composed it in Milan. John Rutter was commissioned by the Texas Choral Directors Association to write Open thou mine eyes. The text was written by Lancelot Andrews (1555-1626).

Gordon Slater: Jesu, the Very Thought of Thee
Choir of St. John's, Elora, Noel Edison
Paul Halley, organ

Giuseppe Sarti: Now the Powers of Heaven
South Dakota Chorale, Brian A. Schmidt

Vincent Lubeck: Praeambulum in G
Leon W. Couch III, organ
1995 Noack organ in Christ the King Lutheran Church, Houston, Texas

Gordon Slater (1896–1979) was organist of Leicester and Lincoln Cathedrals. While Italian composer Giuseppe Sarti is not exactly a household name to 21st-century listeners, Don Juan in Mozart's opera Don Giovanni listens to a piece from one of Sarti's operas. German composer Vincent Lübeck (c. 1654–1740) was organist at Hamburg's historic St. Nikolai Church.

J.S. Bach: Cantata 54, "Widerstehe doch der Sunde"
Hanover Band, Roy Goodman
Nathalie Stutzmann, contralto

The German translates as “Withstand firmly all sin”. This cantata was first performed in Weimar on March 24, 1715. Simon Crouch comments on ClassicalNet: “An early, short (around twelve minutes) cantata in three movements for solo alto concerning the avoidance of sin and the temptations of Satan. If dominant sevenths over a thumping tonic pedal turn you on, head straight for the first movement. The use of this dissonance is an ingenious and direct portrayal of the title. The tune given to the alto is wonderful and I can never resist singing along here! This sounds like a piece that would be quite easy to arrange for voice plus a couple of instrumentalists. I’m surprised that I’ve never heard it done that way, since the first movement, despite its somewhat old-fashioned portrayal of sin, would make an excellent showcase for a singer. The first movement takes up two-thirds of the cantata and is followed by a recitative and a four part fugal aria in which, unusually, the vocalist takes one of the voices of the fugue. Lots of lovely dissonance too!”

Johann Pachelbel: Ciacona in D minor
Marilyn Mason, organ
Fisk Organ, Opus 87, "The Marilyn Mason Organ" at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan, designed in honor of the performer

American organist Dr. Marilyn Mason (1925-2019) was Professor of Organ Emerita at the University of Michigan where she was on staff from 1947. She retired from active duty at the university in 2014.

George Frideric Handel: Israel in Egypt
Monteverdi Choir & Orchestra, Sir John Eliot Gardiner

The Zamfir Chorale states: "George Frideric Handel (1685-1759) is best known to the general public today as a composer of oratorios. But the German composer originally established his reputation as a composer of Italian opera, first in Rome and later in London."

"During the 1730s Handel realized that his operatic style was losing popularity among London

audiences. He therefore turned to a new type of composition—the oratorio in English—which could be produced at less expense (no sets or costumes were required), and which could be enjoyed by those who had never felt comfortable with the aristocratic entertainment of Italian opera."

"Following the examples of earlier oratorios, Handel's works are essentially operatic in style, and based on stories from the "Old Testament." Handel broke from his predecessors, however, in his preference for the English language and his dramatic use of the chorus, setting it on an equal footing with the solo roles. Handel's oratorios thus succeeded in portraying the drama of great biblical stories to Londoners in a language they could understand. Furthermore, in their glowing portrayal of the heroes and populace of ancient Israel, Handel's oratorios were among the rare works of art that portrayed Jews in a favorable light. And London's Jews (only 6,000 strong) responded with enthusiasm."

"Composed in just one month between 1 October and 1 November 1738, Israel in Egypt premiered at London's King's Theatre in the Haymarket on April 4, 1739. The first performance was not received well by its audience, so Handel immediately revised the work, and it has subsequently become a favorite among choral societies the world over."

Josquin des Prez: Miserere mei, Deus
Magnificat, Philip Cave

Josquin des Prez's setting of Psalm 51 dates from 1503 or 1504 when Josquin was employed by the Duke Ercole I d'Este in Ferrara.

Sir George Dyson: St. Paul's Voyage to Melita
Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra and Chorus, Vernon Handley
Neil Mackie, tenor

Dyson's one movement cantata was first performed in Hereford Cathedral in September 1933.