

Great Sacred Music

Sunday, May 2, 2021

Martin Luther: Psalm 46
Choir of St. Paul's Cathedral, London, John Scott
Andrew Lucas, organ

Paul Halley: Christe, qui lux es et dies
Woodley Ensemble, Robert Lehman
Paul Halley, English-born Canadian composer, pianist and organist (b. 1952)

St. Paul's Cathedral, London, begins the program with the chanting of Psalm 46 (God is our hope and strength) to the familiar tune by Martin Luther, Ein feste burg (A mighty fortress). Then Canadian composer, conductor and organist Paul Halley (1952-) creates a cosmic soundscape in his gripping setting of the 6th-century Compline hymn "Christe, qui lux es et dies" (O Christ, who art the light and day) Much like the times in which we are living, the music juxtaposes cries of anguish with moments of introspection. Paul composed this anthem for the birthday of Penny Morton, the wife of the Dean of St. John the Divine Cathedral, New York.

Nicolas Gombert: Tulerunt Dominum meum
The Studio of Ancient Music of Montreal, Christopher Jackson
The Latin translates as "They have taken away my Lord"

John Rutter: The Lord bless you and keep you
Cambridge Singers; City of London Sinfonia, John Rutter

Nicolas Gombert (c.1495-c.1560) composed his six part setting of Tulerunt Dominum Meum (They have taken my Lord away) in the poly choral style which uses imitative voicing as opposed to contrasting blocks of choral sound.

Healey Willan: Prelude on "Ave, maris stella"
Patrick Wedd, organ
Casavant Organ (1914, 1995) of the Eglise Saint-Jean-Baptiste, Montreal

Commentary: Dr. Susan Treacy

Gregorian Chant: Ave maris stella
Dominican Sisters of Mary Mother of the Eucharist

John Dunstable: Ave maris stella
The Binchois Consort, Andrew Kirkman

Here we have three contrasting settings of the plainsong hymn "Ave maris stella." The organ setting of the tune by Canadian composer Healey Willan reflects Dr. Willan's love for and encyclopedic knowledge of plainsong. The Dominican Sisters of Mary sing the hymn for us. Then the Binchois Consort sings a setting of the tune by the late medieval composer John Dunstable. Dr. Susan Treacy talks about the structure and use of "Ave maris stella" in her commentary.

J.S. Bach: "Erbarme dich" from St. Matthew Passion, BWV 244
Collegium Vocale Gent, Philippe Herreweghe
Andreas Scholl, countertenor

Herbert Howells: Psalm-prelude "De Profundis"
Christopher Dearnley, organ
Mander organ in St. Paul's Cathedral, London

"Erbarme dich" reflects on Peter's despair at having denied knowing Jesus three times.

English composer Herbert Howells wrote two sets of Psalm Preludes "De profundis" (From the depths) dates from 1958.

J.S. Bach: Cantata 108, "Es ist euch gut, dass ich hingehe ... "
Holland Boys' Choir; Netherlands Bach Collegium, Pieter Jan Leusink
Marjon Strijk, soprano; Sytse Buwalde, alto
Marcel Beekman, tenor; Bas Ramselaar, bass

The German translates as "It is expedient for you that I go away. This cantata was first performed on April 29, 1725 in Leipzig.

George Frideric Handel: Chandos Anthem No. 07, "My song shall be alway" Psalm 89
The Sixteen Choir and Orchestra, Harry Christophers
Patrizia Kwella, soprano; James Bowman, alto
Ian Partridge, tenor; Michael George, bass

English composer Handel wrote his setting of Psalm 89 whilst in the employ of James Brydges, Duke of Chandos in 1717.

Felix Mendelssohn: Christus
Accentus; Paris Orchestral Ensemble, Laurence Equilbey
Sandrine Piau, soprano; Robert Getchell, tenor; Laurent Slaars, bass I; Markus Butter, bass II

Mendelssohn only completed Part 1 of his oratorio "Christus". It was published posthumously as his Opus 97.

Josef Gabriel Rheinberger: Requiem in E flat, Op. 84
Saarbrücken Chamber Choir, Georg Grun

German composer Joseph Gabriel Rheinberger (1839-1901) composed four settings of the Requiem Mass. The E flat setting, his Opus 84, dates from 1867.

Johannes Ockeghem: Missa sine nomine
Clemencic Consort, Rene Clemencic

Ockeghem's music written in the fifteenth century sounds fresh and vital to our ears which are accustomed to a wide variety of musical styles. One can only imagine what fifteenth century listeners made of it.

Andre Campra: Te Deum

Le Concert Spirituel, Herve Niquet

Veronique Gens, soprano; Jean-Paul Fouchecourt, counter-tenor

Douglas Nasrawi, tenor; Peter Harvey, bass

French baroque composer Andre Campra was organist at the Cathedrals in Arles and Toulouse before becoming director of music at Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris.

Giuseppe Verdi: Te Deum from Four Sacred Pieces

Ernst Senff Choir/Berlin Philharmonic, Carlo Maria Giulini

Sharon Sweet, soprano

Italian opera composer Giuseppe Verdi wrote four sacred motets in the last decades of his life. "Te Deum" dates from 1886-1889.