

Great Sacred Music

Sunday, December 19, 2021

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

Nicholas Ludford: Ave cujus conceptio
Blue Heron, Scott Metcalfe

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

Franz Biebl
Chanticleer

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 Parker 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
An Oct. 19, 1982, performance at 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

Gabrieli Consort and Players, Paul McCreesh

Dorothea Roschmann, soprano I; Susan Gritton, soprano II

Bernarda Fink, contralto; Charles Daniels, tenor; Neal Davies, bass

The Foundling Hospital Version (1754)

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 have been heard in Handel's time.

Marc-Antoine Charpentier: Midnight Mass for Christmas on French Carols

Choir and Musicians of the Louvre, Marc Minkowski

Annick Massis, soprano; Magdalena Kozena, mezzo-soprano

Eric Huchet, tenor; Patrick Henckens, tenor; Russell Smythe, baritone; Jean-Louis Bindi, bass

Charpentier was particularly drawn to writing Christmas music, producing instrumental carols, Latin oratorios on Christmas themes, French pastorales and a Christmas mass - the delightful Messe de Minuit pour Noël. This piece dates from around 1690 and was probably composed for the great Jesuit church of St. Louis in Paris, where Charpentier held the important post of maître de musique.

John Bwden writing in Choirs UK states: "The use of popular carols in church music had long been an accepted practice. In England carols were more often sung than played, but in France noëls figured prominently in the substantial French organ repertoire. The liturgy of Midnight Mass permitted the singing and playing of these Christmas folksongs, and by Charpentier's time quite complex instrumental arrangements were commonplace. However, Charpentier's idea of basing a whole mass on these songs was completely original. Altogether there are eleven noëls, most of which are dance-like in character, reflecting the carol's secular origins. In addition to the carol melodies that he adapted to fit various parts of the mass text, Charpentier also composed new material, such as the slow sections 'Et in terra pax' at the beginning of the Gloria and 'Et incarnatus est' in the Credo. It says much for the composer's craftsmanship that these quite different idioms are so seamlessly and convincingly blended together."