

British Choral Masterworks

Russell Community Choir

Judith Ofcarcik, organ

Alex Underwood, conductor

Ad Astra Music Festival

JULY 18 ~ AUGUST 2
2015
*Russell,
Kansas*

This concert is underwritten by The Line Family &
Angela and Warren Gfeller

British Choral Masterworks

Russell Community Choir

Judith Ofcarcik, organ

Alex Underwood, conductor

Trinity United Methodist Church

Friday, July 24th, 7:30pm

Rejoice in the Lamb, Op. 30

Benjamin Britten

Festival Cantata for treble, alto, tenor and bass soloists,
choir and organ

Text from Jubilate Agno by Christopher Smart

Rhapsody for Organ, Op. 17, No. 1

Herbert Howells

Magnificat

Sir James MacMillan

For mixed choir and organ

English text from the Book of Common Prayer (1662)

Russell Community Choir

Organ

Dr. Judith Ofcarcik

Soprano

Melody Barton

Shelby Matlock*

Janna Montgomery

Mary Ann Steinle

Rayn Sehl

Alto

Ellen Bialek*

Katie Bruton

Andrea Cross

Erin Renard

Trista Wysong

Tenor

Michael Davidson

Nathan Hilger*

Mike Williams*

Bass

Jim Balthazor

John Irving

Riley King

Dale Schmitt

Gage Brady

*Young artist

Alex Underwood, conductor

Benjamin Britten

Born November 22, 1913 in Lowestoft, England

Died December 4, 1976 in Aldeburgh, England

The story of *Rejoice in the Lamb* begins in 1943 with the Reverend Walter Hussey. Then Vicar of St. Matthew's Church in Northampton, Hussey was seeking a new musical work for the fiftieth anniversary of his church's consecration. Throughout his life, Hussey was a strong advocate of bringing the Church of England and the arts of England closer together, an aspiration shared by the young composer Benjamin Britten. The precocious Britten had already made a name for himself as a student at the Royal College of Music. By 1943, he had amassed an impressive catalogue of works and achieved additional notoriety as a conscientious objector to World War II. In March 1943, Hussey reached out with a commission for chorus and organ to Britten who promptly threw himself into the project with abandon.

Britten seems to have been granted free rein in his choice of text and he could not have chosen a more unorthodox source: the poem *Jubilate Agno*. Written by the eighteenth century poet Christopher Smart, the work had no shortage of notoriety. In the first place, Smart had written the poem while confined at St. Luke's Hospital in London under charges of insanity attributed to religious mania. The work runs over twelve hundred formulaic lines. Half of them begin with the word "Let" while the other half begin with "For." (See the text below for an example of these constructions and Smart's grasp of Biblical detail.) Britten, no stranger to the odder corners of English poetry, wrangled a libretto from this chaos that reflects the message of the Song of Creation: "all ye Works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord." Like the poet, the composer sought to illuminate the beautiful in the peculiar, the simple in the complex, and the majestic in the anguish.

The cantata falls into ten sections. The first three feature the chorus, who praise the unity of man and beast in magnifying God's name and his glory. The next three sections, which feature treble, alto and tenor soloists, all focus on specific instances of creatures and nature in action: the simple pleasures of a frolicking feline (Smart's only companion while confined was his cat Jeoffrey), the valor of a common mouse, and the pensive beauty of the flowers. The chorus then returns with an ominous section, "For I am under the same accusation," which presents an undercurrent familiar to Britten's work: the struggle of the outsider against an unfeeling and hostile world, in this case against the hospital watchman. A recitative for bass follows that focuses on the spiritual subtext of the alphabet. Coming to M for "musick," the chorus bursts forth in rapturous anthem to musical instruments before returning to a valedictory "Hallelujah" whereby peace is conferred on the tumult.

Herbert Howells

Born October 17, 1892 in Lydney, United Kingdom

Died February 23, 1983 in London, United Kingdom

A protégé of composer Charles Villiers Stanford, Herbert Howells represents a convergence of English musical traditions. A dedicated composer of church music, Howells was also central figure in the English musical education establishment with many important appointments. (Howells taught at the Royal College of Music in the 1930s when Britten himself was a student, but the latter's surviving opinions of the faculty are far from pleasant.) Howells's three rhapsodies for organ, Op. 17, were composed between 1915 and 1918. The First Rhapsody was completed at Churchdown in Howells native Gloucestershire during August 1915. Dedicated to the celebrated English organist Dr. Harold Darke, it begins with an unassuming ripple-like undercurrent. Over this, a series of broad themes are introduced, developed and brought to a grandiose pitch before subsiding back under the undulating waves.

Sir James MacMillan

Born July 16, 1959 in Kilwinning, United Kingdom

The works of Sir James MacMillan (newly knighted in the Queens Birthday Honor's List this past June) run the gamut from opera to concerto, but all in some way relate back to the Scottish composer's Roman Catholic faith. His Magnificat and Nunc dimittis from 2000 continues a storied tradition of liturgical composition reaching all the way back to Gregorian chant. In contrast to the wacky text of Britten's cantata, MacMillan's work relies on two of the most established and well-known texts in religious music, the Magnificat and the Nunc dimittis. The text of the Magnificat (also known as the Cantic of Mary) originally comes from the Gospel of Luke. It is sung by the Virgin Mary to Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, out of delight at hearing the child leap in Elizabeth's womb. In the Vespers and Evensong traditions, the Magnificat is sung at the end of services, frequently paired with in Anglican worship with another canticle, the Nunc dimittis. The words of the Nunc dimittis also comes from Luke, sung by the figure of Simeon after having seen the infant Jesus at the Temple in Jerusalem.

The shared presence of these two canticles amongst the various branches of Western Christianity has, in turn, spawned a wealth of music settings in various languages. For his composition, MacMillan utilized the English translation of the canticles as they appear in the 1662 English Book of Common Prayer. As per tradition, MacMillan also interpolates the

text of the Gloria Patri (Glory be to the Father...). The Magnificat was originally a stand-alone work for chorus and orchestra, but MacMillan later arranged the work for choir and organ and expanded it to include the Nunc dimittis. Like the Britten cantata, the piece emerges from an almost eerie state of stillness. In contrast to Britten's turbulent changes of mood, MacMillan meticulously builds up both sections of the work like tremendous arches that gradually rise to two glorious, if not slightly terrifying, summits (the Gloria Patri) before eventually returning to a reverential state of calm. The chant-like austerity of the choral passages masterfully complements the elaborate filigree and dissonant bravado of the organ, maximizing contrast for a sublimely spiritual effect.

—Ryan M. Prendergast



Judith Ofcarcik is a professor at Fort Hays State University, where she teaches Music Theory and Organ. She graduated with a Master's degree in Organ Performance from Indiana University, where she studied with Marilyn Keiser and Todd Wilson, and also holds a PhD in Music Theory from Florida State University. She serves as organist at St. Michael's Episcopal Church in Hays, KS and is also active as a Beethoven scholar. Judith's professors teacher conducted the premiere of *Rejoice in the Lamb*, by Benjamin Britten.



Alex Underwood is the artistic director of the Ad Astra Music Festival. A native of Russell, Alex is working on a doctoral degree in Choral Conducting at the University of Illinois with Andrew Megill. He completed his Masters in Choral Conducting from Westminster Choir College in 2014 where he sang multiple times with the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Simon Bolivar Venezuelan Youth Orchestra, the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, and the London Philharmonia. Alex will conduct the Chamber Choir, High School Choir, and Community Choir performances.

Texts and Translations

Rejoice in the Lamb, Op. 30

Benjamin Britten

Chorus

Rejoice in God, O ye Tongues; give the glory to the Lord, and the Lamb.
Nations, and languages, and every Creature, in which is the breath of Life.
Let man and beast appear before him, and magnify his name together.

Let Nimrod, the mighty hunter, bind a Leopard to the altar,
and consecrate his spear to the Lord.
Let Ishmael dedicate a Tyger, and give praise for the liberty
in which the Lord has let him at large.
Let Balaam appear with an Ass, and bless the Lord his people
and his creatures for a reward eternal.
Let Daniel come forth with a Lion,
and praise God with all might through faith in Christ Jesus.
Let Ithamar minister with a Chamois, and bless the name of Him, that cloatheth the naked.
Let Jakim with the Satyr bless God in the dance.
Let David bless with the Bear – The beginning of victory to the Lord – to the Lord the
perfection of excellence – Hallelujah from the heart of God, and from the hand of the artist
inimitable, and from the echo of the heavenly harp in sweetness magnificent and mighty.

Treble Solo

For I will consider my Cat Jeoffrey.
For he is the servant of the Living God, duly and daily serving him.
For at the first glance of the glory of God in the East he worships in his way.
For this is done by wreathing his body seven times round with elegant quickness.
For he knows that God is his Saviour.
For God has blessed him in the variety of his movements.
For there is nothing sweeter than his peace when at rest.
For I am possessed of a cat, surpassing in beauty, from whom I take occasion to bless
Almighty God.

Alto Solo

For the Mouse is a creature of great personal valour.

For – this a true case – Cat takes female mouse – male mouse will not depart, but stands threat'ning and daring.

...If you will let her go, I will engage you, as prodigious a creature as you are.

For the Mouse is a creature of great personal valour.

For the Mouse is of an hospitable disposition.

Tenor Solo

For the flowers are great blessings.

For the flowers have their angels even the words of God's Creation.

For the flower glorifies God and the root parries the adversary.

For there is a language of flowers.

For flowers are peculiarly the poetry of Christ.

Chorus

For I am under the same accusation with my Saviour –

For they said, he is besides himself.

For the officers of the peace are at variance with me, and the watchman smites me with his staff.

For Silly fellow! Silly fellow! is against me and belongeth neither to me nor to my family.

For I am in twelve HARDSHIPS, but he that was born of a virgin shall deliver me out of all.

Bass Recitative and Chorus

For H is a spirit and therefore he is God.

For K is king and therefore he is God.

For L is love and therefore he is God.

For M is musick and therefore he is God.

For the instruments are by their rhimes.

For the Shawm rhimes are lawn fawn moon boon and the like.

For the harp rhimes are sing ring string and the like.

For the cymbal rhimes are bell well toll soul and the like.

For the flute rhimes are tooth youth suit mute and the like.

For the Bassoon rhimes are pass class and the like.

For the dulcimer rhimes are grace place beat heat and the like.

For the Clarinet rhimes are clean seen and the like.

For the trumpet rhimes are sound bound soar more and the like.

For the TRUMPET of God is a blessed intelligence and so are the instruments in HEAVEN.

For GOD the father Almighty plays upon the HARP of stupendous magnitude and melody.
For at that time malignity ceases and the devils themselves are at peace.
For this time is perceptible to man by a remarkable stillness and serenity of soul.

Chorus

Hallelujah from the heart of God, and from the hand of the artist inimitable, and from the echo of the heavenly harp in sweetness magnificent and mighty.

Magnificat and Nunc Dimittus

Sir James MacMillan

My soul doth magnify the Lord : and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.
For he hath regarded : the lowliness of his handmaiden.
For behold, from henceforth : all generations shall call me blessed.
For he that is mighty hath magnified me : and holy is his Name.
And his mercy is on them that fear him : throughout all generations.
He hath shewed strength with his arm : he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
He hath put down the mighty from their seat : and hath exalted the humble and meek.
He hath filled the hungry with good things : and the rich he hath sent empty away.
He remembering his mercy hath holpen his servant Israel : as he promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed for ever.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the holy Ghost.
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end, Amen.

Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace : according to thy word.
For mine eyes have seen : thy salvation,
Which thou hast prepared : before the face of all people;
To be a light to lighten the Gentiles : and to be the glory of thy people Israel.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son : and to the holy Ghost.
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be : world without end, Amen.

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