

Program Notes

Introduction

In March 1971, when I was a freshman at McGill University, W.H. Auden came to Montréal and gave a reading of his own poetry. The occasion was the year-long celebration of the 150th anniversary of the founding of McGill. Auden was then sixty-four years old. He wore a rumpled suit and an English regimental tie just like the ones my father always wore. He read almost entirely from his recent poetry, some of which had just appeared in *The New York Review of Books* (to which I was a new, eager subscriber!). I felt a surge of energy when I recognized poems that he was reading as ones that I had just read.

At the end of the lecture, which was filmed by the college publicity department – a fact I remember as the noise of the 16mm cameras sometimes interfered with Auden’s solo voice, I was bold enough to go up on to the stage and wait in line to shake the grand old man’s hand. Auden died just a little over two years later in September, 1973.

I tell this story not to boast, but as a way of touching the surface of the amazing historical sweep of this concert: from ancient monastic music (which we sometimes still sing in our churches), to a motet by Bach (the chorus of which we still sing often), to a Japanese folk song and a modern Swedish “nonsense syllable” song (both of which I’m sure are “new” to most of us here), to the evocative 1939 classic about “A Nightingale Singing in Berkley Square,” to an African American spiritual set by the modern composer Dominick Argento (whose hand a few of us have surely shaken), to the culmination of all these songs – the Auden/Britten *Hymn to St. Cecilia*, which comes close to achieving the impossible goal of all program notes: to express music in words.

And what is music? Auden defines it thus: It is “something immortal composed by mortals.”

Veni, Creator Spiritus

Veni Creator Spiritus, Mentes tuorum visita: Imple superna gratia Quae tu creasti pectora.	Come, O Creator Spirit, come, And make within our hearts thy home; To us thy grace celestial give, Who of thy breathing move and live.
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Qui diceris Paraclitus, Altissimi donum Dei, Fons vivus, ignis, caritas, Et spiritalis unctio.	O Comforter, that name is thine, Of God most high the gift divine; The well of life, the fire of love, Our souls' anointing from above.
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Accende lumen sensibus, Infunde amorem cordibus, Infirma nostri corporis Virtute firmans perpeti.	Our senses with thy light inflame, Our hearts to heavenly love reclaim: Our bodies' poor infirmity With strength perpetual fortify.
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Hostem repellas longius, Pacemque dones protinus: Ductore sic te praeviso, Vitemus omne noxium.	Our mortal foe afar repel, Grant us henceforth in peace to dwell; And so to us, with thee for guide, No ill shall come, no harm betide.
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Deo Patri sit Gloria, Et Filio, qui a mortuis Surrexit, ac Paraclito, In saeculorum saecula. Amen.	To God the Father glory be, All praise, O risen Son, to thee And Holy Ghost, whom we adore, For ever and for evermore. Amen.
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For those of you here on Saturday night, you can turn to #577 in the "Cranberry Hymnal" to find this 9th century plainsong. For those of you here on Sunday afternoon, you can reach forward and pull out the "Presbyterian Hymnal" and find "Veni, Creator Spiritus" as #125 ("Come, Holy Spirit, our Souls Inspire"). Those of you in attendance both days (i.e. the singers!) already know that this is probably the best-known Latin hymn in English usage. It is amazing to realize that here is a song that has been sung for over 1,000 years.

The tradition behind both the words and the music is the monastic

one which became so prevalent throughout Western Europe that people believed it *had* to date back to the saintly Pope who did so much for the poor in the world and for the standardization of worship in the church: St. Gregory the Great (550-604). Scholarship (and simple math) shows us that the Gregorian chants we know cannot really be as old as this Pope. But that hasn't changed ... tradition!

The hymn, and the music which is so perfectly wedded to it, reminds us of the creative gift of those ancient musical monks: they invented the first system of musical notation. But you'll have to ask someone who knows music theory how the ancient chants are written in different "modes" than the "keys" of our modern music.

***Jesu, Meine Freude* by Johann Sebastian Bach**

1. Hymn, verse 1

Jesu, meine Freude, meines Herzens Weide, Jesu, meine Zier. Ach, wie lang, ach lange ist dem Herzen bange, und verlangt nach dir! Gottes Lamm, mein Bräutigam, ausser dir soll mir auf Erden nichts sonst lieber werden.	Jesus, my joy, my heart's repose, Jesus, my treasure; oh, how ceaselessly my fainting heart longs for thee. Lamb of God, my bridegroom, no one on earth is dearer to me!
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2. Chorus

Es ist nun nichts Verdammliches an denen, die in Christo Jesu sind, die nicht nach dem Fleische wandeln, sondern nach dem Geist.	There is therefore now no condemnation for them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.
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3. Hymn, verse 2

Unter deinen Schirmen bin ich vor den Stürmen	Protected by thee, I am free from the raging
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aller Feinde frei.	of all enemies.
Lass den Satan wittern,	Let Satan thunder,
lass den Feind erbittern,	let the fiend threaten!
mir steht Jesus bei.	Jesus is my aid.
Ob es itzt gleich	Even though thunder
kracht und blitzt	and lightning rage,
ob gleich Sünd und Hölle schrecken:	Even though sin and hell terrify me,
Jesus will mich decken.	Jesus will protect me.

4. Chorus

Denn das Gesetz des Geistes,	For the law of the Spirit
der da lebendig machet in Christo Jesu,	of life in Christ Jesus
hat mich freigemacht von dem Gesetz	has made me free from the law
der Sünde und des Todes.	of sin and death.

5. Hymn, verse 3

Trotz dem alten Drachen,	Defy the old dragon!
trotz dem Todes rachen,	Defy the jaws of death!
trotz der Furcht dazu!	Defy fear as well!
Tobe, Welt, und springe.	Rage, world and quake.
Ich steh hier und singe	I stand here and sing
in gar sich'rer Ruh.	in perfect peace.
Gottes Macht hält mich in Acht.	The might of God protects me.
Erd und Abgrund muss verstummen,	Earth and hell shall be silent,
ob sie noch so brummen.	however much they roar.

6. Chorus

Ihr aber seit nicht fleischlich	You are not in the flesh,
sondern geistlich,	but in the Spirit,
so anders Gottes Geist	if it be that the Spirit of God
in euch wohnt.	dwell in you.
Wer aber Christi Geist nicht hat,	Now if anyone has not the Spirit of
der ist nicht sein.	Christ, he is not His.

7. Hymn, verse 4

Weg mit allen Schätzen!	Away with all earthly treasure!
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<p>Du bist mein Ergötzen, Jesu, meine Lust! Weg ihr eitlen Ehren, ich mag euch nicht hören, bleibt mir unbewusst! Elend, Not, Kreuz, Schmach und Tod soll mich, ob ich viel muss leiden, nicht von Jesus scheiden.</p>	<p>You are my delight, Jesus, my joy. Away, vain glories! I will not listen to you. I want none of you! Grief, distress, cross, shame, and death, shall, however much I suffer, not part me from Jesus.</p>
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8. Chorus

<p>So aber Christus in euch ist, so ist der Leib zwar tot um der Sünde willen; der Geist aber ist das Leben um der Gerechtigkeit willen.</p>	<p>And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.</p>
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9. Hymn, verse 5

<p>Gute Nacht, o Wesen, das die Welt erlesen, mir gefälltst du nicht. Gute Nacht, ihr Sünden, bleibt weit dahinten, kommt nicht mehr ans Licht! Gute Nacht, du Stolz und Pracht! Dir sei ganz, du Lasterleben, gute Nacht gegeben.</p>	<p>Good night, oh being, which has chosen the world, you do not please me! Good night, sins, stay far behind me, do not rise into the light! Good night, pride and vain glory! And to you, life of iniquity, a special good night!</p>
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10. Chorus

<p>So nun der Geist des, der Jesum von den Toten auferwecket hat, in euch wohnt, so wird auch derselbige, der Christum von den Toten auferwecket hat, eure sterblichen Leiber lebendig</p>	<p>But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit</p>
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machen um des willen,
dass sein Geist in euch wohnet.

that dwelleth
in you.

11. Hymn, verse 6

Weicht, ihr Trauergeister, denn mein Freudenmeister, Jesus, tritt herein.	Give way, you spirits of sadness, for Jesus, the King of joy enters in.
Denen, die Gott lieben, muss auch ihr Betrübten lauter Freude sein.	Those who love God must accept even their sadness as pure delight.
Duld ich schon hier Spott und Hohn, dennoch bleibst auch du im Leide, Jesu, meine Freude.	Though I suffer mockery and derision here, yet even in my grief shalt thou, Jesus, remain my joy.

-Johann Franck, 1653

Again, for those of you here on Saturday night, if you reach forward and take a hymnal and open it to #775, you will find the familiar English words of this classic German chorale. The words by Johann Franck date from 1650. Johann Cruger's beautiful melody was wedded to the text three years later.

Those present on Sunday afternoon can find the same hymn as #365 in the blue hymnals in front of you. The English version was done in 1863 by the well-known and prolific Catherine Winkworth. But she only translated three of the original six stanzas. I'm sure that they stood out when you read the text above. They are sections 1, 3 and 11. The other three stanzas of the chorale are 5, 7 and 9 of Bach's motet. Verses from Romans Chapter 8 make up the other sections. They are what Bach chose to include in order to provide a theological and musical dialogue.

We know the exact date that this motet was first performed. It was for the funeral service of Johanna Maria Kase, the widow of the Postmaster of Leipzig. The date was July 18, 1723. It is both inspiring and overwhelming to realize that Bach composed this piece in just the few days between Johanna's death and her funeral. It is inspiring to see

that the Master started with a familiar hymn and then it's overwhelming to see what he "did" with it.

Albert Schweitzer calls this motet, "Bach's Sermon upon Life and Death." Schweitzer stressed how each one of Bach's religious cantatas is a "musical sermon." And if we are overwhelmed by Bach's creativity, we then perhaps need not wonder why his amazing interpreter Albert Schweitzer never wrote any music of his own.

Who could ever match Bach for the variety of the vocal texture, the harmonization and melodic elaboration so masterfully carried out in the different stanzas? Musicologists have unlocked the "logic" of the relation of the key signature of the various sections. They call it a "musically symmetrical motet" and they point out how "the five-part fugue in the fifth stanza is in the key of G, the relative major key to the piece's all-pervading key of E-minor."

I'm grateful for scholars who can "explain" this musical structure. I'm on firmer ground with the textual architecture. Note how every stanza (except the last) is followed by a single verse from the Letter to the Romans. Listen to the dialogue between the two voices – between the devotional poetry of the hymn, and St. Paul's declarative and dogmatic sentences.

All in all, it is a powerful sermon – for it mirrors more closely the human mind with its capacity to generate (and hear) multiple voices at the same time. Music, especially as it developed in the church, transcended the limitation of the spoken voice and more closely approximated thought. But here again you'll have to ask someone who knows music theory to explain "How harmony allows multiple voices to sing all at the same time."

It is worth pointing out that when the standard three-hour German church service of Bach's time came to be "downsized," it was the cantata or motet that was cut – not the sermon delivered by the Pastor. But here I am anticipating the first piece we'll hear after the intermission. It contains the line, "Don't let the priests win!"

***Shojjee*, arranged by B. Wayne Bisbee**

“Shojjee” is the name of a Japanese temple. It is also a raccoon-like animal with a big stomach!

Translation:

*Temple garden on a moonlit night,
Everyone, come out, come out, our friends!
Don't lose! Keep it up! Don't let the priests win!*

In ancient Rome, there were geese who gaggled around the Temple of Juno on the Capitoline Hill. When their cries of alarm – their honking – saved the city when attacked by the Gauls in 390 B.C., these geese became extra “sacred.”

I don't think the raccoon-like animals named “Shojjees” who somehow have the same name as a temple in Japan are as famous or as sacred as Juno's geese. But this Japanese folk song has fun with the pun occasioned by the fact that the words for the animal and the temple sound exactly the same.

So there they are, these far-east raccoons who, as in a cartoon, beat on their stomachs like drums. Are they imitating the priests who beat on drums while they pray? Or is it vice versa? In any case, the Shojjee animals are competing with the Shojjee priests. We don't know what the prize is for winning. We don't know what the rules of the game are. Again, cartoon-like, it looks like the raccoons can talk – or at least they have cheer-leaders who shout out, “Don't let the priests win!”

It adds to the happiness of this piece to learn that the American musician and choir director, B. Wayne Bisbee creatively arranged it for his college choir's tour of Japan.

***Rondes* by Folke Rabe**

This piece falls under the playful category of “And Now for Some-

thing Completely Different.” So, listen to the circus announcer as he booms out, “Ladies and Gentlemen, Children of All Ages ... stay in your seats as the choir re-arranges theirs while performing never-yet-seen-or-heard deeds of musical and kinetic daring. Before your very eyes, the Chamber Chorale will transform itself into the 1964 Swedish choir who first brought to life this amazing event that has traveled the world over! But do not let the intrepid performers take your breath away! Please laugh and cheer and gasp and cry ... freely! And then take your programs home, and enter this address in your internet search engine to read the composer’s own ‘note’: www.folkerabe.se/. Click on “Comments” at the top and then on “Rondes.”

I now return to my regularly scheduled voice and announce that thanks to my knowing some Swedish, I can give you this sentence from that language’s Wikipedia article about Rabe: “For many years the composer has played trombone in Jack Lidström’s *Hep Cats* and in Lasse Törnqvist’s *Blue Stars*.” (Footnote: I didn’t have to translate the names of the bands!)

Benjamin Britten’s *Hymn to St. Cecilia*, words by W. H. Auden

I.

In a garden shady this holy lady
With reverent cadence and subtle psalm,
Like a black swan as death came on
Poured forth her song in perfect calm:
And by ocean’s margin this innocent virgin
Constructed an organ to enlarge her prayer,
And notes tremendous from her great engine
Thundered out on the Roman air.

Blonde Aphrodite rose up excited,
Moved to delight by the melody,
White as an orchid she rode quite naked
In an oyster shell on top of the sea;
At sounds so entrancing the angels dancing
Came out of their trance into time again,

And around the wicked in Hell's abysses
The huge flame flickered and eased their pain.

*Blessed Cecilia, appear in visions
To all musicians, appear and inspire:
Translated Daughter, come down and startle
Composing mortals with immortal fire.*

II.

I cannot grow;
I have no shadow
To run away from,
I only play.
I cannot err;
There is no creature
Whom I belong to,
Whom I could wrong.
I am defeat
When it knows it
Can now do nothing
By suffering.
All you lived through,
Dancing because you
No longer need it
For any deed.
I shall never be
Different. Love me.

*Blessed Cecilia, appear in visions
To all musicians, appear and inspire:
Translated Daughter, come down and startle
Composing mortals with immortal fire.*

III.

O ear whose creatures cannot wish to fall,
O calm of spaces unafraid of weight,
Where Sorrow is herself, forgetting all
The gaucheness of her adolescent state,
Where Hope within the altogether strange
From every outworn image is released,
And Dread born whole and normal like a beast
Into a world of truths that never change:
Restore our fallen day; O re-arrange.

*O dear white children casual as birds,
Playing among the ruined languages,
So small beside their large confusing words,
So gay against the greater silences
Of dreadful things you did: O hang the head,
Impetuous child with the tremendous brain,
O weep, child, weep, O weep away the stain,
Lost innocence who wished your lover dead,
Weep for the lives your wishes never led.*

O cry created as the bow of sin
Is drawn across our trembling violin.
O weep, child, weep, O weep away the stain.
O law drummed out by hearts against the still
Long winter of our intellectual will.
That what has been may never be again.
O flute that throbs with the thanksgiving breath
Of convalescents on the shores of death.
O bless the freedom that you never chose.
O trumpets that unguarded children blow
About the fortress of their inner foe.
O wear your tribulation like a rose.

*Blessed Cecilia, appear in visions
To all musicians, appear and inspire:*

*Translated Daughter, come down and startle
Composing mortals with immortal fire.*

W. H. Auden wrote his well-crafted poem with its three movements in 1940 especially for Benjamin Britten, who was a personal friend. Britten composed the music in 1942. English and Music majors may remember the famous precedent, John Dryden's 1687 "Ode for St. Cecilia's Day" which Handel set to music in 1739.

Auden's poem is both classical and modern. Some of its lines are easy to understand on first reading (or hearing) while others need to be read multiple times to uncover their layers of meaning. (Try reading the poem out loud – during intermission!) Much of Auden's imagery and language may sound old-fashioned to us – though there are lines which could come from a Bob Dylan ballad, such as, "Weep for the lives your wishes never led."

Auden's poem is of course wonderfully musical, for it is about the early Saint who invented the organ and who sang as she was being martyred. What an accomplishment and what a way to go! Auden has fun with this legend. He re-fashions and re-interprets it. The major example of this is his taking the famous image of Venus in Botticelli's painting and adding what every painting would have if it was made into a Hollywood movie: he adds music. So the Venus who arises out of the sea carried on a huge oyster shell is literally being carried away by St. Cecilia's music. Auden then compounds the original story by having the Saint's music both ascend to the angels in heaven and descend to the sufferers in hell.

Auden accomplishes a very difficult task here: to express the nature of music in words. In the second "movement," it may very well be St. Cecilia, or Music Herself (or both!) who is the speaker (that is, the singer). It may also be that Auden is attempting too much here – to have St. Cecilia sing out in her martyrdom, "I am defeat!" yet to want us to understand that the deeper, religious meaning is, "I won!" I think that Auden, and Britten, expect us to come to their work with a knowledge of both Christian mysticism and of "the joy of the cross."

As for the third “movement,” it is, even for English majors, “dense.” But note how it concludes with a surprising “Guide to the Orchestra” in which first the strings, then the drums, then the flute and trumpet are evoked in wonderfully creative language. The concluding line, sung by the tenor soloist, is poignantly evocative: “O wear your tribulation like a rose.”

We have the privilege here of observing and participating in an age-old challenge and opportunity that is both secular and sacred: the wedding of words and music. Auden wrote this hymn knowing that it would be set to music. Yet he must have felt wonder and surprise at how his friend Benjamin Britten “translated” it into melody. Remember, there are some poets who believed their poems were beautiful in and of themselves and didn’t need any musical embellishment. (Of course there have also been some composers who intentionally wrote “songs without words.”)

But here we are in a church – not in a college lecture hall. The *Hymn to St. Cecilia* is deeply religious, while at the same time remaining “intellectual.” Its strongest expression of faith is its chorus. This is a prayer to St. Cecilia in heaven. It links the sacred and our secular life on earth. It reminds us of what has always been there in almost all of our religious traditions: the belief that heaven is a place especially characterized by music – by angel voices and by “the music of the spheres.”

***Shenandoah*, arranged by James Erb**

If you were watching Wisconsin Public Television last month on Thursday night, March 18, you would have heard (and seen) this classic American folk song performed by one of the dozen high school choirs featured on the show, “Celebrate America.” Here in Wisconsin we are roughly midway between the two rivers of this song: “the wide Missouri” and the “rolling Shenandoah” (which is located in southwestern Virginia). So is our nostalgia for the river (and area) we’ve left behind, or for the river which lies ahead in our travels? You don’t really have to answer this question. All you have to do is sit back and

enjoy this ballad. (But for extra credit you can write lyrics about *our* Wisconsin River which one of *our* Wisconsin composers can set to music and *our* Chamber Chorale can sing it!)

A Nightingale Sang in Berkley Square (1940) by Manning Sherwin, arranged by Gene Puerling, lyrics by Eric Maschwitz.

Oo, oo, oo
That certain night, the night we met
There was magic abroad in the air,
There were angels dining at the Ritz
And a nightingale sang in Berkley Square.

I may be right, I may be wrong
But I'm perfectly willing to swear
That when we kissed and said goodbye
A nightingale sang in Berkley Square.
Oo, oo, oo

The moon that lingered over London town,
Poor puzzled moon, he wore a frown,
Oh how could he know we two were so in love!

The whole darn world seemed upside down,
The streets of town were paved with stars
It was such a romantic affair
And as we kissed and said goodbye
A nightingale sang in Berkley Square.

This popular song expresses the light-heartedness that young lovers feel – no matter what's going on around them. As in Auden's poem, it also brings a little bit of heaven down to earth. But it's not intellectual at all. Though Bishop George Berkeley who gave his name to the famous square in London town was quite a philosopher!

You don't have to know any of the background of this song to enjoy it. (Though some of you may have grown up hearing it sung "every-

where”!) But my love of France motivates me to make sure you all know that it was written in the summer of 1939 in the city on the Riviera named Le Lavandou. The song’s ever-increasing popularity inspired the inhabitants of Le Lavandou to put up a historical plaque to commemorate its birthplace. This was done in 2002. It’s an interesting footnote to music, memory and “glory,” that after 63 years no one in the area could recall the exact café where the song was first performed. Oh well, people here in Onalaska and La Crosse probably won’t do any better in 2073!

***So I'll Sing With My Voice* by Dominick Argento**

If I had a harp
Like David had a harp
I'd play on that harp
'Till the glorious day!
But I got no harp
So I'll sing with my voice,
Hallelujah!

If I had a horn
Like Gabriel had a horn
I'd blow on that horn
Till the judgment day!
But I got no horn
So I'll sing with my voice,
Hallelujah!

If I had a lyre
Like Jubal had a lyre
I'd strum on that lyre
Till that beautiful day!
But I got no lyre,
No I got no lyre,
So I'll sing with my voice,
O, hallelujah! Hallelujah!

Spirituals – even little-known ones – do not need any “notes.” They are folk music and we can all understand and follow them without explanation or footnotes. But I hope it might add to the pleasure of hearing this one to point out how it unselfconsciously takes three Biblical characters, who all come from different epochs and books of the Bible, and brings them into our imagination as if they were contemporary with one another. Such is the power of song. It’s fun – not completely logical.

Everyone knows about King David (ca. 1033 to ca. 970 B.C.) and about the Angel Gabriel (who lives from eternity to here!) But Jubal, who was he? Well, he’s a great-great-great-great-great grandson of Adam. He’s credited (in Genesis 4:21) with inventing the first string instrument (generally called a “lyre”) and the first wind instrument (called simply a “pipe”). But how did our prelapsarian ancestors get along without them?

– Program Notes by Rev. Donald H. Fox, Pastor of Lower Coon Valley Lutheran Church and Staff Chaplain at Franciscan Skemp Healthcare in La Crosse

**May
Feaste**

A Magical, Musical, Mystery Tour

Friday, May 21, 2010 • 5:30 pm
Cartwright Center
University of Wisconsin - La Crosse

Advance ticket purchase required
608-780-6107 • www.chamberchorale.org

A graphic design for a tour event. The text 'May Feaste' is written in a large, bold, black, hand-drawn font, slanted upwards. Below it, 'A Magical, Musical, Mystery Tour' is written in a similar bold, black font. To the right of the text is a simple line drawing of a bus. Below the bus is a simple line drawing of a suitcase with a handle and a latch. There are several musical notes scattered around the text and illustrations. The entire graphic is enclosed in a black rectangular border.