

WE HEAR AMERICA SINGING!

PROGRAM NOTES by Rebecca Scott and Emily Kaster

Dawn to Dusk in Song and Sound

This short but continuous segment of our program presents songs we sing, and sounds we hear and imagine, as we go through our day. Almost everyone has music running through their mind. Songs and sounds play on our memory and create vivid moments and lasting impressions of some period in our lives. They can suddenly bring back the past or create a new relationship with the future. The sounds we hear and make during our day, reflect who we are and how we live in this world.

Nowadays, few people wake to the sound of a rooster unless they live on or near a farm. But in Brahms' time, this was the sound of the morning. Our waking sound is more likely a bell or buzzer from an alarm clock, the tinkling of the cell phone or a disembodied voice announcing today's weather. This folk song that Brahms set is the waking of a child by a parent with a moralistic message which in effect says "Be good, or else".

Our songs and sounds represent growth in time, presented here as one day, but showing a lifetime. A child is awakened for breakfast by a loving and protective parent, then goes through years learning letters and numbers in school, plays games - here with an echo, grows into a teen-aged-lover, becomes an adult learning respect for earthly creation and the Creator, and finally goes to bed with an insecure future in a dangerous and frightening world.

Along the way in this life, human songs and sounds, and nature's songs and sounds buffet our journey and give us the courage to continue on. They enable us to communicate with each other in deep and effective ways and create joy and a sense of unity among people and the natural world.

Our four madrigals come from the 15th-16th centuries, which were rich in complicated part songs.

Good Morning, My Lady, originally in Italian, is a difficult four-part spoof that ridicules its own complicated contrapuntal part-writing form, as it ridicules the proper lady for her put-on airs and fashionable dress.

This Month of May presents a young woman who boldly dresses in her new green skirt so that she can impress her boyfriend, whom she will then invite to remove it!

Fair Phyllis celebrates the frolicking of the shepherd and the shepherdess who have no chaperones out in the fields where they are supposedly watching the sheep. The pitches wander "up and down" in an obvious reference to the love-making game while the vocal parts chase each other, entering and exiting at various times, mimicking the actions of the shepherds and shepherdesses.

Sing We and Chant It celebrates the idea of live, love and be merry, for life does not last long. All five vocal parts sing the same rhythm, creating a sense of unity. The triple meter is a dance step with a lift. The Fa- La- La refrain frees the singers from words to simply enjoy the sounds of their voices harmonizing in time. There is joy in singing together, forgetting our pains and struggles and enjoying each other and our world.

After rising at dawn and working and learning through a long day or a long lifetime, we come to appreciate where we are, thanking the Lord for our daily food and health. But we do not know what is next nor how long our life will be. Is there a heaven? Meanwhile, we are asking for the Lord's guidance and protection towards a heavenly home. *Evening Song (Esti dal)* is a famous Hungarian lullaby arranged

by Zoltan Kodaly. The lyrics present a feeling of nostalgia and a longing for “home”. We are seeking a place to lay our head down and sleep. Gradually, as the tempo slows to a stop, we are falling asleep in the arms of nature - under a tree, protected only by the night-shade and our own faith.

Selections from the music of Leonard Bernstein

Bernstein was an iconic figure of the 20th century art scene. He was known as an educator, conductor, composer of both classical and “popular” music, and a liberal political figure during the Vietnam War.

Known by the general public worldwide for his music to *West Side Story* created with librettist and lyricist Stephen Sondheim, Bernstein’s career as an educator and conductor of the New York Philharmonic had a wide influence on the music of the 20th century.

Born in Massachusetts, the son of Ukrainian Jewish parents, he was educated at Harvard and later at the Curtis Institute of Music of Philadelphia. Young Bernstein stormed the classical music world after a last minute substitution as conductor of the New York Philharmonic upon the illness of the great conductor, Bruno Walter. Stories abound about his flamboyant and ebullient personal style. One story recounts that at the premiere of *West Side Story*, he came down the center theatre aisle in a cape, throwing it off seconds before striking the downbeat.

This evening, we are performing two selections from *MASS*, a musical theatre work that Bernstein composed in 1971, commissioned by Jacqueline Kennedy for the opening of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. Originally composed to be a traditional mass, the piece took on a more innovative form, including both Latin and English texts. Intended to include upwards of 200 performers, *Mass* was a musical and theatrical experience. *Gloria Tibi* and *Almighty Father*, present a small sample of this larger, pageant-like work. The youthful excitement of the *Gloria Tibi* gives a suggestion of playfulness between the chorus of women (think “youth”) echoed or chased by the rest of the chorus (think “elders”). *Almighty Father* appears twice in the Mass, once before the drama unfolds in the church when outsiders begin to invade, and again towards the end of the upheaval, when the formerly rebelling youth are bringing the uncertain celebrant back into the flock.

Psalm 23: Adonai roi is the second movement of the *Chichester Psalms*, which had its premiere in 1965. Bernstein stated explicitly in his writing that the solo part may be sung by either a countertenor or a boy soprano, but never by a woman. This was to reinforce the liturgical meaning of the passage sung, perhaps to suggest that *Psalm 23* (a “Psalm of David”) was to be heard as if being sung by the boy David himself. While our excerpt ends before the men begin singing, their music is actually from Bernstein’s own cutting-room floor, taken from music he cut from *West Side Story*. Two tunes that did make the cut, *One Hand, One Heart* and *Tonight* have secured Bernstein’s notary in the popular realm of American music. In *One Hand, One Heart*, the duetting lovers perform a symbolic marriage when their beautiful harmonizing ultimately merges into unison, symbolizing the ‘oneness’ of the two. *Tonight* has reach beyond the iconic musical, and is recognized as one of the top tunes in cinematic pop music. The choral arrangement of this piece expresses the optimism and longing of the text, with the underlying drive of the accompaniment, suggesting the constant pulse of time, and the limit of this night of experience.

Four Lyrics of Inspiration by Eric Ewazen

Eric Ewazen has been on the faculty of The Juilliard School since 1980 where he and Rebecca Scott met. While working on his DMA degree there, he wrote song cycles for Ms. Scott and they began to work together as colleagues and friends. Since then, Dr. Ewazen has become widely known for his compositions which have been commissioned and performed by many soloists, chamber ensembles and

orchestras in the U.S. and overseas. His works are recorded on Summit Records, d'Note Records, CRS Records, New World, Clique Track, Helicon, Hyperion, Cale, Albany and Emi Classics. Cantabile members were introduced to the music of Dr. Ewazen in June 1989 with *No Use Sighin'*, the first of eight commissions that he composed for the group.

Tonight's choral cycle was written for a high school chorus, but this does not mean that it is easy! The character of the cycle lends support to young, light voices, often doubling the tenor and soprano and alto and bass parts, in order to accommodate the range and texture of the high school male voice. But the pitches, rhythms and lyrics are not easy to sing and the pitch range of the melodic lines is high and difficult to maintain. The poetry was chosen because of its appeal to young Americans and was loved by Dr. Ewazen as a young man from Cleveland, Ohio.

If—

The melody of this song begins in A minor, twisting and turning through the flats keys, then the sharp keys, then back to the flat keys and ending in D Major. It flows like a river, urgently and continuously spilling forth the lyrics of the encouraging poetry. Only two to four measures of piano solo interrupt the pulse of the verses.

Hold Fast Your Dreams

In 3/4 waltz-like meter, the poetry unfolds as if in a dream. In verse two, the running sixteenth notes return from the previous song, but this time in the pianist's right hand. An urgency is created by the lyrics expressing concern for keeping distance from disillusionment. In verse three, the piano builds rhythmically through rising tonal centers to burst forth with the "ugly things" in life. In the final verse, the original melody and tonal key return with the advice to "hold fast your dreams."

Common Road

Beginning as a march in B minor with elements of the Strathspey, a Scottish dance, with its characteristic "Scotch snap" [a short note before a long note], this song with its traveling rhythm is looking for the experiences of "everyman": "to ken what they see and hear" [ken=to know, Scottish dialect]. It has the character of a set of variations with a second theme in D Major which builds to the fervent ending "I want to mingle with the Common Man!"

I Hear America Singing

The final song opens with a strong, harmonic theme in Bb Major which truly SINGS as a short introduction to the song. The next melodies churn as people sing while working, morning, noon and night, followed by the A section and original theme a tone higher, in C Major. Once more the workers appear with their singing. Then we are treated to a wonderful fugue using the original text for a theme. As each section takes up the fugue theme, the other sections are "vocalizing" like singers do in their warmup exercises. Each voice section enjoys the theme and its inversion, as the other voices vocalize freely up and down in arpeggios. Finally, the opening comes back in the original key of Bb Major, as a coda, and the song ends as a tribute to American individuality.

Dr. Ewazen speaks about his music:

"Four Lyrics of Inspiration, is a choral cycle, commissioned by the Music Department of South Side High School of Rockville Center, New York, for their Honors Chorale, directed by Karen Baer. The ensemble had previously performed my choral work "Pray for Peace", so it was wonderful being able to work with them a second time for this cycle.

The poems I chose come from a very famous book of American and English poetry, published by the New York Times, originally in the 1930s, titled "Best Loved Poems of the American People". A previous cycle of choral works I wrote for my dear friends in Cantabile, *And the Night Shall be Filled with Music* also consisted of poems chosen from this cherished collection.

I. *If—* by Rudyard Kipling. This very famous poem, was actually, on a personal note, my Mother's favorite poem! -- it was the single only poem I ever heard her recite! The poem is an address to a son from a parent, giving worldly wisdom on how to negotiate the complexities of life -- how to be steadfast, level-headed, worldly, but wise. In a way the poem is a lecture, but the poem is also filled with the loving concern from a parent. The music is calm, authoritative, sometimes agitated as the pitfalls of life are described, but ultimately lovingly reassuring. The music reflects the nature of the words with alternating strength and tenderness.

II. *Hold Fast Your Dreams* travels from the worldly realm of Rudyard Kipling's *If—* to the realm of dreams and hope. Louise Driscoll was a poet from the Catskill region of New York, and her poem, although describing the vicissitudes of life, ultimately is wonderfully comforting in describing the pleasure and contentment in the beauty of nature, and emphasizing the importance of hope and dreams. It is ultimately a tribute to the strength of the human spirit -- taking pleasure in all that is good and beautiful and hopeful about our world. The music is sweet, lyrical in its depiction of the importance of holding onto one's dreams and NEVER giving up, although there are moments of great tension, as worldly trauma fights with those dreams. In Louise Driscoll's poem, the Hope and Dreams prevail!

III. *The Common Road* is by Silas H. Perkins, a Poet from Maine, which contains the Down-Easterner's Maine sensibility! As an American composer, who owes my artistic influence to the great American composers from Copland to Barber to Bernstein, and as I am quite proud of having my music described by my overseas musical colleagues and friends as sounding "SO American", I absolutely love this poem. It is a joyful description of our relatively young country's sensibility -- of forging a sense of joyous unity with common goals of goodness and joy and a sense of never giving up, working through the travails of life with a knowledge that there are other people right there with us sharing the same feelings and aspirations. In times of tragedy and the terrible events that can occur in the lives of people and of countries, the ultimately knowledge that we are not alone is reassuring; and as in all the poems that I've chosen to set for these Lyrics of Inspiration, ultimately comforting and life-affirming. The music for this poem is almost march-like and energetic as people are joining together down their shared pathway of life in all its glory, in all its complexity.

IV. *I Hear America Singing* by one of my very favorite American Poets, Walt Whitman, not only confirms that we have (or at least SHOULD have), as a country, common ideals and senses of right and wrong. But it celebrates the spirit that has resulted in some of the momentous accomplishments of our times, righting wrongs, forging ahead with knowledge, hopes, and dreams and a sense of energy and wisdom. The common man is celebrated in *I Hear America Singing*, but so too are the parents, and the children, the workers, and the old and the young. The words are a joyous tribute to life in its most positive and celebratory essence. The words sing, and I wanted my music to sing, with rich chorale writing, major keys predominating, a playful fugue, and a final cadence bringing these lyrics of inspiration to a joyous finale.

My sincerest thanks to Cantabile and my dear, lifelong friend, Rebecca Scott, who has championed my music with her glorious singing and her

wonderfully artful direction of the outstanding Cantabile Chamber Chorale. I'm delighted they are introducing this cycle of Choral Poems to you this evening.” Eric Ewazen

If—
by Rudyard Kipling
(‘Brother Square-Toes’—*Rewards and Fairies*)

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don’t deal in lies,
Or being hated, don’t give way to hating,
And yet don’t look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream—and not make dreams your master;
If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you’ve spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build ’em up with worn-out tools:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: ‘Hold on!’

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds’ worth of distance run,

Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!

Hold Fast Your Dreams by Louise Driscoll

Hold fast your dreams!
Within your heart
Keep one still, secret spot
Where dreams may go,
And, sheltered so,
May thrive and grow
Where doubt and fear are not.
O keep a place apart,
Within your heart,
For little dreams to go!

Think still of lovely things that are not true.
Let wish and magic work at will in you.
Be sometimes blind to sorrow. Make believe!
Forget the calm that lies
In disillusioned eyes.
Though we all know that we must die,
Yes you and I
May walk like gods and be
Even now at home in immortality.

We see so many ugly things—
Deceits and wrongs and quarrelings;
We know, alas we know
How quickly fade
The color in the west,
The bloom upon the flower,
The bloom upon the breast
And youth's blind hour.
Yet keep within your heart
A place apart
Where little dreams may go,
May thrive and grow.
Hold fast—hold fast your dreams!

The Common Road by Silas H. Perkins

I want to travel the common road
With the great crowd surging by,
Where there's many a laugh and many a load,
And many a smile and sigh.

I want to be on the common way

With its endless tramping feet,
In the summer bright and winter gray,
In the noonday sun and heat.

In the cool of evening with shadows nigh,
At dawn, when the sun breaks clear,
I want the great crowd passing by,
To ken what they see and hear.

I want to be one of the common herd,
Not live in a sheltered way,
Want to be thrilled, want to be stirred
By the great crowd day by day;
To glimpse the restful valleys deep,
To toil up the rugged hill,
To see the brooks which shyly creep,
To have the torrents thrill.

I want to laugh with the common man
Wherever he chance to be,
I want to aid him when I can
Whenever there's need of me.

I want to lend a helping hand
Over the rough and steep
To a child too young to understand-
To comfort those who weep.
I want to live and work and plan
With the great crowd surging by,
To mingle with the common man,
No better or worse than I.

I Hear America Singing by Walt Whitman

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe
and strong,
The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,
The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off
work,
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the
deckhand singing on the steamboat deck,
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing
as he stands,
The wood-cutter's song, the ploughboy's on his way in the
morning, or at noon intermission or at sundown,
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at
work, or of the girl sewing or washing,
Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,
The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of young
fellows, robust, friendly,
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.