

Encore: Songs for a Silver Jubilee

CANTABILE welcomes you to the opening concert of the group's 25th performing year. With the theme "Encore: Songs for a Silver Jubilee," founding Artistic Director Rebecca Scott has included a variety of favorite pieces from past concerts, including several pieces commissioned and premiered by Cantabile. Other selections feature our guest artists for this gala holiday concert: the Menagerie Brass Quartet, Diane Michaels, harp; Jim Hinman, percussion, our regular collaborators Lynne Stallworth and Dennis Dell, and the Cantabile Youth Singers & Players.

We welcome "alumni" and "alumnae" of Cantabile, especially Cantor Anna West Ott, who will conduct a portion of the Sacred Service composed by Ernst Bloch. We also welcome many old and new friends in the audience. With your support, we will continue to commission new works and explore the living tradition of choral music. Please plan to join us for our April 20, 2013 concert, featuring a new Jubilee commission by Eric Ewazen.

* * *

We begin with Pachelbel's *Nun danket alle Gott*, written for two choirs and instrumental continuo. A brass quartet provides the second choir, lending a special festive touch. Johann Pachelbel's works for organ and instruments, especially chorale preludes based on church hymns, were immensely popular in his lifetime. Lively themes in dance-like rhythms alternate and echo between the two opposed antiphonal choirs. Midway into the work, the sopranos enter in long soaring phrases of the beloved hymn of thanksgiving known in English as "Now thank we all our God." In Catherine Winkworth's effective translation:

Now thank we all our God / with heart and hands and voices,
who wondrous things hath done / in whom his world rejoices;
who from our mother's arms / hath blessed us on our way
with countless gifts of love, / and still is ours today.

Giovanni Gabrieli (1557-1612) composed *In Ecclesiis* for the magnificent San Marco Basilica in Venice. Cantabile choristers

who sang in that basilica during the chorale's Italian tour in 2001 can easily imagine the magnificence of the first performance 400 years ago. Four solo voices present the benediction, echoed by the choir's "Alleluia":

In the congregation, bless the Lord,
in all the places of His dominion, bless the Lord, O my soul.
In God is my salvation and my glory.
My help and my hope is in God. We call on You, O Lord,
we worship You. Save and deliver us, give us life.
O God, our refuge in eternity. Alleluia.'

Cantor Anna West Ott will conduct the next selection. She writes:

Ernest Bloch (1880-1959) was born in Geneva and settled in the United States in 1916, becoming a citizen in 1924. He held several teaching appointments in the US, including the Cleveland Institute of Music and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. It was during the aftermath of the notorious anti-Semitic Dreyfus affair (1896) that he began to think seriously of himself as a Jew. The first germ of what would be called *Avodath Hakodesh* (The Sacred Service) came to him in 1911. It was not until 1929 in San Francisco that he was finally able to write this service, when his friend Reuben Rinder, the cantor of Temple Emanu-El, commissioned him to set the Union Prayer Book version of the Sabbath morning liturgy. A generous grant enabled him to spend the next four years in the Swiss Alps to finish the work and it received its premiere in 1934.

The section called **Silent Meditation** (*Yihyu l'ratzon imrei fi*) occurs at the end of the Amidah, the "standing prayer" that is the centerpiece of the service. It is a prayer that the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be integrated and consistently acceptable to God. Bloch's stunning musical setting of this text is reminiscent of a Renaissance motet, with the melody line and various countermelodies being taken up polyphonically by each voice part. The voices finally come together in homophony with the words *Adonai, tzuri v'goali* (Adonai, my rock and my redeemer), *Amen*.

Lakol z'man—For Everything a Season, by Cantor Gerald Cohen, was commissioned by Cantabile Chamber Chorale in 2004 in memory of Cantabile baritone Ronald Axelrad, 1952-1999. The

text is from Chapter 3 of the book of Ecclesiastes known in Hebrew as Kohelet. Setting the refrain in both Hebrew and English, the composer has chosen only certain of the pairs of opposing “times.” The melody of the refrain is based upon the traditional cantillation of the text as chanted in Hebrew. Cantor Cohen has achieved a succinct and integrated setting of the most familiar passages. He links opposing characters of the ‘times’ by employing a traditional chant, representing the eternal life force:

Lakol z'man, v'et l'kol chefets tachet hashamayim,

For everything a season, and a time for every purpose under the heavens.

A time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to break down and a time to build up;

A time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

A time to tear, a time to mend. a time to love, a time to hate, a time for war, a time for peace, a time, a time, a time, a time, for every purpose under the heavens.

Cohen's compositions range from chamber music, choral music, and opera to liturgical music. A CD of his compositions entitled *Generations* is on the Composers Recordings, Inc. label. *Sarah and Hagar*, a two-act opera based on the story from the book of Genesis, and *Seed*, a one-act opera about love and choices for a post-apocalyptic Adam and Eve, have been performed in concert form. A two-act opera *Steal a Pencil for Me*, based on a true concentration camp love story, will have its concert premiere in New York in April 2013. (Source: geraldcohen.com)

Pengyou,ting! is a short Christmas greeting arranged for chorus by Carolyn Jennings, Professor of Music and Associate Dean for the Fine Arts at St. Olaf College in Northfield, MN. The text is anonymous Chinese ca. 1935 set to an ancient pentatonic (5 note) melody.

Listen Friend! Good news: Jesus came to earth for you,
came from heav'n where he was Lord, came to save, to save

us all; Listen, friend, Good news, hear this great good news,
Jesus Christ came to earth for you, for me for you.

From the earliest years of the Cantabile “family” comes *Lullaby for Stars*, composed in 1989 by tenor William Whitehead to celebrate the arrival to his wife Betsy of son Edward. “A very special birth,” indeed, celebrated in one of the first concerts presented by Cantabile Chamber Chorale.

The women of Cantabile present next a classic of the *a cappella* literature, the third of Giuseppe Verdi’s Four Sacred Pieces, a litany of praise to the Virgin: *Laudi alla Vergine Maria*. The text comes from Canto (song) XXXIII of Dante’s *Paradiso*, Saint Bernard’s prayer just before the final beatific vision. Like all of the Divine Comedy, it consists of a chain of three-line groups interlinked by triple rhymes (*terza rima*) symbolizing the Trinity:

Vergine madre, figlia del tuo Figlio
Umile ed alta più che creatura
Termine fisso d’eterno consiglio.
Tu se’ colei che l’umana natura
Nobilitasti sì, che’l suo Fattore
Non disdegnò di farsi sua fattura.
Nel ventre tuo si raccese l’amore
Per lo cui calda nell’eterna pace
Così è germinato questo fiore.
Qui se’ a noi meridiana face
Di caritate e giuso, intra i mortali
Se’ di speranza fontana vivace.
Donna se’ tanto grande e tanto vali
Chequal vuol grazia ed a te non ricorre
Sua disianza vuol volar senz’ali.
La tua benignità non pur soccorre
A chi dimanda ma molte fiate
Liberamente dimandar precorre.
In te misericordia, in te pietate,
In te magnificenza, in te s’aduna
Quantunque in creatura è di bontate.

Ave, Ave.

(Virgin Mother, daughter of your Son, most humble and most high of creatures, fixed goal of eternal counsel; human, of nature so exalted that your Maker deigned to make its Making: in your womb was reborn the love which warms the flower of eternal peace. In Paradise you are the noonday sun of charity; on Earth, a living fountain of hope. Your aid precedes even the prayer; your merciful pity contains all the goodness of creation. Hail, Hail.)

Returning to the festive sound of brass, harp, and organ, we next present Lee Hoiby's *A Christmas Carol*, an skillful journey through diverse musical keys that still preserves the fresh simplicity of a traditional holiday song. Hoiby's choral music is widely performed, including his Christmas cantata *A Hymn of the Nativity*, the oratorio *Galileo Galilei*, and several works for chorus and orchestra on texts of Walt Whitman. Deemed by *Fanfare* magazine a worthy successor to American composer Samuel Barber, Hoiby, who died just last year, was known for his art songs and operas. His final opera, *Romeo and Juliet*, awaits its world premiere. (Source: schott-music.com)

Es ist ein Ros entsprungen (Lo, how a rose e'er blooming) was first published in the Speyer Hymnal of 1599. Our brass quartet plays the carol, then Cantabile's men sing a verse of Leavitt's arrangement. We follow with one of the "signature compositions" of contemporary Swedish composer Jan Sandström (*Det är en ros utsprungen*, Lo, how a rose e'er blooming) a setting of this carol for two choirs a cappella. An upper chorus sings the harmonization by Praetorius, as the larger choir spins out a bell-like wash of sound. The alternation of these two choirs is very much in the spirit of the Pachelbel chorale setting that opened tonight's concert.



In 2002, Rebecca Scott and Cantabile Chamber Chorale commissioned Bruce Lazarus to compose a set of Winter

Madrigals. The second madrigal is a chorale on “*Snowflakes*,” a poem by Linda Copp celebrating the beauties of the season. Composer Bruce Lazarus studied composition at Juilliard and has been recognized with residencies at Yaddo and awards from Meet the Composer and the American Guild of Composers, among others. Cantabile audiences have enjoyed several choral cycles by Lazarus, many on astronomical themes.

Song for Snow, a 1932 *New Yorker* poem by Elizabeth Coatsworth, starts with riddles. Which is lighter: earth or air? Which is brighter: winter or spring? Prolific African-American composer Florence B. Price set this lyric with deft pictorial touches – the twinkling of powdery snowfall, sleigh runners gliding effortlessly. Cantabile first presented this rarely-heard work in 2003. Price was born in Arkansas and trained as composer at American Conservatory and Chicago Musical College. Frederick Stock, then conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, presented Price's Symphony in E Minor at the Chicago Century of Progress Exposition in 1933 – the first time a symphony written by a black woman was performed by a major American orchestra.

A Song of Thanksgiving was commissioned by the BBC from Ralph Vaughan Williams and recorded in November 1944 to celebrate the end of World War II, when it was clear that Hitler could not win. Although the work was originally titled “Song of Victory,” the later title reflected its true intent – thankfulness for the return of peace and the beginning of renewed stability in the world. Vaughan Williams chose texts from a variety of sources, such as the Old Testament, Shakespeare, Kipling and a volume of children’s poetry. Utilizing a high soprano soloist paired with “Gabriel’s” trumpet, and narrator, organ, chorus and orchestra, he gives expression to mankind’s hope for peace and love.

* * *