

PROGRAM NOTES

by Linda Russell

Mary walks amid the thorn

German traditional

In each verse of this sixteenth-century German carol appears the words *Kyrie eleison* (Lord have mercy) from the Mass. The text is a reverent description of Mary and baby Jesus; the melody embodies a folk-like character.

Maria walks amid the thorn,
Kyrie eleison.
Maria walks amid the thorn,
Which seven years no leaf has born.
Jesus and Maria.

What 'neath her heart doth Mary bear?
Kyrie eleison.
A little child doth Mary bear,
Beneath her heart He nestles there.
Jesus and Maria.

And as the two are passing near,
Kyrie eleison,
Lo! roses on the thorns appear,
Lo! roses on the thorns appear.
Jesus and Maria.

Mary had a Baby

Christmas Spiritual

The spiritual *Mary had a Baby* may have originated on St. Helena Island, off the coast of South Carolina. Slave traders first brought people from Sierra Leone to this island in the 1500s to work in the rice fields. Exposed to Christian church music, the African-Americans combined Christian concepts and texts with their traditional African music. The song uses a “call and response” format where one person makes a statement and the other voices answer.

Mary had a baby, my, Lord.
What did she call him? my, Lord.
She called him King Jesus, my, Lord.

Personent hodie voces puerulae (from *Piae Cantiones*, 1582) arr. Hoggard/Russell

Both the tune and text for our processional are found in *Piae Cantiones*, a collection of anonymous Latin school and religious songs compiled by a Finnish student in 1582. The songs spread to Sweden, where they were still sung in schools in the 1700s. They remained popular in Finland through much of the nineteenth century.

Personent hodie voces puerulae,
laudantes iucunde qui nobis est natus,
summo Deo datus, et de virgineo ventre procreatus.

In mundo nascitur, pannis involvitur
praesepi ponitur stabulo brutorum,
Rector supernorum,
perdidit spolia princeps infernorum.

Magi tres venerunt, munera offerunt,
parvulum inquirunt, stellulam sequendo,
ipsum adorando,
aurum, thus, et myrrham ei offerendo.

Omnes clericuli, pariter pueri,
cantent ut angeli: advenisti mundo,
laudes tibi fundo. ideo gloria in excelsis Deo.

Let youthful voices resound today praising joyously
Him who is born to us,
given of God on high and born of the Virgin's womb.

He is born on earth, is wrapped in cloths,
is placed in a manger, in the animals' stable.
Ruler of heaven,
prince of hell, he has done away with sin.

Wise men three have come; they offer gifts,
they seek a babe by following a star,
to worship him,
to offer him gold, frankincense and myrrh.

Let all priests and young men alike
sing as did the angels: You have come to earth.
Glory to God in the highest

Serenity (O Magnum Mysterium)

Ola Gjeilo (b. 1978)

Norwegian composer Ola Gjeilo moved to the United States in 2001 to begin composition studies at Juilliard. He especially enjoys composing for choir, orchestra/symphonic winds, and the piano. His setting of the ancient Christmas responsory *O Magnum Mysterium* is richly harmonic with obbligato horn. Gjeilo describes the piece as a “passionate peacefulness—a peacefulness that is not passive, but filled with warmth, faith, passion and gentle intent.”

O magnum mysterium,
et admirabile sacramentum,
ut animalia viderent Dominum natum,
jacentem in praesepe!
Beata Virgo, cujus viscera
meruerunt portare
Dominum Christum.
Alleluia.

O great mystery,
and wonderful sacrament,
that animals should see the new-born Lord,
lying in a manger!
Blessed is the Virgin whose womb
was worthy to bear
Christ the Lord.
Alleluia!

Vidimus Stellam, Op. 38

Kevin Siegfried (b. 1969)

Kevin Siegfried received his DMA in Composition from the New England Conservatory and is currently on the faculty of the Boston Conservatory. His music is described as “timeless, ravishing, and refined, and is known for its direct expression, lyricism, and accessibility.” Commissioned by ChoralArt for our 25th anniversary celebration of Christmas at the Cathedral five years ago, *Vidimus Stellam* tells the Christmas story through the images of the stars, and the light and darkness that surrounds them. Last year the Capitol Hill Chorale (Washington, DC) commissioned the composer for a fifth movement (on the text *Surge, illuminare*). We are pleased on the occasion of our 30th Christmas at the Cathedral to present the Maine premiere of the five-movement work.

- I. O Oriens
O Oriens, splendor lucis aeternae, et sol justitiae: veni, et illumina sedentes in tenebris.

O Rising Star, splendor of light eternal, and sun of righteousness: come and enlighten those who dwell in darkness.
- II. Rorate caeli
Rorate caeli desuper, et nubes pluant justum. Aperiatur terra, et germinet Salvatorem.

Drop down heavens from above, and let the clouds pour down righteousness. Let the earth be opened, and send forth a Savior.
- III. Hodie Christus natus est
Hodie Christus natus est; hodie Salvator apparuit; hodie in terra canunt Angeli, laetantur Archangeli; hodie exsultant justi, dicentes: Gloria in excelsis Deo, alleluia.

Today Christ is born, today the Savior has appeared, today the Angels sing on earth, the Archangels rejoice: today the righteous rejoice, saying: Glory to God in the highest. Alleluia!
- IV. Surge, Illuminare
Surge, illuminare, Jerusalem:
quia Gloria Domini super te orta est.

Rise, shine Jerusalem:
for the glory of the Lord is risen upon you.

- V. Vidimus stellam
Vidimus stellam ejus in Oriente, et venimus cum muneribus adorare Dominum.
Venit lumen tuum, Jerusalem, et gloria Domini super te orta est; et ambulabunt Gentes in lumine tuo.

We have seen his star in the East, and have come with gifts to adore the Lord.
Thy light is come, O Jerusalem, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee, and the nations shall walk in thy light.

Sing! Charles-Marie Widor (1844-1937)/arr. Sir David Willcocks

Charles-Marie Widor was one of the most talented late Romantic French organist-composers. A gifted child, he matriculated at the Brussels Conservatory. He was the organist at Saint-Sulpice in Paris for nearly 64 years.

The notion of adding choral parts to the famous “Toccatà” from *Symphony No. 5* is not a new one. With Widor’s approval his organ student Arthur Becker sketched out a version, which was completed by his pupil William Ferris in 1990. The version on today’s program is by David Willcocks “for Jane Watts, who triumphed against 4,000 voices at the first performance of this arrangement at the Royal Albert Hall, London on July 11, 1999.”

Sing we to the Lord a new song.
Sing all the earth.
Sing we, bless his name.
Sing let all rejoice.
Let us all our voices raise and sing to God a joyous hymn of praise.

Festival First Nowell English Carol/arr. Dan Forrest (b. 1978)

American composer and pianist Dan Forrest received his DMA in composition from the University of Kansas. His compositions include choral, instrumental, orchestral, and band works. The *Salt Lake Tribune* has praised his “superb writing...full of spine-tingling moments.” The Westminster Choir College commissioned *Festival First Nowell* for their 2013 Readings and Carols service in Princeton Chapel. It is based on the familiar 17th century English carol, *The First Nowell*.

Hark! the herald-angels sing Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

The words to this familiar Christmas carol, written by Charles Wesley (1707-1788), appeared in *Hymns and Sacred Poems* in 1739. The original opening line, “Hark! how all the welkin rings,” became the current familiar wording. Felix Mendelssohn composed the tune as part of *Festgesang* (1840), a cantata honoring Johann Gutenberg and commemorating the invention of the printing press. William Cummings put text and tune together.

The Rain is Over and Gone

Paul Halley (b. 1952)

English composer and organist Paul Halley was organist and choirmaster at The Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York City; during that time (1977-89) he also performed with The Paul Winter Consort. After leaving New York, he lived in Connecticut where he founded Chorus Angelicus, a children's choir, and Gaudeamus, an adult ensemble. In 2007, Halley relocated to Halifax, Nova Scotia, serving as director of music at the University of King's College and St. George's Anglican Church, university musician at Atlantic School of Theology, and organist and director of music at The Cathedral Church of All Saints, Halifax. Halley made additions to the Biblical text from the Song of Solomon for a gospel-inspired setting.

The rain is over and gone,
And the winter is passing by,
The time for singing has come
And the clouds have parted from the sky.

Arise, my love, and come away.
For lo! the winter is past.
The rain is over and gone,
Over and gone, my love,
Come away, my fair one, come away.

We will rise and go to the city
The city without any walls,
Where we can live in freedom,
To the new Jerusalem we're called.

Arise, my love, my fair one,
For lo! the winter is gone,
The flowers appear on the earth again,
And the time for singing has come.

Sing of life and love and laughter,
Sing of freedom to live in peace
And there shall be no more crying
Only joy that will never cease.

We Wish You a Merry Christmas (English traditional)

arr. Arthur Warrell

We Wish You a Merry Christmas is a sixteenth-century carol from the West Country of England. Groups of traveling carolers entertained for pay or food, perhaps singing this song.

Silent Night

Franz Gruber (1787–1863)

In 1818 the Austrian organist Franz Gruber composed his one published work, the music for the poem *Stille Nacht* by the local curate, Josef Mohr. Gruber and Mohr first performed the carol with guitar accompaniment for the Christmas Eve mass. In 2011 UNESCO declared *Silent Night* an intangible cultural heritage. Gruber produced many other musical works; his hymns and masses are still sung by Austrian choirs and many are available in booklet form.

Linda Russell, a member of Maine Music Teachers Association and an independent piano teacher, lives in Portland with her longtime spouse.