

ChoralART

ROBERT RUSSELL | MUSIC DIRECTOR

O Radiant Dawn: A ChoralArt New Year



Online at choralart.org

O Radiant Dawn: A ChoralArt New Year January 2021

Robert Russell, music director
ChoralArt Camerata
J. Barrie Shepherd, reader
Matt Emkey, organist

Carillon de Westminster, Opus 54, No. 6 Louis Vierne

The Oxen Thomas Hardy

O Radiant Dawn James MacMillan

Aleih Neiri Chaim Parchi/arr. Joshua Jacobson
Sarah Bailey, soprano

Just a Wee Lassie J. Barrie Shepherd/Robert Russell
Molly Harmon, soprano

Balulalow Loreena McKennitt
Andrea Graichen, mezzo-soprano – Rose Underkofler-Foulke, violin

Greensleeves 16th c. English folk tune
Rose Underkofler-Foulke, violin

I Wonder as I Wander John Jacob Niles
Darrell Leighton, tenor – Rose Underkofler-Foulke, violin

To Sing Again J. Barrie Shepherd/Robert Russell

The people respond: Amen Dan Locklair
(from *Rubrics: a liturgical suite for organ*)

Essence of the Season J. Barrie Sheperd

Sure on this Shining Night Morten Lauridsen
Kathleen Scott, pianist

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ChoralART *camera*

SOPRANOS

Sarah Bailey
Molly Harmon
Heidi Seitz
Rose Underkofler-Foulke

MEZZO-SOPRANOS

Andrea Graichen
Ginny Pomeroy
Barbara Sutcliffe

TENORS

Stuart Bailey
Darrrell Leighton
Patrick Martin

BASSES

James Bucknam
Matt LaBerge
Trevor Lavenbein
Robert Stoddard

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PROGRAM NOTES

by Linda Russell

Carillon de Westminster, Opus 54, No. 6 Louis Vierne (1870-1937)

French organist and composer, Louis Vierne was organist at Notre-Dame de Paris from 1900 until his death. Born nearly blind, Vierne displayed an unusual gift for music at an early age. While at Notre-Dame, he concentrated on compositions for organ. In the course of his final organ recital, he suddenly pitched forward, fell off the bench, and died on the spot. For his *Carillon de Westminster*, one of the 24 *Pièces de Fantaisie* (1927), Vierne set the familiar Westminster Palace clock-chime melody, beginning simply and gradually enriching the texture to a rapturous ending.

The Oxen

Thomas Hardy (1840-1928)

Christmas Eve, and twelve of the clock.

“Now they are all on their knees,”

An elder said as we sat in a flock

By the embers in hearthside ease.

We pictured the meek mild creatures where

They dwelt in their strawy pen,

Nor did it occur to one of us there

To doubt they were kneeling then.

So fair a fancy few would weave

In these years! Yet, I feel,

If someone said on Christmas Eve,

“Come; see the oxen kneel,

“In the lonely barton by yonder coomb

Our childhood used to know,”

I should go with him in the gloom,

Hoping it might be so.

O Radiant Dawn (from *Strathclyde Motets*)

James MacMillan (b. 1959)

The music of Scottish conductor and composer Sir James MacMillan, knighted by the Queen in 2015, is inspired by his Roman Catholic faith and the traditional music of Scotland. *The Strathclyde Motets* (2007-2010) are communion settings composed for the Chamber Choir of Strathclyde University. *O Radiant Dawn* is one of the “Great O” antiphons, commemorating the seven days that herald the approach of Christmas. Spare harmonies foretell the coming dawn and the imminent birth..

O Radiant Dawn, Splendour of eternal Light, Sun of Justice:
come, shine on those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.

Isaiah had prophesied, "The people who walked in darkness have seen the great light;
upon those who dwelt in the land of gloom a light has shone." Amen.

Aleih Neiri

Chaim Parchi (b.1947)/arr. Joshua Jacobson

Born in Yemen, Chaim Parchi is a composer, artist, educator and performer who moved to Boston in 1979. He became the Music Director of the Solomon Schechter Day School and began performing and recording Israeli and ethnic Jewish music. He moved to Boca Raton, Florida in 1995 where he continued teaching music and developing his painting techniques. Both his music and art reflect a deep passion for Judaism and his love of Israel. *Aleih Neiri* is an evocative Israel Hanukkah song.

Rise up, my light, rise up and shine;
My candles, glow with light divine.
See my menorah shining in the night,
For all the children basking in its light.

Rise up, my light, rise up and shine;
My candles, glow with light divine.
On Chanukah we celebrate and sing;
Our prayers rise, our melodies take wing.

Rise up, my light, rise up and shine;
My candles, glow with light divine.
Candles burn, come tell us the tale
Of God's great wonders in Erets Yisrael.

Rise up, my light, rise up and shine;
My candles, glow with light divine.
Come hear the story of Judah Maccabee,
The mighty hero who set our people free.

Just A Wee Lassie

Barrie Shepherd/Robert Russell

She was just a wee lassie, she was, she was,
when the Holiness came to her womb.
She was just a wee lassie, a timid wee birdie,
not even away from her home.
And she wondered how,
and she wondered why
she wondered near and far.
Just a wee lassie, our Mary was,
with a grace that was all her own.

She was just a new mother, our Mary was,
with an infant snug at her breast,
in a cave surrounded by shepherds and kings
and angels and friendly beasts.

And she wondered how,
and she wondered why,
she wondered wide and deep.
Just a new mother, she was, she was,
with a universe round her feet.

A poor weeping woman, sad Mary was,
with her son nailed high on a cross.
Just a poor weeping woman, she was, she was,
all broken and crushed by her loss.
And she wondered how,
and she wondered why,
she wondered high and low.
A poor weeping woman, our Mary was,
bearing her grief and her woe.

High Queen of the Angels, now Mary is,
a blue robe, and gold crown on her head.
High Queen of the Angels, she is, she is,
with her Son raised high from the dead.
And she wondered how,
and she wondered why,
she wondered God's glory and grace.
High Queen of the Angels, now Mary is.
Let all of creation sing praise.

Balulalow

Loreena McKennitt (b.1957)

Loreena McKennitt is a Canadian singer, composer, harpist, accordionist and pianist who writes, records and performs world music with Celtic and Middle Eastern themes. *Balulalow* is a traditional Old Scottish tune and text first published in 1567 under the title *Ane Sang of the Birth of Christ* (I come from Heaven to tell). It is a rhymed paraphrase of Luther's Christmas Eve carol *Vom Himmel hoch da komm ich her*. McKennitt's arrangement is simple, sparse, and sublimely beautiful.

I come to hevin which to tell
The best nowells that e'er befell
To you thir tythings trew (their tidings true) I bring
And I will of them say and sing.

This day to you is born ane child
Of Marie meik and Virgin mild
That bliss it bairn bening (blessed babe, benign) and kind
Sall (shall) you rejoyce baith (both) hart and mind.

Lat us rejoyis and be blyth (blithe)
And with the Hyrdis (herdsmen) go full swyth (swift)
And see what God of his grace he's done

Throu Christ to bring us to his throne.
My saull (soul) and life stand up and see
Wha lyis in ane cribbe of tree.
What Babe is that, sa gude and fair
It is Christ, God's son and Air.

O my deir hard, yung Jesus sweit (sweet)
Prepair thy creddil (cradle) in my spreit! (spirit)
And I sall rock thee in my hart
And never mair fra (nevermore from) thee depart.

Bot I sall praise thee evermoir
With sangis sweit songs sweet) unto thy gloir (glory)
The kneis (knees) of my hard (heart) sall I bow
And sing that rycht Balulalow. (right lullaby)

Greensleeves

16th c. English folk tune

The text *Greensleeves* first appeared in the 16th century: Shakespeare mentions it twice in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*; the tune was published widely in the 17th century in song and lute collections. Christmas and New Year texts became associated with the tune as early as 1686; the popular *What Child is This* was written in 1865 by William Chatterton Dix.

I wonder as I wander (Appalachian Carol)

John Jacob Niles (1892-1980)

The Christmas folk hymn, *I Wonder as I Wander*, was composed by American folklorist and singer John Jacob Niles from a song fragment he collected in 1933. Called the "Dean of American Balladeers," Niles was a signal influence on the American folk music revival of the 1950s and 1960s.

I wonder as I wander out under the sky
How Jesus the Saviour did come for to die
For poor on'ry people like you and like I;
I wonder as I wander out under the sky.

When Mary birthed Jesus 'twas in a cow's stall
With wise men and farmers and shepherds and all
But high from God's heaven, a star's light did fall
And the promise of ages it then did recall.

If Jesus had wanted for any wee thing
A star in the sky or a bird on the wing
Or all of God's Angels in heaven to sing
He surely could have it, 'cause he was the King.

To Sing Again

J. Barrie Sheperd/Robert Russell

From the poet J. Barrie Shepherd: Bob Russell is a challenger. He also plans ahead. Way back before the COVID-shadowed days of February and March he “invited” me to write the text for a new piece to be performed at the 2021 ChoralArt Epiphany Concert. Bob himself was to compose the music. Then came the virus, and with it the devastating news that music making, and choral singing in particular with its multitude of droplets, is an especially dangerous activity. A few weeks of stunned silence followed. Then Bob sent me a message: ‘We’re going to be singing again someday, and when we do we’ll need a song to celebrate.’ What you are about to hear is the result.

From the composer Robert Russell: Barrie Shepherd is a challenger. Two years ago he challenged me to make a musical setting of one of his poems. I demurred, ‘I really don’t consider myself to be a composer. I would rather prepare the compositions of others than to make my own. At any rate I never had time while teaching at USM.’ He shot right back, ‘Aren’t you currently retired?’ I accepted his challenge and am glad that I did. From the mouths of other composers, ‘The composition seems to work on me as much as I work on it.’ That made no sense to me until I started composing. The journey of composing choral music has been deeply rewarding.

There is glad welcome in our song,
a fond and sweet embracing
after a drought of simple touch,
long months of separating.
This harmony we know again
where we once more discover
just where it is that we belong.
There is glad welcome in our song.

There is a weeping in our song,
a legacy of sorrow,
of voices stilled, loved faces lost
who will not share tomorrow.
Yet hope still rises with the sun,
deep thankfulness for living.
This love we share is never done.
There is a weeping in our song.

There is communion in our song,
a bond beyond the voices,
uniting all who sing and hear
in delight that rejoices,
where self dissolves, becomes a part
of something richer, holier,
embraced within the arms of art.
There is communion in our song.

It's about the giving, really.
 So that all those holy folk who moan
 about the marketing and such can tend to miss
 the deep, abiding truth that, for a month,
 at least, and once in every year,
 all sorts of people seek to find new,
 and surprising ways to make other people smile,
 ways to say, in varying degrees of warmth,
 "I love you," or at least, "I care,"
 ways to call a temporary truce
 to mine or yours, to grab-and-gain, and set aside
 a time and place for simple gratitude instead.
 Given the way we spend the remainder of our days,
 and months, one might even be excused
 for calling this – an honest-to-God – miracle.

Sure on this Shining Night

Morten Lauridsen (b. 1943)

Morten Lauridsen enjoyed a long tenure in the composition department at the University of Southern California School of Music. Formerly a composer-in-residence for the Los Angeles Master Chorale, he is one of America's most-performed modern choral composers. In 2007 in a ceremony at the White House, he received from the President the National Medal of Arts "for his composition of radiant choral works combining musical beauty, power and spiritual depth that have thrilled audiences worldwide." For his *Nocturnes* (2005) Lauridsen set three twentieth-century texts about night and romantic love: *Sa Nuit d'Ète* by Rilke, *Soneto de la Noche* by Neruda, and *Sure on This Shining Night* by James Agee. In *Sure on This Shining Night* "the luminous sonorities of the piano surround the intertwining voices with a halo of mellow resonance." (Adams)

Sure on this shining night
 Of star-made shadows round
 Kindness must watch for me
 This side the ground.

The late year lies down the north,
 All is healed, all is health.
 High summer holds the earth,
 Hearts all whole.

Sure on this shining night
 I weep for wonder
 Wandr'ing far alone
 Of shadows on the stars.

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



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