To Sing Again                                       J. Barrie Shepherd, poet – Robert Russell, composer

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 richly 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.

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

Both 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 19th century.

Personent hodie voces puerulae,

 *Let youthful voices resound today praising joyously*

laudantes iucunde qui nobis est natus,
 *Him who is born to us,*

summo Deo datus, et de virgineo ventre procreatus.
 *given of God on high and born of the Virgin’s womb.*

In mundo nascitur, pannis involvitur
 *He is born on earth, is wrapped in cloths,*

praesepi ponitur stabulo brutorum,
 *is placed in a manger, in the animals’ stable.*

Rector supernorum,

 *Ruler of heaven,*

perdidit spolia princeps infernorum.

 *prince of hell, he has done away with sin.*

Magi tres venerunt, munera offerunt,
 *Wise men three have come; they offer gifts,*

parvulum inquirunt, stellulam sequendo,
 *they seek a babe by following a star,*

ipsum adorando,

 *to worship him,*

aurum, thus, et myrrham ei offerendo.

 *to offer him gold, frankincense and myrrh.*

Omnes clericuli, pariter pueri,
 *Let all priests and young men alike*

cantent ut angeli: advenisti mundo,
 *sing as did the angels: You have come to earth.*

laudes tibi fundo. ideo gloria in excelsis Deo.

 *Glory to God in the highest.*

Let the River Run Carly Simon (b. 1945)/arr. Craig Hella Johnson

Carly Simon, award-winning American singer-songwriter and children’s author, rose to fame in the 1970s. The 1988 film *Working Girl* featured the song, *Let the River Run,* which won the Academy Award for Best Original Song. Simon stated that she found inspiration for the lyrics by reading the film script, and the poems of Walt Whitman. Craig Hella Johnson, conductor of the Grammy-winning ensemble, Conspirare, created this vibrant arrangement for chorus with a “dancing keyboard and percussion accompaniment.”

Let the river run,
Let all the dreamers
Wake the nation.
Come, the New Jerusalem.

Silver cities rise,
The morning lights
The streets that meet them,
And sirens call them on
With a song.

It's asking for the taking.
Trembling, shaking.
Oh, my heart is aching.

We're coming to the edge,
Running on the water,
Coming through the fog,
Your sons and daughters.

Let the river run,
Let all the dreamers
Wake the nation.
Come, the New Jerusalem.

Silver cities rise,
The morning lights
The streets that meet them,
And sirens call them on
With a song.

Pavel Chesnokov (1877-1944)

* Nye imami iniya pomoshchi  (For us there is no other help but Thee)
* Spaséñiye, sodélal (Salvation is created)

Chesnokov, an Imperial Russian and Soviet composer, choral conductor, and teacher, composed over 500 choral works, mostly sacred. After studying at the Moscow Conservatory, Chesnokov became a faculty member, founding a choral conducting program which he directed from 1920 until his death. His composition of sacred music came to a standstill at age 40 after the Russian revolution, when Communists forbade sacred art. It was then that he composed another hundred secular works. Chesnokov died of a heart attack caused by malnutrition while waiting in a Moscow bread line.

Chesnokov composed these hymns in 1912 and included them in his *Ten Communion Hymns (Op. 25)*. For us there is no other help but Thee is intended to be sung for the feast day commemorating an icon of the Virgin entitled “The joy of all who sorrow.” For us there is no other help but Thee an independent composition, not based on any pre-existing chant. Salvation is created was one of his last sacred works before the Soviet government began their suppression of Christian religious practices. Chesnokovbased the hymn on a Russian Orthodox chant melody with text from Psalm 74.

**For us there is no other help but Thee**

For us there is no other help but Thee,

for us there is no other assurance,

save but in Thee.

O Thou Holy Virgin.

Send us now Thine aid,

for in Thee we place our hope

and we praise Thee evermore,

O send us Thine aid,

for in Thee we place our hope,

and we praise Thee evermore.

For Thine are we all,

For we are Thy servants here,

save us from dishonor.

**Salvation is created**

Salvation is created,

in midst of the earth,

O God, O our God.

Alleluia.

Let My Love Be Heard                                                                                  Jake Runestad (b. 1986)

American composer, conductor, and singer Jake Runestad composes for a wide variety of musical genres and ensembles. He graduated from the Peabody Conservatory in 2011. “Steeped in a belief that music has the power to initiate positive change, Jake creates musical works that are socially conscious and explore authentic human emotions and experiences. Conductors, performers, and audiences continue to praise his music for its ability to connect with the head and the heart.” (JakeRunestad.com)

Premiered by Choral Arts Northwest in 2014, *Let My Love Be Heard* took on a new life after the 2015 terrorists attacks in Paris and Beirut. Nohemi Gonzalez, a California State Long Beach student was killed—the only American among the 130 killed in Paris. The day after a campus vigil, the choir at Long Beach was supposed to begin rehearsing holiday music. Runestad continues,

However, their conductor, Johnathan Talberg felt that was not appropriate and wanted time for the singers to grieve this loss. So, at the beginning of rehearsal, he passed out a brand-new piece of music (*Let My Love Be Heard*), rehearsed it, and then recorded it. It was posted on SoundCloud and shared in memory of Nohemi and as a plea for peace. Their musical offering is a powerful outpouring of grief but also a glimmer of light. I am honored that this piece*, Let My Love Be Heard*, has helped to provide hope in the darkness of our world.

Runestad composed an ethereal piece which lifts melody, harmony, and text to the angels. His music paints a portrait of pain, grief, and love – all lifted heavenward. ChoralArt offers this performance in memory of friends and loved ones taken during the pandemic.

A Prayer by Alfred Noyes
Angels, where you soar
Up to God’s own light,
Take my own lost bird
On your hearts tonight;
And as grief once more
Mounts to heaven and sings,
Let my love be heard
Whispering in your wings.

Verleih uns Frieden gnädiglich                                                    Felix Mendelssohn (1809-47)

Felix Mendelssohn, grandson of the Jewish philosopher Moses Mendelssohn and son of an art-loving banker, grew up in a wealthy and intellectual environment. His success in a number of roles—pianist, conductor, educator, entrepreneur—brought him an adoring public, but also propelled a career that taxed his energies and contributed to an early death. The text for this hymn is a translation by Martin Luther of the Latin *Da Pacem Domine*. Mendelssohn set only one verse of the original hymn, utilizing different combinations of voices in a lyrical, contemplative reflection of the meditative text.

Verleih' uns Frieden gnädiglich,

Herr Gott, zu unser'n Zeiten,

Es ist doch ja kein Ander' nicht,

Der für uns könnte streiten,

Denn du, unser Gott alleine.

Mercifully grant us peace,

Lord God, during our life on earth;

There is indeed no other,

Who could fight for us

Thank you, our God, alone.

For unto us a Child is Born                                            George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

George Frideric Handel’s oratorio *Messiah* premiered in 1741 and has become a musical landmark in the English-speaking world. Travis M. Ramsey, a 2003 graduate of the University of Southern Maine School of Music, created this brass quintet arrangement of *For unto us a Child is Born* on commission from ChoralArt.

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given.

And the government shall be upon His shoulder.

And his name shall be called Wonderful Counsellor,

The Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.  *Isaiah 9:6*

Wana Baraka (Kenyan) arr. Shawn L. Kirchner (b. 1970)

Shawn Kirchner, composer, arranger, singer, pianist, and conductor, has a special interest in American and international folk music, and performs widely with his folk group, Kindling. The joyously rhythmic *Wana Baraka*is a popular Kenyan religious song.

Wana baraka wale waombao;

Yesu mwenyewe alisema. Alleluya!

Wana amani.

Wana furaha.

Wana uzima.

They have blessings, those who pray;

Jesus himself said so. Alleluia!

They have peace.

They have joy

They have well-being.

Christmas Trilogy                                                                                       arr. Robert Russell

O Come, O Come, Immanuel

Lo, how a Rose e’er Blooming

O Come, all ye Faithful

For today’s performance Russell reworked an arrangement he created to celebrate the birth of his eldest son 35 years ago. The 19th century English writer John M. Neale created *O Come, O Come Emmanuel* by translating and adapting the 12th century Latin verses of the seven great “O Antiphons.” These ancient chants were sung in medieval monasteries during the week before Christmas.

Originally published in 1582, the 15th century hymn, *Lo, how a Rose*, is a paraphrase of Isaiah 11:1: “And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.”

*O Come, All Ye Faithful* is the English translation of the original Latin text *Adeste, fideles*. The carol was first published by John Francis Wade in his *Cantus Diversi* in 1751.

O come, O come, Emmanuel
O come, O come, Emmanuel,
And ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here,
Until the Son of God appear.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Dayspring, from on high,
And cheer us by Thy drawing nigh;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
And death's dark shadows put to flight.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, O come, Thou Lord of might,
Who to Thy tribes, on Sinai's height,
In ancient times didst give the law
In cloud and majesty and awe.
Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel
Shall come to thee, O Israel.

Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming
Lo, how a Rose e'er blooming
From tender stem hath sprung!
Of Jesse's lineage coming
As men of old have sung.
It came, a flower bright,
Amid the cold of winter
When half-gone was the night.

Isaiah 'twas foretold it,
The Rose I have in mind:
With Mary we behold it,
The virgin mother kind.
To show God's love aright
She bore to men a Savior
When half-gone was the night.

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant!
Adeste fideles læti triumphantes,
Venite, venite in Bethlehem.
Natum videte
Regem angelorum:
Venite adoremus
Dominum.

O come, all ye faithful, joyful and triumphant!
O come ye, O come ye to Bethlehem;
Come and behold him born the King of Angels:
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord.

God of God, light of light,
Lo, he abhors not the Virgin's womb;
True God, begotten, not created:
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord.

Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation,
Sing, all ye citizens of Heaven above!
Glory to God, glory in the highest:
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord.

Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning;
Jesus, to thee be glory given!
Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing!
O come, let us adore Him,
Christ the Lord.

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 from 1977 to 1989. During that time, he also played in The Paul Winter Consort. After leaving New York, he lived in Connecticut where he founded a children’s choir, Chorus Angelicus, and adult ensemble, Gaudeamus. In 1999 he became Director of Music at Trinity Episcopal Church in Torrington, CT. Halley relocated to Halifax, Nova Scotia in 2007 where he has been 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. In his composition *The Rain is Over and Gone,* Halley made additions to the biblical text from the Song of Solomon for a gospel-like 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 wouthout 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 arr. Arthur Warrell (1900-1970)

(English traditional)

*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)

On Christmas Eve, 1818 the Austrian organist Franz Gruber composed music for the poem *Stille Nacht* by the local curate, Josef Mohr. The church organ was out of commission due to recent flooding, so Gruber and Mohr first performed the carol with guitar accompaniment.

Although he is mostly known outside Austria as the composer of *Stille Nacht*, Franz Gruber produced many other musical works. His hymns and masses are still sung by Austrian choirs and many are available in booklet form. The Museum in der Widumspfiste in Fügen, Austria holds the world’s largest collection of *Silent Night* recordings; in Wagrain, Austria, Mohr’s last parish, one can visit the Silent Night Museum. In 2011 UNESCO declared *Stille Nacht* an “intangible cultural heritage.”

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