

Durufié and his sacred choral music, Requiem Op. 9

By Francesco Barbuto, choral conductor and composer

The *Requiem* (Mass for the dead) has been one of the most important parts of the Catholic liturgy since the 11th Century.

In the Requiem mass, some parts of the *Ordinarium* (Gloria and Credo) are taken out and other specific parts such as the *Introit* (Introduction), *Dies Irae* (Day of Wrath), *Lux Aeterna* (Eternal Light), *Libera me, Domine* (Deliver me, Lord) are added.

The word *Requiem* comes from the recitation of the first prayer in the *Introit*: “Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine” (Eternal rest grant unto them, Lord).

Throughout history, many composers have tried their hand at writing a *Requiem* based on, as a thematic source, the original Gregorian melodies; among these are Dufay, Ockeghem, La Rue, Vittoria, Mozart, Berlioz, Verdi, Liszt, Brahms, Britten, Ligheti. Durufié himself harks back “faithfully” to Gregorian chant in the VI mode, the *Hypolydian*, used by the Benedictine monks of Solesmes:

In the footsteps of the musical compositional style of Gabriel Fauré, who broke with the tradition of writing a *Requiem* with a sweeping “dramatic” character:

He composed his Requiem in D minor, Op. 48 between 1870 and 1890, and offers a comforting view of death, as if wanting to convey a journey towards to a place of peace and rest, rather than to somewhere horrifying. Responding to critics, Fauré replied: “It has been said that my Requiem has failed to convey a sense of the terror of death... but this is how I

imagine it: more a surrender filled with peace and a wish for happiness in the afterlife”.

Duruflé too, in true homage to the great Master, follows this aesthetic, which will formalise a new, typically French, tradition. It is not coincidental that neither will set to music the *Dies Irae*, the movement usually considered to be the most ‘dramatic’ of the texts and passages of the Mass for the dead.



His *Requiem*, *Op. 9* (dedicated to the memory of his father), in three versions: for choir, organ and orchestra, choir and organ, choir and string quintet and organ (with the option of trumpets, harp and timpani), is by far the longest and most complex work he composed during his professional musical life. It appears that Duruflé was already working on a *suite* of pieces dedicated to the dead when he was asked to write an actual *Requiem* by his French editor, Durand.

Duruflé accepted, immediately implementing his already-formed idea of combining the ancient world, and its Gregorian melodies – perfectly in accord with the recommendations of Pius X's *Motu Proprio* of 1903 (as with his later *Quatre Motets sur des thèmes grégoriens pour chœur a cappella*, *Op. 10*) – with a modern harmonic setting and orchestration typical of the 20th century. His neomodal inflexions hark back particularly to the music of Debussy and Ravel. He in fact declared the orchestral work by Debussy *Prélude à l'Après-midi d'un faune* to be a masterwork he “adores”.

In a direct statement by the composer about his *Requiem*, he affirmed:

"My Requiem is entirely constructed on Gregorian themes from the Mass for the dead. At times the text is uppermost in importance, and therefore the orchestra is there to support or provide a commentary on the meaning of the words. At other times an original musical backdrop, inspired by the text, takes centre-stage."

Gregorian chant, modality, compositional style rich in counterpoint and modern harmonies, originality, power and aesthetic and expressive beauty allow performers the opportunity for very sensitive musical interpretation and rhythmic freedom, which results in a natural and extremely smooth flow in the text and the music.

As previously mentioned, Duruflé chooses to continue an aesthetic style initiated by Fauré, with an intimate and restricted orchestration. Even in the **forte** or **fortissimo** moments, there continues to be felt a quality in the music, both polyphonic and harmonic, of profound delicacy and refinement.

The *Requiem* is made up of nine movements, each with a tripartite structure: *Introit*, *Kyrie*, *Domine Jesu Christe*, *Sanctus*, *Pie Jesu*, *Agnus Dei*, *Lux Aeterna*, *Libera me* and *In Paradisum*.

Like Fauré, Duruflé has the *Domine Jesu Christe* and the *Libera me* sung by a baritone soloist and the *Pie Jesu* by a mezzo-soprano.

Although both composed their *Requiem* in D minor, in Duruflé's version the tonality ranges more widely, and is also more modal and modern.

The first version for choir, organ and orchestra was written in 1947 and it is said to be the version preferred by the composer. In 1948 he wrote the second version for choir and organ, with the intention of allowing this work to be used by

choirs in churches. In the same year he also wrote the third version for choir, strings, organ and optional parts for harp, trumpets and timpani.

Musical Analysis

(For illustrative purposes, we are confining our attention here to the version for choir and organ – Introit and Kyrie – believing it to be the most suitable for the member choirs of AERCO (Regional Association of Choirs) and provincial choral associations)

Introit

The structure of this movement is in the typical A-B-A ternary form.

The first chord is in D minor with the seventh (I7). This ensures that the harmony is ambiguous right from the beginning. We can definitely interpret this start within a “modal” framework. The accompaniment goes into an arabesque which in fact dissolves the tonic seventh, with neighbour notes and passing notes on B flat and G.

The image shows a musical score for the Introit. It includes staves for Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass voices, along with an Organ part. The tempo is marked 'Andante moderato (♩ = 102)'. The key signature is one flat (B-flat). The organ part features a complex arabesque pattern in the right hand, while the left hand plays a simpler harmonic accompaniment. The vocal parts enter with a Gregorian melody in the key of F (VI mode Hypolydian mode).

The tonal ambiguity we encounter right from the start is also due to the fact that entrance of the male voices faithfully echoes the Gregorian melody in the key of F (VI mode Hypolydian mode). For the listener this therefore creates a

melodic harmonic progression which alternates between D and F.

This progression is also found in the long finale of this movement which actually ends in F major and also faithfully follows the *Finalis* of Gregorian melody.

Bar 56 – end of movement:

The image shows a musical score for the end of a movement, specifically Bar 56. The score is written for a choir and piano. The choir parts are for Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The piano part is for the right and left hands. The score is in F major, indicated by one flat (Bb) in the key signature. The time signature is 4/4. The score is divided into two systems. The first system shows the choir and piano parts for the first half of the bar. The second system shows the choir and piano parts for the second half of the bar. The piano part features a complex harmonic structure with many accidentals and a final cadence in F major. The choir parts are simple, with the Soprano and Alto parts having a final note on F and the Tenor and Bass parts having a final note on D.

The complex harmonic structure moves through the Doric (D), Aeolian (A), Phrygian (E) and Mixolydian (G) modes, to end finally in the Hypolidian (F).

From the point of view of metre and rhythm, Duruflé faithfully recreates the smooth flow of the delivery of the text, freely alternating two-beat and three-beat bars, simple and compound time, irregular forms. From the point of view of performance therefore, it is important to pay attention to following the natural accents of the liturgical text, to continue expressing and recalling the style of delivery and Gregorian mood of this passage. Care should be taken, for example, right from bar 2, where the male voices come in on the second beat with the word *Requiem*. This start is not to be interpreted as a headlong attack. This way, one would fall into the trap of accenting the final syllable of the word *Requiem* (-èm) which would upset

all the melodic and prosodic phrasing. The correct emphasis in the word *Requiem* is in fact on the first syllable (Rè-)

The second section (from bar 24) begins in A minor and broadly in the Aeolian mode.

The cadence Vm-I confirms this at the end of the phrase, without using the leading tone G#.



Duruflé does not change the key modifications, perhaps leaving them there to remind us that the complex tonal structure is still in D (minor) and F (major). However whether it is in the writing or the listening, the recitative, this time in the hands of the sopranos, alternates systematically between the mother-chords of A and C, maintaining the original Gregorian melodic profile, but putting in a third over the top and moving from the Hypolydian (F) to the Aeolian (A).



Duruflé inserts a subtle new element with the triplets. Together with the metric variation, highly dynamic and interesting phrasing is created despite the fact that the melody is concentrated on the two notes of A and C, with the

only passing note B (natural).

At the end of this Section, the original theme returns, but Duruflé has a new way of presenting the reprise. It is a simple variation which enables the new element to be heard, but at the same time faithfully reprises the first part. He gives the organ the Gregorian theme (still accompanied by the arabesque and pedals as in the first Section) and has the text *Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine* sung by the male and female voices in unison on the repeated notes of C, D, C again and A. In this way the organ enters fully into dialogue with the choir, as if it was itself a second choir.

This is also an example of what Duruflé himself stated, namely that *"the orchestra (in our case the organ) is there to support or provide a commentary on the meaning of the words"*.

This involvement means that, on the one hand the listener is recalled to the text and the original Gregorian melody via the instrumentation, and on the other they can hear the choir (which continues the recitative just gone in the second Section), in perfect and consistent polyphonic and textural connection.

Kyrie

The structure of this movement is practically identical to the one before: A-B-A ternary form.

Duruflé joins the first movement directly to the second via the instruction *Enchaînez* (continue without pausing), emphasising the feeling of continuity between the two pieces. The second movement in fact starts immediately.

This time, rhythm and tonality remain fixed and definite from the beginning to the end: 3/4 and F major. The reason for this may be motivated by the fact that the intense and complex

polyphonic structure is given over exclusively to the internal development of the choir and organ which interacts directly and continually with the voices. Choir and Organ become as one.

Duruflé starts with the basses, recalling the original *Incipit* of the Gregorian melody in the word *Kyrie*, then goes on to develop his entire complex counterpoint.



Following the exposition of the subject by the altos and sopranos, a organ comes in as a fifth voice. It is once again the *Incipit* of the Gregorian melody (doubled at the octave) on the word *Kyrie*, this time used in the form of *Cantus firmus*.

This has the undeniable intention of reinforcing the original Gregorian melody.

Bars 10-16:



Here Duruflé finds a clever way to develop his polyphonic, contrapuntal creativity and at the same time remain faithfully anchored to his choice of original source.

The combination of harmonies which are created by the vigorous movement of the voices freely creates a number of 'dissonances', which are always however 'natural' and appropriate for the polyphonic texture used.

In the second Section, on the words *Christe eleison*, Duruflé chooses this time to compose of a new melody. His starting point is the melodic line of the word *eleison*, which he then develops creatively and openly.



As in the first movement, in this second Section we again shift into A minor (which recalls the Aeolian mode) with just the female voices in continuous imitation of each other.

The reprise dovetails in with the basses powerful **ff** on the word *Kyrie* in the last bar of the sopranos and altos singing the word *Christe*.

The final Section starts in imitation at the fourth (tenors), at the fifth (altos) and again at the fourth (sopranos) in a textural crescendo which leads to the 'climax' of the movement in bar 58, with the sopranos who end on the accented A flat.

In this part the F major harmonies are also occasionally

coloured by the inclusion of the E flat, which seems to suggest a movement towards B flat major, without ever modulating in any real sense to this key.

Composers also often employ the flattened seventh to avoid or reduce as far as possible the use of the leading tone which would give the listener a more traditional classical musical experience.

Once the climax has been reached, as in the first movement, there is a gradual loosening of the overall vocal and instrumental texture, which ends once again with a long tonic pedal – the choir ends up on a perfect chord of F major, meant to be understood once again (as in the first movement) as the *Finalis*, the final note of the original Gregorian melody – which is cleverly achieved with a melodic ascending movement of the bass, thus avoiding the functional formula of classical cadences, such as the V-I.

Even in the final two bars of the cadence V-I, Duruflé shies away from using the leading tone, thereby giving the notes he chooses to use a more modulatory than tonal quality.



Performance suggestions

Even though the entire Requiem has been written with dynamics ranging from **ppp** to **fff**, it is important to focus on producing a performance and an interpretation which are delicate and

refined above all else. The contrapuntal writing directs us towards a style of singing (with voices which are always well supported and fluid, without being too lyrical) and playing which are “flowing and smooth”.

Over-singing in the **forte** passages, and too much falsetto in the **piano** and **pianissimo** passages would certainly result in something too heavy, static and would fail to convey correctly or adequately the complex polyphonic and textural structure which Duruflé presents.

From the point of view of prosody, Duruflé himself, taking as his example Gregorian chant and the approach of the Benedictine monks of Solesmes, suggests that it is vital to sing in accordance with the natural accents of the text.

This approach will ensure a smooth text, enhance the phrasing and will also allow greater articulation of the expressive meaning of the spoken words.

The instrumental accompaniment is designed to help with this, often using arpeggios and arabesques which encourage singing in synchrony with the fluidity of these musical figures.

Regarding the voices, it is important to try and perform the individual parts of the section perfectly in unison, striving as much as possible for an integrated vocal timbre, avoiding individual timbres which differ too much between themselves which may lead to ‘beats’ (i.e. different oscillations in frequency on the same note) and will mean that the overall pitch of the choir suffers through lack of precision. This is even more vital in polyphonic and harmonic passages containing lots of dissonances.

We conclude this article dedicated to the Requiem, Op. 9 with an interesting testimony by Duruflé himself who writes a letter to Director George Guest, Welsh organist and choirmaster of St John’s College, who made many recordings in the 1970s, including of this work:

Paris, 3rd April 1978

Dear Sir,

The management at Decca Records has kindly given me your address. It is a great pleasure for me to send you my sincere thanks and congratulations on the excellent recording which you were kind enough to do of my Requiem.

I very much appreciate the quality of the performance, the interpretation and the sound itself.

If you have the opportunity to conduct my Requiem again the future, might I say that I would prefer it if the baritone solos are sung by all the basses and second tenors.

It is an error on my part to have given these few bars to a soloist.

Once again, with all my thanks etc etc.

Duruflé, 6 Place du Panthéon, 75005 Paris

Translated by Laura Massey, UK

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Teaching Vocal Sight Reading from Medieval Times through to the 20th Century: Crucial Points for Methodology

Lucio Ivaldi, choir director and instructor

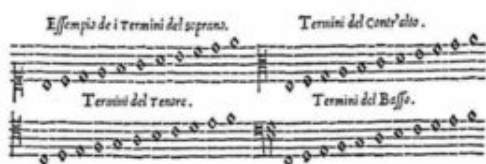
Many aspects related to ancient song have yet to be studied adequately. As Bruno Baudissone argues:

The recovery of ancient music and its practices began with instruments, whereas the subject of ancient singing was approached much later. Let us not forget that, during the time in which ancient music was contemporary, instruments served the voice; today, it is just the opposite: the voice follows instrumental practices, a fact that holds true even in the performance of ancient music. Through the years, an error has led to the absence of serious research on ancient vocal music: namely, it has been believed that, to get at ancient vocal art, it is enough to distance oneself from Romantic and Realist practice (Baudissone, *La vocalità antica*, in *Orfeo, mensile di musica antica e barocca*; Florence, 1996).

The teaching of music during the medieval era was shaped by the need to form good singers for the mass and daily offices. Around the turn of the first millennium, there were several thousand complex melodic pieces at the disposal of the *cantor*, with considerable regional variation. The orderly arrangement of music on the basis of *tonaria* responded to mnemonic aims more than a desire for classification, *per se*: the thematic, indexed element was always the formula of the beginning of the melody (tonaria arranged by *incipit*), rather than its modal outcome (tonaria arranged by *finalis*). The liturgical legacy

of the early middle ages included the daily practice of song as a form of prayer and as a contribution to religious services; it was in this context that the practices of *cantillatio* and of the recitation of psalmodic tones developed. Here, too, mnemonic aspects in the arrangement of material are evident: from cantillation based upon the principal *recitation tone* sprung the *incipit*, *mediatio* and *terminatio* formulae, by free association with similar formulae, following modes typical of oral tradition.

The numerous medieval treatises on vocal technique are of interest: In the 7th century, Isidoro di Siviglia defined the necessary qualities of liturgical song as “*clara, alta et suavis*” (clear, high and sweet), but in following centuries, other writers of treatises also added “*rotunda, virili, viva et succinta voce psallatur*” (rounded, manly, lively and intoned in a succinct voice). In the late Renaissance and Baroque eras modern vocal classifications (chest voice, head voice, etc.) appear in the writings of Maffei, Vicentino, Banchieri, Zacconi, Zarlino and other authors of treatises. It is important to keep in the mind the precise distinction between those of a polyphonic disposition (*cantus, quintus, altus, tenor, bassus*) and the characterisation of vocal typologies (soprano, contralto, tenor and bass), as in Vicentino’s *L’Antica musica ridotta alla moderna prattica* (Rome 1555).



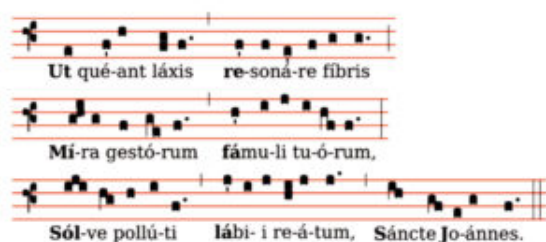
Vocal Typologies in Vicentino

Another salient aspect of vocal teaching in the 15th through to the 18th century is the constant, wide-spread use of the didactic *bicinium*, the practice of performance in duet, on the part of the apprentice singer and his teacher, of scholastic

counterpoint, and of exercises scaled according to levels of difficulty of performance. This was a sublime means of ear-training and of training in intonation, developed over time and in the modes of a vocal practice that required daily exercise and agility equal to the practice of a musical instrument, with artistic outcomes of great efficacy and elegance. The reader is referred to the inexhaustible repertoire in collections and courses of study, including collections of didactic duos by authors such as Angelo Bertalotti, Adriano Banchieri, Orlando di Lasso, Gramatio Metallo, Eustachio Romano, but also northern European composers such as Johannes Ockeghem, Claudin de Sermisy, etc. (Bornstein, in www.gardane.info/bicinium).

However, the practice we wish to underscore here is the teaching of vocal sight-reading, which, beginning with Guido d'Arezzo in the 11th century, goes by the name of solmisation, with the important advantage of overcoming the need to memorise thousands of melodies; one result, in fact, once problems of notation were solved, was that the singer could read and learn music *sine magistro*.

Already during preceding centuries, the mnemonic and didactic practice of computing the fixed pitches of *tabula compositoria*, that is, of a series of pitches contrasted by means of alphabetical notation, had taken hold, as was theorised by treatise writers of the early medieval era (Boethius, Cassiodorus), who associated them with the various bones and joints of the left hand, that is often erroneously called the *guidonian hand*.



Hymn to St. John the Baptist

Thus, it was merely a matter of memorising and getting the ear used to this scheme, by which one sought to gain agility and dexterity (a matter of some importance even for modern singers) in the intonation of ascending and descending intervals (i.e., unison, and the major and minor second, major and minor third, fourth, fifth, and major sixth intervals).

Do	Re	Mi	Fa	Sol	La
	T	T	St	T	T

The six syllables could then be assigned to the notes of a composition with an extensive *ambitus*, by means of *mutation*, that is, a change of hexachords carried out in such a manner that the semitone was always sung with the syllables *mi-fa*. By such a procedure, the *cantores* learned, not the absolute pitches of tones (*claves*), but the relative pitches (*voces*), and fixed the intervals in their memory: a semitone was always *mi-fa*, no matter at what pitch it might be found. Thus, singers could easily intone any scale of six tones that had the semitone in the central position. This was the case, not only with the *natural hexachord* with Do corresponding to C, but also with the *flat hexachord* (with Do = F, and thus with *b* flat), and the *hard hexachord* (with Do = G).

ce-de-me-fe-ge; the German theorist, **Otto Gibelius** (1612-1682) amplified and altered the Guidonian syllables in a manner similar to that of **John Curwen** two hundred years later: *do-di-re-ri/ma-mi-fa-fi-so-si/lo-la-na-ni-do*; **Karl Heinrich Graun** (1704- 1759), with "Damenisation": *da-me-ni-po-tu-la-be*. The various proposals found scarce application in musical practice due to the meagre correspondence between, on the one hand, the syllables referred to the altered sounds and, on the other hand, those corresponding to the natural tones (Acciai, *Solmisazione e didattica musicale in Italia*, in *La Cartellina*; Milan 1996).

Another aspect of which authors of treatises in the 16th and 17th centuries took account was that of extending hexachordal solmisation to the octave.

Many theorists (Banchieri, Burmeister, Bernhard, Nives, La Maire and others) held it to be necessary henceforth to add a new syllable, *si*, to the Guido d'Arezzo's canonical six. The evermore frequent use of transposition technique (*chiavette* or *chiavi acute*) and the introduction of *mixed modes* within compositions rendered Guido d'Arezzo's system somewhat artificial and complex (Acciai, *op. cit.*).

In reality, the theoretic use of a new system of solmisation, also called *solmisation of the octave*, though widespread in many contexts, did not have time to find theoretic uniformity and universal acceptance in the didactic practice of the 17th and 18th centuries. This is a shame, because, with the addition of the seventh step and of the principal chromatic alterations, such a system could have been perfectly expressive of all the melodic and harmonic formulae present in the teaching vocabulary of the musical repertoire, at least until the late 19th century.

Since 1600, contemporaneous with attempts to create the *solmisation of the octave*, the practice of making the syllable, *Do*, correspond to the fixed tone, *C*, became

increasingly widespread. In particular, during the period following the Napoleonic Wars, the French system succeeded in negating the difference between *claves* and *voces*, probably in order to simplify the practice of exercises aimed at instrumental agility; from this derived the notable paradox by which *do, re mi* became absolute pitches, with the total nullification of the *voces* in favour of a system based exclusively on the *claves*. Such a system of “single nomenclature” persists even today in the schools and musical conservatories of many countries, along with the questionable practice of *spoken solfeggio*.

The presence of two systems of nomenclature, with the *voces* alongside the *claves*, is a form of systemic redundancy, or arguably, of systemic abundance. The double system of nomenclature has systemic advantages, because it is intimately connected with the nature of western classical music. In fact, the system of *claves* expresses simply the absolute pitches, while the system of *voces* with *solmisation of the octave* also expresses the *scale functions* in the harmonic-tonal system. *Do* is always the tonic of whatever major tonality; *re*, the supertonic; *fa*, the subdominant, and *sol* the dominant, etc. As for the minor tonalities, the tonic is always *la*. Solmisation can even be fully applied to modal music, inasmuch as the Doric mode is always intoned as *re-mi-fa-sol*; the Phrygian, as *mi-fa-sol-la*, etc. This has great advantages for the singer in the understanding of intervals and of the system of intonation, regardless of the song’s modality.

A young singer, deprived of this didactic system that has been hand-tailored for the exact representation of melodic formulae, often can calculate pitches only with the help of a musical instrument, without really having the “mental framework” of the scale and interval systems necessary for her or his art. Roberto Goitre paints a disastrous picture of the consequences in Italy of abandoning the “double nomenclature”:

Such errors and misunderstandings in the teaching of music

have been handed down so as to reduce our country, once the cradle of vocal polyphony, to the global rearguard of musical civility (Goitre, op. cit.).

In reality, there was an international recovery of *claves* and *voces* in the 19th and 20th centuries, thanks to the *do mobile*, as found in the monumental works of John Curwen in England and of Zoltán Kodály in Hungary. Today, we are witnessing a gradual dispersion of other didactic practices derived from ancient music (psalmody, solmisation, *bicinia*, canons, etc.).

Let us hope, then, to see in coming years a flowering of new methodological reflection on the teaching methods of polyphonic song, hopefully not just in conservatories, but more generally in the courses of study followed by all musicians, in professional music publications, and in the daily life of the musical community in all its complexity.

A version of this article already appeared on the website, www.musicheria.net, for which we thank its editors.

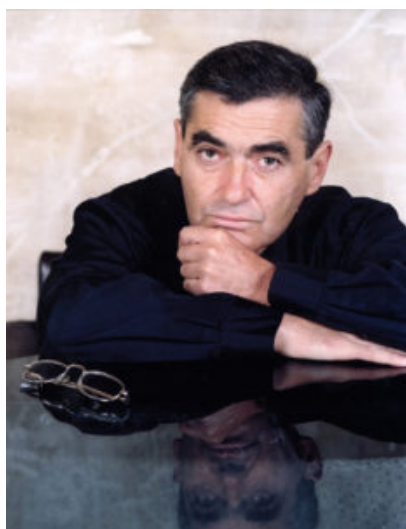
Translated by Marvin Vann, USA

An International Choral Project in St. Petersburg: Boris Abalyan's workshop

Alexandra Makarova, choral conductor

At the end of August 2016 in St. Petersburg, the Second International Workshop in choral conducting took place under the leadership of Honoured Artist of Russia and Professor of the St. Petersburg State Conservatory, Boris Abalyan. The organiser of the master class is the Rimsky-Korsakov State Conservatoire of Music, in which Professor Abalyan taught for over 40 years, and the Chamber Choir Festino.

Boris Abalyan



Russian choir conductor and teacher. The founder, Artistic Director and Conductor of the **Lege Artis** chamber choir. With Boris Abalyan as conductor the choir has recorded more than 20 CDs in collaboration with the recording labels **Sony Classical** and **Mazur Media GmbH**, and the musical alliance **Northern Flowers**. As a result of the collaboration with the medieval music researchers from the department of Medieval Russian Chant at the Saint

Petersburg State Conservatory the choir recorded two CDs of Ancient Russian music. Boris Abalyan is the chief conductor of the **Gracias choir**. Under the leadership of professor Abalyan, the **Gracias choir** took part in several international choir competitions in South Korea and abroad.

Structure of the workshop

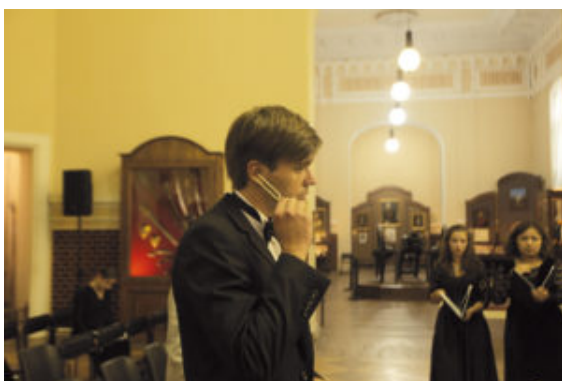
The workshop is a unique educational project that has no equal not only in St. Petersburg, but also in the Russian choral conducting scene in general. The first workshop was held in 2015 and it showed the effectiveness and relevance of this form of learning.

From the beginning, the workshop acquired international status. Over the past two years participants included young

conductors from Japan, Poland, Belarus and Russia.

The workshop's programme includes theoretical and practical training over a period of one week. The theoretical course includes two days of training with the professor and two pianists and various educational lectures. The practical part of the programme is the work with the **Festino** chamber choir for four days and the performance at the final concert. The purpose is to improve professional skills in the field of interpretation and analysis of the score, rehearsing and concert practice, and a significant expansion of the repertoire.

"As I have already said, the goal is to invite people who are really interested in this. Let me explain: conducting students and young choirmasters that have already started to work have different problems and questions. I think you will agree with me that a student who has graduated University already "knows everything". Only practice gives rise to the questions, and the master class can give the answers. A student, who graduated from a conservatory, has more answers and a young choirmaster has more questions. I am deeply convinced that the questions appear when you start to work, but during education in the classroom with the professor everything is usually clear." (B. Abalyan)



Ilya Malafey, a participant to the workshop, at the final concert

Repertoire

The variety of works presented in the master class programme is representative of the cultural space of St. Petersburg, as a platform where Russian and European performing trends are intertwining. The repertoire includes works from three stylistic periods: Russian medieval chant, the contemporary music of St. Petersburg's composers and the contemporary music of Western Europe.

St. Petersburg is a unique city in Russia, where the study of Russian medieval singing culture is maintained at a highly professional level. In collaboration with researchers from the St. Petersburg Conservatory, **Boris Abalyan** and **Lege artis** Chamber Choir recorded two CDs of ancient Russian chants. The painstaking work of a conductor and scientists specialised in the medieval period allowed an innovative way of performing to be created, uniting a deep understanding of the sacred liturgical sphere with the concert interpretation on the stage. Russian sacred music from the pre-Petrine period is still "terra incognita" not only for foreigners but also for many Russian artists. That is why the introduction to it and the guidelines for the choirmaster constitute a unique educational part of the workshop. Besides practical work with musical material, participants are given the opportunity to listen to lectures by leading experts from the St. Petersburg State Conservatory about the history and style of Russian chant and Russian early polyphony.

The contemporary choral music by St. Petersburg's composers always was an essential part of the concert repertoire of many leading Russian choirs. Yuri Falik, Sergei Slonimsky, Anatoly Korolev, Alexander Knaifel and Dmitry Smirnov are all names that are now well-known worldwide. During the master class participants not only work on the best examples of contemporary choral music from St. Petersburg, but also have the opportunity to directly interact with the composers. There were two meetings-lectures in 2016: with Dmitry Smirnov and Anatoly Korolyov.

The inclusion in the programme of the course of modern choral music from Western Europe is very important for the expansion of the concert repertoire of Russian youth choirs. During the master class, participants have the opportunity to discover new names and works of interest which will allow them to continue to integrate more successfully into the Western choral community.



Chamber Choir Festino.
Rehearsal before the final
concert

Participants

Young choirmasters under the age of 35, students and graduates of higher educational institutions with experience of working with the choir are all invited to take part in the workshop.

This year there were 6 active participants in the master class: Pawel Choina from Warsaw; Elena Klimova from Minsk; Christina Pivovarova from Novosibirsk; Ilya Malafey from Saint-Petersburg; Natalia Shelkovskaya and Daniil Zhurilov from Moscow. All of them were young conductors pre-selected from a video of their work with a choir or a concert. In addition to the 6 active participants in the master class, there were also choir conductors from Petrozavodsk, Saratov, Yaroslavl, Nizhny Novgorod and Moscow who participated in a passive way.

“Of course, nobody can learn in a week what people learn over the years, but this week there have been significant changes,

mainly in the sense of music and the methods of work with the singers. It is very difficult to express with a gesture the thing that a conductor hears in the music, so he has to explain with the words or demonstrate with the voice.” (B. Abalyan)

Composers

An important aspect of the work of the master class is the interaction of conductors and composers, whose works are presented in the workshop. Joint rehearsals help more precisely understand the style and the idea of a composition, and unlock the author’s creativity. In 2016, two composers, Dmitry Smirnov and Anatoly Korolev, attended the rehearsals of the workshop. In addition, composers held creative meetings and responded to all the questions of interest from the audience.

“I can say that there was a very curious trend in the second half of the twentieth century, when there were tandems”. (composer – performer) “For example, Shostakovich – Mravinsky, Sviridov – Chernushenko or Sviridov – Minin, Gavrilin – Minin or Gavrilin – Chernushenko. In those cases, the conductor has to understand not only what it says, but also what is not written. I was lucky to work frequently with Dmitry Smirnov, Anatoly Korolev and Yuri Falik, and Sergei Slonimsky, and they helped me to decipher their style. Such co-creation cannot be overestimated.”

Future workshops

The next workshop will take place at the end of August 2017. Applications can be sent in during March 2017. Organisers plan to expand the programme of practical and theoretical sessions and show students the unique diversity of the Russian choral culture. We hope that the international master-class of Professor Abalyan will become an important annual event that will bring together choral conductors from Russia and other

countries.

Edited by Mirella Biagi, UK/Italy

Moorambilla Voices: More Than Just A Choir?

By Michelle Leonard – founder, Artistic Director, and Conductor: Moorambilla Voices

Moorambilla Voices is a much loved and nationally recognised unique choral programme. It is a cultural institution in rural, remote Western NSW Australia. For the past 11 years, it has facilitated an extraordinary opportunity for children to engage with high-calibre music making, dance and art in their own region. Delving into the stories, life experiences and rich cultural heritage of the region, Moorambilla Voices has unearthed people's potential and given them a vehicle with which to express it.

Choirs, as we all know, are an incredibly positive catalyst for social change. The three choirs of Moorambilla Voices, our regional primary-aged girls' choir, our regional boys' choir and our high school ensemble, called MAXed OUT, each bring their unique gifts to every performance, rehearsal and recording that we have.

But is it more than just a choir? And what are the critical factors that make this ensemble so life-affirming?



MAXed OUT ensemble doing
Dance sequence inspired by
the dreaming story of
Narran lake -Dubbo –
artwork Frank Wright

The energy from the Australian landscape in our region is palpable, and it is instrumental in shaping every aspect of our programme. The vast, intense blue sky; the gum trees; the rivers; the ancient sea beds; the red earth; rocks and black dust; and of course the heat! The humour and resilience of the people in this part of Australia make the distance and isolation seem like small barriers. This is a region that only has three trained music teachers, yet geographically it makes up over one-third of the state of NSW. Here sport is king; boys certainly do NOT sing “high” or dance; and there is no primary classroom or school choir at all in any of the 63 schools. Moorambilla Voices is the only choral or arts-based programme to have survived beyond three years in this region. After eleven years, it is thriving. Why?

Perhaps it is because Moorambilla Voices is now not “just a choir”. It is now a proven programme for children between 8 and 18 years of age, which is entirely devoted to the pursuit of artistic excellence. It gives a safe space for all (regardless of identity, race or financial circumstance) to expand their artistic potential in the fields of choir, dance, visual art and sculpture, as well as indigenous language and culture. It is an integrated art programme that looks holistically at children and supports and empowers them to

think beyond their current circumstances. It meaningfully connects them with their peers and introduces them to the lifelong joy of choral singing.

The halo effect of this programme extends to the parents who volunteer as supervisors; the regional artists, both established and emerging; and our incredible professional artistic partners. It also extends to our cultural leaders and to the families of these children, and beyond....even to the catering staff! All of these people have seen, firsthand, the importance of choirs. More incredibly, they independently articulate to anyone in governmental and educational circles that this programme is vital to our country's social and cultural fabric. They are now proudly engaged in concert programmes entirely devoted to new work by leading and emerging Australian composers. This is nothing short of a miracle in rural Australia!

This cultural shift in conversation speaks volumes to people's deep need to have their sense of self, space and worldview celebrated. Moorambilla does this in an integrated and holistic way, and it empowers people to share and connect across all demographics.

By engendering the pursuit of excellence as a lifelong ambition, we are also teaching resilience, self-awareness and the power of artistic collaboration and teamwork. All this plus a lifelong respect for the arts, artists and the power of choirs to be their source of happiness throughout their lives.



Artistic Cultural immersion

at Mt Grenfell Cobar with
all artists and cultural
facilitators

I have often been asked; does this cross-art form focus, weaken or undermine the choral aspect of the Moorambilla Voices programme? And by inference – by being “more than just a choir”, is Moorambilla Voices indeed a choir at all? These are all valid questions, yet interestingly I see only incredible positives in the richness that comes from this style of collaboration for our choirs.

It has been my experience that with clear artistic direction and exceptional artistic partners, trust between artists facilitates a collaborative synergy that is greater than the sum of the individual parts.

This synergy is palpable at our residency camps. The focus, the energy and the willingness to listen enables clear artistic reactions from all involved. Within this incredibly supportive context, we create a different ensemble every year, which is artistically flexible, constantly engaged and capable of co-creating incredibly sophisticated works. The choral component of the programme is thriving because of it, and we are serving our region’s rich cultural legacy in an empowering and electric way.

Moorambilla Voices proves that placing professional artists of the highest calibre next to children and youth is both artistically satisfying and empowering for all. It is one of the greatest achievements of this programme, and it positively reiterates that the concept is not only possible, but also necessary for all of us and our ongoing artistic development.

Yet still I am asked: What do dance and Taiko bring to your choirs? In short, more movement means a better choral sound, better physical engagement within the choir and a more “present” physical presence on stage for many. Other outcomes

are greater rhythmic capacity; a deeper respect for other ensembles; and an understanding of the intense listening and watching required to make an ensemble great. These skills are immediately transferable to the choral context.

Having an exceptional vocal ensemble like The Song Company to mentor our singers has meant that they not only have clear vocal models, but also they have emotional and musical support (and our composers recognise this and accommodate for it in their writing). Having singers of this calibre truly care and support the participants has been life-changing for many—especially in MAXed OUT.

For our primary children, having time allocated each day to an activity based in visual art allows them to process the enormous amount of new musical material they are given, and it has been an incredibly beneficial addition to their daily schedule. These young singers create sculptures and other works of art, and then they synthesise that process and structure into their choral rehearsals. It is yet another way to scaffold artistic process and learning.



MAXed OUT performance based on the moonlit trees at Mt Grenfell Star City Sydney

After 11 years, the choirs of Moorambilla Voices see it now as completely normal to engage in “live time” with composers, choreographers and visual artists to create new work about their stories from their region. They see music and choirs in particular as living, breathing organisms that are incredibly

relevant to their lives. The concept of choirs simply standing and delivering a pre-ordained performance by composers they have never met is totally foreign to them.

Many of you reading this will acknowledge that this is a rare and privileged artistic scenario. But it is one that I strongly feel they deserve. When all else around them has such low expectations, this opportunity is one cherished by all.

Clearly this collaborative model has not come without challenges to maintain its standard and scope. Some of the initial years have been very challenging due to various factors: the arduous process of universal workshop experience before selection; the associated artistic and administrative costs to engage exceptional partners; and the sheer scale of the programme.

However, if Moorambilla Voices were to look at the seven critical factors in its success, I feel they could be broadly summarised as follows:

1. **The landscape** – There is no escaping the enormity of the Australian bush landscape, and the artistic energy that comes from this part of the country is unique and incredibly powerful. The landscape affects the energy of the children, their intense physicality, the robustness of their sound and their approach to learning.
2. **The people** – The lynch pin of our organisational structure is our regional women. Our two regional Moorambilla mums, our General manager, our cultural elders, and our singers, all come from this landscape. Their capacity to handle adversity with humour and lateral thinking is vital as we solve the logistics of transport, fundraising and sustainability. Moorambilla Voices' cultural and emotional compass comes from our people. They live our three pillars: excellence, equity and opportunity for all.
3. **The calibre of artistic partners** – Partnering children

and youth with exceptional professional artists is not unusual—but our standard and scope certainly is. Rather than compromising their capacity in an educational setting, we engender the notion of natural excellence. Our successful ongoing partnerships with leading arts organisations have created a new vigour in the wider choral scene and given permission for others to emulate this cross-art form model.

4. **The annual artistic cultural immersion** – This is an incredible experience for all of our artistic staff. Every year we leave our phones off for five days and submerge ourselves in the rich stories, traditions and worldview of indigenous Australia. Views are shared generously from many perspectives, and, under the night sky after intense days, we have a shared vision and set of experiences that informs our collaboration.
5. **The skills-development tour: equity of access** – From incredibly humble beginnings, our skills-development tour has provided over 15,000 children in our area with the opportunity to do free workshops in their own school, removing all barriers to experiencing the joy of singing (short of flood or fire!) In any one year I see 2,500 children in order to select up to 300 who will participate in the programme at the next stage: the residency camps. This one-hour workshop focuses on music literacy, part-singing and the establishment of a good, clear head voice in the trebles. In the high schools, we frame the acceptance of the changing voice as a normal part of life, whilst focusing on teamwork and rhythmic literacy. Parents, educators and community members see firsthand the skills needed to read, create and perform music.
6. **The residency camps in Baradine** – Here is where the real work begins. In this safe and loving small community all participants stay for four-day camps in the cooler month of August, creating not only exceptional performances, but also lifelong friendships with their regional peers.

They meet again in September and focus on “stepping up” to the final performance with the professional ensembles.

7. **The artistic vision** – It is my belief that regional and remote communities are capable of greatness. We have done this by developing a culture of collaboration, generosity and a truly open mind to what a choir can be, artistically and culturally. In doing so, Moorambilla Voices has created positive conversations around identity; cultural normalcy; and our emotional need to connect with the legacy of knowledge, stories and wisdom of the first people in our nation people. It has normalised singing in a region that had forgotten it was possible. It has given people permission to dance, drum, paint, sculpt and laugh. Long may this continue!



Three 'Year Six Moorambilla Voices' boys from the region (two are now in MAXed OUT)

For more information on the Moorambilla Voices programme, please visit:

- Website www.moorambilla.com
- FB www.facebook.com/moorambilla.voices
- Twitter <https://twitter.com/moorambilla>
- Insta <https://www.instagram.com/moorambilla/>
- Youtube <https://www.youtube.com/user/moorambilla1>

Edited by Nina De Palma, USA

Critic's Pick ... Prayers and Poems, The ACJC Alumni Choir & Valarie Wilson, conductor (Singapore)

Reviewed by Tobin Sparfeld, choir conductor and teacher



The Anglo-Chinese Junior Choir has had a remarkable history of producing beautiful choral music since its inception in 1977. One would assume, therefore, that an Alumni Choir made up of continuing singers would also be impressive. This premise can be confirmed by hearing their most recent recording, *Prayers and Poems*.

The Anglo-Chinese Junior College is a Methodist two-year college founded in Singapore in 1977. Made up of just under 2000 students, its College Choir has served an important role

as ambassador for the school, winning international competitions in Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia. The Alumni Choir is comprised of 37 singers who continue performing ambitious choral music after their time in the College Choir. Valarie Wilson, an alumnus of the Anglo-Chinese Junior College and King's College London, directs the ensemble.

In addition to its yearly concerts, competitions and tours, the Alumni Choir is also dedicated to commissioning and performing new music both by composers from Singapore as well as abroad. This new album features works by two contemporary composers, Eran Dinur and Kelly Tang. Dinur is an Israeli composer and visual effects artist based in New York. He has composed music for various instrumental and vocal ensembles including many theatre music compositions. Kelly Tang is a Singaporean composer whose orchestral works have been regularly performed by the Singapore Symphony Orchestra. While he is known more for his wind band and instrumental works, Tang has also composed music for several Singaporean choirs. All the works on the album have been composed within the last ten years.

The album begins with two works by Eran Dinur which are Piyutim – Jewish liturgical poems chanted or recited during religious occasions. *Adon Haselighot* (God of Forgiveness) is a fascinating work exploring man's petition for mercy. The work features a refrain in open harmonies with a melody of dotted rhythms in the minor mode that builds in intensity to a powerful climax. Brief solo exclamations highlight this spirited opener. It is contrasted by *Adon Olam*, a placid setting with ambiguous but not particularly dissonant harmonies, with many similarities to several Samuel Barber choral settings.

Later is *Tres Ciudades* (Three Cities), a suite based on poems by Spanish poet Federico Garcia Lorca. The first, *Malagueña*, begins with the basses singing low, ominous half-step chants.

This is answered by an intense melody sung by the tenors. This slowly climbing melody is mimicked by the altos and later sopranos. After a fierce flourish, the work ends in hushed tension.

The second, *Barrio de Córdoba* is a soft and somber contrast, interrupting the homophonic statements with unexpected glissandos down to new chords. The last piece, *Baile*, includes a flashy melody with the percussive effects of an accompanying flamenco guitar. While the intonation and soloists are impressive, sufficient dramatic flair are lacking for these three pieces.

The most compelling selection by Kelly Tang is *Tread Softly*, a setting of William Butler Yeats's "He Wishes for the Cloths of Heaven." It features a number of lush harmonic effects, and is sung beautifully by the Alumni Choir, particularly the solo soprano voices.

This is followed by *Nei'la*, a prayer recited during Yom Kippur. The work begins with an intense solo voice in a Middle Eastern-inspired melody. This is answered and amplified by men's voices until they reach an intense cacophony of descending chants and downward octave glissandos. After they recede, the treble voices join at first peacefully, but later vociferously plead for mercy in chants that sound like angry beehives. This unravels into repeated slower, uneasy statements about a future reckoning.

The final two songs are by Kelly Tang. *The Snow Man* sets a poem by American poet Wallace Stevens. The existentialist text is depicted by harmonies which begin warmly, but slowly disperse into hushed dissonance as they conclude. This is followed by Tang's setting of the *Pater Noster* in English.

This was commissioned by the ACJC Choir to commemorate its 25th year of being in the Choral Excellence Programme. While well sung, it ends abruptly and contains few emotional or musical highlights.

The ACJC Alumni Choir's singing is a welcome treat for choral music enthusiasts. Their singing is fantastic. Despite all of the works having challenging a cappella settings, their intonation hardly ever falters. The voices sing with freedom and vibrancy, and consistently with a healthy, supported resonant tone. Valarie Wilson should be commended for her work in building such a pleasant sound. Suggestions for improvement can rarely be found. In *Malagueña*, for instance, the basses could sing with a brighter placement, and the tenors could unify their sound better in several places. The diction in some works is difficult to understand at times. Yet these are nit-picking suggestions in what is a well-produced recording.

While the quality of the choral sound is consistently high, however, the caliber of the compositions themselves is inconsistent. Some works, such as *Malagueña*, *Ne'ila*, *Adon Haselichot*, and *Tread Softly* are unique and engaging, while many others pieces flit by with typical contemporary chordal harmonies punctuated by mildly acerbic dissonances.

While the ACJC College Choir has made a name for itself both in Singapore and internationally, the Alumni Choir is still establishing its bona fides as a premier choral ensemble. *Prayers and Poems* is an album that choral music listeners should become familiar with as an example of great choral sound, artistry, and commitment to the promotion of contemporary choral composers. Hopefully this will be the beginning of many excellent recordings by these terrific singers.

Edited by Mirella Biagi, UK/Italy

Critic's Pick ... Chor Leoni / Wandering Heart, Erick Lichte, Artistic Director

T. J. Harper, DMA, choral conductor and teacher

Chor Leoni / Wandering Heart

Erick Lichte, Artistic Director

Chan Center for the Performing Arts, Vancouver, British Columbia

(2016; 1:07:17)

<https://chorleoni.org/>



Recorded in the stunning acoustic setting of Vancouver's Chan Centre for the Performing Arts with GRAMMY award-winning producer Steve Barnett, Wandering Heart is simply beautiful. This is the choir's first recording since 2011, and its first recording under the direction of Erick Lichte. Founded in 1992 by acclaimed conductor Diane Loomer the Chor Leoni Men's

Choir, which is “known internationally and loved locally”, is recognized as one of the world’s foremost male vocal ensembles. Chor Leoni prides itself on its musical ambassadorship for Vancouver and Canada and has performed at major festivals and concert venues across Canada and the United States. Internationally, the choir has shared its music in Italy, Croatia, Bosnia, Germany, and the Czech Republic.

Erick Lichte has carved out a distinct niche in the vocal music world and concert life in North America. As a founding member, singer and artistic director of the male vocal ensemble Cantus, Lichte created and sustained one of only two full-time vocal ensembles in the United States. His work with Cantus garnered the 2009 Margaret Hillis Award for Choral Excellence, the highest honour for the professional choral organization Chorus America. As a choral conductor, Lichte has served as conductor for many professional, educational and amateur choral ensembles. In January of 2013, he began his tenure as Artistic Director of Chor Leoni Men’s Choir. Lichte is an active clinician and guest conductor, and is especially passionate in his work to get young men singing. Lichte is a published composer and arranger, especially known for his writing in *All is Calm: The Christmas Truce of 1914* which has been taken on seven North American tours.

Stars (track #1) by Ēriks Ešvalds with text by Sara Teasdale (1884-1933) is published by Musica Baltica. This is the male choir world premiere recording. Composer Ešvalds recalls the inspiration for this work: “I remember being out in the country in my native town in Latvia to celebrate Christmas with my parents. After dinner, I went out to have a silent walk in the cold winter night and, in my 30 years, I was never as impressed by the view in the sky – the stars were so bright! I couldn’t believe that in my youth I hadn’t seen such a powerful sky-scape before. Now there was something very special speaking to me from the sky. I couldn’t name it.”

I Saw Eternity (track #2) by Paul Mealor with text by Henry

Vaughan (1621-1695) from The World is published by Novello & Company, Ltd. "Henry Vaughan's poetry stands alongside the works of Donne and Herbert as metaphysically inclined and spiritually rich. Mealor sets the opening lines of Vaughan's poem 'The World' for male choir, soloists, wind chimes and soprano saxophone to create a dense but luminous texture. The choir's role provides not only a cosmic backdrop for the work but also a swelling one."

Wandering Heart (tracks #3-#5) by Ēriks Ešvalds with text by Leonard Cohen (1934-2016) from The Spice Box of Earth is published by Musica Baltica and commissioned by Chor Leoni Men's Choir with funds from the Diane Loomer Commissioning Fund. This is the world premiere recording and stands as a testament to the lasting memory of singer, songwriter, poet, painter, Leonard Cohen. In Ešvalds own words, "My cycle of three songs to words of Leonard Cohen has become, in the voices of Chor Leoni and through the hands of Erick Lichte, like a symphony with a true orchestral, multi-dimensional depth. *Wandering Heart* is a symphony where the instruments – the real Canadian singing men – have opened the books of their life-stories. We can hear pages from their childhoods, sweet memories, their first-love stories, their life-long dreams and their destinies."

Adspice Domine (Vespergesang: tracks #6-#9) Op. 121 by Felix Mendelssohn (1833, published posthumously in 1874). "The *Vespergesang*, Op. 121, is one of the few medium-scale works for male choral forces written by Mendelssohn and for this alone, *Wandering Heart* is well-worth the price of admission. Mendelssohn's score provides parts for only a four-part male chorus and a cello and double bass accompaniment. The work sets the liturgical texts of the Vespers for the 21st Sunday after Trinity. The first and third movements feature Baroque-inspired imitative polyphonic textures. The very short second movement presents the prescribed plainchant from the liturgy, which Mendelssohn then develops and illuminates in the third

movement. Finally, the dawn breaks through the darkness with the chorale-like setting of St. Ambrose's *O Lux Beata Trinitas*."

Even When He Is Silent (track #10) by Kim André Arnesen with text by an anonymous source is published by Walton Music. This is the male Choir world premiere recording. "This male choir premiere recording of *Even When He Is Silent* takes the composer's setting for female voices and lowers the pitches by a 7th. While most male choral works voice their chords in root position, this adaptation of an SSAA work features tight low harmonies in first and third inversions, which brings out both the darkness and the light of this anonymous 20th century text."

Sure on This Shining Night (track #11) by Morten Lauridsen with text by James Agee from *Description of Elysium* is published by Hal Leonard. This is a beautiful, thoughtful, and solid performance of a contemporary classic by America's composer laureate.

Yahrzeit (track #12) by Robert Moran with text by James Skofield is taken directly from the manuscript. This is the world premiere recording. "The text of *Yahrzeit* was written by James Skofield in memoriam to his 40-year-old partner, Michael, who died from AIDS. When his many friends couldn't agree upon a time for his NYC memorial service, James commissioned me to write a work in his memory. *Yahrzeit* is the Jewish celebration, in any manner, of the departed person on the anniversary of his or her death. This could be a concert 'in memory,' a poem shared by all, a party, etc. and happens on that death date of that specific person. It is a lovely idea. I wish to have *Yahrzeit* as a musical reflection on "someone, something no longer with us...but just a memory."

Long Road (track #13) by Ēriks Ešenvalds with text by Paulīna Bārda (1890-1983) and translated by Elaine Singley Lloyd is published by Musica Baltica. Set for male choir and

commissioned by Chor Leoni through the Diane Loomer Commissioning Fund. “Much of Paulīna Bārda’s poetry speaks of loving him as does *Long Road*. When reading it, I felt for a moment that her memories of their past had become so real. There are not many words in the poem, so after the last word was said I turned the music into a sound-scape or picture; painting one’s eyes gazing towards the sky, searching for the star, and whispering the heart’s prayer for the beloved one.”

Edited by Eviano George, Mexico

International Choral Music Spring in Kaunas

Ieva Kananavičiūtė, choral conductor

The most notable choral music event in Lithuania is the “Kaunas Cantat” International Choral Festival and Competition, which took place from 12 to 15 May 2016 in Kaunas.

4 days, 2 concert halls, 4 churches, and 8 countries (Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Finland, Sweden, Germany, and Thailand). There were 10 choir categories, professional interpretations, various programmes, and big victories.



All the participants at the end of the Award Ceremony

This is the sixth occasion for the Lithuanian audience, which opens up to the religious, folk, and composed choral music features of different regions. Rolandas Daugėla, the art director of the festival, claims that, during the six years of its existence, this event has become an integral part of Kaunas city's cultural life. An essential element of the festival is choir competition, and it has become the crux for the participants and their programmes, which cover both the Mass and concerts. By tradition, this year's choirs sang during Holy Mass at Vytautas' Great Church of the Assumption of The Holy Virgin Mary, Holy Cross Church, Church of St. Francis Xavier, and St. George the Martyr Church. At the latter church on the third day of the festival, a night concert entitled "Cantus Nocturnus" took place, which every year brings ever more vivid emotions. A dark and sacred atmosphere fused with heartfelt chants creates, if not elevated religious feelings, then at least the human need for artistic fulfilment.



Children's Choir
Radost Praha, Czech
Republic (Grand Prix
competition)

The chairman of the professional jury was the famous Polish conductor and Dean of the Faculty of Fine Arts at the University of Warmia and Mazury, Benedykt Błóński. Its members include: Sergey Ekimov, who is a composer and a conductor, as well as a professor at the Rimsky-Korsakov Saint Petersburg State Conservatory; Raimondas Katinas, who is a choir conductor, a teacher, and the art director and chief conductor of the Lithuania Song Festival; and Rolandas Daugėla, a conductor, associate professor, and the artistic director of this festival. This jury was the primary draw for foreign choirs. Another attractive aspect of the festival was the venue – the prestigious Kaunas concert halls. The competition lasted for two days (Friday and Saturday), and took place in the main hall of Vytautas Magnus University and at the Kaunas State Philharmonic. The flexible evaluation criterion in the competition was based on the song selection in the choir programme category, on interpretation, and on the level of professionalism of the conductor or concertmaster. Prizes were awarded in the form of cups for runner up and third place winners, and a Grand Prix Cup for first place. Indeed, this competition presents extremely favourable conditions for

participants, who have significant opportunities to win at least one prize, and are also awarded with a record in the history of choir competition, which can often lead to the launch of future careers.



5th – 9th class choir of
Ozolnieku secondary school,
Latvia (A1 category
performance)

The first day of the competition saw 7 choirs, 12 programmes, and 9 categories. Each choir represented different styles of choral music and different age categories, and choirs only competed with those in the same grouping as themselves. One could ask how competitive the festival really is, if almost every programme has only one competitor. This is where the competence of the jury is revealed – regardless of the number of the participants, choirs are judged only by the quality of the performance. Participating choirs included: the choir of Ozolnieku high school and boys' choir "Spīguņi" from Latvia in the Children's Choirs (A, A1) category; children's choir "Radost Praga" (Czech Republic) which prepared programmes for Children's, Youth (B1), Folk (L) and contemporary composed music (M) categories; ensemble "Rasa" from Kekava's high school (Latvia), which competed in Ensembles (F) category; Thailand's Mahidol university choir with their programmes in Youth under 25 years (C) and Spiritual, gospel, jazz (S) categories, mixed seniors (R) choir "Echo" (Poland) and women's chamber choir "Resonus" (E).



Mahidol University Choir,
Thailand (C category
performance)

As we know, the desire for victory is an innate human drive that encourages us to constantly improve. For participants it is necessary, but for the viewer it is the most interesting. So from the viewer's position, I want to summarize the most outstanding performances that brought full attention to them, and that made us listen and experience every single expression of sound. The art of being intriguing is as important as the other criteria of artistry or quality. Indeed, it was not a struggle for the viewer to pick the best ones – at the end of the first day, the jury announced the choirs that had presented the best performances, who would compete the next day for the Grand Prix cup.

In the morning, after the performances of the selected choirs and the award ceremony, it finally became clear who, how, and why, since the overall essence of the entire competition is in some way reflected in the awards.



Ensemble of Kekava
secondary school "Rasa",

Latvia (F category performance)

All the participants were truly professional artists: the lowest award (silver diploma) went to only two choirs, and the other choirs won the gold diploma or higher. One silver winner was the choir of Ozolnieku high school, directed by Rūta Bergmane. They performed arrangements of Latvian folk songs, "Kalējs kala debesīs" (arranged by Andris Kontauts), and "Dzied' , māsiņa , skaistas dziesmas" (arranged by Janis Medins). Although they showed a sincere performance, they did not make it to the second stage of the competition because of poor intonation.

The other choir that won silver was the girl's ensemble "Rasa", directed by Dace Bula. They also performed arranged Latvian folk songs, such as Dace Robule's "Saule", Selga Mence's "Es bij meita", and the sacred piece "Agnus Dei" by Dace Toločko. Their performance shined through their smooth choreography, unified singing, and perfect scenic image. For the last event, they received a special jury prize "for the best scenic image", but they were not invited to compete for the Grand Prix.



Competition jury: (left) Raimondas Katinas (Lithuania), Benedykt Blonski (Poland), Sergej Yekimov (Russia), Rolandas Daugėla (Lithuania)

Other participants that were competitors for the main prize

revealed the different strengths of choral art. The third place winner was boys' choir "Spīguņi", directed by Ingus Leilands and Irina Osipova. They performed arranged Latvian folk songs "Rīga dimd" by Līga Celma-Kursiete and "Suņi zaķim pēdas dzina" by Romualds Jermaks. With perfect intonation, stage effects, and delightful-looking burgundy-coloured costumes, they received not only the cup, but also the audience prize.

Second place went to women's choir "Resonus", which performed a programme rich with Scandinavian sounds. Since they chose to perform songs that required special voice subtlety and technique, Piotr Janczak's "Kyrie" and Mia Makaroff's "Ala sano ehka, jos voit sanoa kylla", they received not only a jury acclaim, but also a special *Composers Union Choras.lt* prize "for the most compelling programme".



Female Choir Resonus,
Finland (Grand Prix
competition)

The competitors in this year's festival can be described as professional, subtle, and artistic, and these choirs are connected by shared ideas. It is obvious that when people are led by ideas and desire, the results often surpass expectations. This is the case with two surprising, contrasting choirs – the Mahidol University mixed choir (directed by Rit Subsomboon) and the children's and youth choir "Radost Praha" (directed Jan Pirner). From their first chords, these two choirs earned their victory. Both choirs shared an incredible combination of unity and quality that

makes the listener forget the technical aspects of their performances and focus on the message of pieces.



Awarding ceremony: (left)
Sergej Yekimov (Russia),
Ingus Leilands (Latvia),
Raimondas Katinas
(Lithuania)

A Thai choir performed programmes for two categories, and showed its nature and talented spirit. The choir won first place by performing contemporary religious choral music – Branko Stark’s “Plaudite Manibus” and Paul Caldwell and Sean Ivory’s spiritual “John the Revelator” – but they were far from winning the Grand Prix Cup because of small inaccuracies in intonation.

Not only quality of performance, but also the scenography and extraordinary skills of the concertmaster Teeranai Jirasirikul earned him the special jury prizes. However, there is no reason to doubt in the victory of the “Radost Praha” choir. This large group of talented girls, although it had serious opponents, did not experience a solid challenge. They performed programmes in 4 categories and demonstrated the exceptional sound quality and versatility of the choir. They started with opuses of Baroque composers and ended with contemporary composed music. Two performances of final pieces – Czech folk song “Pred muziku” (arranged by Petr Řezníček) and Jan Novák’s “Gloria” – were acclaimed with the Grand Prix Cup by jury. They won first place because of their unity, the

patience of choir members and their director, and their shared love for choral music. Besides the main prize, the choir won 4 gold diplomas, their concertmaster Jitka Nešverova earned a name of best concertmaster, and Jan Pirner received the best conductor award.



Awarding ceremony Grand
Prix cup goes to Children's
Choir Radost Praha,
Conductor Jan Pirner

A concert of the competition winners "Cantus Nocturnus" was held on Saturday evening, and it became a reflection of the two days of the festival. By then, the performers had calmed down after intense performances, and the peace of the night in the sacred atmosphere of the St. George the Martyr Church inspired the sound of the music. Choirs that performed in this final concert once again proved their talent, and the first place winning choir lowered its temperamental tones to calm ones.

I believe the moment of calmness and concentration inspired one thought from the audience: the "Kaunas Cantat" festival is a truly gift for Lithuanian choral music lovers and they would like to witness more high-level choral art events like this one.

Edited by Avery Lemmon, USA

Handel's English Oratorios from 1736-1742

*Jürgen Budday, Choral Conductor and Artistic Director of the
Marktoberdorf International Choral Festival*

After a four-year stay in Italy, in 1710 Handel returned to Germany, and in June he obtained a post at the court of Hanover. However, as early as by the end of the year, he yearned to return to London. After a one-year sojourn in that kingdom he briefly returned to Hanover, only – in 1712 – to move to London for good. Apart from travels, he remained there till the end of his life.

Thus Handel spent two thirds of his life in England, and we must not be surprised that his most important and most large-scale oratorios were written in England, among them three so-called odes and most of his 25 oratorios. It is these – in particular “Alexander’s Feast” (ode), “Israel in Egypt”, “Saul” and “Messiah” (all oratorios and all in print with the publisher Carus) – which are to be discussed here. Of course all these works were composed to English texts. The Carus editions offer an additional German translation.



The Great Music Hall on Fishamble Street, Dublin, where Messiah was first performed

The so-called **English oratorio** can be described as Handel's "invention". The genre is a blend of his experiences in Italy (including Italian opera), elements of the German Passion oratorio (like the Brockes Passion of 1719) and the English anthem. He primarily used texts from the Old Testament in which scenes from the history of the Israelites take centre stage, but which he often enriched and expanded by the inclusion of dramatic (sometimes additional) stories of personal relationships. But Handel was less concerned with the dramatic concept of the oratorio (after all they are not operas, and staged production was not – despite minor stage instructions in some scores – intended) but rather with the depiction of the solemnly elevated and of the expression of affects and emotions. Applied to the works already listed that means that the words of "Messiah" and "Israel in Egypt" were taken from the Bible very nearly verbatim, with "Saul" falling

back on the Biblical source; it is only the libretto for "Alexander's Feast" that was written by Newburgh Hamilton, based on an ode by John Dryden. The words for the other three works were put together by Charles Jennens, who may well be described as the most important of Handel's librettists.

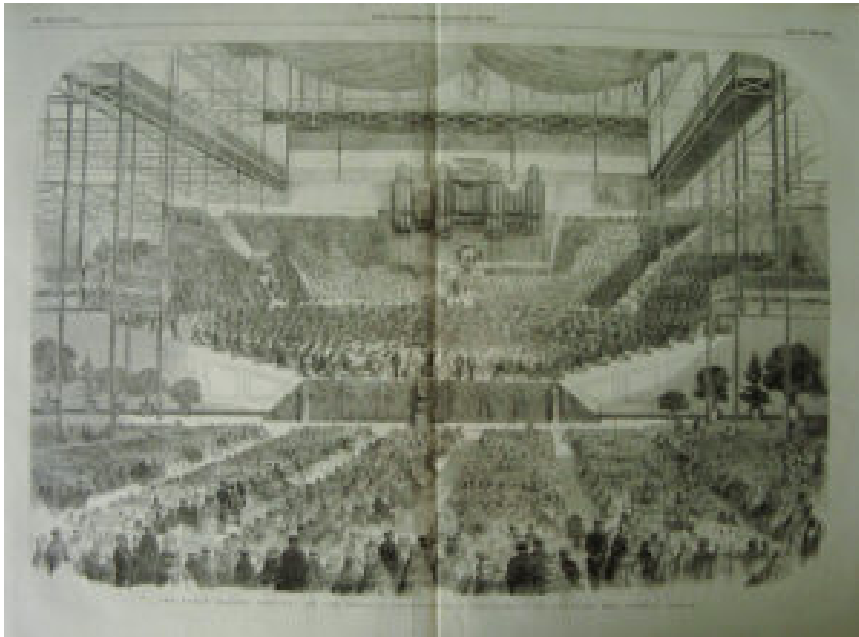
In the **chronology** of their creation and the first performances, the oratorios/ode referred to lie close together. "Alexander's Feast" is from 1738/39, Handel composed "Israel in Egypt" and "Saul" in the years 1738/39, and "Messiah" followed in 1741.⁴² It was a most fruitful period in Handel's creativity. Apart from the oratorio "L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato" (1740), during this period Handel composed a further eleven (!) operas, among them the one that is probably best known, "Serse" and, his last opera ever, "Deidamia" (1741).

We could expect this intense preoccupation with **opera** to have rubbed off onto the **oratorios**, but with "Messiah" and "Israel in Egypt", this is most certainly not the case. We find story-telling, descriptions, explanations and programmatical scenes laid out most vividly and with immense stylistic sensitivity ("Israel in Egypt"). "Messiah" makes the listener enter into the story of the life and suffering of Jesus, allowing us to participate with sympathy. It is particularly in the great songs of praise at the end of the oratorios that it becomes clear that everything is underpinned by God's power. "Messiah" and "Israel in Egypt" are the two among Handel's oratorios with the biggest share allocated to the choir; we would be justified in describing the latter as a veritable choral oratorio. Looking at Parts II and III ("Exodus" and "Moses' Song") which are usually performed, we find that of the 31 numbers 20 are for the choir. The remainder is made up of four brief recitatives and seven arias. Part I, the Funeral Anthem, consists exclusively of choral numbers.

"Saul" is quite a different matter. Here the choir's share amounts to less than a quarter of the whole piece. Recitatives

and arias dominate in a work that is shaped by twelve (!) individual characters and thus is more closely related to the opera genre. Handel emphasises this fact even in superficial matters, by subdividing the work into acts and scenes.

This applies even more strongly to Part II of “Alexander’s Feast” with its truly dramatic perspectives.



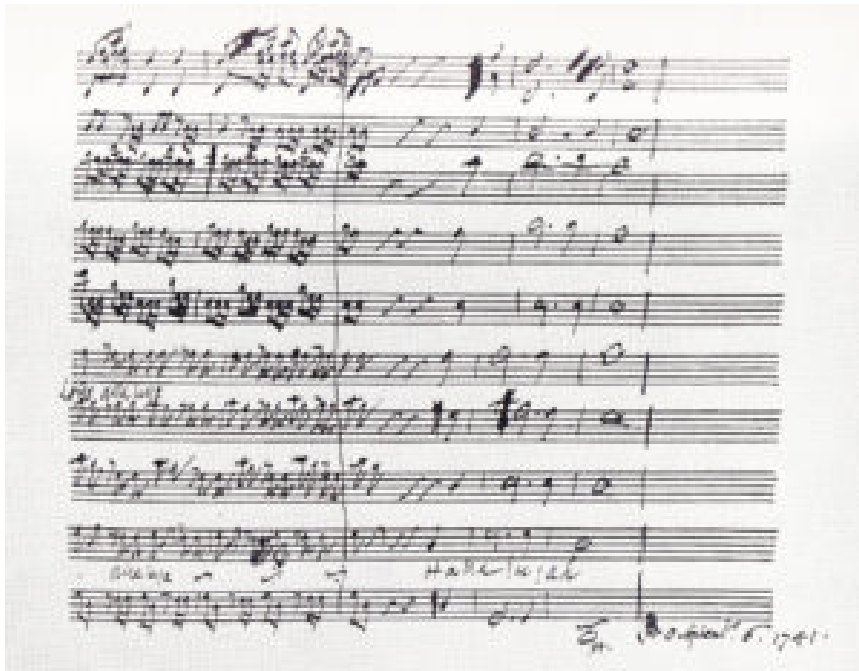
The Handel Festival at The Crystal Palace, London, 1857

As already hinted at – Handel was less concerned with the dramatic characterisation of individuals; rather, he employed most differentiated **musical affects** and subtle descriptions of **emotions**. He allows the listener to feel involved in the feelings of the *dramatis personae*. This, however, demands of the singers a high degree of sensitivity in relation to turns of phrases and rhetorical figures which need to be traced in the score. Nor do we find many dynamic instructions, articulation marks are extremely rare, and relationships between words and music need to be uncovered. These matters, however, are the very things recognition of which is essential if we wish to understand the music, to throw light onto the plot and for the liveliness of the interpretation. This is where the difference will lie between the listener merely

hearing sounds or feeling really grabbed by this music. The singer enjoys a large measure of interpretational liberty and thus at the same time bears a great responsibility for a performance that does the work justice. For a conductor this is a fascinating task and a challenge!

It is impossible to discuss all these situations in the works referred to – for this end nothing can replace careful scrutiny of the score. As prime examples, look at several numbers of Part II of “Messiah” or the description of the plagues in “Israel in Egypt”, Israel’s song of sorrow about the deaths of Saul and of Jonathan in “Saul”, or the dirge in Part II of “Alexander’s Feast” (Nos 7-10). This is really great, moving and emotional music that sweeps us away with it.

And now we approach another aspect of performance practice, one which is not without its problems: the question of the various **versions** and **arrangements**. “Alexander’s Feast” alone boasts five versions (1736, 1737, 1739, 1742, 1751). Carus offers the original version of 1736 as well as the final one from 1751. The differences are not insignificant, and the decision as to which to choose needs to be carefully weighed up. Nevertheless we can work on the assumption that these different versions are not versions of the work, but adaptations to suit performance conditions, i.e. Handel adapted the pieces to local conditions – availability of instrumentalists, vocal soloists, quality of the choir, characteristics of the hall, degree of entertainment expected by the audience, etc) and thus tried to optimise the conditions for a successful performance in this place. and on this occasion. Nevertheless I’d advise against mixing and matching the different versions!



The final bars of the “Hallelujah” chorus, from Handel’s manuscript (Scanned from *The Story of Handel’s Messiah* by Watkins Shaw, published by Novello & Co Ltd, London 1963)

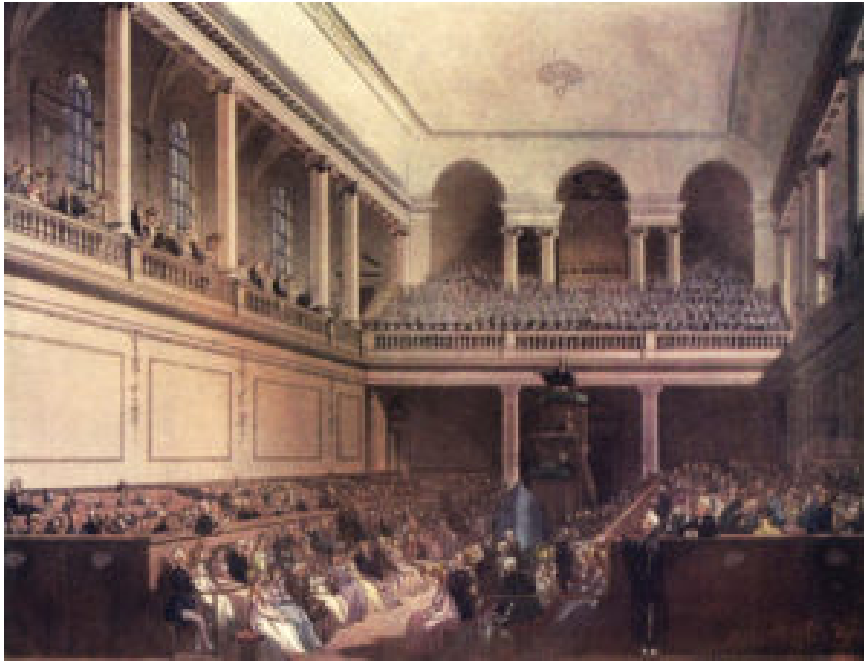
“Messiah”, too, comes in five versions (1742 Dublin; 1743 London; 1745/49 London; 1750 London; 1754 “Foundling Hospital Version”), but we cannot go into these in detail here. In the new Carus edition all variants are given with a clear overview. Alternatives which Handel never performed himself are to be found in an appendix, so that conductors can make informed decisions as to their own performances. “Messiah” and “Alexander’s Feast” are the oratorios/odes which were most enthusiastically received even in Handel’s lifetime. They were widely known and responsible for Handel’s success and fame. It is no coincidence that Mozart later chose those very pieces for a complete overhaul, clothing them in the gown of the classical orchestra.

The oratorio “Saul” experienced three different performing editions by the composer: 1738, 1739, 1741. The Carus edition follows the original version of 1738.

The oratorio “Israel in Egypt” is a special case. Although in

our day usually only Parts II ("Exodus", the story of the Israelites' escape from Egypt) and III ("Moses' Song", a great song of praise to God) are performed, it nevertheless was originally an oratorio in three parts. It is interesting to note that Handel composed Part III first, then Part II. Only when these compositions had been completed did he decide to incorporate them into a three-part oratorio by prefacing Parts II and III with "The Ways of Zion do mourn" which expresses the sorrow of the Israelites about the death of Joseph (son of the Israelite Patriarch Jacob). In doing so he fell back on an earlier composition of his ("Funeral Anthem for Queen Caroline") which needed only minor adaptations. It was in this completeness that the three-part oratorio was heard in London in 1739/40. In the version of 1756-1758 the introductory funeral anthem was dropped in favour of movements from several others of his own oratorios. Thus the reception history of "Israel in Egypt" possesses two branches: on the one hand the oratorio in three parts, on the other only the actual departure from Egypt with Parts II and III. The funeral anthem (Part I) continues to enjoy a life of its own to this day. This fact is taken into account by the new Carus edition which publishes Part I separately and Parts II and III in their own volume. This greatly assists current performance practice.

As far as **casting** goes, Handel displays huge variability. We can look upon the instrumental forces as used in "Messiah" as a kind of basic casting for Handel's oratorios: strings are joined by two oboes and two trumpets as well as timpani. Of course the bass part will be performed by cello and bassoon, and then there's a choir, sometimes in four parts, sometimes in five, and four soloists.



The chapel of the London's Foundling Hospital, the venue for regular charity performances of Messiah from 1750

For "Israel in Egypt" the instrumental body gets expanded by two flutes and three trombones. The choir is split into eight parts as a double choir, and despite the fact that there's not that much for them to do, six vocal soloists are required.

"Alexander's Feast" boasts an opulent orchestral casting: two flutes and two oboes are joined by three bassoons, two horns, two trumpets and timpani, and the strings, too, are richly scored with three violin parts, two viola parts, one solo cello, ripieno celli and double bass. The choir on occasion splits into up to seven parts, and four soloists complete the whole set-up.

"Saul" turns out to be even more inventively scored. There are no fewer than twelve vocal solo parts (these could, however, be covered by just six singers if required). The orchestra matches that of "Israel in Egypt" but additionally demands a carillon and a harp as the finishing touch.

A basic remark concerning the casting of the **continuo** bass line: this can be varied to match musical conditions and the

character and the affect of a piece. This applies to the bass line with cello or bassoon, possibly even bass viol and double bass or violone, as well as the harmonic area with harpsichord, organ and theorbo or lute. The greater the variety of sound and the character of the instruments, the more lively and appropriate to the music the continuo can be shaped. This combination of instruments forms the basis of any performance and is capable of achieving an incredible effect just on its own.

The way the entire ensemble was arranged in the space available made a considerable impact on the resulting sound and differed considerably from continental practice in the 19th and 20th centuries. In this we should quote Hans Joachim Marx in his standard work "Händels Oratorien, Oden und Serenaten": at the centre of the stage [stood] the organ, to the left and to the right of which staging was erected in steps, as for an amphitheatre, i e in semicircles. This was for the seating of the instrumentalists. The harpsichord was probably placed in front of the organ, with the instruments of the continuo group (cello, double bass, theorbo etc) on both its right and its left. Behind this group, on the staging, the strings and most of the woodwind would be arranged, with the horns, trumpets, bassoons and timpani on the top steps. The choir would be positioned in front of the orchestra, and the vocal soloists would be sitting at the front edge of the stage, which would be protected with railings. Like for the performance of operas, a curtain would be attached to the proscenium arch, which would only be opened when the performance of the oratorio was about to begin ... The important difference between the English oratorio performances of the 18th and the continental ones of the 19th and 20th centuries is thus to be found in the placing of the vocal soloists and the choir in front of, rather than behind, the orchestra. The mere acoustics of this testify to the favouring of the voices above the instruments, something which fitted in with the aesthetic ideas of the time ... "¹ An arrangement worth

considering for all musicians and managers whose spatial conditions would permit such an alternative!

Finally a few thoughts might be added in respect of **performance practice**. Of course every conductor must take the initial decision as to whether he will use modern instruments, maybe even in the Classical-Romantic tradition, or apply historically informed performance practice. If the interpretation as a whole is convincing, both options can do Handel's music justice. Nevertheless the author will not conceal the fact that he is a fervent enthusiast of the historically informed performance practice. Particularly with Handel, the music can be presented in a more transparent manner, lighter, more colourfully, with more rhetorical relevance, more three-dimensionally, with more daring sounds, more virtuosically and simply in a way that speaks to us more clearly and in a more enlightening manner, if historically informed performance practice is consistently employed. For that, however, we need not only an instrumental ensemble that specialises in this area, but also a choir trained and experienced in Baroque performance practice as well as soloists who are really steeped in Baroque performance practice, in respect of the aesthetics of sound as well as in their vocal technique (coloraturas, diminutions!).

This is, however, a wide field that requires special study. Some hints in these directions can be found in the score of the "Messiah" in the Carus edition. Let me here restrict myself to referring to the relevant literature about Baroque performance practice.

¹ *Hans Joachim Marx: Händels Oratorien, Oden und Serenaten. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht p. xxvii*

Jürgen Budday was, till 2016, artistic director and founder of the Maulbronn Chamber Choir and the music festival "Maulbronn Monastery Concerts". With the Maulbronn Chamber Choir he won several first prizes (among them at the 5th German Choral Competition in Regensburg). With the Maulbronn Chamber Choir and international star soloists, between 1994 and 2007, he performed a cycle of Handel's oratorios which was also recorded on CD. Regular activities as guest conductor, leader of workshops and jury member at home and abroad. 1998 high civic honour from the Federal Republic of Germany. Since 2002 Chair of the Choral Commission of the German Music Council and thus over-all direction and chair of the jury for the German Choral Competition. 2011: appointed Professor by the Prime Minister of the Federal State of Baden-Württemberg. 2013: award of the George-Frideric-Handel-Ring. 2014: artistic director of the International Chamber Choir Competition in Marktoberdorf. Freedom of the town of Maulbronn. www.jbudday.de. E-mail info@jbudday.de

Translated by Irene Auerbach, UK

Canons from the Heart: A closer look at the counterpoint of Abbie Betinis

Peter Steenblik, choral conductor and teacher

Abbie Burt Betinis (b. 1980) is one of the leading composers of 21st-century American choral music. At only 36 years old, her compositional output is wide and varied. It is clear that

Betinis is now creating her own distinct and secure place in the choral repertoire, an observation highlighted in a 2009 issue of *International Choral Bulletin* dedicated to the work of young people.[1] A two-time McKnight Artist Fellow, Betinis is Adjunct Professor of Composition at Concordia University-St. Paul, is composer-in-residence for The Schubert Club (a post she has held for 12 seasons), and has a catalogue spanning over 60 commissioned works. *The New York Times* describes her music as “inventive [and] richly melodic.”[2] Matthew Culloton, director of *The Singers*, an internationally renowned choral ensemble in Minnesota, has said, “the music of Betinis...is worthy of consideration because of its originality, degree of compositional craft, and musical sincerity.” She is no longer an “emerging” composer, but one whose career now belongs to the same tradition as Dominick Argento, Stephen Paulus, and Libby Larsen.[3]

Betinis was raised by a musical family in Amherst Junction, Wisconsin—situated amidst farms and forests about 20 miles southeast of Stevens Point.[4] At the age of three, while singing a canon in the car with her family, she proudly held her own part—an event that is fondly remembered as a “coming-of-age” experience in a family abounding in musical tradition.[5]

Partly due to this upbringing, one compositional technique of which Betinis is very fond, and which affects most of her repertoire, is canon. The inclusion of canonic devices forms a deep connection between Betinis’s very soul and the music she composes. Of one of her compositions she has said:

“I love singing [canons] so much I apparently write them in my sleep! I woke up with this one in my head one morning, as the sun streamed into my window on a bright fall day.”[6]

Her published catalogue includes five stand-alone canons: *Be Like the Bird* (5-part, 2009), *Come In, Come In!* (4-part,

2011), *Lumen* (up to 4-part, 2012), *Morning Round* (4-part, 2013), and *Table Grace* (up to 8-part, 2007). At first glance her canons are quite simple, but further inspection will reveal something more complex; such canons can serve as surprisingly moving concert pieces. She encourages performers to explore alternative performance designs. One such canon, for example, comes with an assortment of suggested maps. Some direct singers to begin two measures apart—as one would perform *Row, Row, Row Your Boat*. Others allow the piece to build from unison to 3-part, to 5-part. Additional recommended maps indicate measures of rest that create a product more akin to Steve Reich's *Phase Patterns* than what one might expect from a traditional round. In the hands of Betinis, a canon is a much more complex and aurally stimulating art form.



In a related discussion, Betinis has acknowledged the canon as a source of strength amidst significant trial. Although young, she has survived three bouts of Hodgkin's lymphoma over the past 19 years, ultimately leading to a complete bone-marrow transplant in 2010. It was during this time that she wrote *Be Like the Bird*, a round based on the Victor Hugo text "Be like the bird that, pausing in her flight awhile on boughs too slight, feels them give way beneath her – and sings – knowing she hath wings." Her grandfather was a minister; she found the text couched in one of his sermons after his passing. Of the circumstances surrounding this composition, she writes:

"A canon is a melody that is its OWN harmony. You can't sing a canon by yourself (live, anyway) and hear all of its harmonies. You need to sing it with other people to really hear how the melody creates its own support system of pitches and rhythms. I thought that was the perfect metaphor for

getting through rough times. I think we each have our own melody in this life, something unique to us that we can offer the world – but sometimes that melody is hard to hear when life gets hard. Sometimes we need our friends to come in, one at a time, and sing that melody too, so we can hear how strong it is and it can lift us up. Or – like the words say – it can give us wings.

“I didn’t know that I was going to need *Be Like the Bird* so much myself when I wrote it. A few friends came over to my house and we were singing around the piano and getting all the harmonies just right... We went to the local radio station the next morning and recorded it. Three months later I was diagnosed with cancer a third time. And that’s when this melody became like a mantra to me... something I could sing whenever I felt afraid. I’m healthy now, but...when I’m by myself, I imagine all my friends coming in at their part and singing it with me.”[7]

Betinis’ use of canon does not stop at the five published examples, but can be observed in many of her works. For example, *Hail, Christmas Day!* (SSA or SATB, 2003) begins with a unison verse, progresses into a polyphonic section, then launches into a 3-part round. A coda brings the piece to a climactic finish. Similarly, *The World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt’s Evening Prayer* (SATB, 2012) ends in canon with the instruction given for singers to “choose your own adventure.”[8]

Other works in Betinis’ catalogue have less obvious examples of canon, but incorporate the form in large episodes. The first movement of *Carmina mei cordis* (SATB, 2004) includes a complex double canon. In this instance, the soprano and tenor lines present the same melody two beats apart; while alto and bass lines offer a counter-melody that begins on the intermittent beat (EXAMPLE 1). Extended canonic episodes can also be found in *Psalms 126: A Song of Ascents* (SATB, 2003),

Bar Xizam (SATB, 2007), *Spell of the Elements* (SATB, 2007), *Chant for Great Compassion* (SSAA, 2008), and, most recently, Betinis' exquisite ACDA commission *A Blessing of Cranes* (SSAA, 2015) which sets the text "Never a thought of thinking, only this weaving..." and illustrates an elegant theme of communal healing.

One of Betinis' most powerful and well-known works is *From Behind the Caravan: Songs of Hâfez* (SSAA, 2007). Of this work, Betinis stated, "A canon is the perfect compositional technique for a lot of this poetry." [9] In the second movement, for example, Betinis uses canon as a way to depart from the structure of the original *ghazal* text and prolong its poetic meaning as a four-voice canon occurs on the text *Qam ma-khor, ey del* (Suffer no grief, O heart). Betinis' compositional skill is most evident when, even in the middle of this canon, she incorporates a second level of departure. A nod to Sufi mysticism, the outer voices utilize a textless sigh, connecting themselves once again with the divine power, further deepening a level of grief, while all voices engage simultaneously in thematic material not part of the original canon (EXAMPLE 2). At this moment, it is clear that the choir empathetically wraps the listener in an aural blanket of comfort—soothing the grieving heart.

Obvious examples aside, canonic-like figures can be found in much of Betinis' repertoire. Such examples include: *Songs of Smaller Creatures* (SATB, 2005), *In the Bleak Midwinter* (SATB, 2006), and *The Mirthful Heart* (SSA, 2012).

Furthermore, throughout her entire catalogue, one can observe a significant amount of voice-crossing—a side effect that stems from such immersive work in canon and canonic-like devices.

"I love manipulating voice-crossings in my melodic ideas.... Some of my most successful writing, I think, is just two-part counterpoint that leapfrogs, or three-part counterpoint that,

in effect, braids itself across the page.”[10]

Works by Betinis are rife with such instances. A conductor less familiar with Betinis’ writing style might be tempted to ignore elements of voice crossing and, subsequently, make adjustments to the score. However, one must understand that Betinis’ use of voice-crossing is highly intentional. While studying on scholarship at the *European American Musical Alliance* in Paris, France, Betinis developed a compositional vocabulary and distinct understanding of counterpoint that particularly affects her choices regarding voice leading techniques. It is displayed in a style of writing she learned there: single-voice counterpoint—the idea that an audience hears in stepwise motion, and that any break larger than a major second draws the listener’s ear to the beginning of new melodic material. Composing in this manner results in frequent, intentional voice-crossings. Such crossings, while they may be considered awkward at first, are to be observed whenever possible. Betinis, a singer, is deftly conscious of vocal colors that result from tessitura and placement.[11]

Concerning this issue, Dr. Elroy Friesen, Director of Choral Studies at the University of Manitoba and a conductor involved in early performances of Betinis’ works, has said,

“A composer, especially like Abbie knows darn well what a first alto sounds like versus a second soprano in a typical choir. So, I just wouldn’t ever mess with that. It’s all a voice-leading thing. I don’t see how adjustments would simplify [her writing].”[12]

With canons, canonic-like devices, and the side-effects of such practices replete throughout her repertoire, any singer or conductor approaching Betinis’ music must understand the deeper meaning behind such mediums. Further discussion concerning the texts in each of these instances is also warranted. For now, suffice it to say that Betinis is an

inventive composer whose use of canon is deliberate, often text driven, and always sincere.

Captions for examples

[illegible]

EXAMPLE 1 – Carmina mei cordis, measures 42-46. An

example of double canon (continues through measure 53).

The image displays two pages of a musical score for 'Behind the Caravan'. The left page features a 4-part canon starting at measure 37, with a red arrow pointing to the 'Start of 4-part canon'. The right page continues the canon, showing a 'Momentary departure' indicated by a red dashed line and a 'Viola continues' section marked with a red arrow. The score includes staves for various instruments and voices, with musical notation and lyrics visible.

EXAMPLE 2 – From Behind the Caravan, mvt. 2, measures 37-49. The most extensive episode of canon in the work.

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Edited by Shanae Ennis-Melhado, UK

[1] Shekela Wanyama, "Nothing Off-Limits: An interview with composer Abbie Betinis," *International Choral Bulletin* 28:2 (2009).

[2] Allan Kozinn, "Romanticism, Tone Paintings and Modern Takes on Folk Tunes," *The New York Times*, May 27, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/>.

[3] Michael Culloton, "Jocelyn Hagen and Timothy Takach: An Introduction to Their Choral Music and a Study of Their Positions Within a Lineage of Minnesota-Based Composers" (DMA diss., North Dakota State University, 2013), 79, 96-97, ProQuest (AAT 3557360).

[4] Stanley H. Rothrock, II, "The Choral Music of Abbie Betinis: A Prospectus of the Composer's Output Through December 31, 2008" (DMA diss., University of Minnesota, 2009), 3, Unpublished.

[5] Abbie Betinis, e-mail message to the author, June 12, 2015.

[6] Abbie Betinis, *Morning Round*, (Abbie Betinis Music Co.: Saint Paul, 2013).

[7] Abbie Betinis, e-mail message to Jennah Delp, Artistic Director of iSing Silicon Valley, June 04, 2015.

[8] Abbie Betinis, *The World Made New: Eleanor Roosevelt's Evening Prayer*, (Abbie Betinis Music Co.: Saint Paul, 2012).

[9] Abbie Betinis, e-mail message to the author, June 12, 2015.

[10] Debra Spurgeon, ed., *Conducting Women's Choirs* (Chicago: GIA Publications, 2012), 171.

[11] Abbie Betinis, in-person interview with the author, February 26, 2015.

[12] Elroy Friesen, interview with the author, June 2, 2015.

Part Uusberg: Renaissance Man of Rapla

Cara Tasher, conductor and teacher

Despite his very busy calendar and rigorous composing regimen, Pärt Uusberg and I corresponded via email together, just a few weeks shy of his thirtieth birthday on December 16th. In 2014, my UNF Chamber Singers fell in love with his piece *Süis vaikivad kõik mõtted* and then recorded his better-known *Muusika*. These two stunning works drew my interest to enquire more deeply into the composer, his life, and his works.

Cara Tasher: *Many people think of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania together as the Baltic choral giants. Are there any salient features that you can identify as more specifically "Estonian" in regard to choral music?*

Pärt Uusberg: I must admit that I am mainly more familiar with Estonian choral music, and of course I know a bit Latvian and Lithuanian music, but have not got too deeply into those yet. If there is ever something really unique in any nation's music, it's the folksong. In this case, it stems from a tradition that is over a thousand years old. I personally feel very close to the Estonian folksong, *regilaul*, on which one of our most famous composers Veljo Tormis has based many beautiful arrangements. I have also used Estonian folksongs in some of my compositions. Recently I have been living and studying in Lithuania and have become more familiar with the old Lithuanian folksongs *sutartines*. As I have been listening to Lithuanian music so much, I feel that many Lithuanian composers have been influenced by *sutartines*. I have also had the opportunity here to attend a specialised class for foreign students where together we sang through many different *sutartines*. Through the study of these *sutartines*, it is interesting to notice that there is something similar to *regilaul*, but also something which makes it particularly Lithuanian; it's even difficult to put it into words. Having experienced living here and at the same time having had many opportunities to sing *sutartines*, it seems to me evident that they go somehow together with that land. And I think, that probably singing and listening to Estonian *regilaul* over a significant length of time in Estonia would also help a foreigner deepen the understanding of our culture and more fully understand Estonia through its music.

What was it like to conduct 10,000 people on your piece Muusika in the open air? (And, congratulations on yet another of your pieces being chosen for the next Youth Song Festival for 25,000 singers!) Please tell us more about the Summer Song Festivals.

It was a very interesting experience for me. I must admit that it was rather more a dream than a reality, not in the

sense that I have been dreaming of conducting in a Song Festival – actually I haven't, more in the sense that in the moment itself, those two and a half minutes were rather dreamlike. Somehow time stopped, but also, just after finishing conducting, I felt like it all had lasted for only 10 seconds so it was kind of a paradoxical experience in the case of perceiving time. I have not experienced something like that since then.

Laulupidu, the song festival, has been very close to my soul since I was a baby. My mum is a choral conductor and I have been attending song festivals since I was in her womb. I must admit that when I was a child and youngster, my love for the song festival was unconditional. Back then I did not know much about the festival, how it is organised and I also did not note the differences between the amateur choirs and orchestras and the professional ones. I truly loved the atmosphere of *Laulupidu* and I greatly enjoyed singing there together with thousands of singers. Nowadays I experience it a bit differently. Although I was aware that, by delving too deeply into the study of music, many people lose their childlike astonishment of the art, I decided to study music professionally. Dealing with music every day changes your sense and understanding of music. I still love the atmosphere of the song festival, but musically I enjoy a Sibelius or Brahms symphony more than a 2-3 minute *a cappella* song written for an amateur choir and performed outdoors (and nowadays supported with sound amplification). Of course it is still a magical moment when 25,000 people sing together, but that is not even so much about the music, it is something more... and I am very happy that this kind of tradition lives on in Estonia!



Pärt Uusberg and Arvo Pärt

Describe your compositional process

In a way I think that maybe it is not good idea to talk too much about writing music. The beauty of composition is that you are really alone with yourself, meeting your soul and I would not like to put it into words. Of course, I could still talk about more practical things. For example, it has been very important to me to write music every day (excluding holidays, of course) ever since I had my first composition lesson with my teacher Tõnu Kõrvits, who told me: "Why do you think, that you are different from a pianist or a violinist, who has to practice his/her instrument every day?" I appreciated his lesson and I have tried to maintain a disciplined routine. I still have some periods where I do not write at all, and during the summer I have often gone for quite a long period without writing any music. I need that to kind of digest everything I have collected in my brain, and to

kind of forget it. Then I return to composing after the break maybe more fresh and open minded. When I write regularly, I try to work about 3-4 hours every morning. Of course, that kind of practice has come into my life since I have started to identify myself more professionally as a composer. I started composing actually before studying composition, and back then I did not write every day; I did it more for fun, and when I had time. Now I have commissions and deadlines, so I need to plan my time quite strictly. I must admit, that in a way I miss the freedom of composing what I want when I want, but I also feel that, by writing more routinely, my commissions are improving. Maybe some day the freedom will come back, and then I will have even more knowledge and experience to express my feelings and thoughts in music.

Based on the films that you have acted in or composed scores for, it seems that you have an interest in social justice and addressing current issues through film. Describe some ways in which you have programmed, composed or performed music that brings these to light in the choral art form

The truth is, that I did not choose the topics of the films that I have been connected with. When I was a youngster I also dealt with theatre a bit and because of that I had a possibility to act in a movie. I must admit that I even did not like the topic of the movie which I acted in (Klass) very much. The music that I have written for films has always been commissioned. Of course, it is very sad that there are kind of silly things in our world like school violence or deportation, but in art, I believe more in beauty. I think that there are different artistic figures – the ones, who are fonder of innovation and are also sometimes fond of being socially active as an artist. And there is another type of creative person, more conservative and not too socially active as an artist. I am for sure the second one. For me, writing music is more of a possibility to communicate with eternity – to leave my message. And what is the message? It is just the way I

sense and love music and, through it, the world. Music for me is the most beautiful part of eternity. It just is eternal and we are not, and there is nothing we can do about it. So through music, I can communicate with souls who have already left here 500 years ago. Singing or listening to old music gives the possibility to kind of feel time and its live energy that was written down on notepaper long ago. So, being involved in music makes us immortal and opens a larger space of communication.

What is your dream commission?

My dream is actually not to write commissions at all J. My dream is to be free to write what I want whenever I want and to take as much time as I like to complete it. Writing a commission and musically exploring an idea that comes freely to my mind are to very different feelings. I do not know why, but it has been my life-long dream to write a symphony. That is why I decided to study classical composition. I do not yet know if I am able to write one, and another question is what kind of symphonic piece could you call "a symphony" nowadays? But I hope that one day there will be a performance of my symphony J. Also, I would like to write at least one opera and a Requiem.

Do you have advice for other aspiring composers?

I would like to quote my teacher Tõnu Kõrvits: "Every composer has his/her own song to sing, just sing yours!" He also said that it is important to serve the music, and that is why he believes it is important to write music every day! I agree with him and respect these two points a lot.



I know you are headed soon to study conducting in Vilnius with Vytautas Miškinis, please describe your journey until now

I was born in a little town called Rapla (circa 6000 inhabitants). I studied in an ordinary high school there, but I had a lot of interesting optional after school activities: studying the trumpet in the children's music school, singing in my mum's choir (*Riinigimanda*), and I was involved in the school theatre. I was also active in sports and was a national champion in both pole vault and discus (although Rapla is very small and those events were not the most popular J)! Later, I played volleyball. My love for choral music began while singing in my mum's choir, where I felt a lot of warm feelings. I loved choir camps and even ordinary choir rehearsals made me excited. Many of my lasting friends sang in that choir, and now some of them sing in my chamber choir that I created in 2008 (*Head Ööd, Vend*). Private trumpet lessons

with Aigar Kostabi were also very important to me because they showed me the way to professional music. Actually, at first, I wanted to become a trumpeter, but I was not very successful due to my high levels of performing anxiety. In 2005, my life changed significantly when I moved to Tallinn and started studying choral conducting with Heli Jürgenson at Georg Ots Music School. Since then I have been dealing with music as part of my every day routine, for almost ten years. After finishing Georg Ots Music School as a choir conductor, I decided to continue my studies in composition at the Estonian Music and Theatre Academy with Tõnu Kõrvits. I still divide myself between being a composer and a conductor and it has been difficult to decide if that is a good idea. I think that there are pluses to doing both, but they each take a lot of time, and if to want to go more deeply into one, it makes it a bit difficult doing both. Currently, my number one activity is composing, but conducting provides some variety. Also, conducting my own music makes it easier to express my compositional intention, so that is probably the main reason why I continue conducting.

Pärt Uusberg (1986) is an Estonian composer and choral conductor. He graduated as a conductor from the class of Heli Jürgenson at the Tallinn Georg Ots Music School in 2009. In 2014 he completed a degree in composition with Tõnu Kõrvits at the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre. Always an active choral singer, Pärt began in the Riinimanda children and youth choirs conducted by his mother Urve Uusberg. Throughout the years he has also sung in the Estonian Youth Mixed Choir (Taavi Esko and Kadri Leppoja), Voces Musicales (Risto Joost), and World Youth Choir (Ragnar Rasmussen and Josep Vila i Casanas). In 2008 Pärt created his own chamber choir Head Õöd, Vend (Good Night, Brother), which has become known for beautiful church concerts as well as successful performances at choral competitions. Pärt has also been working with the

Estonian Youth Mixed Choir and Mitte-Riinimanda Youth Choir. Several of Pärt's choral compositions have already become popular and have acquired critical acclaim. Head Ööd, Vend has also recorded a CD with his compositions that is available on <http://www.emic.ee/>

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