



Minnesota State University, Mankato
Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly
and Creative Works for Minnesota
State University, Mankato

All Graduate Theses, Dissertations, and Other
Capstone Projects

Graduate Theses, Dissertations, and Other
Capstone Projects

2013

Program Notes for a Master's Recital in Choral Conducting

Melissa Ann Williams
Minnesota State University - Mankato

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/etds>



Part of the [Music Performance Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Williams, M. A. (2013). Program Notes for a Master's Recital in Choral Conducting [Master's thesis, Minnesota State University, Mankato]. Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University, Mankato. <https://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/etds/197/>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Theses, Dissertations, and Other Capstone Projects at Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University, Mankato. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Graduate Theses, Dissertations, and Other Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of Cornerstone: A Collection of Scholarly and Creative Works for Minnesota State University, Mankato.

**PROGRAM NOTES FOR A MASTER'S RECITAL
IN CHORAL CONDUCTING**

By

Melissa Ann Williams

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Music

In

Choral Conducting

Minnesota State University, Mankato

Mankato, Minnesota

May, 2013

Abstract

PROGRAM NOTES FOR A MASTER'S RECITAL IN CHORAL CONDUCTING

Melissa Ann Williams, M.M.

Minnesota State University-Mankato, 2013.

This document is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Master of Music, and submitted in support of a choral concert conducted by the author on April 28, 2013 at 3:00 p.m. at St. Peter and Paul's Catholic Church, Mankato, MN. It presents brief biographical information regarding each composer and a conductor's analysis of their compositions performed in the concert. It includes suggestions on performance practice, appropriate rehearsal techniques, and a rehearsal journal of the progress of the chosen recital pieces.

The author conducted Henry Purcell's *Come, Ye Sons of Art*, performed by the University Chorale and Peter Philips' *Ascendit Deus*, performed by the Chamber Singers. The University Concert Choir performed Johannes Brahms' *O Schöne Nacht* and Charles Villiers Stanford's *The Blue Bird*, also conducted by the author in fulfillment of recital requirements.

CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
Chapter	
1. Peter Philips.....	2
2. Henry Purcell.....	14
3. Johannes Brahms.....	26
4. Charles Villiers Stanford.....	40
Conclusion.....	51
Works Cited.....	53

Introduction

This thesis is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Master of Music and submitted in support of a choral concert co-conducted by the author on April 28, 2013 at 4p.m., to be performed at Saints Peter and Paul Catholic Church, Mankato, MN. The pieces to be discussed are Peter Philips' *Ascendit Deus*, to be performed by the Minnesota State University Chamber Singers; Henry Purcell's *Come, Ye Sons of Art*, to be performed by the University Chorale; Johannes Brahms' *O Schöne Nacht*, and Charles V. Stanford's *The Blue Bird*, both to be performed by Minnesota State University Concert Choir.

This document will combine for each choral work research of each composer, a brief conductor's analysis, a summary of applicable rehearsal techniques, and a personal reflection on the preparation for the recital experience. It should be noted that the reflection portion will include the time from the beginning of the rehearsal preparation to a few weeks before the actual recital because the due date of this thesis precedes the date of the concert.

Chapter 1

Peter Philips' *Ascendit Deus*

Background

Peter Philips was born ca. 1560, most likely in London. Not much is known about his early years as the first reference to him was when he was a choir boy at St. Paul's Cathedral in London around 1574. After his voice changed in 1572, he studied with William Byrd (1540- 1623). In 1582, he left England and went to the English college in Rome where he could freely practice Catholicism and where he served as organist. In 1585 he met Lord Thomas Paget, who was also an English Catholic refugee. Paget was visiting Rome when he met Philips and hired him to serve as his organist. This was a great opportunity for Philips who travelled with the household to Genoa, Madrid, Paris, Antwerp and Brussels. Philips returned to Antwerp after Paget's death in 1590, where he earned a living teaching students the virginals.

In 1593 Philips went to Amsterdam to study briefly with Jan Pieterszoon Sweelinck (1562-1621). On returning home from Amsterdam that same year, he fell ill. He spent three weeks in Middleburg and was arrested and accused of plotting against the life of Queen Elizabeth I. His time spent imprisoned in The Hague was not wasted. It was there that he composed his *Pavan and Galliard Dolorosa* for keyboard. He was

exonerated after inquiries were made to London. He returned to Antwerp upon his release.

In 1597 he was appointed organist to the court of the Archduke Albert in Brussels, where he worked with John Bull (? 1562/63-1628) and where he remained until the archduke's death in 1621. He was ordained a priest in 1609, although there is no evidence that he ever functioned as a priest. His employment with the archduke was to be his last position. He continued to compose and publish his music.

In regard to his keyboard music, Philips is considered an Englishman but in regard to his vocal music, he is considered a Continental composer (Arnold). Many of his pieces for the virginal were incorporated into the Fitzwilliam Virginal Book¹. His Italian madrigals are very ornate; they are set to Italian verse and are noted for their singability and delicate word painting. His motets are written for five-part and double choir, and also as solo, duet and trio in the concertato style.

Philips motets are a reflection of his devout Roman Catholic faith. A majority of his motets are taken from the breviary rather than directly from scripture. He rarely set freely chosen texts, such as Psalm verses, as former Renaissance composers did (Steele).

Philips composed approximately three-hundred Latin motets, one set of Litanies and fifty Italian madrigals. His motets were published over time in multiple collections and were composed for varying voices, many being five-voice motets. The motets first appeared in the anthology "*Hortus Musicalis*" of 1609. Other motets were published in

¹ The largest single collection of Jacobean keyboard music containing nearly three-hundred pieces composed by major composers such as Byrd and Bull.

volumes devoted exclusively to Philips. The first of these volumes published in 1612 is *Cantiones Sacrae, propriae festis totius anni et communi sanctorum* (*Sacred songs for special feasts of the whole year and the Common of the Saints*). It is a collection of sixty-nine five-voice motets in varying styles, such as *Pater Noster*, in a conservative polyphonic style with cantus firmus and canons. A majority of the motets, including *Ascendit Deus*, are homophonic with polychoral effects and expressive word painting (Schrock, 45). A second volume of *Cantiones Sacrae*, published in 1613, includes thirty eight-voice double choir motets. Sweelinck's musical influence is most evident in these motets with their short phrases of text in dialogue between groups of voices. The publications that followed, *Gemmulae sacrae*, 1613, and *Deliciae sacrae*, 1616 are volumes of motets. *Paradisus sacris cantionibus consitus*, 1628, contains one-hundred six vocal concertos for one to three voices and basso continuo in the *seconda prattica* style. This volume was very successful and became quite popular. There were many printings of this book.

Conductor's Analysis

Ascendit Deus was published in the first volume of motets in 1612. The date of composition is not known. The text is taken from and based on Psalm 47: 5 and was originally sung after an Israelite victory. The Biblical text speaks about the God of the Covenant who is enthroned upon the ark. Its liturgical purpose in the Roman Catholic

Church is to help commemorate Christ's Ascension into heaven, found in the New Testament gospels of Mark and Luke, and also the book of Acts, which parallels the Old Testament readings in the book of Psalms, II Kings and Samuel. The *Ascendit Deus* is an Alleluia verse response to the Epistle in the Mass for the feast of the Ascension and a short antiphon for Terce of the feast of the Most Holy Rosary of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Jeffers, Vol. I. 95). The text is translated:

Ascendit Deus

God is ascended

Ascendit Deus in jubilatione,

Is ascended God in Jubilation,

et Dominus in voce tubae. Alleluia!

and the Lord to the sound of trumpet. Alleluia!

Dominus in coelo paravit sedem suam. Alleluia!

The Lord in Heaven has prepared his seat. Alleluia!

Harmonically there is nothing that suggests modality over tonality, which is an indication of Philips' movement toward composing in the Baroque style. Philips' employment of polychoral treatment is a precursor to the contrasting forces of the Baroque. Points of imitation were often used in music of the sixteenth-century. A "point of imitation" refers to a small section of text that is given to all parts in some form of imitation. Once all the parts have sung the text, the next section of text is set with either with imitation, homophony or other varying textures.

As with most of the vocal music written during this period, the music changes each time the text changes. Philips contrasts choral sections by alternating between equal voice polyphony and polychoral techniques. The polychoral technique is a compositional technique that varies forces for effect and for textural interest.

“Ascendit Deus” is literally translated “Is ascended God.” Philips paints this text with an ascending, arpeggiated triad. Triads were often used to depict the Trinity of God and the rising of the notes brings attention up toward heaven. The sopranos begin this section of imitative counterpoint. The altos are the next to enter the piece with a slightly modified version of the opening statement. The exact opening pitches may be found again in the tenor entrance and the second soprano entrance, with the bass voice repeating the alto line between these two entrances.

The next text, “in jubilation”, or “*in jubilacione*”, differs slightly from the previous section in that it has a buoyant, jubilant feel. The music now contains melismas on eighth-note rhythms that are in contrast to the half-note rhythms of the opening text, thereby intensifying the music, moving notes and rhythms closer together in preparation for the vocal fanfare to come.

“Et Dominus in voce tubae”, “And the Lord to the sound of the trumpet” is the next part of the text. *“Et Dominus”* is stated three times, a technique often used in sacred music to depict the Trinity. The voices are mimicking a trumpet fanfare similar to that of Giovanni Gabrieli’s (c. 1555 - 1612) brass music. The bass part in this section changes function, from being a part of the fanfare to helping to determine harmony,

another precursor to Baroque music. Once again, Philips intensifies the music. This is achieved by moving the notes and the text closer together to create a fanfare-like excitement to prepare for the "*Alleluia*" section.

Philips uses the polychoral technique in this *Alleluia* section. First, the top three voices, soprano, soprano II and alto sing together, then the lower three voices, alto, tenor and bass sing, achieving a six-part choir sound. Then all the voices join in the alleluia, once again intensifying into the penultimate section, "*et Dominus in coelo paravit sedem suam*", "And the Lord in Heaven prepared his throne". A tenor anticipation begins this new section in imitative counterpoint. Philips is once again alternating between old and new textures. From there, Philips brings the focus toward heaven as the voices begin an ascending line starting with the altos' entrance on a D pitch, then the second sopranos up a fourth to a G pitch, and the sopranos up another fourth, on a C. The music in this section sounds a little more grand and broad than before, like a king being seated on his throne. This is accomplished by the rhythm changing from the eighth notes of the previous section to the dotted quarter note-eighth note figure that is repeated throughout this section. The music has also become a little more intricate with the addition of a few sixteenth note figures. Philips seems to be relaxing the music a little towards the end of this passage instead of intensifying. He completes the musical thought with a brief cadence, then continues on to the last "*Alleluia*" section, alternating again between polyphony and a polychoral style.

The meter has now changed from 4/4 to 3/4. The music is joyful and buoyant. Philips alters the texture by employing a predominantly homophonic polychoral technique with the lower four voices in the following phrase. At that point it is just the two soprano parts and the tenor by themselves, in anticipation of the full sound of the whole choir, for the most part, to the end of the piece.

Rehearsal Techniques and Performance Practice

The performance practices of Peter Philips' *Ascendit Deus* may be most easily organized according to the musical sections of the piece and best understood by what is accepted today as common performance practice of Renaissance choral music. While it is important to remember that bar lines, dynamics, accidentals and phrase markings are editorial, they help to clearly define the music and help to create music that is accessible and understandable to today's musicians.

In the initial preparation, the choir should be made aware of the text painting throughout this piece so they may understand and execute Philips' vision for the work. Care should be taken to bring out subtle points of interest such as cadences and suspensions. As always, proper weight placement in the text should be addressed and followed through in each part.

A moderate tempo should be chosen according to the text and rhythmic passages, carefully avoiding extremes. The vocal tone of the choir should be light and

free of tension, colored with only minimal vibrato. Historically this music would have been sung by a small ensemble of boys and men, so care should be taken to keep a youthful, pure sound. In this piece collective breaths are generally not an issue, as the phrases help to determine when breaths should occur. Pitch and tuning will be especially crucial at cadence points, when the octave, fifth and third overtones are most noticeable.

In the performance of Renaissance music, care must be taken to imitate articulation and phrase shape throughout the parts. The tone must also be in keeping with the emotion of the piece being performed, allowing that emotion to color the music in a somewhat more restrained way than in the Romantic period. In *Ascendit Deus*, the various sections can be colored by the mood of the text. Whenever the text, "*Ascendit Deus*" is sung, the choral tone must be kept somewhat light and buoyant, avoiding heavy, full tones laden with vibrato. The choir should depict awe as God is ascending. This phrase is followed by "*in jubilatione*", where the choir will sing with a joyful buoyancy and clear vocal articulation on the eighth notes. Because of the fugue-like nature of this section, it is important that each entrance is clearly heard.

The music and the rhythm changes slightly when the text changes to "*et Dominus*". The choir should reflect that change by emphasizing the dotted quarter note rhythm in a manner worthy of announcing a king. The next text is "*in voce tubae*" and as the text suggests, Philips sets the choral parts to sound like a five-part brass fanfare. The choir should sing with robust energy, bringing out the entrance of each

phrase to clearly portray the fanfare, and singing somewhat lighter and softer at the end of the phrase so the other fanfare entrances may be heard. Perhaps an excerpt of Gabrieli's music should be listened to as an example of what to imitate. Each entrance should be heard clearly, and when there are duets in the voices, they should be slightly emphasized.

The choir will maintain its joyful, light sound through the following "alleluia" section. To avoid misplaced word stress on the quick repetitions of the word, it will be important to take any weight or heavy placement out of the word, especially in the final syllable, "...ia". Singer gesture and vocalises will help the choir to properly execute this text. The texture is dense during this part of the piece so clear and concise pitch will be especially important.

Continuing the text painting, "*Dominus in coelo*", the texture becomes a little thinner. The dynamics should be brought down to a mezzo piano. Next, like a king being seated on his throne, "*paravit sedem suam*", this new material gets broader and grander, and the rhythms become more intricate with the introduction of sixteenth notes. The rhythm must be carefully articulated to bring out these intricacies. The choir's sound must also paint the text with a feeling of awe and excitement. This can be accomplished by singing through the phrases while keeping a lift in the sound. Philips returns to fugue-like music and the entrances of each choral section will again be brought forward so the ear can differentiate the melodic motifs being sung. At the

cadence of this section there will be a slight *ritardando* and *fermata*, which leads into the second and final '*alleluia*' section.

This final part calls for a change of meter and tempo. The tempo change will be in triplum, in proportion to the previous tempo, and will be conducted in a one-pattern or a soft two-pattern. Philips changes textures again during this section from a polyphonic fugue to a homophonic chorale. He begins with using the top four voices, answered by the lower four voices, making the music sound like a double chorus. That effect will be brought out by slightly emphasizing the soprano I part in the first half and the bass part in the second half. Philips then writes for three voices, thinning out the texture but setting up the music for the drive to the final cadence. When all five voice parts join together, the volume will slowly increase from mezzo forte to forte and that will be maintained to the end of the piece. It will end with a slight *ritardando* and a *fermata*. The final chord will be released, the sound will be allowed to dissipate naturally and the piece will conclude.

Rehearsal Journal

My ultimate goals for Philip's *Ascendit Deus*, as sung by the Chamber Singers, are to achieve flowing phrases with proper word stress, clean, precise lines and to differentiate and articulate the difference between the sections that alternate between polyphony and polychoral technique.

March 6: I worked with the Chamber singers during the last part of choir. I had them sight read. It was harder for them than I had anticipated, and it seemed the first sopranos were struggling the most. My goal for the next rehearsal is continuing to learn the music, notes and rhythm, with the hope of getting into the Latin text and the individual lines. We marked breaths and phrasing into the music so there would be no question as they learn the music.

March 21: After having no rehearsal due to auditions and spring break, I worked with the Chamber Singers again today. I had the last 10 minutes of choir to rehearse. I kept reading and working parts. I introduced the Latin today and they seemed to have caught on very quickly. There was not much time to do more than work parts and Latin today. I am really seeing the benefit of being fully prepared so not a minute of rehearsal time is wasted.

March 27: After a few days without singing this piece, it seems much has been forgotten. They are still needing notes and becoming familiar with this piece. It has been discussed that we need to quickly get past the learning and into the lines of the piece and that is my goal for the upcoming rehearsal.

March 28: I hope to get into the individual lines and beyond parts today. I'd like to be able to discuss word stress and direction of phrases. Rehearsal was a "fast 10 minutes" which makes me be more goal-oriented. I find this challenging, as it's hard to know how the choir will be singing. Will they embrace it and sing boldly enough to move on quickly, or work slowly, as if still sight-reading? I find myself needing to work

on clarity of communication, both through words and direction. I felt like the singers were getting a feel for the style, for the Renaissance tone and harmony. I tried to be clear about word stress. I am feeling better about this now than the previous day. It was discussed that I need to take the most challenging parts, namely the first six pages or so, much slower, to really make sure they are getting their notes correctly, and getting the emphasis of the text learned properly.

April 2: We went over the first half of the piece slowly in four for notes. I worked the T/B together and the S/S/A together separately, then together. I asked for a slight distinction or separation between the basses quarter note rhythm on page five, because as legato as it was sounding very mushy. My impression is that they are becoming more and more familiar with the piece, therefore starting to make more musical things happen. I am seeing more and more eyes watching me, a sure indication that they are more comfortable looking out of their music. The Latin was good. My goal for the next rehearsal is getting into the beauty of the individual line. I'd like to discuss with them Philips' technique of varying textures throughout the piece. I will be listening to the Latin more carefully in the following rehearsals.

Since this thesis is due before the recital, I will not be able to record the final rehearsals, but my goals are to really work on my conducting and communication of directing the music, not the beats; to take the weight out of the "Alleluia" sections, and out of my directing. I have every confidence in the musical ability of this talented group of singers and am privileged to be able to work with them.

Chapter 2

Henry Purcell's Come, Ye Sons of Art

Background

Henry Purcell (? 1659-1695) is considered one of the most important seventeenth-century composers and one of the greatest of all English composers (Holman). He was the son of Henry Purcell (d. 1664), who was a singer and a Gentleman of Chapel Royal and Master of the Choristers at Westminster Abbey. As a boy, the younger Purcell was also chorister in the Chapel Royal². He began composing at the age of eight.

Much of what is known about Purcell's early life is found in documents from the Chapel Royal concerning his maintenance and further training after his voice changed in 1673. It is believed that he studied with John Blow³ and Christopher Gibbons⁴ after he left the choir. He may have also studied with Matthew Locke⁵, as he was a great influence in Purcell's life. In 1677, he became a composer for the violins at court. He composed very little purely instrumental music, and it is thought that he received this

² Chapel Royal refers to personnel maintained by the successive sovereigns of England as members of the royal household to order and perform service for the family at all times.

³ John Blow (1648-1708) was an English composer, organist and teacher. By his mid-20's, he had become the foremost musician in England and in years was the elder statesman of the Restoration School, whose chief luminary was Henry Purcell.

⁴ Charles Gibbons (b. Westminster, London 1615; d. Westminster, London 1676) was an English composer and organist; son of leading English composer and keyboardist, Orlando Gibbons (1583-1625); chorister and organist of Chapel Royal and Westminster Abbey.

⁵ Matthew Locke (b. ?1621-3; d. 1677) was an English composer and organist; often thought of as the most important, influential and prolific English composer of his generation (Holman; Locke).

position because it was the only one available when he turned eighteen. During this time he composed sacred music more than anything else.

In 1679, he succeeded John Blow as organist of the Abbey, a post he retained for the rest of his life. In 1682, he, like his father before him, was admitted as a Gentleman of the Chapel Royal to serve as one of three organists. Although the court changed throughout the years, he managed to keep his position with little change. The ascension of James II led to a reorganization of the court musical establishment. Purcell's title changed from composer to 'harpsicall', but he retained the position of organist for the Anglican Chapel Royal, although its status was greatly diminished under the reign of the new Catholic monarch.

The exile of James II in 1688 ended Purcell's career as a composer working mainly for the court. He did, however, remain on the royal payroll under William and Mary⁶. During this time he composed odes for Mary and other occasional music, but he branched out in his composing. He wrote music for theatre and for other organizations outside the court.

Purcell's will, in which everything was left to his wife, Frances, was evidently drawn and signed in haste on the day of his death, suggesting that an apparently minor infection took a severe and unexpected turn for the worse. On the day of his funeral at Westminster Abbey, *The Flying Post* stated that Purcell was to be buried near the organ

⁶ William and Mary were coronated in 1689.

in the presence of the chapter and choir of the Abbey as well as the choir of the Chapel Royal.

Purcell contributed to many of the musical genres current in seventeenth-century England. He wrote stage music, six operas, over one-hundred anthems, services, sacred music, over three-hundred songs, duets and trios, fifty catches, instrumental and keyboard music. Admired as a song composer, he composed multi-sectional works, perhaps as a response to the cantata-like Italian pieces that were popular at the time. He is best known for establishing the English secular cantata and for his anthems. His large-scale anthems, or verse anthems, are multi-sectional works scored for soloists, chorus and organ with the frequent addition of strings. As the motet was a sacred piece in Latin, the anthem was a sacred piece in English. Purcell wrote his anthems intentionally in the 'old style' of the Renaissance. His church music can be divided into four types: service music, anthems for full choir and organ, verse anthems for solo voices, choir and organ, and symphony anthems for solo voices, choir, strings and continuo. He continued the development of extended, multi-section songs.

Purcell wrote approximately twenty-four odes. Among these odes, ten were intended for occasions that welcomed dignitaries home, four were for St. Cecilia's Day⁷ observances, six for Queen Mary's birthdays, and the others were occasional. One ode was written for the marriage of Princess Anne and Prince George of Denmark (1683), one for Lewis Maidwell's school in Westminster (1689), one for a London meeting of

⁷ St. Cecilia, a martyred saint in the Roman Catholic Church, is the patron saint of musician and church music. There is a Feast Day in the church for her remembrance celebrated on November 22.

Yorkshiremen (1690) and one for the centenary of the foundation of Trinity College, Dublin (1694).

Purcell wrote welcome songs⁸ until he switched to odes for Queen Mary's birthday. His first welcome songs were similar to Blow's odes of the late 1670's. They consist of short sections written mostly in dance rhythms, with solos often leading to ritornellos, or repetitions of the words and music by the chorus. Most were simply scored for strings and continuo. After 1689, his odes in general became more Italianate in character. He employed Italianate harmonic thinking, as the harmony moved through a series of modulations to related keys.

Conductor's Analysis

Come, ye sons of art, away z323, subtitled Ode for the Birthday of Queen Mary, 1694 is the most famous of Purcell's odes. It was written in celebration of the Queen's thirty-third birthday. The entire work contains nine sections or movements:

1. Overture; scored for trumpet, oboe, violin I & II, viola and bass in three smaller movements-Largo, Allegro Canzona, and Adagio, scored for violin I & II, viola and bass

⁸ A welcome song was written for the purpose of welcoming the royalty home after being away for a period of time.

2. Alto solo (“Come, ye Sons of Art”) labeled “Symphony”; Allegro Comodo; scored for oboe I & II, violin I & II, viola and bass. Song – alto solo with piano part marked ‘continuo’
3. Chorus (a continuation of “Come ye Sons of Art”); scored for SATB, trumpet I & II, oboe I & II, violin I & II, viola and bass
4. Duet – “Sound the Trumpet”; Allegro Moderato; scored for alto I & II, with continuo
5. Alto Solo with Flutes (“Strike the Viol”); Allegretto; scored for alto solo, flutes I & II, violin I & II, viola, bass, continuo
6. Bass Solo with Chorus (“The day that such a Blessing gave”); piu mosso; scored for bass solo, violin I & II, viola, bass
7. Soprano Solo with Oboe (“Bid the Virtues”); Adagio; scored for soprano, oboe, continuo
8. Bass solo (“These are the sacred charms”); Allegro; scored for bass and continuo
9. Duet with Chorus (“See Nature, rejoicing, has shown us the way”); (Con brio); soprano, bass, continuo

One of the available editions of parts two and three of *Come, Ye Sons of Art* is published by Neil A. Kjos Music Company. This version was published in 1980 and is still in print today. It is edited by John B. Haberlen, Professor Emeritus and Past-Director of

the Georgia State University School of Music. He has studied and conducted all over of the world and is a past National President of the American Choral Director's Association. In editing this piece of music, he chose to set the SATB choir and alto solo with piano accompaniment and an optional two oboes or trumpets in C.

"Come, Ye Sons of Art" is the second movement of the ode. It is originally scored for two oboes, two trumpets, strings and continuo instruments. The piece is divided into three equal sections of twenty-eight measure phrases: the first, an instrumental "symphony", the second, an alto solo (most likely historically performed by a counter tenor), and the third, a four-part choral setting. Each section has the same melody with some minor embellishments, and the form is basically A B A B A B.

The Neil A. Kjos version of the piece follows this form exactly. The instrumental parts have been reduced and the continuo written for piano. The instrumental parts could be played by any good players, and if none are available, the parts can easily be absorbed into the keyboard part. All the tempo and dynamic markings are editorial, however they are appropriate. The piece is in the key of D throughout, with a few accidentals and ornamentations added on the repetitions of sections so as to add interest to the music. The text, "To celebrate", is repeated each time it is sung to emphasize the purpose of the piece. There is no polyphony in this movement. The choral section is homophonic in nature which adds a strength and broadness to the piece and reiterates the grandness of the celebration.

Rehearsal Techniques and Performance Practice

In performing Baroque music, several considerations must be made. Generally, choirs of the Baroque period were relatively small. While it is not essential to pare down a choir, it is important to not let the volume and fullness of sound weigh down the piece. There is a certain lightness and buoyancy to Baroque music. Metered music and bar lines came into being during this time, so accentuations occur at regularly spaced intervals (Garretson, 48). The conductor should employ a beat that is both definite and precise, while determining in each phrase, what requires greater weight. Metric alterations, such as hemiolas and sesquialteras, should be emphasized.

Articulation should be clear and concise. As a general rule, quarter notes should have some space between them, while eighth notes may be more connected. Dotted rhythms should be performed with the dotted note being slightly longer, while the note with the shorter value be released more quickly. Generally, fluctuations of tempo were not observed in Baroque music, however a slight ritardando at the end of the piece is an acceptable practice. A fermata in this period is an indication of the end of a phrase and a point in the music where the singers may breathe. Cadences must be differentiated by the conductor as to their function.

Terraced dynamics, the addition or subtraction of voices or instruments to create different volume levels, were practiced during this period. The instruments of the time had far less ability to change their volume, so there should be little crescendo and

diminuendo in the performance of Baroque music. Extremes in volume should also be avoided. The conductor should maintain a dynamic range from piano to forte only.

The tone quality of vocal music should be clear and concise, with a certain agility to perform ornamentations and scale passages. *Bel Canto*⁹ was the vocal technique most widely used and its characteristics should be employed in the singing of choral music written during this period. Vibrato, when produced freely and as a result of good vocal technique, is acceptable.

The editorial tempo marking chosen by Haberlen is *Maestoso* and due to the occasion of this piece, it is appropriate. The tempo should remain constant throughout the piece. Since this piece is composed in 3 / 4 time, care should be taken to keep every downbeat from being heavy and accented. The phrases of the music, which are generally shorter than in later periods, will help to define which beats should have emphasis and which should not. In order to achieve continuity, the trills should be notated to communicate to all the performers how they should be performed. In this case, the trills should be four sixteenth-notes, beginning on the upper neighbor and including the lower neighbor, and performed on the beat.

Diction will be important in this piece, whether by soloist or choir. A slight lift should be employed between each "Come, come" and before the repetition of "to celebrate". The vowel sounds that begin a word, such as "of", "art", and "away", should be freshly articulated each time they are sung. In keeping with precise diction, the word

⁹ *Bel Canto* is an Italian term for 'beautiful singing'. This technique emphasized beauty of sound, brilliancy of performance and an elegant vocal style (Garretson, 67).

“tune” should have a slight [j]¹⁰ sound in it. “. For a formal and English sound, certain ‘r’s will be flipped as in the word “celebrate”. A double [tT] is appropriate when the text repeats, “To celebrate, to celebrate”. Word stress and weight placement will also be discussed and conducted. The words and lines should be very well-articulated and precise.

The pianist will play in a slightly detached manner, with no sustain pedal. The instruments will take care to not be too legato in style. The choir will follow likewise. The overall feeling of the piece is joyful and dance-like, so the musicians should reflect that sound. The dynamics as edited are historically appropriate, so they should be followed. Haberlen adds a few staccatos toward the end of the choral section which adds extra emphasis to the already slightly detached style. The piece will end with a slight ritardando and fermata.

Rehearsal Journal

I have many goals for the University Chorale, singing Purcell’s *Come, Ye Sons of Art*. The first of which is to achieve a light, detached sound with precise diction, sung with proper English. I would also like to achieve the mood of a royal event, to work as an ensemble with piano and oboes, and to achieve appropriate, well-sung dynamics without losing the melody in the alto line. I am most comfortable teaching and directing

¹⁰ [j] is the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) symbol for the sound of a ee-ya, passing quickly through each sound.

this level of choir, as this is closest to the choirs I've had in the past. I hope to work with the choir to help them achieve their best vocal sound as well.

March 6: I introduced myself to the chorale today. I led the women's sectional, then I introduced the piece and the choir sight read it. They grasped it pretty quickly, although upon first impression, there is a need to help the five basses and two tenors to balance the sopranos. The sopranos will need to take the edge out of their sound as it overpowers the other sections. The altos have the melody throughout the piece, but it is very hard to hear them. My goal for the next rehearsal is really just more working parts and learning notes and rhythms. I hope to add a few details as we go, because I feel that too many details up front will be too overwhelming for some of these singers.

Monday March 18: After taking a week off for spring break, we are back to regular rehearsals, and I will be there every Monday and Wednesday until the recital.

Wednesday March 20: I was unable to be at Monday's rehearsal due to the weather. Today I led warm-ups and the women's sectional. I worked notes and parts along with word stress and placement. There is one troublesome soprano voice that has a very piercing and sharp sound. This singer seems unwilling or unable to alter her sound when I worked with the rest of section. Men are few in number and soft in volume. I must work on getting them to have a forward tone by having them place the sound behind their teeth. Also, deliberate separation of notes will help. I will talk to Mr. Urtel about bringing them down a few rows and placing them between soprano and alto sections for this piece. I think this will improve the overall balance of this piece.

March 25: I led warm-ups and sectionals again. I think the choir, especially the women are getting used to me. I worked notes and continued emphasizing the word stress I desire by demonstrating, both speaking and singing and having them repeat back to me. They seem to understand well. I spoke to basses about bouncing or 'lifting' and separating their quarter note rhythms. The soprano section is still affected by that one voice. I spoke to Mr. Urtel about her and he explained that she had suddenly gotten very bold in her singing. When he started the semester and placed the singers, she was singing much more timidly. My goal for the following rehearsal is to gain even more confidence. There are two singers that have expressed being interested in trying for the beginning solo. I will hear them sometime the week of April 8th.

April 1: I led warm-ups, as I will each rehearsal from now on. The notes are coming through pretty clearly. The altos are still hard to hear and it seems to be low for them. I told them that when the rest of the choir sings softly, that they do not have to change their volume, because I can hardly hear them when they diminish their volume. The sopranos blended well today because that one particular voice was not at rehearsal. The F# at the end of the piece is still too bright. I had them try to modify their vowel, and use their air to 'soften' the sound and that seemed to help. We will work on this more during sectionals. I am pleased with their progress. They will easily be able to memorize this piece because it is so repetitive. I asked Mr. Urtel for any feedback he could give me. He mentioned that they seem to jump on "...brate". I think it is because

I'm conducting it short with a lift following the note. I will definitely work on my communication and conducting to keep that from becoming a habit.

My goal for the rest of our rehearsal time is to continue embracing the Baroque style. When I asked them to imagine singing for a royal event, perhaps Princess Kate, their tone changed immediately. This will be sung from memory and I hope to have the alto solo be an alto solo. If the voices will not work, or cannot be heard over the piano and instruments, then we will go back to just altos. I had all the ladies learn it, in case I end up desiring a more full sound.

Chapter 3

Johannes Brahms' *O Schöne Nacht*

Background

German composer, Johannes Brahms, was born in Hamburg in 1833. He is considered by many to be a successor to Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) and Franz Schubert (1797-1828) in larger forms of chamber music and orchestral music and to the Renaissance and Baroque composers in choral music. He creatively combined in his music many of the expressions of art music of the middle to late nineteenth-century and three centuries of folk and dance styles (Bozarth).

As a youngster, Brahms studied piano, cello and horn. At the age of seven, he was accepted for instruction in theory and piano Eduard Marxsen¹¹, without charge. Marxsen shared with the young musician his knowledge and appreciation for the music of the Viennese Classical composers, such as J. S. Bach (1685-1750). Brahms' first known public performance was as pianist in a chamber concert in 1843, at the age of ten. A few years later he would perform solo recitals including the music of Bach and Beethoven.

As a young man, Brahms contributed to the family income by teaching piano and playing popular music for various private gatherings. He also spent time accompanying

¹¹ Eduard Marxsen (1806-1887) was a German pianist, composer and teacher in Hamburg, now known as Brahms' teacher.

theatrical productions and arranging music for brass bands and piano. His favorite pastimes were reading novels and poetry by German Romantics, studying and performing the music of Bach and Beethoven, and learning about folklore, folk poetry and folk music.

In 1853 Brahms met Robert Schumann (1810-1856) and Clara Schumann (1819-1896). These were relationships that would effect and mold his musical, professional and personal life. When Schumann met Brahms and heard him play, he recognized Brahms as a genius. He was moved to resume his role of music critic, for the first time in a decade, and named Brahms a “musical savior who would give ideal expression to the times”. This was stated in the celebrated essay, *Neue Bahnen* or *New Paths*.

While in his twenties, Brahms became acquainted with Arthur Schopenhauer, the pessimist philosopher, who believed life gave more pain than pleasure. Brahms’ choral music reflects this philosophy. The majority of his sacred compositions and large-scale secular works have texts that express the idea that existence is a task to be endured and that the only hope of joy is found after death. Only a few occasional works, such as his part songs and vocal chamber music, deal with happiness on earth (Schrock 474-5). Pieces such as *O Schöne Nacht* from *Vier Quartette* reflect his love of folk poetry and folklore.

The same year Brahms met the Schumanns, he also met Franz Liszt (1811-1886), a musical contemporary, whose symphonic poems eventually came to disgust Brahms. In 1860, Brahms signed a manifesto opposing the alleged “Music of the Future” that was

being propagated by Franz Liszt and Richard Wagner (1813-1883). In autumn of 1862, Brahms met Richard Wagner. At the time, Brahms boasted that he understood Wagner's music better than anyone.

In 1862, Brahms took his first trip to Vienna, where he was well-accepted into the foremost musical circles. The next year he became the director of the Vienna *Singakademie*¹², for which he conducted in his first season *a capella* Renaissance works, a Bach cantata, works by Schumann, Beethoven and Mendelssohn (1809-1847), and a few of his own pieces. He was not in this position long, and kept himself from accepting any conducting positions to guard his freedom to compose. Brahms eventually accepted the position of director of the concerts of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna in 1872, a position he held for only three years.

Brahms' fame in continental Europe soon spread to England and to the United States. He was repeatedly honored by his contemporaries as concert pianist, conductor and composer. His music was enjoyed and well accepted in his lifetime and performed quite regularly. Brahms' fondness for historical styles and his incorporation of them into his own compositions helped to make his music appeal to audiences. His use of Renaissance and Baroque polyphony and his joining of old and new styles created a new kind of musical language, one that influenced generations of composers to come.

Brahms passed away in 1897 in Vienna, and was buried in a grave of honor near the remains of Beethoven and Schubert. It has been said that his posthumous influence

¹² *Singakademie* – German for singing school.

was found everywhere, especially in conservatories and concert halls. Certain features that were found in his music, such as thick chords, lush harmonies, triadic melodies and duple against triple rhythms were employed in much of the music written for decades after his passing. Composers such as Hubert Parry (1848-1918) and Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) in England, and Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924) in France have been noted to have been influenced by Brahms.

Conductor's Analysis

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897) composed *O Schöne Nacht*¹³ from *Vier Quartette op. 92* no later than 1877. Although it is listed as a quartet, it has since become a standard piece in today's choral repertoire¹⁴. Its popularity is not only due to its lyrical melody, lush harmonies and masterful part-writing, but also due to Brahms' skillful crafting of the music to support the text. The poet is Georg Friedrich Daumer (1800-1875) and the poem is taken from his *Polydora*¹⁵. It begins as a simple portrait of a starry, moonlit night and turns into a love poem at the end, when the youth steals away to his beloved.

¹³ Brahms' *Vier Quartette op. 92* (1877-1884) also includes "*Spätherbst*", "*Abendlied*" and "*Warum*", all written for SATB quartet and piano (Schrock, 482).

¹⁴ Among Brahms' most beloved and frequently performed pieces are his vocal chamber works, including *Liebeslieder Walzer op. 52*, the three quartets of op. 31, and "*O Schöne Nacht*" from op. 92 and the *Zigeunerlieder op. 103* (Schrock, 479).

¹⁵ *Polydora* is an anthology that contained German translations of "folk" poetry, in this case from Hungary (Paine, 132).

The German text translates:

O schöne Nacht!

Oh lovely night!

Am Himmel märchenhaft

In the sky, fairy tale-like

Erglänzt der Mond in seiner ganzen Pracht;

the moon shines in all its

splendor;

um ihn der kleinen Sterne

Around it the little stars

liebliche Genossenschaft.

Pleasant company.

Es schimmert hell der Tau

glistens brightly the dew

Am grünen halm; mit Macht

on the green stem; with

power

Im Fliederbusche schlägt die

in the lilac bush sings the

Nachtigall;

nightingale;

Der Knabe schleicht zu seiner Liebsten

the youth sneaks to his

beloved

sacht—O schöne Nacht!

quietly—Oh lovely night!

The poem used for this piece was twice altered by Brahms most likely to heighten the expressive qualities. “The onomatopoeia of “*fliederbusche schlägt*” is certainly superior to “*Fliederbaume schlägt*”, and having the youth steal away to his “most beloved” (*Liebsten*) sounds more intense in German than Daumer’s “love” (*Liebe*).” (Paine, 133).

The overall form of this piece is A B A B' C A' Coda, and is set predominantly in the key of E major and in $\frac{3}{4}$ time. The song begins with a four measure piano introduction. Brahms immediately sets the tone with an ascending, arpeggiated E Major chord, bringing the listener's attention and imagination upward, as if the listener should be looking upward toward the sky. The left hand arpeggio is joined by the right hand's major thirds, set offbeat by the length of an eighth note. This is an effect that could represent stars twinkling, crickets chirping or night birds singing. He repeats the E major arpeggio, but this time raises the thirds in the treble clef from the root and third of the chord to the third and fifth of the chord, again bringing the listener's attention upward. The strongly established key of E Major presented in such a manner creates a peaceful and tranquil mood. It is in this mood that the first section of the melody is introduced in the choir.

Brahms begins the A section with the choir singing a unison B that leads into another E major chord. The first subtle movement of line is in the bass part, which is transferred to the soprano and tenor parts after a measure. The text, "*O schöne Nacht!*", is supported by a lovely, legato melody line. The accompaniment continues in a fluid manner with the right hand maintaining its offbeat pattern in octaves instead of thirds.

The B section melody is first heard in the bass voice to the text "*Am Himmel märchenhaft...*" meaning, "in the sky fairy tale-like...." The melody continues to outline an E Major ascending chord, bringing attention toward the night sky. The flowing

ascending line is set to the text, "*er glänzt der Mond in seiner ganzen Pracht*", "Shines the moon in its full splendor". This is accompanied by a pattern of varying inversions of the tonic E Major chord again in ascending arpeggios, the left hand on the beat and the right hand still on the off-beats. Each measure's pattern is descending and it lends the music a dream-like rhythm. Brahms' prolonged use of the tonic establishes for the listener a sense of tonality and stability even though the chord is often found in positions other than root position.

When the text changes, Brahms switches the melody line to the tenors who continue the B theme from the basses, starting with the pitch on which the basses ended. The editor's marking in the music is appropriately "*dolce*", since they are singing about the little stars being pleasant company. The melody line is a little more animated in this section. Brahms uses a tonicized dominant chord in the accompaniment to take the performers and listeners somewhere 'new'. He chooses a playful duple versus triple pattern in the piano and a playful melody to set the text, "*um ihn der kleinen Sterne liebliche Genossenschaft.*" Here Brahms breaks from the legato he had originally employed and uses a few staccatos in the right hand while returning to the previous pattern of offbeat eighth notes also in the right hand. This evokes the image of stars twinkling and playing around the moon. The poet is personifying the stars so Brahms sets the music as to give life to them.

There is a brief return to the A theme that is carried out in all four voices. The E major key is reestablished and the accompaniment is similar to the beginning of the

piece. The B theme is reintroduced after this four bar phrase, "*Es schimmert hell der Tau am grünen halm.*" Brahms uses the same harmonic interest as with the previous B section, a series of borrowed leading tone chords each moving to another leading tone chord, thus depicting wandering. After two measures and six chords, he brings us to the B' section in the soprano voice to continue the story.

The soprano entrance, similar to that of the tenors, has a forte marked to support the text, "*mit Macht*", "with power". Brahms composed this section with an eighth note and sixteenth note rhythm distinct from the other rhythms in the piece and mostly comprised the melody of fourth and fifth intervals, to paint the powerful voice of the nightingale, and to support the text, "*mit Macht im Fliederbusche schlägt die Nachtigall*". The accompaniment is doing something new here, as the right hand portrays a bird's song with a trill figure in the line. During this section Brahms is intensifying the music harmonically and rhythmically. The left hand of the piano is arpeggiating ascending sixteenth notes. At the end of this section, with the sopranos singing, like a nightingale, strongly through to the end of the phrase, Brahms employs an evaded cadence, using the E chord to take us not to the tonic, but to the key of C major, temporarily tonicizing the flat VI. This is a surprising, yet welcome departure from the previously established key and it serves to add interest to the poem as the poem is now less about creating a scene, and more about the love story.

The C section of the piece, "*Der Knabe schleicht zu seiner Liebsten...*", "The youth sneaks to his beloved..." contains a lovely duet between the tenors and basses with the

piano creatively supporting the text. Brahms sets the text "*sacht, sacht*" or "quietly, quietly" with a hemiola effect, portraying the youth tip-toeing away to see his love. The piano under the voices is in a simple triplet pattern played quietly one note at a time. After this section there is a choral change. The sopranos and altos enter after tenors and basses begin their duet and there are alternating mini-duets that go from just the male voices singing, to just the female voices, then to soprano and bass together. This is a nice effect of changing color and texture without taking away from the text or the continuity of the piece. Brahms then returns to the same accompaniment as before with the return of the text "*O schöne Nacht!*" bringing together all the voices for a rich, full sonority for the return of the A section.

Brahms sets this restatement of the text in the original tonic key of E major, then quickly employs a series of dominant of the dominant chords to intensify the music to the end of the piece. From this point the chords move back to the tonic chord found in first position, then second position, and finally to root position. In doing so the listener is returned to the original feeling of peace and stability which supports the picture and mood of the poem. There is a short coda in which Brahms uses a hemiola technique in the vocal parts with the sopranos one beat ahead of the rest of the choir and each syllable set to a two-beat length. The use of this technique right at the end adds interest, but also relaxes the momentum of the piece. They finally rest in agreement for the last two measures, ending with an E major chord similar to that which begins the

piece, continuing the mood and scene created, as if there may be more poem, story or song to come.

Rehearsal Technique and Performance Practice

In the Romantic period, composers sought to break free of the confines and strictness of the Classicists. While honoring the basic rules of composition, they sought ways to express themselves within those rules. Composers found ways of changing the feel of the meter of music without changing the time signature.

This was a time of extremes in music. There were now extremes in tempi and often a tempo was set depending on the mood to be created. *Accelerando* and *ritardando* were employed to greater extremes as was *Tempo Rubato*. Romantic composers began indicating their tempi much more precisely, especially after the metronome was invented by Mälze in 1816.

Extremes in dynamics were also very common and widely utilized. It is not uncommon to see a piece of music from this period marked *ppp* or *fff*. Texture also changed during this time. There was a lot more dissonance and tonal wandering in music than ever before. The use of harmonic chromaticism was one of the many devices that allowed for greater personal expression. Deceptive and obscured cadences were also being used. The texture of a piece often varied within a relatively

short span of time. Compared to the Classical period, Romantic texture was frequently dense and heavy.

Composers were inspired by the lyricism of the human voice. Tone color in instrumental music was often meant to duplicate the singing-quality of the voice. As individual expression was the goal of the composer, the tone color of the voice or voices were to be beautiful, sensuous and enchanting.

In rehearsing and preparing *O Schöne Nacht*, understanding the text painting becomes very important in creating the choral sound. The tone of the choir will reflect the text throughout the piece. Dynamics will play an important part of creating the mood, as will the pronunciation of the text. Care should be taken to pronounce the German correctly and clearly. Vocal line is very important in this piece, as Brahms has written lovely melodies that serve to support the text.

Each line presents challenges to be overcome. In the basses' opening solo, it will be important for them to sing lightly, taking the weight out of their sound. Since the line soars to an E above the staff, the baritones will need to carry the line through the end of the phrase. The challenge with this line is for the basses to sing with a consistent tone as they move from low in their range to the top of their range. When the tenors take over the melody, it will be important for them to sing lightly in a legato style. The same considerations apply to the alto line. They should let their sound float on their breath to keep forward movement and lightness of sound, and to keep the tone

consistent as they also move from low to high. The sopranos come in on a forte, which will be relative to the mood of the piece. The challenge of this line will be to keep the singers from getting too rhythmic that they sound 'chirpy' and too lax that the bird-like rhythm is lost.

The conductor's beat should never bear weight or pulse in this part song. A legato line is of the utmost importance as is expression. Equally important will be the showing of dynamics and lifts throughout the piece. The choral tone, while achieving a certain richness, should be light and flexible. The beauty of this work is intertwined between text, melody, accompaniment and beautiful choral tone.

Rehearsal Reflection

My ultimate goals for the Concert Choir in Brahms' *O Schöne Nacht* are to have them tell a delightful story in song, to musically to play up the Brahms' text painting and to create beautiful, flowing lines with crisp and proper German. We will overcome the technical challenges of individual soli lines and achieve a full, rich sound, investing in tone and line.

February 20: This is the first day of working with the Concert Choir. They sight-read the piece straight through with no significant issues. I had them sing on [lu] or [du] instead of the German text. Next rehearsal we will perhaps read through again and

begin to work the chorus. I offered a very brief summary of the poem and will discuss the text painting as we work the piece, and give diction and translation.

February 21: Today was the second reading of this piece. I did not have time to begin the 'real' work of learning notes, but it went well. Again, I had them sing on [lu] or [du], their choice as to what was easier for them. For the next rehearsal, I hope to get into working phrases with a little of the German diction...perhaps just the chorus. I will work on getting my head out of my music and work on directing line. The German will require more work when there is time to work each line individually.

March 6/7: We ran through the piece again, but with not too much time. I feel the choir likes this selection. They are responding well to my direction when they look out of their music.

March 21: Today I introduced the German and ran the song again. "Sacht, sacht" is going to be very tricky, as we had discussed even before I introduced this piece. One of my goals for the following rehearsals is to really demonstrate how they should feel and hear them. I will also give them the image of a lad sneaking, tip-toeing, to his youth. I feel that the accompanist is taking her own liberties instead of taking my tempos. The choir is following her lead. I know she dislikes snapping and being 'corrected'. This is going to take some finesse on my part and greater communication.

March 25: We have just enough time to run the Brahms' today for the sake of keeping it 'in their heads'. There was not much time to really work any particular thing.

March 27: My goals for today are to have them keep the eighth-note pulse going and to keep their energy in the sound, even through the piano sections. Dr. Dickau and I discussed what an appropriate pianissimo level would be for a choir of this size. The mezzo forte is still too soft. I had the choir think eighth-notes during the sacht section...and it was precise but very affected and mechanical. Tomorrow I'll try to demonstrate again and again if need be. I feel there are some nice moments happening. The Basses and Tenors are especially attentive with eyes and expressions. The altos are too. I feel the sopranos are holding back a little in general. I will work on this during sectionals.

March 28: I spoke with Dr. Dickau about the pianist. He said to be bold and I will. He noticed that it was working against me too. We will work individual lines for each section and talk about the translation. It is time to bring about the meaning of each line.

I will continue to work the German, so that it is accurate and precise. The translation will help choir to achieve the goal of story-telling. This is such a delightful piece and I am confident that they will sing it artfully and musically. I will continue to work on line, diction, and precision of entrances and releases.

Chapter 4

Charles Villiers Stanford's The Blue Bird

Background

Charles Villiers Stanford (1852-1924) was born in Dublin to a somewhat wealthy family and as a child was immersed in music from a very early age. His father, a prominent lawyer, was also an amateur musician who often hosted musicians and concerts in his home. Stanford began composing by the age of four. He received a classical education and studied violin, piano and organ. He showed promise in the field of composition and began to study with Dublin's foremost musicians, who would have great influence on his career. His study with Robert Stewart¹⁶ taught him organ and church music; his study with Michael Quarry¹⁷ gave him knowledge of the music of Bach, Schumann and Brahms; and he greatly admired the conducting talent of Joseph Robinson¹⁸ (Dibble). Stanford continued studying music in the fields of piano and composition and during this time he composed church music, songs and part songs and orchestral works.

In 1870 he received a scholarship at Queen's College, Cambridge and attended that year as a choral student. A year later, he was elected assistant conductor to the

¹⁶ Sir Robert Stewart (*b.* Dublin 1825- *d.* Dublin 1894) was an Irish organist, conductor, composer and teacher.

¹⁷ Michael Quarry (dates unknown) was an Irish musician and teacher.

¹⁸ Joseph Robinson (*b.* Dublin 1815- *d.* Dublin 1898) was an Irish baritone, and conductor, and composer.

Cambridge Musical Society and by the age of twenty-one was the conductor of two choral societies. In 1874, he was appointed organist at Trinity College, and as part of the arrangement he was able to study for half of each year in Germany.

By the age of thirty-five he was a professor of music at Cambridge. He also taught at the Royal College of Music. His influence as a teacher of composition was wide and among his students are prominent composers such as Gustav Holst (1874-1934), Charles Wood (1866-1926), Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958), John Ireland (1879-1962), and Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875-1912). Among the musical positions he held during his career was conductor of the Leeds Philharmonic Society, the Leeds Triennial Festival and the Bach Choir¹⁹ of London. The Bach Choir was formed in 1875 by the famed singer Jenny Lind²⁰ and Arthur Duke Coleridge*, father of poet Mary E. Coleridge²¹, whose poems he would eventually set to music.

Stanford was the recipient of many honors during his lifetime, including honorary degrees from Oxford, Cambridge, Durham and Leeds. He was knighted in 1902. As a composer, he was held in high esteem from England and throughout Europe and North America. He is best known for his great contribution to liturgical music of the Anglican church, although he found certain success in most of the genres for which he composed.

¹⁹ The Bach Choir is now a large, independent organization that promotes concerts in London and elsewhere. The choir boasts approximately 220 active members. Singers are subject to triennial auditions in order to maintain high standards. The choir's patron is the Prince of Wales, Charles Philip Arthur George.

²⁰ Jenny Lind (1820-1887) was a Swedish coloratura soprano, known as 'The Swedish Nightingale'.

²¹ Mary E. Coleridge (1861-1907) was a British novelist and poet. She was Samuel Taylor Coleridge's grand-niece. Hubert Parry was a family friend who also set her poetry to music.

It is said that Stanford's compositional style rejected the heavily chromatic idiom of Wagner and his counterparts. His high regard for Brahms was paramount in his chamber and orchestra music. His melodies are often permeated with Irish folk music and his love of Ireland can be heard in a number of his solo songs and song cycles. He chose to espouse a diatonic language that showed a sophistication and refinement as revealed in the well-known Latin motets op. 38, the part song *Peace, come away*, and in his remarkable setting of *The Blue Bird op. 119 No. 3*. (Dibble).

Stanford, along with Parry and Mackenzie, are given credit for the so-called renaissance of British music. At a time when British standards of music and art were at a low point, these composers brought beauty and substance to music in an innovative way and restored its importance to society and education.

Stanford composed thirty-two choral and orchestral works, two oratorios, forty anthems and motets, twelve publications of Anglican service music, many hymns and carols and approximately one-hundred part-songs and folk song arrangements.

Stanford's part songs are predominantly strophic and homophonic, with rhythmic variances between the soprano voice and the lower voices. Often the verses are rhythmically altered to conform to word declamation and dramatic effect. This is seen in two of his most popular part songs, *Heraclitus* and *The Blue Bird* (Schrock, 538).

Stanford's part songs reached near perfection both in melodic invention and in capturing the mood of the poem. *The Blue Bird* is the third in a set of eight published in 1910 with words by Coleridge.

Conductor's Analysis

At the end of the nineteenth-century, Romanticism was coming to an end, to be replaced by a number of varying styles. One of those styles was Impressionism, which was a movement in art that was transferred to music. As painters sought to capture the impression of a single moment, so did composers. Although Stanford is not considered an Impressionistic composer, he was influenced by the movement, as seen in his use of seventh chords and non-functional chords in various inversions and linear bass lines that function both harmonically and melodically.

The poem as written by Mary Coleridge is as follows:

The lake lay blue below the hill,
O'er it, as I looked, there flew
Across the waters, cold and still,
A bird whose wings were palest blue.

The sky above was blue at last,
The sky beneath me blue in blue,
A moment, ere the bird had passed,
It caught his image as he flew.

Set in the key signature of G-flat, analysis of this piece reveals that Stanford avoids any functional harmonic progressions, the exception being at cadences. More often than not, the chords are found in positions other than root position. This practice gives the piece a sense of weightlessness and adds to images of sky and flight.

In the opening A section, the choir begins singing the text, "lake lay blue...". The pianissimo opening combined with long, sustained notes and chords generally not found

in root position gives the sound a floating, ethereal effect. The text “below the hill” is marked with sustained staccatos for subtle, grounding emphasis. The soprano voice comes in ever so softly over the choir with a simple, “blue” on a pianissimo fifth of the chord up an octave, achieving the effect of the bird flying. “The haunting repeated use of the word ‘blue’ illustrates the timelessness of the moment, and the blue suspended sky” (Parfitt).

The text is repeated in similar style, with the reiteration of the text “below the hill” in light staccatos. The melody and the first verse, the B section, is introduced in the soprano line, to the text, “O’er it, as I looked, there flew across the waters, cold and still, a bird whose wings were palest blue.” The text is repeated both in the sustained chords of the choir, again, achieving a timeless moment, and in the soaring, legato line in the soprano voice, depicting the bird in flight.

The A section comes back with the choir singing, “The sky above was blue at last”, with the recurring soprano note, “blue”, above them. “The sky beneath me blue in blue” are the words the choir sings next, with the staccatos placed on the same beats as the previous statement. The B’ section begins, again in the soprano voice, on the text, “A moment, ere the bird had passed”. As in the B section, the text is in all vocal parts, singing “it caught his image as he flew”. Stanford employs the same soaring, legato soprano line that takes the listener up to the imagined sky, as if watching the bird fly away, which is connected to the diminuendo in the vocal part. The chorus ends the

piece with a restatement of the opening text, identical in notes, except for the first bass note, that has been dropped a half-step, resulting in a slightly richer, diminished sound on that chord.

Rehearsal Techniques and Performance Practice

In performing music of this style, both conductor and choir must agree on the mood of the moment being created. The mood that Coleridge and Stanford capture is a moment of serenity, clarity and beauty, both breath-taking and fleeting. The choir should maintain a clear, consistent sound throughout the piece. There will be a need for good breaths and the inhalations should be thought of as part of the mood of the piece. A good deal of energy will be needed to sustain the long, held notes. Vowel agreement should be emphasized, especially during the sustained chords. A rehearsal technique that will help with this is count-singing each phrase on eight notes.

Intonation is especially critical as it is *a capella* and has both wide spread chords and cluster chords. The choir should sustain their chords softly underneath the soprano melody, offering harmonic support, but not impeding the soaring melody.

Diction may be an issue as the tempo is *Larghetto*. The choir must be together in the singing of the text. Care should be taken to place the vowel on the beat with the starting consonant sounds placed slightly before the beat. Consonants must be given

greater energy in the slow tempo. The Dynamics of this piece range from *ppp* to *mf*, so a little restraint on the part of the singers will be needed in keeping with the awe of the moment Stanford has created.

The soprano part should float above the choir, as if detached from them while being an integral part of them. The tempo will adjust slightly to the swells in the music and as with most music, it will be important for the conductor to conduct the music and not the beats. The impressionistic style of this piece lends to it not only the beauty of a special moment, but also an ethereal quality that must come through the sound of the singers. The tone of the singers should be rather light, using vibrato for the purpose of adding a shimmer and richness to the overall sound. A full, but not heavy, tone quality will provide a stability over which the soprano melody may soar. The phrases of this part song must always be well-supported and carried through with energy and on good breath.

Rehearsal Journal

The goals I have for Stanford's *The Blue Bird*, sung by the Concert Choir, are to create and maintain the moment that is captured in both poem and music, to sustain energy and maintain pitch in the sustained notes, and to achieve expressiveness and precision within the legato and sustained phrases.

February 20: This was my first day of working with the Concert Choir. They sight read the piece straight through. There were no significant issues with note reading. I had them choose [lu] or [du] instead of the text. I assigned four first sopranos to sing the soprano part. The rest of the sopranos will sing the first alto part, and all altos will be on the second alto part. For the next rehearsal we will read through the piece again and begin to work in the text and work on phrases.

February 21: Today was the second reading of piece. I didn't have time to begin the 'real' work of learning notes, but it went well. They sang the text. My impression is that they like this song...they read it well and seem to grasp the feel without my saying much so far. Goal for next rehearsal is to work individual phrases, describe desired tone and choral effect. I plan to begin to clean up the staccatos by clarifying by demonstration how I'd like them to sound. I am realizing how important it is to be very clear on cut-offs and reducing motion going into releases. I will spend more time practicing the conducting, especially at the end of phrases.

March 6: Today was another run-through of The Blue Bird, and we worked mostly parts, as time did not allow much more than that.

March 25: My goal was to work staccatos and line. I demonstrated how I wanted them and had them repeat after me several times and speak them together. I worked on line a little.

March 27: My goals to work on today were to have them keep eighth note pulse going and maintain energy even through the pianissimo sections. The mezzo forte is still

too soft and they do not sustain it through to the end of the phrase. I will work on communicating that for the next rehearsal. I will continue to work on my conducting, to make cut-offs as clear as possible by reducing motion, stopping and lifting for the breaths.

March 28: I added three first altos to help the second sopranos. One of the second sopranos mentioned that, for her, the difficulty in pitch lies with the singers around her. The second sopranos in general are the weakest section as they can hardly be heard. They have to be told that they have the melody. My personal goal for the next rehearsal is to work on my cut-offs and be as precise as I can be. I will work section by section, starting with the second sopranos and their melody. I will have them stand and run their part on their own, a capella. I will have the choir pulse eighth-notes so they do not drag. I know some have sung this before and I'm hearing things that might be a result of previously learned ways. I need to be really precise and I'm seeing the need for my own practice. I intend to do just that. If this does not improve quickly, we will not be taking it on tour. I'd rather have it comfortable for all of us, and wait to perform it, than to gloss over the important things, and not have it right. There is a beauty that comes from doing it correctly and feeling it together.

April 1: I felt better and more confident today. I worked the soprano II part in mixed formation, had them stand and sing. I told them not to worry about the pianissimo marking. With the extra voices and the change of dynamics, it became much better balanced. The improvement in the clarity of my conducting has helped

tremendously in the clarity and precision of the releases and entrances. The idea of energizing into the cut-offs seemed to help. I will work more with the first sopranos, but currently the lower voices need attention right now. The first sopranos were brought out in a semi-circle in front of the choir and it sounded great, especially with the choir in mixed formation. I would like to take a minute, and have them close their eyes and read to them the poem. I would have them picture the moment, describe how it looks and feels to be in that moment. Some words to describe the scene or the moment may be ethereal, beautiful, peaceful, calm, lovely, or fleeting. I'm encouraged at how many more heads are out of the music and how the second sopranos have embraced their melody. The first sopranos continue to make a lovely, clear tone. They do need some direction here and there, and I need to work on balancing my attention from large group to small group.

April 5: We rehearsed and performed *The Blue Bird* on tour and it was an excellent experience. I felt the choir was with me when I breathed and they released the sound and text when I did. I received nice compliments and am grateful to have had the opportunity to work with the choir before my actual recital.

My tour experience, as I conducted this piece twice, was very fulfilling. The choir sang well. I felt they were precise in their entrances and releases. The first sopranos had a few tone issues that I will address with them during our next sectional. It may have been a vowel agreement problem. I do not anticipate it being anything more than that.

In the weeks that follow, I hope to really discuss the moment being captured by the poem and music. They will benefit from the discussion and the piece will be even more musical and more complete.

Conclusion

It is a conductor's responsibility to research and study, analyze and prepare each piece that she conducts. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to prepare these pieces and learn about the composers on a deeper level than I have in the past. The benefit of this type of preparation is immeasurable. I have found it to be a wonderful tool to educate the musicians in our choirs, aiding in understanding the circumstances in which the pieces were written and the meaning of the texts. By applying the appropriate historical performance practices to be as stylistically accurate as possible, we can further advance our understanding of the music and the audience's understanding and enjoyment as well.

In working with the University Chorale, I find myself at home. As a choir, they are so similar to the choirs I've worked with in the past. I enjoy teaching students who have a limited knowledge of singing and choral music. Teaching students who are eager to learn new things is enjoyable for any teacher. As always, some students are more receptive to learning than others. Helping the choir make a sound that is balanced and in tune is always rewarding. Making that sound musical and stylistic is my goal for them. I hope to continue to improve this piece by communicating clearly and rehearsing them well.

Applying what I have learned in two years of conducting lessons and choral seminar has been very beneficial. Finding new ways to communicate physically is as important as communicating verbally. For me, the challenge lies in the motions, but I am committed to continue to grow as a conductor, so I may have choirs that grow and improve.

This experience has been one that will continue long after I graduate. The process of making music is at times tedious and at times magical. For the moments in between I will rely on the skills that I've learned, the knowledge I've gained and my love for making music with others. Perfection is an ideal goal, but making music that touches the listener and communicates effectively is, in my opinion, the greater goal. Precision in diction, vowels, and cut-offs is something I've never had the luxury of pursuing with my small, volunteer choirs. I will begin to take the time to go for precision, not perfection. It is what makes a good choir sound great.

I am thankful for the one-on one instruction that I had, for that is where I feel I have learned and grown the most. I am grateful for the opportunity to work with all three choirs and I am grateful that I am a more aware conductor than I was before I enrolled in this program.

References

- Arnold, Denis and John Milsom . "Philips, Peter." *The Oxford Companion to Music*. Ed. Alison Latham. *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 28 Jan. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e5143>>.
- Banfield, Stephen and Jeremy Dibble. "Coleridge-Taylor, Samuel." *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 23 Feb. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/06083>>.
- Bowers, Roger. "Chapel Royal." *The Oxford Companion to Music*. Ed. Alison Latham. *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 9 Feb. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e1298>>.
- Brahms, Johannes. *O Schone Nacht*. Ed. Maynard Klein. Milwaukee: G. Schirmer, Inc., 1971. sheet music.
- Carver, Anthony F.. "Concertato." *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 4 Feb. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/06242>>.
- Clemens von Gleich, et al. "Hague, The." *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 4 Feb. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/12167>>.
- Daverio, John and Eric Sams. "Schumann, Robert." *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 19 Feb. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40704>>.
- Dibble, Jeremy. "Parry, Sir Hubert." *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 19 Feb. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/20949>>.
- Dibble, Jeremy. "Stanford, Sir Charles Villiers." *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 23 Feb. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/26549>>.
- Drabkin. William "Marxsen, Eduard." *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 19 Feb. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/17959>>.

Field, Christopher D.S.. "Gibbons, Christopher." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 9 Feb. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/11089>>.

"Fitzwilliam Virginal Book." *The Oxford Companion to Music*. Ed. Alison Latham. *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 4 Feb. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e2560>>.

Gordon Paine, ed. *Translations and Annotations of Choral Repertoire*. Ed. Gordon Paine. Trans. Ron Jeffers. Vol. 2. Corvallis: earthsongs, 2000. 3 vols. book.

"hemiola." *The Oxford Companion to Music*. Ed. Alison Latham. *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 26 Feb. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e3212>>.

Hiley, David, et al. "Sesquialtera." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 26 Feb. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40114>>.

Holman, Peter. "Locke, Matthew." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 9 Feb. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/16848>>.

Husk, W.H. and Joseph J. Ryan. "Stewart, Sir Robert." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 23 Feb. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/26743>>.

Jeans, Susi and O.W. Neighbour. "Bull, John." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 28 Jan. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/04294>>.

Kerman, Joseph et al. "Beethoven, Ludwig van." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 19 Feb. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40026>>.

Lesure, François and Roy Howat. "Debussy, Claude." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 5 Mar. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/07353>>.

"Lind, Jenny." *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, 2nd ed. rev. Ed. Michael Kennedy. *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 23 Feb. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t237/e6129>>.

Matthews, Colin. "Holst, Gustav." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 23 Feb. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/13252>>.

Millington, Barry, et al. "Wagner." *The New Grove Dictionary of Opera*. Ed. Stanley Sadie. *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 20 Feb. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/O905605pg1>>.

Nectoux, Jean-Michel. "Fauré, Gabriel." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 19 Feb. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/09366>>.

Ottaway, Hugh and Alain Frogley. "Vaughan Williams, Ralph." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 19 Feb. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/42507>>.

Ottaway, Hugh. "Ireland, John." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 23 Feb. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/13905>>.

Pascall, Robert. "Robinson (ii)." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 23 Feb. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/23595pg2>>.

"Philips, Peter." *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, 2nd ed. rev. Ed. Michael Kennedy. *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 28 Jan. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t237/e7886>>.

Reich, Nancy B. "Schumann, Clara." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 19 Feb. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/25152>>.

Roche, Jerome and Henry Roche. "Moscheles, Ignaz." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 23 Feb. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/19185>>.

Shrock, Dennis. *Choral Repertoire*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

"Sweelinck, Jan Pieterszoon." *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, 2nd ed. rev. Ed. Michael Kennedy. *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 4 Feb. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t237/e9996>>.

Tilmouth, Michael. "Point (i)." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 6 Feb. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/21983>>.

Walker, Alan, et al. "Liszt, Franz." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 19 Feb. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/48265>>.

Winter, Robert et al. "Schubert, Franz." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 19 Feb. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/25109>>.

Wolff, Christoph, et al. "Bach." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 19 Feb. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40023pg10>>.

Wood, Bruce. "Blow, John." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 9 Feb. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/03306>>.

"Wood, Charles." *The Oxford Dictionary of Music*, 2nd ed. rev. Ed. Michael Kennedy. *Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 23 Feb. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t237/e111127>>.

Young, Percy M.. "Leeds." *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. Oxford University Press. Web. 23 Feb. 2013.
<<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/16254>>.