

The Importance

of

B

Bach

Brahms

Byrd

Britten

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CHORALE**

Gary Cannon,
Artistic Director
www.cascadianchorale.org

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THE IMPORTANCE OF B

- Though Amaryllis dance in green (1588)..... William Byrd (c.1540–1623)
Laudibus in sanctis (1591).....William Byrd
Ave verum corpus (1605).....William Byrd
Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied (1727?) Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750)
 1. Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied
 2. Wie sich ein Vater erbarmet
 3. Lobet den Herrn in seinen Taten

∞ intermission ∞

- Schaffe in mir, Gott (1857?) Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)
 1. Schaffe in mir, Gott, ein rein Herz
 2. Verwirf mich nicht von deinem Angesicht
 3. Tröste mich wieder mit deiner Hilfe
Five Flower Songs (1950)..... Benjamin Britten (1913–1976)
 1. To Daffodils
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Cascadian Chorale

Gary D. Cannon, conductor



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William Byrd (c.1540–1623)

No composer was more central to Elizabethan life than William Byrd. As a boy, London-born Byrd was a chorister at the Chapel Royal during the reigns of Edward VI and Mary Tudor and therefore had a central view of the seventeenth century's religious controversies. In 1563, he became organist and choirmaster at the Puritan-leaning cathedral in Lincoln. Byrd returned to the Chapel Royal in 1572 as co-organist with his former mentor, the aging Thomas Tallis. Byrd quickly gained the favor of the English aristocracy, and his influence extended even to the queen herself, who in 1575 granted to him and Tallis a monopoly on music printing.

Byrd was devoutly Catholic even as Queen Elizabeth's initially tolerant reign increased persecutions in order to establish Anglican prominence. Byrd supplied music for secret Catholic worship services and may even have repeatedly harbored Jesuit priests from the law. However, his important patrons ensured that he was harassed only minimally. It was fortunate that the queen enjoyed Latin services at her private Chapel Royal, thereby giving Byrd opportunities to compose in historically Catholic forms, such as the motet, without recrimination. Perhaps he was granted special allowances in part because of the brilliant music he wrote specifically for the Anglican service, such as his masterpiece, the *Great Service*.

In 1593, Byrd and his family moved to Essex, joining a group of recusant Catholics that centered on the household of Sir John Petre. The countryside gave Byrd a certain security, whereby he began to focus his compositional efforts on Catholic liturgical music, including three Masses. As London moved on to new compositional trends—such as madrigals, lute music, and verse anthems—Byrd instead consolidated his achievements in a growing number of published volumes during the first decades of the 1600s. These collections embraced not only sacred works, but Byrd's large corpus of music for keyboard or instrumental consort. Byrd was a moderately wealthy man who died in comfort at his Essex estate.

After Tallis's death in 1585, Byrd held the music-publishing monopoly alone. His first volume was a collection of his *Psalms, Sonnets, and Songs of Sadness and Piety*, published in London in 1588. It was extraordinarily successful, selling out within five years. (The book is the third-oldest surviving volume of music with English texts.) Most of its contents originated as songs for a solo singer with a small instrumental ensemble (called a "consort"), modified for five unaccompanied voices in the style of the madrigal, a genre which had rapidly gained popularity in England. *Though Amaryllis dance in green* is in the much-beloved pastoral vein. The author of the text's five verses—of which we will sing the first, third, and last—remains unknown. This text demonstrates the contemporary vogue for ancient poetry: Amaryllis was a beautiful, love-spurned shepherdess in Greek mythology, and Corinna was the unattainable paramour of the Roman poet Ovid. The dance-like music belies the disappointed refrain: "hey ho, I will love no more."

Though Amaryllis dance in green,
like Fairy Queen,
and sing full clear,
Corinna can with smiling cheer:
yet since their eyes make heart so sore,
hey ho, chill* love no more.

Her loving looks, her beauty bright,
is such delight:
that all in vain,
I love to like, and lose my gain:
for her that thanks me not therefore,
hey ho, chill love no more.

Love ye who list I force him not,
sith God it wot**
the more I wail,
the less my sighs and tears prevail,
what shall I do but say therefore,
hey ho, chill love no more.

* *chill* = a truncation of the archaic *ich will*, meaning "I will"

** *sith God it wot* = "as God may will it"

Laudibus in sanctis first appeared in Byrd's second collection of *Cantiones sacrae* [Sacred Songs], published in 1591. It is infused with madrigalian vigor. This style matches the ebullient text perfectly. Byrd ingeniously employs techniques of word-painting to depict Psalm 150's many references to musical instruments. For example, the "warlike trumpet" ("tuba martia") heralds rhythmic motives centering on fourth and fifths, intervals particularly associated with trumpets. "Melodious psalteries" ("psalteria corda") have more flowing, lyrical tones. A "joyful dance with nimble foot" ("laeta chorea pede") moves to a suitably dance-like triple meter. The great culmination is his interpretation of "for evermore" ("tempus in omne"), when the predominant rhythmic values suddenly slow.

Laudibus in sanctis Dominum celebrate supremum:
firmamenta sonent inclita facta Dei.
Inclita facta Dei cantate sacraque potentis
voce potestatem saepe sonate manus.

Magnificum Domini cantet tuba martia nomen,
perieria Domino concelebrate lira.
Laude Dei resonent resonantia tympana summi,
alta sacri resonent organa laude Dei.

Hunc arguta canant tenui psalteria corda,
hunc agili laudet laeta chorea pede.
Concava divinas effundant cymbala laudes,
cymbala dulcisona laude repleta Dei.
Omne quod aethereis in mundo vescitur auris
Halleluia canat tempus in omne Deo.

— poetic paraphrase of Psalm 150

Celebrate the Lord most high in holy praises:
let the firmament echo the glorious deeds of God.
Sing ye the glorious deeds of God, and with holy voice
sound forth oft the power of his mighty hand.

Let the warlike trumpet sing the great name of the Lord:
celebrate the Lord with Pierian [i.e., the Muses'] lyre.
Let resounding timbrels ring to the praise of the most-high God;
lofty organs peal to the praise of the holy God.

To him let melodious psalteries sing with fine string,
to him let joyful dance praise with nimble foot.
Let hollow cymbals pour forth divine praises,
sweet-sounding cymbals filled with the praise of God.
Let everything in the world that feeds upon the air of heaven
sing Alleluia to God for evermore.

Perhaps Byrd's most famous work, his *Ave verum corpus* stems from his first volume of *Gradualia*, published in 1605. (In traditional Catholic worship, a gradual is a liturgical hymn sung between the epistle reading and the *Alleluia*, corresponding to the modern-day responsorial psalm.) Byrd's opening sonorities reflect a particularly English love for the exotic "false relation": the second chord includes an F-sharp, but the third chord has F-natural. The text is always very clear, even when some lines are sung in close imitation. "Water and blood flow" ("unda fluxit sanguine") with delicately descending scales. The leaping thirds and fifths of "in cruce" ("on the cross") are recalled with the same motive at "in mortis" ("in death") and "O Jesu" ("O Jesus").

Ave verum corpus natum
de Maria virgine,
vere passum, immolatum
in cruce pro homine,
cujus latus perforatum,
unda fluxit sanguine:
esto nobis praegustatum
in mortis examine.

O dulcis, O pie,
O Jesu, fili Mariae,
miserere mei. Amen.

Hail, true body, born
of the virgin Mary,
who truly suffered, and was sacrificed
on the cross for mankind,
from whose pierced side
flowed water and blood:
may this, for us, be a foretaste
in the trial of death.

O sweet, O holy,
O Jesus, son of Mary,
have mercy on me. Amen.

Ah, Bach.... Perhaps no name in the history of music from any culture is steeped in such hallowed grandeur. Yet, to his contemporaries, Johann Sebastian Bach was not at all known outside his native Germany. Even his own countrymen perceived Bach mostly as an organist and educator in the commercial town of Leipzig. As a composer, he was considered second-rate, too entranced by chromatic harmony and complex counterpoint to be a major voice. How times have changed.

The extended Bach family provided over seventy noted musicians throughout Saxony and Thuringia, the regions that now comprise east-central Germany and where Sebastian (the “Johann” wasn’t commonly used) spent most of his life. Sebastian’s father was a violinist in the local court orchestra and Hausmann, or director of civic music, for the town of Eisenach. As a child, Sebastian attended the local Lateinschule (Latin School) where Martin Luther had studied two centuries prior. Upon the death of his parents, nine-year-old Sebastian relocated first to nearby Ohrdruf to live with his eldest brother, then in 1700 to Lüneburg, just thirty miles southeast of the major port city of Hamburg. There he encountered the harmonically adventurous works of the north German school of organists, which made a lasting impact on his own compositional style. He learned composition mostly from copying the scores of past German masters and contemporary Italians.

In 1703 Bach returned to the region of his birth, first briefly for a minor post at the Weimar court, then to the position of organist at the main church in Arnstadt. In late 1705, he traveled, allegedly on foot, to the northern city of Lübeck, ostensibly to hear the great organist Dietrich Buxtehude, but perhaps also seeking a better job. Such a post didn’t materialize until 1707, when he moved to nearby Mühlhausen. He remained barely a year, soon finding himself back in Weimar, now with the illustrious title of court organist. There he wrote most of his extensive corpus of highly original works for organ. The duke liked Bach’s work so much that he promoted the composer to a newly created post of Konzertmeister in 1714. However, three years later an even more illustrious post came to Bach, that of Kappellmeister at the court in Cöthen, thirty miles from Berlin. His new boss was musically educated, and Bach was the second-highest-paid court official. From this period date some of his most beloved instrumental works, including the cello suites, the works for unaccompanied violin, the six Brandenburg Concertos, and the first book of *The Well-Tempered Clavier*. It was also at Cöthen that Bach met his second wife, the court singer Anna Magdalena Wilcke, who was sixteen years his junior.

The year 1723 saw the conclusion of Bach’s job-hopping as he accepted a major post at Leipzig. The post held three primary components. First, as cantor at the Thomasschule (Thomas School), he was responsible for the musical training of 50–60 boy choristers. As Director Musices Lipsiensis (i.e., Director of Music in Leipzig), he oversaw music-making for civic occasions and for the city’s four major Lutheran churches, especially the large Thomaskirche (Thomas Church). He also held a largely ceremonial role as director of music for the University of Leipzig, the most prestigious educational institution in Germany. During his first two years at Leipzig, Bach composed a new liturgical cantata for every Sunday and major feast day, in some cases revising Weimar-period works. Over the years he composed over three hundred cantatas, of which about three-fifths survive. For his first Christmas in Leipzig Bach composed an extended *Magnificat*, and the following Good Friday saw the first presentation of his *St. John Passion*. The late 1720s brought his first publications (the keyboard partitas), and the *St. Matthew Passion* was first heard in 1727. As if all that didn’t keep him busy enough, he maintained a schedule of teaching private students and of touring as a concert organist to nearby cities such as Dresden and Kassel. The civic authorities were quite justified when they complained in 1729 that Bach neglected his teaching duties at the Thomasschule and that he routinely traveled without leave.

Nevertheless, in the same year of 1729, Bach began to direct the local collegium musicum, a volunteer collection of professional and student instrumentalists who presented weekly concerts at a coffee-house. He thus renewed his interest in instrumental composition, resulting in the orchestral suites, violin concertos, harpsichord concertos, and flute sonatas. He directed the collegium until 1741, with a brief hiatus in 1737–9. Meanwhile, keyboard works and occasional Sunday morning cantatas continued to flow from his pen. The Goldberg Variations of 1741 demonstrated his developing interest in canons and fugues. In his final decade, Bach devoted great attention to compiling two works that would be his *magna opera*: first *The Art of Fugue*, a comprehensive demonstration of imitative compositional techniques; and second the Mass in B minor, which incorporated earlier works as his definitive statement on choral writing. By early 1749 his health was failing severely, with encroaching blindness probably brought on by diabetes.

Upon Bach’s death in 1750, his manuscripts were divided among his widow and his sons. Unfortunately, only one of the sons — Carl Philipp Emanuel, who worked for King Frederick II of Prussia — took proper care of his bequest, hence a large part of Sebastian Bach’s output is lost to us. While some connoisseurs, including Haydn and Mozart, were aware of his music, the broader European public didn’t take note of Bach until Felix Mendelssohn conducted a revival of the *St. Matthew Passion* in 1829. Since then, Bach has been hailed as history’s greatest master composer, with twin emphases on impeccable craftsmanship and extreme virtuosity.

These two skills — craftsmanship and virtuosity — achieve their highest marks in Bach’s most often performed motet *Singet dem Herren ein neues Lied*. Analysis of Bach’s handwriting indicates that the manuscript dates from 1726–7, but the paper he used was from his earlier Cöthen period, so the precise chronology is unclear. The motets sung at the Thomaskirche on Sundays were taken from a volume that included about 270 works by the great masters of Renaissance polyphony. Bach’s motets were written not for these typical liturgies, but for ceremonial and funereal services. We do not know the exact circumstances for which Bach wrote *Singet dem Herren*, though the second movement implies a funeral and scholars have suggested about a half-dozen worthy events in 1726–7. On these special occasions Bach had more than the usual complement of singers from the Thomasschule; hence his vocal counterpoint is more

complex than in his weekly cantatas. Instrumentalists were also available. The motets, in fact, were not performed unaccompanied in Bach's day, though we have chosen to present *Singet dem Herren* in this form.

Singet dem Herren is cast in three movements, organized like a Baroque concerto: fast-slow-fast. The first movement is a prelude and fugue, which the conductor Sir John Eliot Gardiner has called "the most secular, dance-impregnated vocal music Bach ever wrote." The choir is divided into two groups of four parts each: Choir 1 presents instrumental filigree while Choir 2 proclaims repeatedly: "Singet!" ("Sing!"). A German musical dictionary from 1732 defines the word *motet* partly as "a composition largely ornamented with fugues and imitations," and there is much imitative writing in this first movement, as different melodic fragments appear in the various voices. The fugue is especially dance-like. Mention of "Pauken" (in Bach's time and ours these are timpani, though ancient Israelites would have used the more tambourine-like timbrel) brings steady arpeggios to depict the drums. The "Singet!" chords persist through the fugue, sometimes tossed back and forth between the two choirs.

The second movement pits the two choirs in opposition, in a style brought to Germany from the Venetian polychoral masters a hundred years earlier. But Bach has modernized the tradition by assigning the two choirs very different types of music. Choir 2 sings a gentle harmonization of a chorale-like melody with text telling of God's mercy to our weak human selves. Between each phrase of their text, Choir 1 interrupts with music that is more rhapsodic, lyrical, and instrumentally conceived, as they repeat pleas of: "God, continue to care for us." This second component was termed by Bach an *aria*, though he uses the term liberally. Bach's manuscript indicates that this second movement should be repeated, with the two choirs trading parts; we have opted not to invoke this repeat.

Another prelude and fugue follow as the final movement. In the prelude, the choirs are again antiphonal, taking turns with the musical material. The basses often initiate each choir's takeover, with their premature entrances of "lobet" ("praise"). The two choirs merge together for the final four-voice fugue, once again begun by the basses. There are several episodes of *stretto*, when the fugue theme is heard in two different parts, offset by just one measure. The process continues until the sopranos arrive to a top B-flat, after which Bach promptly shuts down the motet with a peremptory cadence.

When Mozart visited Leipzig in 1789, he attended a service at the Thomaskirche. The choir began to sing this motet, and within a few bars, Mozart is alleged to have suddenly sat upright, asking aloud: "What is this?" After the fifteen minutes of music had passed, he proclaimed: "Now there is something one can learn from!" Ah, Bach....

Movement 1:

Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied:
die Gemeine der Heiligen sollen ihn loben.
Israel freue sich des, der ihn gemacht hat.
Die Kinder Zion sei'n fröhlich über ihrem Könige,
sie sollen loben seinen Namen im Reihem;
mit Pauken und mit Harfen sollen sie ihm spielen.

— Psalm 149: 1–3

Sing to the Lord a new song:
the assembly of saints shall praise him.
May Israel rejoice in him who made them.
May the children of Zion be joyful in their king,
they shall praise his name with dance;
with drums and harp shall they play to him.

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Program notes and translations
by Gary D. Cannon

Program produced by Barb Fraley

Movement 2:

Choir 1 (Aria):

Gott, nimm dich ferner unser an,
denn ohne dich ist nichts getan
mit allen unsern Sachen.
Drum sei du unser Schirm und Licht,
und trügt uns unsre Hoffnung nicht,
so wirst du's ferner machen.
Wohl dem, der sich nur steif und fest
auf dich und deine Huld verläßt.

— Author unknown

Choir 2 (Chorale):

Wie sich ein Vat'r erbarmet
üb'r seine jungen Kinderlein,
so tut der Herr uns allen,
so wir ihn kindlich fürchten rein.
Er kennt das arm Gemächte,
Gott weiß, wir sund nur Staub,
gleichwie das Gras vom Rechen,
ein Blum und fallend Laub;
der Wind nur drüber wehet,
so ist es nicht mehr da,
also der Mensch vergehet,
sein End' das ist ihm nah'.

— Psalm 103: 13–16, as paraphrased by Johann Gramann in the third verse of the hymn *Nun lob' mein Seel', den Herren* [Now praise the Lord, my soul], 1530

God, continue to care for us,
for without you is nothing achieved
in all our matters.
Therefore, be our shield and light,
and deceive us not in our hope,
thus will you continue to do.
Blessed is he who rigidly and strongly
on you and on your grace relies.

As a father pities
his young little child,
so too is the Lord to us all
as we, childlike, fear him purely.
He knows our weak powers,
God knows we are only dust,
like the grass to the rake,
a flower, and falling leaf;
the wind only blows over them,
and there is no more,
so man dies away;
his end, it is near to him.

Movement 3:

Lobet den Herrn in seinen Taten,
lobet ihn in seiner großen Herrlichkeit!
Alles, was Odem hat, lobe den Herrn,
Halleluja!

— Psalm 150: 1–3

Praise the Lord for his deeds;
praise him in his great grandeur.
All that has breath, praise the lord,
Alleluia!

Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)

Schaffe in mir, Gott, opus 29 no.2 (1856–60)

What were you like at age twenty? Perhaps you were in college, training for a career. Perhaps you had already embarked on that career, with varying degrees of confidence and trepidation. Perhaps you saw a life of many diverse opportunities yet awaiting you. In any case, recall yourself at age twenty, and imagine that the world's leading authority in your field crowned you the next global genius. Would this increase your confidence? Or cause a new wave of self-criticism, even fear of inevitable failure? Thus was Brahms's blessing and curse when Robert Schumann, the pre-eminent figure in German concert music, acclaimed his younger colleague in the October 1853 issue of his newspaper, *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. Brahms was seen by the few who had heard his piano music as the chosen one who would lead a generation of German composers to their rightful place as the world's supreme musicians.

Brahms's life had been relatively humble. He was born in 1833 in Hamburg, a port city in northern Germany not noted for its musical establishment. His father would today be classified as a freelance musician, playing frequently at taverns and joining the militia band. The young Brahms studied piano from age seven and eventually began playing professionally in restaurants and theaters (though not seaside brothels, as is commonly believed). In 1853, while touring Germany as the accompanist for an expatriate Hungarian violinist, he met Liszt and the day's leading violinist, Joseph Joachim. The latter encouraged Brahms to introduce himself to Robert Schumann, which he did in September 1853. The very next month, the master-composer introduced his new young friend to the world.

That February, Schumann suffered a mental breakdown and attempted suicide, leading to his incarceration in an asylum. His wife, Clara, was one of the nineteenth century's greatest pianists. In order to make ends meet, she reenergized her concertizing throughout

Europe. Brahms, having developed a close relationship with the Schumann household in Düsseldorf, moved in with them to attend to family and business duties. He remained close to Clara, accompanying her on concert trips and spending much time in Düsseldorf, until Robert's death in July 1856, when he began to perform with greater frequency. He toured as a solo pianist, also playing in chamber music and as a concerto soloist. In 1855–6 Brahms undertook a serious study of the choral polyphonic works of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century masters, an unusual hobby for a composer then immersed in piano and chamber music, and having begun work on his First Piano Concerto. Brahms and Joachim—a close friend and also a budding composer—exchanged counterpoint exercises. The first fruits of Brahms's renewed independence and study were an unaccompanied *Missa canonica* (believed lost for nearly a century, this was not performed until 1983), the *Geistliches Lied* for chorus and organ (published in 1864 as opus 30), and the present motet, *Schaffe in mir, Gott*.

The first of the three movements or main divisions of *Schaffe in mir, Gott* centers on a canon between the soprano and bass voices. The two parts are singing the same notes, but the basses expand them to twice the sopranos' rhythmic values. This process, called augmentation, was very common among the great polyphonists of the sixteenth century. Brahms hints right away that he will also be experimenting with tonal relationships: though we begin in G major, the first cadence lands in E minor. Brahms closes gently in G major.

The second section is a strict fugue in four voices, beginning with the tenors. Tonally the ground has become less secure: the key signature reads G minor, but passing B-naturals (indicative of G major) vie with B-flats that, were they not rhythmically longer than their surrounding pitches and assigned to an accented syllable, would be considered an inconsequential neighbor tone. The theme ends with a strong leading tone of F-sharp and G. The altos enter with their statement of theme and immediately the tenors initiate a slow, chromatic descent from C-sharp to G—the interval of a tritone, which does not help to establish a firm tonal center. When the sopranos join the fugue, the tenors repeat the chromatic descent, though now from F-sharp to C, and the altos invoke steady eighth-notes that can't decide between B-natural and B-flat, or between A-natural and A-flat. I suggest that this lack of a tonal center is Brahms's way of depicting the text: the singers may be begging God to “take not your Holy Spirit from me,” but the tonal meanderings indicate that the Holy Spirit has already fled.

As tonally ambiguous as the fugue is, it is structurally a textbook example of several fugal techniques. Once all four voices have entered, Brahms initiates a *stretto* among the tenors and altos, in which the altos enter a measure early. The sopranos join the *stretto* too, but their starting gesture is inverted (upside-down). When the sopranos undertake the chromatically descending motive, the basses add to the harmonic tension with a pedal D, followed by a chromatic *ascent*. The tenors and altos *stretto* again, now displaced by just one beat. A few moments later, the sopranos and tenors do the same trick, but at the higher extremes of their ranges. The basses try two more pedals—first F, then G—but neither succeed in grounding the harmony. Throughout this fugue, the dynamics swing dramatically from *piano* to *forte* and sometimes thwart expectations entirely; for example, the three-part texture during a six-measure absence of the bass line would usually be an excuse for gentler, softer music, but Brahms marks it *forte*. The sopranos finally drop out; the basses and altos invoke another one-beat *stretto*; the tenors ascend chromatically, and we are left with stark octave G's: the Holy Spirit, in the form of a full chord, is definitely lacking. Bach would have been immensely impressed by this angular, ambiguous fugue which seems to break all the rules but is actually viewing them through an innovative prism.

The final movement returns us to a gentle G major. As in the first movement, the first cadence is on E; but this time it is E major, for Brahms has turned optimistic. The men are divided into three parts, as are the women. The lowest part of each trio is a canon at the interval of a seventh: the tenors begin on B, followed one measure later by the basses singing the same music but starting on C. The lilting meter of six beats per measure reflects the traditional meter of a lullaby, which is again driven by the text: the voices are appealing to God for comfort, and the lullaby reinforces a humble, filial relationship. The sopranos interrupt with a bouncy, quicksilver fugue subject that emphasizes not lullaby but rapture—we are invoking, after all, the “freudige Geist” (“spirit of joy”). The pitch content of this new theme firmly reinforces that we are in G major: G–G–D–G–D–high G, followed by a playful scalar cascade. No sooner has the final part entered than the sopranos initiate a *stretto*, returning right on the basses' heels. Brahms obviously enjoys the little turn in the theme's cascade, as he handles it in sequence (a series of steadily rising statements) sung by a pair of duets between the women's and men's voices, rendered exuberant by anticipating the downbeat, as the low basses pedal on D. The tempo picks up again, and the sopranos hold a high G pedal. The fugue ends with an unstable cadence on C major, but the brief coda—three and a half bars—returns us firmly and solidly to G: the Holy Spirit (G for “Geist”?) has arrived.

Though brief, *Schaffe in mir, Gott*, is grandly conceived. This student of ancient polyphony is already a master who ingeniously updates canonic and fugal traditions with modern approaches to structure, chromatic harmony, and textpainting. The first movement dates from 1857, and the rest of the motet was written by 1860. During this span, Brahms continued to hone his craft with the First Piano Concerto (a failure at its 1859 premiere, it is now one of his most popular works), the two orchestral Serenades (like the concerto, these were aborted attempts at writing a first symphony), sets of variations for piano, two short works for chorus and orchestra, a continued flurry of art-songs, arrangements of folksongs for solo voice and for chorus, and several works for women's chorus. He also accepted two regular jobs as choral conductor. The first of these was a seasonal position every autumn from 1857 to 1859 as conductor of the court choir and orchestra at Detmold; *Schaffe in mir, Gott* demonstrates that he knew well the demands of singers. His second post was conducting a women's choir in Hamburg (hence all those works for upper voices). In 1862, he moved to Vienna and began to fulfill Robert Schumann's prediction. When the complete *Ein deutsches Requiem* was first heard in 1869, Brahms became the foremost composer of concert music in the German-speaking world, and beyond.

Schaffe in mir, Gott, ein rein Herz,
und gib mir einem neuen gewissen Geist.

Verwirf mich nicht von deinem Angesicht,
und nimm deinen heiligen Geist nicht von mir.

Tröste mich wieder mit deiner Hilfe,
und der freudige Geist erhalte mich.

— Psalm 51: 10–12

Create in me, God, a pure heart,
and give me a new, confident spirit.

Reject me not from your face,
and take your Holy Spirit not from me.

Comfort me again with your help,
and may the joyful spirit uphold me.

Benjamin Britten (1913–1976)

Five Flower Songs, opus 47 (1950)

Benjamin Britten is usually hailed as the most important British composer of the twentieth century, and he belongs on every list of the most important choral composers in all of history. He was born in the bleak but beautiful coastal region of Suffolk, in the east of England, and commentators often claim that his music shares an aesthetic with that region's starkness. His passion for composition began at an early age: his surviving juvenilia number nearly seven hundred works. He studied privately with Frank Bridge, one of the more unusual voices in English composition. Not for Bridge, or for Britten, the pastoralism of Vaughan Williams or the Victorian grandeur of Elgar; rather, Bridge embraced continental models. Britten's great desire was to study with Alban Berg, the Austrian who wedded Schoenberg's atonality with nineteenth-century Romanticism, but the lad's parents would not allow such a scandalously "modernist" teacher.

Instead Britten studied at the Royal College of Music, that great bastion of conservatism, from 1930 to 1932. His music began to draw attention outside of his hometown, with a BBC broadcast of *A Boy Was Born* (a brilliant half-hour set of variations for unaccompanied choir) and a job composing incidental music for government films and radio. Prominent premieres for major works such as the orchestral song-cycle *Our Hunting Fathers* (1936), the Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge (1937) for string orchestra, and the Piano Concerto (1938) added up. By the time of his departure for Canada and the United States in April 1939, Britten was among the leading English composers of his generation. His time in North America was noteworthy for many reasons: a refinement of his orchestral voice in the Violin Concerto (1939) and *Sinfonia da Requiem* (1940), his first foray into theatrical writing with the operetta *Paul Bunyan* (1941, to a text by W.H. Auden), and, most importantly, a flowering of love for tenor Peter Pears and the concomitant outpouring of works for Pears's unique timbre. As war raged in Europe, Britten and Pears began to feel that their rightful place was home in England, even if that meant facing tribunals as conscientious objectors. On the sea journey in May 1942, Britten composed two of his most loved choral works, *A Ceremony of Carols* and *Hymn to St. Cecilia*. In the following years, Britten composed for Pears two works which showed a true mature voice and which have become central to twentieth-century classical music: the Serenade for Tenor, Horn and Strings (1943), and the opera *Peter Grimes* (1945).

At the premiere of *Peter Grimes* in 1945, Britten was hailed as the leading British composer of the day, bar none. In 1947 he founded the English Opera Group, a touring company that aimed to present Britten's newly invented genre of "chamber opera" (i.e., opera with a small chamber group rather than full orchestra); its first production was *Albert Herring* (1947), a delightful parody of English village life. The following year brought the establishment of the Aldeburgh Festival in the Suffolk town where Britten and Pears lived. Orchestral works, solo songs, and choral music poured from his pen, and each new work was instantly hailed as a masterpiece. Among them were two major choral works with orchestra: the cantata *Saint Nicolas* (1948) with parts for children among the singers and orchestra players, and the *Spring Symphony* (1949), a collection of fourteen different English poems set for large chorus and orchestra.

The joy, brightness, and varied content of the large-scale *Spring Symphony* exist in microcosm in the *Five Flower Songs*, composed in the spring of 1950. The occasion was the twenty-fifth wedding anniversary of two major donors to the English Opera Group. Leonard Elmhirst was an agronomist who worked between the wars to develop economic growth in depressed rural regions, especially India and the southwest English county of Devon. His wife, Dorothy, had been one of America's richest women when she met and married Leonard at Cornell University; she was a noted philanthropist, especially in support of education and women's rights. Their estate at Dartington Hall, in rural Devon, included a large garden. To reflect the Elmhirsts' love of agriculture and botany, Britten chose five poems related to flowers (perhaps they had been considered for the *Spring Symphony* but rejected?). Imogen Holst, daughter of the composer Gustav Holst and soon to become Britten's amanuensis, conducted a student choir in the first performance, a private outdoor event at Dartington Hall on July 23, 1950.

Here Britten embraces the tradition of the secular partsong, as exemplified by Stanford and Elgar. They are not as adventurous or ground-breaking as many of his other works, but are nevertheless perfectly and beautifully crafted, each one having a unique identity and style. "To Daffodils" begins as a pair of duets: the sopranos and basses are echoed in close succession by the inner voices. Robert Herrick's text compares the short lifespan of a daffodil to our human weakness. At the second stanza, Britten unites the upper three voices and assigns to the basses repetitions of the opening motive. The second movement is a brilliant and original structure, rooted in

the text. To depict the entrance of each of Herrick's "Four Sweet Months," Britten assigns one month to each part: the sopranos take April, the altos May, the tenors

June, and finally the basses July. The entrances are fugal, with slight differences to render the text clear. The entrances repeat, though in a different order and offset by just one beat. It is only by virtue of Britten's careful craftsmanship that the four voices' overlapping texts do not create a mush: you always hear exactly the words that Britten wants you to hear.

George Crabbe, author of "Marsh Flowers" and of the poems that inspired *Peter Grimes*, had lived in Britten's beloved Aldeburgh. Here Crabbe pessimistically describes the various flora to be found in the marshy county of Suffolk; they are, in turn "slimy," "dull," "deadly," "faded," "wiry," "globose," "fierce," or "poisoned," with "sickly scent" or even "lack[ing] perfume." Britten imbues each flower with a clear musical identity, allowing himself angular, dissonant lines to depict the harsh realities of life on the fen. "The Evening Primrose" follows as a gentle and calm sonic balm. Britten can aurally paint nightscapes as well as anyone. The imitative close—as the shy primrose, blossoming at night, withers at the piercing gaze of day—drifts to silence.

To my knowledge, the opening tempo mark of "Ballad of Green Broom" — *Cominciando esitando*, i.e., "Beginning hesitantly"—exists nowhere else. The choir depicts the strummed guitar of a ballad-singer, a role taken first by the tenors who tell of a young, lazy flower-cutter. The basses grumpily awake the boy at mid-day. The tempo increases slightly as the sopranos tell of the lad's determination to finally make good. The altos take their turn as balladeer when a wealthy woman looks out the window, sees the flower-cutter, and angrily orders: "Go fetch me the boy!" The music accelerates again as he enters "the Lady's fine room" and she surprisingly proposes marriage, being a "Lady in full bloom." As the tempo arrives to *Vivace*, the couple proceeds in lively fashion to church amid the initial guitar chords, now recast as joyous, sonorous wedding bells, in this most perfect conclusion for an anniversary present.

The *Five Flower Songs* are light and airy, which Britten no doubt found a relief while contemporaneously working on the dark and brooding opera, *Billy Budd* (1951). Through his fifteen operas, Britten is often credited as single-handedly resuscitating opera in the English language. In the choral realm, special note must be made of one of the last century's most seminal musical works, the *War Requiem* (1962) composed for the dedication of the newly constructed Coventry Cathedral, which had been destroyed by bombing in the Second World War. The Aldeburgh Festival continued from strength to strength, promoting Britten's works and those of composers past and present whom he deemed worthy. Britten continued to travel widely as a conductor and pianist, especially as Pears's accompanist. For Decca Records he conducted or supervised recordings of nearly all of his major works, a legacy almost unparalleled among composers. He composed demanding works for the world's leading virtuosos but also left many works intended for children to perform. Shortly before his death he became Baron Britten of Aldeburgh in the County of Suffolk, the first composer appointed to a peerage. Few composers have left such an extraordinary legacy.

1. To Daffodils

Fair Daffodils, we weep to see
You haste away so soon;
As yet the early-rising sun
Has not attain'd his noon.
Stay, stay,
Until the hasting day
Has run
But to even-song;
And, having prayed together, we
Will go with you along.

We have short time to say, as you,
We have as short a Spring;
As quick a growth to meet decay,
As you, or anything.
We die
As your hours do, and dry
Away
Like to the Summer's rain;
Or as the pearls of morning dew
Ne'er to be found again.

— Robert Herrick (1591–1674)

2. The Succession of the Four Sweet Months

First, April, she with mellow showers
Opens the way for early flowers;
Then after her comes smiling May,
In a more rich and sweet array;
Next enters June, and brings us more
Gems than those two that went before;
Then (lastly), July comes and she
More wealth brings in than all those three.

— Robert Herrick (1591–1674)

3. Marsh Flowers

Here the strong mallow strikes her slimy root,
Here the dull nightshade hangs her deadly fruit:

On hills of dust the henbane's faded green,
And pencil'd flower of sickly scent is seen.

Here on its wiry stem, in rigid bloom,
Grows the salt lavender that lacks perfume.

At the wall's base the fiery nettle springs
With fruit globose and fierce with poison'd stings;

In every chink delights the fern to grow,
With glossy leaf and tawny bloom below;

The few dull flowers that o'er the place are spread
Partake the nature of their fenny bed.

These, with our sea-weeds rolling up and down,
Form the contracted Flora of our town.

— George Crabbe (1754–1832)

5. Ballad of Green Broom

There was an old man liv'd out in the wood,
And his trade was a-cutting of Broom, green Broom.
He had but one son without thought, without good,
Who lay in his bed till 'twas noon, bright noon.

The old man awoke one morning and spoke.
He swore he would fire the room, that room,
If his John would not rise and open his eyes,
And away to the wood to cut Broom, green Broom.

So Johnny arose and slipp'd on his clothes
And away to the wood to cut Broom, green Broom.
He sharpen'd his knives, and for once he contrives
To cut a great bundle of Broom, green Broom.

4. The Evening Primrose

When once the sun sinks in the west,
And dewdrops pearl the evening's breast;
Almost as pale as moonbeams are,
Or its companionable star,
The evening primrose opes anew
Its delicate blossoms to the dew
And, hermit-like, shunning the light,
Wastes its fair bloom upon the night,
Who, blindfold to its fond caresses,
Knows not the beauty he possesses.
Thus it blooms on while night is by;
When day looks out with open eye,
'Bashed at the gaze it cannot shun,
It faints and withers and is gone.

— John Clare (1793–1864)

When Johnny pass'd under a Lady's fine house,
Pass'd under a Lady's fine room, fine room,
She call'd to her maid: "Go fetch me," she said,
"Go fetch me the boy that sells Broom, green Broom!"

When Johnny came in to the Lady's fine house,
And stood in the Lady's fine room, fine room,
"Young Johnny," she said, "Will you give up your Trade
And marry a Lady in bloom, full bloom?"

Johnny gave his consent, and to church they both went,
And he wedded the Lady in bloom, full bloom;
At market and fair, all folks do declare,
There's none like the boy that sold Broom, green Broom.

— Anonymous



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Gary D. Cannon, Conductor



Gary D. Cannon is one of the Northwest's most dynamic choral personalities, active as a conductor, singer, composer and musicologist. He is, since 2008, Artistic Director of both the Cascadian Chorale and the Vashon Island Chorale. Also in 2008, the Early Music Guild invited him to found and direct a Renaissance choir, Sine Nomine. He has held posts as Principal Conductor of Vashon Opera (2009-11), leading performances of *The Tender Land* and *Madama Butterfly*, and as Chorusmaster for the Northwest Mahler Festival (2001-10). Cannon has conducted the Anna's Bay Chamber Choir, Choral Arts, Earth Day Singers, Kirkland Choral Society, and several ensembles at the University of Washington. He has also served as Secretary of the Greater Seattle Choral Consortium (2010-12).

As a tenor, Cannon has appeared as a soloist with Pacific Northwest Ballet, Seattle Philharmonic, and the Auburn, Rainier, and Eastside symphony orchestras. He also sings regularly with The Tudor Choir and Choral Arts. He has performed with the Kronos Quartet, the Seattle Opera Chorus, and members of the Tallis Scholars. Cannon is formerly an instructor at Whatcom Community College (2004-6), where he received the Faculty Excellence Award. His musicological research emphasizes twentieth-century British music. He holds degrees from the University of California at Davis and the University of Washington, where he successfully defended a doctoral dissertation on the early life and works of William Walton.

Ingrid Verhulsdonk, Pianist



Very active as a freelance accompanist in the area, Ingrid is also principal organist at Sacred Heart Church in Bellevue and accompanist for The Market Street Singers of Ballard. She holds degrees in piano performance from the University of Washington and the University of Hawaii. She is on staff at the University of Washington drama department and has been a regular accompanist with Northwest Opera In Schools, Etcetera (NOISE) and Cornish College of the Arts.

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Welcome Home
Cascadian Chorale
Gary D. Cannon,
Artistic Director
www.cascadianchorale.org

7:30 PM Saturday, March 7, 2015
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