

## PROGRAM NOTES

**B**rilliant heraldic trumpets are imitated in the opening moments of Giovanni Palestrina's festive Advent motet *Canite Tuba*, foretelling the coming of the Messiah. Appropriately, the sound and image of brass have been part of the musical and visual imagery of Christmas for centuries. Within the framework of this pageantry, Palestrina's *Canite Tuba* repeats the Biblical prophecies, so familiar from Handel's *Messiah*. Each half of this joyous two-part work closes with text exhorting the long-awaited Redeemer not to delay His arrival on Earth. Eager *Alleluia*s then underscore the wish.

The Marian antiphon *Alma Redemptoris Mater*, was written, it is thought, by Hermannus Contractus in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. An antiphon is usually a refrain-like device repeated at the end of a psalm verse or other sacred song. Yet the Marian antiphons (chants of worship for the Virgin Mary) are too long and complex in structure to have been employed in this fashion. Rather, they are used in daily religious services, with a different antiphon appropriate for each quarter of the year. *Alma Redemptoris Mater* is sung from Advent (the month leading to Christmas) through the first day of February.

Jean de Ockeghem, a 15<sup>th</sup> century Flemish composer, was a pupil of Guillaume Dufay and was surely familiar with his master's settings of the same *cantus firmus*. Ockeghem was a prominent and greatly admired composer during his lifetime, and spent many of his productive years in service to the French courts of Charles VII, Louis XI, and Charles VIII. A measure of the esteem in which he was held can be read from this statement of Francesco Florio, a contemporary:

I am sure you could not dislike this man, so pleasing is the beauty of his person, so noteworthy the sobriety of his speech and of his morals, and his graciousness. He alone of all the singers is free from vice and abounding in all virtues.

Though Ockeghem's compositions are few in number, they loom large in Early Music fame. His twelve settings of the Mass ordinary are admired for their extraordinary richness and ingenious construct. Apparent in those works, and also in *Alma Redemptoris Mater* (one of only ten surviving motets) is Ockeghem's characteristic and groundbreaking expansion of the range of voice parts, especially the bass. What one remembers most, though, is this composer's wonderful gift for melodic expression, with each voice part a beautiful melody of its own.

Heinrich Schütz, also known in his day, interestingly, as Henricus Saggitarius, has been characterized by musicologist Joshua Rifkin as "...the greatest German composer of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and the first of international stature...he played a major part in establishing the traditions of high craftsmanship and intellectual depth that marked the best of his nation's music and musical thought for more than 250 years after his death."

Schütz was born in Kostritz in 1585 – 100 years before J.S. Bach and G.F. Handel – and died in Dresden in 1672. When we add Rifkin's 250 years of influence to the latter date, we are well into the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the period that witnessed the "arrival" of Paul Hindemith and Carl Orff. While it's true that music

in Germany may at that time have set out in new directions, certainly the terms “high craftsmanship” and “intellectual depth” still apply today – witness the work of Stockhausen, Henze, and Rihm. The three works by Heinrich Schütz which we offer this evening span much of his long career.

The charmingly unadorned beginning of *Ein Kind ist uns geboren* reminds one of a gently rocking cradle song. But as the work progresses one senses a growing degree of complexity. Indeed, after its several shifts from triple to duple time, the work begins to blossom, reaching full bloom on the text “*der Eifer des Herren Zebaoth*” (the zeal of the Lord of Zebaoth) where for twenty-three measures the work ecstatically dwells amidst an extraordinary sequence of overlapping suspensions. It is as if the concept of Christ’s birth at the beginning of the work has now flowered and become the person of the Saviour Himself.

John Harbison wrote two settings of *O Magnum Misterium* in 1992. The longer version is the one heard tonight. It was written for the choir of Emmanuel Church, where the composer has been a welcome collaborator in the Church’s music program for many years. The work immediately engages the listener with its compelling texture of overlapping melodic sequences of repeated rising and falling intervals, fittingly ascending with the text “*O magnum,*” and falling when the text speaks “*misterium.*” Later, octave leaps of unusually poignant contrast enhance the text at “*jacentem in praesepio*” and “*portare Dominum,*” the former with unexpected *staccato* markings, and the latter with a *grazioso*-marked legato. These octave leaps – so similar in structure yet so different in their effect upon the listener due to Harbison’s skill in treating the text they illumine – are among many subtle felicities of detail which elevate this work to the reverent glow it achieves. After the richness of the earlier music, fervent and somewhat stark homophonic statements of the traditional *Ave Maria* prayer bring a rapt and inward focus to this remarkable work’s conclusion.

Johann Michael Bach – younger brother of Johann Christoph Bach and father of the great Johann Sebastian’s first wife (his distant cousin) Maria Barbara – was a skilled maker of violins and clavichords and a gifted composer. Though not possessed of the great talent generally associated with the Bach name, his exuberant 6-part motet welcoming the New Year bubbles with charm and simple, heartfelt rejoicing. Richard Marlow has noted this work’s effective and “...lively encounter between a high trio, bright and transparent, and a lower, more weighty quartet.”

Palestrina’s impressive eight-part setting of the Christmas gradual *Hodie Christus Natus Est* reflects the intrinsic drama of its text, in which reiterated shouts of “*noel!*” echo back and forth between antiphonal angelic choirs.

Heinrich Schütz’s *Hodie Christus Natus Est*, despite its “late” SWV number, likely dates from his early days while the young composer was still under the considerable influence of his Venetian teacher, Gabrieli. Spitta thought that it might actually have been composed while Schütz was still in Venice, perhaps in 1610. Beginning with a rich and unmistakably Venetian flourish, the work embarks on a succession of manic *Alleluias* in triple meter, each time contrasted with increasingly variegated duple-meter settings of text beginning with *Hodie*. This is all prelude to the subsequent *Gloria* which rings out triumphantly as the beginning of the finale.

Once achieved, the triple-time *Alleluias* return only to swing into a final duple setting of the same text, which brings this joyful work to its close.

The Marian antiphon *Alma Redemptoris Mater*, which is sung in chant before Guillaume Dufay's ravishing second setting of its melody as *cantus firmus* to his motet of the same name, is one of the most melodic and beautiful in today's *Liber Usualis*, as befits its subject matter. Dufay's setting is for three voices and his celebrated gift for melody is equally bestowed on each. At its very end, time stands still as Dufay asks his singers to pause at each chord change – an effect illustrated in the manuscript by *fermata*s – one of the first times this musical notation appeared in print.

Benjamin Britten's early *a cappella* masterwork, *A Boy was Born*, is a large-scale work of theme and variations for unaccompanied divided chorus, boys' choir and soloists. *A Boy was Born* presents significant challenges of execution to all but the most accomplished of choirs. Perhaps because of this, the composer revised the work in 1958 and added an independent organ part, likely hoping this change would afford the work more performances. The Spectrum Singers will offer three *a cappella* excerpts from the original version of this major Britten opus: Theme, Variation III, and Variation V. The Theme is set as a beautifully harmonized chorale. Each of the two highly contrasted variations frames a haunting, high soprano solo. Variation III speaks in homophonic choral phrases, answered intermittently by a high-arching solo intonation of the name Jesu. Variation V is an extraordinary impressionistic image of a crystalline, feathery snowfall scored for women's voices alone, whose vocal lines drop weightlessly down the staff much like the lightest of snows on a particularly still and frigid night. Floating through and above this misty scrim of sound is a lone soprano whose words tell the metaphorical medieval tale of the wounded knight and the maiden who cares for him in his torment. These few moments of surpassing and haunting beauty give ample evidence of the early flowering of an immensely gifted composer, and of a major work, rightly deserving to be heard.

John Joubert was born in South Africa in 1927. His professional training and subsequent musical language is purely British, though with a decided harmonic tang of his own. Perhaps best-known for his beautiful Christmas choral works, of which his *Hymn to the Virgin* is a particularly shining example, his several worthy larger works cry out for performance in this country.

Johann Sebastian Bach embarked on a now-famous trip to Lübeck in 1705 specifically to hear Dietrich Buxtehude play the Marienkirche organ, where the latter was employed as "Werkmeister." There, he had instituted a series of afternoon concerts at the end of Trinity and the beginning of Advent which were called "Abendmusik." An organist of prodigious talents, Buxtehude taught both Bruhns and Pachelbel, enjoyed a considerable reputation, and wrote prolifically for chorus, organ, and other keyboard instruments.

The charming New Year's cantata *Das neugeborne Kindelein* embodies a structure Buxtehude employed in most of his works in this form. A short instrumental introduction is followed by choral verses interspersed with further instrumental contributions, with occasional meter changes at points in the text the composer wished to emphasize. While one would be hard-pressed to suggest that ingenious

invention abides in this work, the listener is nonetheless drawn in by music's happy and energetic consonance. The cheerful optimism heard throughout reaches a high point when the text tells us that, as a consequence of Christ's birth, it is now a time for singing. The German words at this point, "*es ist jetzt Singens Zeit*," fairly buzz with sibilant enthusiasm. And at the very end, Buxtehude trumps the work's occasionally sober modality with a sunny A-major cadence.

Heinrich Schütz's last work, his 1671 setting of the *Deutsches Magnificat*, is written for double chorus, homage perhaps to his earliest days in Venice where polychoral settings were a frequent means of musical expression. This composition neatly sums all of this remarkable artist's protean talents. Abundant word painting, meter shifts, vivid setting of text, rich sonority, delicate texture, bold, forward-looking rhythmic drama – it's all here. In a work so rich, any attempt to suggest "highlights" is almost self-defeating. Nonetheless, such wonderful moments as the following really should be mentioned: the opening few measures on the text "*Meine Seele*" (My soul) where the music begins with one tenor voice and opens like a flower as each voice joins; the powerful, almost percussive music for "*Er übet Gewalt*" (He hath shown strength); and finally the joyful tossing back and forth between choruses of the final words "*zu Ewigkeit, Amen*" (forever, Amen). This is the work of a greatly talented musician at the end of his career, offering one last wonderful gift to his listeners, his performers, and his God.

~ Program notes © 2002 by John W. Ehrlich

► **Emmanuel Music - 2002-2003 Season** ◀

**The Bach Cantatas**

Emmanuel Church  
15 Newbury Street, Boston

**We Bring you Bach Alive!** Every Sunday, September 15, 2002 to May 18, 2003 at 10:00 am, you can hear Bach as Bach heard Bach, with The Chorus, Orchestra, and Soloists of Emmanuel Music, Craig Smith, Conductor

**Evening Concert Series**

Emmanuel Church  
15 Newbury Street, Boston

**Saturday, December 14 and Sunday, December 15, 2002 at 2:00 pm, J.S. Bach's *Christmas Oratorio*** with Frank Kelley, Evangelist, and The Chorus, Orchestra, and Soloists of Emmanuel Music, Craig Smith, Conductor

**Saturday, February 1, 2003 at 7:30 pm, Schubert's *Alfonso und Estrella* (D. 732)**, an opera in concert, with soloists Sarah Pelletier, Frederick Urey, William Sharp, James Maddalena, and Sanford Sylvan, and the Orchestra of Emmanuel Music and The Spectrum Singers, John Ehrlich, Music Director  
Craig Smith, Conductor

**Children's Choir Benefit**

Lindsay Chapel, Emmanuel Church, 15 Newbury St., Boston

**Saturday, November 30, 2002 at 8:00 pm**  
J.S. Bach: *The Six French Suites*  
Joseph Payne, harpsichord

**A Service of Lessons**

**and Carols** Lindsay Chapel  
Emmanuel Church

**Thursday, December 19, 2002 at 6:00 pm**  
Emmanuel Children's Choir, Joseph Payne, organ  
Phoebie Payne, music director

**The Schubert Series**

C. Walsh Theatre at Suffolk University, 41 Temple Street  
Beacon Hill, Boston

**October 13 and November 10, 2002, and January 5, February 23, March 9, May 4, May 11, 2003. Sunday afternoons at 4:00 pm**  
The final year of a 7-year, 53-concert cycle of the complete piano, chamber, and vocal works of Franz Schubert

***Emmanuel Music***

15 Newbury Street  
Boston, MA 02116

Craig Smith, artistic director  
Leonard Matczynski, executive director/artistic administrator  
Phone: (617) 536-3356 Fax: (617) 536-3315  
e-mail: [music@emmanuelmusic.org](mailto:music@emmanuelmusic.org) website: [www.emmanuelmusic.org](http://www.emmanuelmusic.org)