

NOTES ON THE PROGRAM

Music, like the whole of human experience, exists in and is shaped by time. We mark the passage of time in our lives through cycles created by the motion of physical objects in space: day and night, the seasons, months, years. Music provides an alternative framework for the experience of time, and helps infuse what might otherwise be innocuous moments with meaning and emotion. Today's program is constructed of works that connect with the concept of time in a variety of ways. The first half consists of two concentric cycles, the outer of which covers the course of a day: dawn and nightfall. The inner cycle is that of the seasons, with each season taken in turn. At the center of the inner cycle are two works that deal with eternity.

We open the first cycle with *Haec est dies*, a work for double chorus by Renaissance composer Jacobus Gallus, also known as Jacob Handl. It is paired with English composer William Byrd's setting of the same text:

Haec [est] dies
quam fecit Dominus,
exultemus et laetemur in ea.
Alleluia.

This is the day
that the Lord has made,
let us rejoice and be glad in it.
Alleluia.

- Psalm 117/118: 24

After these two works that celebrate the joys of today, we move to a pair of pieces that focus on the beginning of day, on the dawn. The first, a madrigal written in 1590 by Claudio Monteverdi, uses striking musical imagery to depict a gentle breeze at dawn.

Ecco mormorar l'onde
e tremolar le fronde
a l'aura mattutina e gl'arborselli.
E sopra i verdi rami i vagh'augelli
cantar soavemente
e rider l'oriente.

Hear the gentle breezes murmuring,
and the leaves and young trees
trembling in the morning air.
And, above, on leafy branches
beautiful birds sing sweetly,
and, slowly, the eastern sky brightens.

Ecco già l'alb'appare
e si specchia nel mare
e rasserena il cielo
e'imperla il dolce gielo
e gl'altri monti indora.

Now the dawn begins to appear,
and to cast a reflection in the sea,
and to lighten the sky,
and to make pearls of delicate dewdrops,
and to clothe in gold the high mountains.

O bella e vagh'aurora
l'aura è tua messaggiera,
e tu de l'aura
ch'ogn'arso cor ristaura.

Oh, radiant and shining dawn,
this breeze is your messenger,
and you are the messenger of the breath
that restores each ardent and withered heart.

-Torquato Tasso (1544-1595)

The second work was written for the Chorale in 2005 and revised for this concert. It sets an ancient Sanskrit poem in which the Dawn itself exhorts the listener to live well in the day that is just beginning, for "...today well-lived / makes every yesterday a dream of happiness / and every tomorrow a vision of hope."

From the Dawn we enter the second of the two cycles, the seasons. Winter is paired with spring, and summer is paired with autumn. Each piece focuses on the character of the season in question, but each also contains at least a hint of the essence of its partner.

Hindemith's *En Hiver* is one of the *Six Chansons* that Hindemith wrote in Switzerland in 1939, shortly before he came to the United States to become a professor at Yale University. The poem is by Rainer Maria Rilke, a German poet who is here writing in French:

En hiver, la mort meurtrière
entre dans les maisons;
elle cherche la soeur, le père,
et leur joue du violon.
Mais quand la terre remue,
sous la bêche du printemps,
la mort court dans les rues
et salue les passants.

- Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926)

In winter, deadly Death
enters houses;
it seeks the sister, the father,
and plays them the violin.
But when the Earth stirs,
under the spades of spring,
Death runs in the streets,
and greets the passers-by.

- translation by Steven Thomas

From winter we move to spring, with a setting of a poem by Torquato Tasso by American composer William Hawley. Hawley's *Io son la Primavera* was commissioned and premiered by Chanticleer in 1986.

Io son la Primavera,
Che lieta, o vaghe donne, a voi ritorno
Col mio bel manto adorno
Per vestir le campagne d'erbe e fiori
E svegliarvi nel cor novelli amori.

A me Zeffiro spira,
A me ride la terra
e 'l ciel sereno;
Volan di seno in seno
Gli Amoretti vezzosi a mille mille,
Chi armato di stral, di chi faville.

E voi ancor gioite,
Godete al mio venir
tra risi e canti;
Amate i vostri amanti
Or che 'l bel viso amato april v'infiora:
Primavera per voi non torna ognora.

- Torquato Tasso (1544-1595)

I am Spring,
Who gladly, lovely women, returns to you
With my beautiful, embellished mantle
To dress the countryside in greenery and flowers
And to arouse in your hearts new loves.

For me Zephir sighs,
For me the earth laughs,
as do the serene heavens;
From breast to breast fly
The charming Amoretti by the thousands,
Armed with arrows and with torches.

And you, again delighted,
Take pleasure in my coming
amidst laughing and song;
Love your lovers now,
While April adorns lovely faces with flowers:
Spring for you will not return forever.

- translation by William Hawley

Inside the continual motion of our concentric cycles of time we insert two works that treat eternity. The first is a setting of e.e. cummings' poem *in time of daffodils* by David Dickau. Cummings' poem, which was written 50 years ago in 1958, presents a sequence of flowers – daffodils, lilacs, and roses – each of which brings a different perspective on what it means to live. The poem ends by looking ahead to an escape from time, an escape the composer views with joyful and confident anticipation:

and in a mystery to be
(when time from time shall set us free)
forgetting me, remember me

The second piece in the pair is David Brunner's *Songs Eternity*. The text is by John Clare (1793-1864), an English poet who struggled with poverty and depression throughout his life, and who became an important 19th-century poet despite a modest education. Brunner's straightforward setting allows the essence of the text to shine through: that while many things that we now value are fleeting, music has the power to endure.

We then return to the cycle of the seasons with Robert Washburn's *Now welcome summer*. The piece begins and ends jovially, but even in the midst of summer's delights there is an awareness that the

fullness of life is fleeting. The inner cycle then comes to a close with a return to the present season: autumn. In Brahms' *Im Herbst*, the composer and the poet both find cause for joy even in the midst of nature's descent to winter and death.

Ernst ist der Herbst.
Und wenn die Blätter fallen,
sinkt auch das Herz
zu trübem Weh herab.
Still ist die Flur,
und nach dem Süden wallen
die Sänger, stumm,
wie nach dem Grab.

Bleich ist der Tag,
und blasse Nebel schleiern
die Sonne wie die Herzen, ein.
Früh kommt die Nacht:
denn alle Kräfte feiern,
und tief verschlossen ruht das Sein.

Sanft wird der Mensch.
Er sieht die Sonne sinken,
er ahnt des Lebens
wie des Jahres Schluß.
Feucht wird das Aug',
doch in der Träne Blinken,
entströmt des Herzens
seligster Erguß.

- Klaus Groth (1819-1899)

Somber is the autumn,
and when the leaves fall,
so does the heart sink
into dreary woe.
Silent is the meadow
and to the south have flown
silently all the songbirds,
as if to the grave.

Pale is the day,
and wan clouds veil
the sun as they veil the heart.
Night comes early:
for all work comes to a halt and
existence itself rests in profound secrecy.

Man becomes kindly.
He sees the sun sinking,
he realizes that life is
like the end of a year.
His eye grows moist,
yet in the midst of his tears shines
streaming from the heart
a blissful effusion.

- translation by Emily Ezust (www.lieder.net)
Used by permission.

The outer cycle and the first half of the program conclude with the falling of night at the end of the day. Rheinberger's *Abendlied* (Evening Song), written when the composer was just 16 years old, is one of the miniature gems of the choral repertoire. It is also one of the few works by Rheinberger that is relatively well-known today.

Bleib bei uns,
denn es will Abend werden,
und der Tag hat sich geneiget.

- Luke 24:29

Stay with us,
for night is falling,
and the day has waned.

~ I N T E R M I S S I O N ~

The second half of the program leaves behind the cyclic aspect of time and begins with a set of works composed for a specific occasion. Benjamin Britten's opera *Gloriana* was written to celebrate the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953. The *Choral Dances* from *Gloriana* were selected from the opera by Britten to stand on their own; today the Chorale sings the first three of the six dances. In the original opera, these dances are part of a masque presented for the queen by her grateful subjects. The character of Time appears first; his dance is youthful and joyous, and contains overlapping rhythmic

patterns that evoke visions of glorious clockworks. His wife Concord then dances demurely in a movement that consists entirely of consonant triads, but that nonetheless offers some harmonic surprises. The two then join in a canonic dance of praise for the Queen, each taking turns following closely in the other's footsteps.

Time Pieces, written by Canadian composer Stephen Chatman in 2003, is a set of four works that each deal with some aspect of time. The first, *Tempus*, is a setting of a text found in the *Auctoritates Aristotelis*, a 13th-century compilation of quotations from a variety of Classical authors. The text is as follows:

Tempus est mensura motus
rerum mobilium.

Time is the means of measuring
moving things.

- translation by Stephen Chatman

The text of the second piece, *Come, my Celia*, was written by Ben Jonson in 1607. It encourages an evidently hesitant target of his affection to take advantage of the current time and opportunity to enjoy "the sports of love." The composer describes this piece as having a "light-hearted, bittersweet tone... composed in a quasi-Renaissance syllabic style." The third piece of the set, *I saw eternity*, introduces the unexpected sound of the violin playing double-stops to "create an austere sense of open space, simplicity, and extended time." The final work in the set, *Clocks*, was inspired by the composer's antique grandfather clock.

The program concludes with two spirituals about the end of time. The first, a moving lamentation that ends with a haunting alto solo, was arranged by Paul Christiansen. Christiansen directed the Concordia Choir at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota for almost 50 years, and was a major figure in the history of American choral music. The final work on the program is William L. Dawson's rousing *Soon-ah will be done*.

- Notes by Steven Thomas