THE DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC
VASSAR COLLEGE

Sunday, 6 December
A Service of Lessons and Carols. Christine Howlett and Drew Minter, conductors. Vassar College Choir, Madrigal Singers, and Women’s Chorus, and Cappella Festiva Chamber and Treble Choir. This annual Christmas service includes readings, choral anthems, and congregational carols that culminates in a candle lighting ceremony.
7:00PM
Chapel

Friday, 11 December
Vassar Camerata.
Patrick Walker ’16 and Sarah Johnson ’16, directors.
7:00PM
Skinner Hall of Music

Saturday, 12 December
Mahagonny Ensemble.
Jaylin Remensperger ’17 and Joseph Sopchak ’16, directors.
8:00PM
Skinner Hall of Music

Saturday, 5 December 2015
3:00 PM
Martel Recital Hall
Skinner Hall of Music

If you would like to receive the music department’s Calendar of Musical Events or its e-newsletter, This Weekend in Skinner, please call the Concert Administrator’s office, 845-437-7294, or contact the music department through its website, http://music.vassar.edu.

Vassar College Madrigal Singers
Drew Minter, conductor

Carolimg, Caroling Near and Far
from among his many carol settings. I chose it partially in memory of David Willcocks again -- it was written for that composer’s 80th birthday. Finally among the contemporary settings is the stunning setting by the contemporary Swedish composer Jan Sandström of Praetorius’s hymn “Es ist ein Ros entsprungen,” a cosmic take on a minute gem.

It was important for me to include Praetorius in some form. He is responsible for an endless number of Christmas motets, most of them in polychoral settings. But in order to keep to the caroling theme and explain a bit of its history, it was important to present some significant medieval English repertoire. The carol, then thought of as a dance more than a song, took shape in England largely during the 15th century. Our four openers are typical of the genre: composed exclusively in triple meter (the “perfect” meter), strophic, and normally with a refrain. This became a regular form for carols worldwide, as the Italian, Spanish and French carols mimic in their compositions.

The carol genre, when it is not monophonic is spectacularly homophonic. But the VC Madrigals is also a group for choral geeks (amongst which I include myself), and it was not surprising to me that when we read through the spectacular Willaert and Palestrina motets at the start of the semester, they got thumbs up from the group. Both motets take as their text the renowned Latin poem “A solis ortus cardine,” an abecedarius by the 5th century Christian poet, Coelius Sedulius. (Run for your devices!) The entire poem is a narration of Christ’s life, but the Palestrina extracts the story of Christ’s birth in eight verses (the part of the poem used in the Catholic Liturgy of the Hours), and the Willaert, created for the feast of St. John the Baptist, employs only three of those verses while exclaiming regularly within the motet “Let this day shine forth!”

--Drew Minter

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Director’s Note

During the years I have been conducting the Madrigals Singers, we have often taken carols to nearby nursing homes at Christmastide, but usually we only get to share one of our carols at the annual Lessons and Carols service. When Mr. Navega asked me if it might be possible for Madrigals to trade places for the last concert slot of the semester with the orchestra (which has traditionally always held this post), I eagerly agreed, as it would give us the opportunity to learn some splendid and splendidly fun repertoire.

Making choices was much more difficult, and even just choosing some favorites out of my head, I had more than twice the amount of repertoire we could perform in a single program. As many in the audience will know, one of our greatest sources in recent decades of new carols has come from the commissioned works for the annual King’s College Service of Lessons and Carols. This historic Christmas Eve service was conceived in 1918, a balm to a nation then at war, and since 1928 it has been broadcast worldwide. Since 1982 a new carol has been commissioned each year, and these commissions have served as centerpieces for Anglican choirs ever since.

Arvo Pärt’s setting of the famous vespers hymn “Bogoroditse Djevo” was commissioned in 1990. Pairing it with the much more renowned setting by Rachmaninov became a departure point for the program. A tragedy was involved in making the next choice: we lost one of our greatest choral conductors when Sir David Willcocks passed away in September. He had spent almost two decades at the helm of King’s College Choir, and his superb version of “Tomorrow shall be my dancing day” had to be moved from the final group (of carols by living composers) to earlier in the program.

Herbert Howells’s terrific settings of three “carol anthems” are now iconic in the repertoire, but Margaret Rizza’s eery setting of a text by Thomas Merton (“Mary Slept”) is barely yet known. Nick White won out over many other composers for his setting of “O Magnum Mysterium”, certainly one of the most frequently set of Christmas texts in the entire repertoire. (In my dreams I imagine an entire program of “O Magnus”)

White and Harold Friedell (“Song of Mary”), also a New York church musician but from two generations before, are the lone Americans on our program. Bob Chilcott’s “Nova! Nova!” lends a vivacious touch