Vassar College Madrigal Singers

Drew Minter, director
Christine Howlett, conductor

with
James Fitzwilliam, organ
Linda Quan, Joseph Louie ’15, Maria Ramsey ’15, Jaylin Remensperger ’17, Marka Young, violins
Rachel Evans and Megan Lewis ’15, viola
Christine Gummere, cello
John Feeney, bass

present

Singing the Psalms

Saturday, 12 April 2014
8:00 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.
Please turn off all cell phones, pagers, and other personal electronic devices. Use of these instruments causes interference with in-house recording and webcasting.

Program

Cantate Domino, Ps. 96, vs. 1-4  Heinrich Schuetz    from Cantiones Sacrae, 1625

Aus der Tiefe, Ps. 130  Schuetz    from Psalmen Davids, 1619

My soul oppressed with care, Ps. 119, vs. 25-32  William Byrd    (ca. 1540-1623)

Sing we merrily unto God, Ps. 81, vs. 1-2  Byrd    from Psalms, Sonets and Songs, 1588

Hear my prayer, O Lord, Ps. 143, vs. 1  Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

Beatus vir, Ps. 112  Claudio Monteverdi    from Selva Morale e spirituale, 1640

Karen Ratcliffe, soprano; Gileann Tan, soprano; Patrick Brady, tenor; Jack Rowland, tenor; Tymon Dickson, bass

The Lord is my Shepherd, Ps. 23  Bobby McFerrin (b. 1950)

Exultate Deo, Ps. 81  Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)

Upon the Water, Ps. 29  (alternate text Tagore: Stray Birds)  Susan Botti (b. 1962)

Maddie Pollis and Morgen Warner, sopranos; Regina Krawiec, alto; Daniel Young, tenor; Tymon Dickson, bass

INTERMISSION

Dixit Dominus  George Frideric Handel (1685-1759)

I. Dixit Dominus

Maddie Pollis, soprano; Hallie Stotler, alto; Patrick Brady, tenor

II. Virgam virtutis

Emily Breeze, alto

III. Tecum principium  Regina Krawiec, soprano

IV. Juravit Dominus

V. Tu es sacerdos in aeternum

VI. Dominus a dextris tuis

Miranda Alquist and Chelsea Yamada, sopranos; Hallie Stotler, alto; Ben Liu, tenor; Jordan Gotbaum, bass

VII. Judicabit in nationibus

VIII. De torrente

Gileann Tan and Chelsea Yamada, sopranos

IX. Gloria patri et filio

Building Safety: Please be aware of the fire exits at the front and rear of the Recital Hall. In the event of an emergency, Vassar College fire watch personnel will direct you.
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Drew Minter, director

SOPRANO
Miranda Alquist, ’14
Laura Barreto, ’17
Christine Howlett (Handel only)
Madeleine Pollis, ’16
Karen Ratcliffe, ’16
Gileann Tan, ’17
Morgen Warner, ’14
Chelsea Yamada, ’14
Maddie Hayes, ’15

TENOR
Patrick Brady, ’15
Jeff Kim, ’16
Ben Liu, ’15
James Ruff (Handel only)
Daniel Young, ’17

ALTO
Emily Breeze, ’14
Rachel Fuerstman, ’16
Maria Ichizawa, ’14
Regina Krawiec, ’15
Ariana Sharma, ’16
Hallie Stotler, ’14

BASS
Tymon Dickson, ’15
Matthew Goldstein, ’17
Jordan Goetbaum, ’17
Thomas Hochla, ’13

Among sacred texts, the psalms are some of those most often set to music. Perhaps only the settings of the mass ordinary rival the psalms for sheer frequency of performance in song. In many traditions and in monastic traditions to this day the book of psalms may be chanted in its entirety over the course of every week. In Catholic tradition, the psalms are ascribed particular psalm tones, and it is generally thought now that the Hebrew psalms were originally thought of more as songs than texts, the texts almost accompanying the melodies.

It is difficult to think of a composer of any era who has not put his hand to a psalm or two. Schütz excels most composers in this regard. His Psalmen Davids of 1619 include almost thirty (our double choir antiphonal setting of “Aus der Tiefe” is from this collection); and Schütz composed further psalm settings for his collections of Cantiones Sacrae of 1625 (the source of our “Cantate Domino”) and Symphonia Sacrae of 1629. In fact, Schütz composed at least one tune for each of the psalms, twice publishing tunes for the psalter of Cornelius Becker which were even more widely used than his elaborate choral settings.

William Byrd's prolific output of sacred music in both Latin and English, for both Catholic and Protestant services, needs no introduction. Both "My soul oppressed with care" and "Sing we merrily" are prose paraphrases from Byrd's 1588 collection of five voice Psalms, Sonets and Songs. While Purcell published less psalm settings, each of them is exquisite. Hear my prayer is one of his most beloved compositions, and widely performed.

The text of Beatus vir has been set by a number of composers, particularly Vivaldi and Mozart, and if the date of the publication of the Selva morale is any indication, Monteverdi composed this version quite late in his life. The opening verse returns constantly throughout the piece, "Blessed is the man who fears the Lord" while different groupings of singers expand the actions of the man. The overall form of the piece, a sort of da capo arch with a lilting triple section in the middle, makes a graceful statement for this favorite psalm.

Bobby McFerrin’s 1990 "The Lord is my Shepherd" takes what would be a standard Anglican chant setting and renews it by making the gender of God female, causing a heightened form of listening to this age old Protestant musical form of psalm setting. Poulenc’s Exultate Deo was composed in 1941, just six years after Poulenc's famous spiritual awakening. Poulenc responds beautifully to the jubilant text, evoking the particular instruments as they come along in the psalm text. At "buccinate" ("blow the trumpet") he creates fanfares of blowing trumpets with his usual highly flavored chords; at "psalterium jucundum" ("the merry harp") he gives a sudden marking of "suddenly very sweet"; and an expanded texture gives the feeling of the "solemn feast day" ("solemnitatis vestrae") to conclude.

Susan Botti was commissioned to create “Upon the Water” for the Madrigal Singers this year. After a couple of meetings at which we discussed the parameters of the piece, and vaguely discussed the concept of a psalms-inspired composition, Susan chose the texts herself, using the beautiful translation of Psalm 29 from the St. Helena’s Psalter and melding it with Tagore’s poem. After a stirring opening section that evokes the power of God as seen in nature, the Tagore verses are introduced in solo voices over hovering choral chords and supporting lines from the strings. The vocal lines of the soloists suggest birds soaring above the earth. This section builds up momentum and strength, ultimately to the text “and hurls defiance to darkness,” at which point the piece comes to a halt before transparent open chords built upon open intervals of fourths and fifths evoke a shimmering light of God’s “glory.” For the final statement, “God will give strength to the people; God will give the people the blessing of peace” Botti teases out an F# major chord; the world of sharps brings the piece to a close with a sense of epiphany.
I have wanted to program Handel’s *Dixit Dominus* for a number of years but wasn’t sure I had the singers to do it. The piece is very difficult for the choir, which may be partly a result of Handel’s ambition with this work to make an impression on prospective patrons in Rome early in his career, and probably partly also as a result of his just being a young composer. Handel wrote the piece when he was just 22, during a journeyman period of three years when he had come to Italy to learn the latest musical styles and form connections. These connections would become central to Handel’s output for the rest of his life, as he formed alliances with powerful patrons, such as the Cardinals Ottoboni and Colonna, who created important performance opportunities for Handel and introduced him to high society in Rome. In addition, Handel met singers whom he would bring to London up to 20 years later to sing in his operas. Even his instrumentalists were illustrious, Corelli serving as his concertmaster during this period.

Psalm 110 is an imposing psalm of bombast. Some writers have accused Handel of being less than faithful to the words in his setting, and perhaps more interested in showing off his virtuosity as a composer (and clearly that of his singers), but I find this is not a very discerning opinion. Handel’s opening statement makes the aggressive, warlike nature of the psalm text clear. Almost immediately, at the words "donec ponam inimicos tuos" Handel employs a technique to be found in two subsequent movements, of one voice part maintaining a cantus firmus while the other parts dance around it with different musical material. Throughout the opening chorus, the homophonic chorus of singers alternates back and forth with the strings on “inimicos tuos” (“your enemies”), creating a sort of internal warfare.

The two arias present more chaste aspects of the king’s rule before the bombast resumes at “The Lord will not repent.” In movement five, Handel cleverly illustrates the ranks of priests with ascending scales in one voice part matched by tiered entrances in the other voices. “Dominius a dextris tuis” depicts more struggle between paired solo voices, as the Lord smites kings on the day of his wrath. The next two movements are both quite extraordinary. At the words “The Lord will heap up the slain” (“fill them with ruin,” literally), swelling upward scales create the sensation of being filled up, only to have the statements of “ruinas” fall downward. At the word “conquassabit” (“destroy”), a building of staccato chords sounds like the world leaders (“over the wide earth”) being stomped on. Then in movement eight, the warrior rests and takes a drink beside the road, in one of Handel’s most haunting duets; the male choristers sing softly rising statements that the warrior “will lift his head high.” The final “Gloria” is perhaps the most challenging movement of all, with an utterly warlike cry at “et in saecula saeculorum” (“and shall be in ages of ages”). The whole of the piece is one of disturbing triumph.

As composer and performer, Susan Botti’s eclectic background and experiences are reflected in her music. Theatre and the visual arts play a formative role in the aesthetic of her work. Her musical explorations have encompassed traditional, improvisational and non-classical composition and singing styles.

Botti is the recipient of numerous grants and awards, including the Goddard Lieberson Fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, a Guggenheim Fellowship, the Rome Prize, and grants from Meet The Composer, the National Endowment for the Arts, The Aaron Copland Fund, The Mary Flagler Cary Charitable Trust, The NY Foundation for the Arts, The Greenwall Foundation, The Jerome Foundation, ASCAP, and the Foundation for Contemporary Performance Arts. She was the third Daniel R. Lewis Young Composer Fellow with the Cleveland Orchestra. Additional orchestral commissions include works for the New York Philharmonic, and The Orpheus Chamber Orchestra.

Recent premieres include Botti’s *sull’ala* (*Concerto for Saxophone and Wind Ensemble*), with Carrie Koffman (saxophone) and Glen Adsit conducting the Hartt Wind Ensemble.

Her *Gates of Silence* was commissioned from the Blakemore Trio – three works for violin & piano, piano trio, and piano trio plus soprano (Botti). Inspired by Virgil’s *Aeneid*, this work incorporates poetry by National Book Award finalist, Linda Gregerson. This poetry, *Dido Refuses to Speak*, was awarded a 2011 Pushcart Prize. A recording of *Gates of Silence* with Botti and the Blakemore Trio has recently been released on Albany Records, with support from the Copland Fund.

In addition to performing her own vocal works, Botti specializes in the performance of contemporary music by composers of diverse styles including Gubaidulina, Kurtág, Chihara, Pintscher, Matheson, and Cage, among others. Composer/conductor Tan Dun created several major works highlighting her vocal and theatrical talents, including the role of “Water” in his internationally renowned opera, *Marco Polo* (Sony Classical).

A native of Cleveland, Ohio, Botti’s early training included studies in music, art, and theater. She received her Bachelor of Music from the Berklee School of Music and her Masters in Music Composition from the Manhattan School of Music. She is a member of the composition faculty at the Manhattan School of Music, and is an Adjunct Associate Professor at Vassar College.

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