

The Seraphim Singers

Jennifer Lester, Music Director

“For heaven is a different thing”

Choral Settings of Sacred Poetry

Sunday, October 25, 2015, 3:00 pm

First Church, Cambridge

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Friday, October 30, 2015, 8:00 pm

St. Cecilia Parish, Boston

Please join us for a reception downstairs in the Parish Hall
immediately following tonight's performance.

Kindly silence cell phones and pagers. Please hold applause until the conclusion of each set.



Welcome Sweet and Sacred Feast

Gerald Finzi 1901 – 1956

Selections from *Six Sacred Songs*

Hugo Wolf 1860 – 1903

- I. Aufblick (Supplication)
- II. Einkehr (Contemplation)
- V. Ergebung (Submission)

Three Poems

Jon Laukvik b. 1952

(U.S. premiere performance)

- I. Discipline
- II. Peace
- III. Praise

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Suite

Laukvik

- I. Plein jeu
- II. Fugue
- III. Duo
- IV. Récit
- V. Grand jeu

Heinrich Christensen, organ

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“Laus Trinitati” from *The Hildegard Motets*

Frank Ferko b. 1950

Easter Day

Dominick Argento b. 1927

Maria (IV): Här är din himmel
(East Coast premiere performance)

Mårten Jansson b. 1965

On Emptiness, Wisdom, and Fortune
(world premiere performance, commissioned by The Seraphim Singers)

Richard J. Clark b. 1969



Hymn: All Creatures of Our God and King St. Francis of Assisi 1181 – 1226
Please stand and join in singing the hymn, found in the insert.

At the Round Earth's Imagined Corners James Woodman b. 1957
Dedicated to Donald Teeters (1936-2014), for whom this work was composed.
Rachael Luther, soprano

“God and the Universe” from Charles Stanford 1852 – 1924
Songs of Faith

The Evening Choir Carson Cooman b. 1982
Laura Mattal (10/25) / Emily Smith-Sturr (10/30), soprano; Alison LaRosa Montez, alto; Paul Mattal (10/25) / Thomas Manguem (10/30), tenor; Taras Leschishin, bass



The Seraphim Singers

Sopranos	Altos	Tenors	Basses
Harriet Bridges	Margaret Angelini	Robert Barney	Daryl Bichel
Rachael Luther	Rita Budwey	Luca Daniel	Michael Budwey
Laura Mattal	Barbara Ehrmann	Ryan Lynch	Taras Leschishin
Wendy Perrotta	Martha Heddon	Thomas Manguem	John Nesby
Kathy Planeta	Alison LaRosa Montez	Paul Mattal	Charles Oliver
Emily Smith-Sturr	Leslie Price	Mark Nemeskal	John Salisbury
Eileen Sweeney	Laurie Szablewski		John Totter

Program Notes

The composers on today's concert explore a wide range of sacred texts, from the meditations of a medieval German abbess through masterworks of Romantic and contemporary sacred poetry. The national and international premieres heard today demonstrate extraordinary stylistic range, fresh vitality, and a sense of mystery. They draw on music and poetry of earlier eras, creating distinctive new sounds.

Mystical poetry of the Elizabethan Renaissance has inspired choral musicians for five hundred years. We present four modern settings of sixteenth-century poets, including George Herbert (1593-1633) in a U.S. premiere by contemporary Norwegian composer Jon Lauvik; John Donne (1572-1631), set by Boston-based composer James Woodman; Richard Crashaw (1613-1649), set by Pulitzer-prize winner Domenick Argento; and Henry Vaughan (1621-1695), set by Gerald Finzi. These metaphysical poets explore vivid, emotional images that reach beyond their already significant contributions to Anglican hymnody.

The Romantics are paired by language and culture: Viennese composer Hugo Wolf interprets the personal prayers of German novelist Joseph von Eichendorff (1788-1857) by creating sacred madrigals. Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892) is set by Sir Charles V. Stanford, and a vision of Transcendentalist Jones Very (1813-1880) is developed by Carson Cooman into a monumental choral cantata recently commissioned by The Memorial Church of Harvard University.

Four moving contemporary voices continue our connection to mystical and metaphysical concerns. Adam Wood's two recent poems ("On Emptiness" and "On Wisdom") are featured in our world premiere of Richard J. Clark's *On Emptiness, Wisdom, and Fortune*. Einar Askestad's Swedish hymn to Mary is featured in a new work by Mårten Jansson.

Since choral composers can feature the human connection to music through the voice itself and through deep exploration of literary texts, these works are successful precisely because they incorporate elements of modernism in accessible ways, managing to sound both old and new.



Gerald Finzi (1901-1956) hoped that the yearning melodies and wistful harmonies of his well over 100 songs and choral miniatures would assure him a lasting place among fellow British modernists such as Vaughan Williams and Holst, remarking, "The artist is like the coral insect, building his reef out of the transitory world around him and making a solid structure to last long after his fragile and uncertain life." He was educated privately (his main teacher had been a student of Stanford), and he eventually became one of the most characteristically "English" composers of his generation, amassing a personal library of over 3,000 volumes of English poetry and a large personal collection (over 700 volumes) of eighteenth-century English music.

Although an agnostic of Jewish descent, Finzi's varied settings of Christian poetry have greatly enriched modern choral and vocal repertoire. His challenging eight-minute motet *Welcome Sweet and Sacred Feast* for mixed chorus and organ (1953) shares a Eucharistic

theme with his better-known *Lo, the Full, Final Sacrifice* (1946, orchestrated for Britain's Three Choirs Festival in 1947). It contains some of Finzi's most impressive word painting, with a moving point of arrival at the words "O rose of Sharon! O the lily of the valley," developed from the opening organ theme.

Henry Vaughan—twin brother of hermetic philosopher and alchemist Thomas Vaughan—was born in Wales in 1621. His great grandfather, Thomas Somerset, died after twenty-four years in the Tower of London for his adherence to Catholicism, but Vaughan converted to the Church of England. He credited his 1650 conversion to the sacred poetry and sermons of George Herbert, adopting the personal motto "moriendo, revixi" ("by dying, I gain new life"). His poems are admired for their long-drawn alliterations, frequent monosyllables, and development of mystical themes. This poem, "The Holy Communion," was directly inspired by Herbert's hymn *Welcome Sweet and Sacred Cheer*.



Hugo Wolf (1860-1903) achieved greatness by composing over 300 German lieder. But unlike Schubert and Schumann, on whose efforts in the form he expanded, Wolf composed little else of note, aside from his brisk *Italian Serenade* and lilting *Intermezzo* (both for string quartet), an opera (*Der Corregidor*), and this set of sacred choruses (published posthumously). Wolf's vocal music possesses a concentrated intensity unique in late Romantic music: he thoughtfully arranged related texts into cycles of highly chromatic and philosophical songs that were considered successors to Wagner's *Wesendonck Lieder*.

Wolf's letters indicate that he considered publishing the collection known as *Sechs Geistliche Lieder* (*Six Sacred Songs after Poems of Eichendorff*) in the early 1890's, and his revisions at this time became the basis for the published version. The fifth movement (*Ergebung*) was performed at Wolf's funeral in 1903. *Aufblick* and *Einkehr* (sometimes referred to as *Einklang*) reflect the composer's descent into despair in 1881, after his fiancée broke off their engagement. The longing and loss evident in Wolf's settings of these sacred texts may have been of a more earthly nature.

Josef Karl Benedikt von Eichendorff (1788-1857) is regarded as one of the most important German Romantic poets. His early poems emphasized man's ability to find happiness in nature, although after volunteering to fight with the famous Lützowsche Freikorps against Napoleon from 1813 to 1815, his later work tended toward religious themes and clerical views. The Napoleonic Wars caused the decline of his family, prompting lyrical poems full of nostalgia, despair, and emphasis on a spiritual, rather than political, cure for moral ills.



Jon Laukvik (b. 1952) is an award-winning Norwegian organist and composer. He was appointed to the faculty of the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo in 2001 and has also taught organ at the Hochschule für Musik und Darstellende Kunst (Stuttgart) and the Royal Academy of Music (London). He is author of the highly successful *Historical Performance Practice in Organ Playing*, and co-edited the *Handel Organ Concerti, Op. 7* for Carus-Verlag together with Werner Jacob. Our concerts mark the U.S. premiere of his *Three Poems* (2013), setting texts by George Herbert.

George Herbert enjoyed an early career as the Public Orator of Cambridge University and served in Parliament in the 1620s. He took holy orders in the Church of England and spent the rest of his life as the rector of the little parish of Fugglestone St. Peter near Salisbury. Throughout his life, Herbert wrote religious poems characterized by a precision of language and imagery: his *Let All the World in Every Corner Sing* has endured as a popular hymn and concludes Vaughan Williams' *Five Mystical Songs*. The three poems set by Laukvik are found in Herbert's collection *The Temple*. The striking visual layouts of the poems in the collection are meant to imitate the architecture of churches.

Laukvik's *Suite* for organ dates from 1983. It reflects Laukvik's post as Professor of Historical Keyboard Instruments at the Musikhochschule in Stuttgart, as it combines the form and registrations of French Baroque organ repertoire with some distinctly jazzy tonal language.



Frank Ferko (b. 1950) is a Chicago-based composer who has won numerous ASCAP awards and has published extensively on the works of Olivier Messiaen and Hildegard von Bingen. He works frequently with professional choral ensembles including the Dale Warland Singers and His Majesty's Clerkes (Chicago). *The Hildegard Motets* (1991-93) were commissioned to celebrate the Clerkes' tenth anniversary season and premiered to a sold-out audience at the Three Arts Club of Chicago on June 13, 1993, under the direction of Anne Heider. The beautiful "Laus Trinitati" (for St. Michael and All Angels), excerpted from *The Hildegard Motets*, shows the influence of Messiaen's sacred music and Gregorian chant. Ferko describes Hildegard's twelfth-century texts as "highly ecstatic, vivid, and rich in imagery."

Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179) founded two monasteries and wrote the earliest extant medieval morality play. Her Latin sacred poetry and liturgical dramas have recently been rediscovered and edited by lovers of early music. Her written works include volumes on visionary theology, musical compositions for the Catholic liturgy, and one of the largest collections of letters (over 400) from the Middle Ages. The text of Frank Ferko's setting of her text *Laus trinitati* comes from *Symphonia armonie celestium revelationem*, a cycle of melodies dedicated to Saint Ursula and the 11,000 Virgins.



Dominick Argento (b. 1927) is a leading figure in the composition of modern vocal music. Based in the Twin Cities, he has received awards from Opera America (for *The Aspern Papers*), Chorus America, the Kennedy Center (for his *Fire Variations*, 1982), a Pulitzer Prize, a Fulbright scholarship and two Guggenheim Fellowships. Argento began his longest collaborative partnership in the 1970s, when he began writing choral works for Philip Brunelle's choir at the Plymouth Congregational Church in Minneapolis (now developed into the nationally-respected choir VocalEssence). *Easter Day* was premiered under Brunelle's direction in 1990.

The son of Sicilian immigrants, Argento grew up in York, Pennsylvania, and earned Bachelor's and Master's degrees from the Peabody Conservatory, where his teachers included Nicholas Nabokov, Henry Cowell, and Hugo Weisgall. Listeners and critics respond to the lyric beauty and emotional impact of Argento's music, which is grounded in the Romantic tradition (especially that of bel canto opera). "Vocal music," Argento wrote, "represents

the composer's purest utterance, his most private being, unadorned, uncluttered, devoid of posturing, spontaneous, distilled." *Easter Day*, a four-minute choral miniature from 1989, contains some of Argento's most beautiful melodies.

Richard Crashaw was a skilled linguist and poet who converted from Anglicanism (in which he was ordained in 1638) to Roman Catholicism during the English Civil War, after escaping to France in 1644. His works feature surprising images and imaginative touches of the most ethereal beauty; they include "Lo, the Full, Final Sacrifice" set by Gerald Finzi and "Bulla (Bubble)," which inspired Elliott Carter's monumental *Symphonia*. During his European exile, Crashaw's religious poetry was published as *Steps to the Temple* and *The Delights of the Muses* (1646), and he eventually traveled to Rome, where he served Cardinal Giovanni Palotta at the Venerable English College and published Latin hymns.



Mårten Jansson (b. 1970) conducted the women's choir Carmen from 1994-2010 and teaches voice, music theory, and conducting in Uppsala, Sweden. He holds an MFA in Music Education and a certificate in Dalcroze Eurythmics from the Royal Academy of Music in Stockholm. In addition to the beautiful *Maria IV* (2012), Bärenreiter has recently published two of his English-language settings: Thomas Hardy's *The Choirmaster's Burial* (for six-part choir, with two optional female trios) and *Fear Thou Not* (setting Isaiah 41:10) for five-part women's choir. He is currently completing a commission for the Uppsala Domkyrkas combining elements of the mass with new sacred texts written by poet-priest Kerstin Dillmar (*innanför Overall [within Everywhere]*) for priest, congregation, children's choir, SSA, SATB, piano, and two organs.

Einar Askestad (b. 1964) is a Swedish poet and author who debuted in 1997 with the short story collection *Det liknar ingenting* (*It resembles nothing*). He is a regular contributor and literary critic (in English and Swedish) to many leading Scandinavian magazines. "Maria (IV): Här är din himmel" was written for his 1999 collection of sacred poetry entitled *På helig mark* (*On the holy land*).



Richard J. Clark (b. 1969) is Chapel Organist at Boston College and has served as Music Director and Organist at Saint Cecilia Parish in Boston since 1989. His compositions have been performed in Russia, China, Australia, and throughout Western Europe and North America. His various works are published with CanticaNOVA, Choralife, Corpus Christi Watershed, and World Library Publications.

Clark's new anthem *On Emptiness, Wisdom, and Fortune* (2014) combines the two poems "On Fortune" and "On Emptiness". Through gradual harmonic expansion of modes and mindset, internal reflection leads to eternal resolution. Seraphim's performances mark the world premiere of this work. Poet **Adam Wood** (b. 1982) is a professional writer and technologist whose interests include liturgy, theology, economics, and the Open Source movement. He writes for several popular websites, and his own blog can be found at <http://adammichaelwood.com>.

James Woodman (b. 1957) is a Boston-based composer educated at Princeton and New England Conservatory. He was appointed the first Composer-in-Residence at the Cathedral Church of St. Paul, Boston, and currently serves as Monastery Organist for the Society of St. John the Evangelist in Cambridge. Woodman is widely admired for an ability to create accessible, practical compositions that nonetheless exhibit a high level of craftsmanship. The Seraphim Singers commissioned and premiered his *Psalm 96* in 2007 and his *Ave Maris Stella* in 2008.

At the Round Earth's Imagined Corners for soprano solo, mixed chorus, and organ, was premiered on March 22, 2009, by the Choir of All Saints Parish in Brookline under the direction of Donald Teeters (1936-2014). This beautiful and tuneful anthem is closely related to his other recent sacred commissions (such as *The Midwife's Tale* cantata set to eighth-century "Infancy Gospel" texts from the Arundel manuscript), delicately resting on unresolved suspensions and contrasting the fire of the organ with homophonic declamation. Today's performance of this work is dedicated to Teeters' memory.

John Donne (1572-1631) is considered the preeminent representative of the Metaphysical poets, as his strong, sensual style and vibrant language can be interrupted by sudden paradoxes and ironies. Born a Roman Catholic when that practice was illegal in England, Donne studied in Oxford and at Cambridge University but refused to take the Oath of Supremacy and received no degrees. After his brother died in Newgate Prison for harboring a Catholic priest, Donne converted to the Church of England, married (fathering twelve children), and was eventually forced to take Anglican orders (as a priest) by James I. His poetry inspired physicist Robert Oppenheimer to choose the code name "Trinity" for the first nuclear bomb test, and his apocalyptic miniatures (such as the famous "At the Round Earth's Imagined Corners," also known as "Holy Sonnet VII") combine sacred images with the tumultuous circumstances of his daily life.



The first Dublin-born musician to be knighted, **Sir Charles Villiers Stanford** (1852-1924) was appointed organist of Trinity College, Cambridge while still a student. He was one of the founding professors of the Royal College of Music, teaching there and at Cambridge from 1882-1924. His students included choral composers Holst and Vaughan Williams, and his settings of the Anglican church/cathedral service allowed that form to regain its full place beside the anthem as a worthy object of artistic invention. "God and the Universe" is taken from his op. 97 choral collection entitled *Songs of Faith*. It contains three settings of Tennyson and three of Walt Whitman.

Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892) was Poet Laureate of Great Britain and Ireland during most of Queen Victoria's reign, and excelled at penning short lyrics, such as "The Charge of the Light Brigade" and "Crossing the Bar." His parents were a country clergyman and the daughter of an Anglican minister. In college, Tennyson joined the Cambridge Apostles secret society and was one of the youngest students to win a chancellor's gold medal for poetry. Although it has been written that he "accepted completely the conclusions of modern science" and his "religious beliefs defied convention, leaning towards agnosticism and pandeism," he wrote many sacred poems and hymn texts, including "God and the Universe." This poem is notable among his late works for its nobility of character and serene hopefulness in the face of death.

Carson Cooman (b. 1982) is a prolific Boston-based composer and professional concert organist who specializes in the performance of contemporary music. He is a staff critic for *American Recorder* and *Fanfare* magazines, and is the Composer in Residence at The Memorial Church of Harvard University. After completing degrees in composition from Carnegie Mellon and Harvard, he was the Composer in Residence for the Cathedral Church of St. Paul in Boston (2008-2011).

The Evening Choir was commissioned in 2012 by The Memorial Church of Harvard University to celebrate the dedication of the C. B. Fisk organ, Op. 139: the Charles B. Fisk and Peter J. Gomes Memorial Organ. Its text was one of the few poems by American Transcendentalist and Harvard alumnus **Jones Very** published during the poet's lifetime (1813-1880). Cooman notes of Very, "Much like the English poet Christopher Smart, Very suffered from issues of mental health and religious delusions (believing at times he was the Second Coming of Christ), and was institutionalized for a number of years. Upon his release, he was helped in the publication of his work particularly by Ralph Waldo Emerson." While Very's poetry was much admired by his Transcendentalist colleagues, it took over a century before a wider audience came to appreciate his talent with the 1993 publication of his complete poetic works (862 poems in all), edited by Helen R. Deese.

Cooman sets *The Evening Choir* as a cantata scored by SATB choir, four soloists, and prominent organ. "Given the dramatic nature of the text, the work is rather more austere and apocalyptic than most of my choral music to date. I sought to create a musical analogue to the blazingly vivid sound of Very's verse," writes Cooman.

Laura Prichard



Composer Helmut Lachenmann Turns 80

Film Screening & Concert
Thursday, November 5
6:00 pm screening / 8:00 pm concert
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