

The 19th Annual Christmas Concert



Festival Choir, Jeffrey Brody, Director
Youth Choir, Andrea Hart, Director

Park Avenue Congregational Church
Arlington, Massachusetts
Sunday, December 6, 2009
3:00 pm

This concert is part of the PACC Concert Series for the benefit of the PACC music program.
Please join us for a reception following the concert to meet the musicians.

Desseins eternels from *La Nativité du Seigneur* Olivier Messiaen
("God, in His love, has predestined us into the adoption of children by
Jesus Christ unto Himself, to the praise and the glory of His grace.")
Jeffrey Brody, organ

Congregational singing
O Come, All Ye Faithful Blue Hymnal #132
The First Nowell Blue Hymnal #141
What Child Is This Blue Hymnal #140

The Christmas Oratorio, Part I Johann Sebastian Bach
1. Christians, be joyful Choir
2. Now it came to pass in those days The Evangelist (tenor)
3. See now the bridegroom Alto
4. Prepare thyself, Zion Alto
5. How shall I fitly meet Thee? Choir
6. And she brought forth her first-born Son Tenor
7. For us to earth He cometh poor Soprano and Bass
8. Mighty Lord, and King all glorious Bass
9. Ah, dearest Jesus Choir
The Festival Choir

Personent Hodie (On This Day) 14th century German, arr. Epstein
The Saviour of the World is Born Gustav Holst
Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring Johann Sebastian Bach
The Youth Choir
Soloists: Hannah Colonnese, Maddie Domenichella, Gretchen Durning,
Tim Evans, Reese Hogan, Kayla Sherwood, and Emma Young

The Christmas Oratorio, Part II

Johann Sebastian Bach

- 10. Sinfonia Organ
- 11. And there were shepherds Tenor
- 12. Break forth, O beautiful, heavenly Light Choir
- 13. And the Angel said to them Soprano and Tenor
- 14. What God to Abraham revealed Bass
- 15. Haste, ye shepherds Tenor
- 16. And this is the sign to you Tenor
- 17. Within yon gloomy manger Choir
- 18. O, haste ye then Bass
- 19. Slumber, beloved Alto
- 20. And suddenly there was with the Angel Tenor
- 21. Glory to God in the Highest Choir
- 22. 'Tis right that angels thus should sing Bass
- 23. With all Thy hosts Choir

Merrith Sabo-Jones, soprano Christopher Aaron Smith, tenor
 Rebecca Saslow, mezzo-soprano Colman Reaboi, bass
 The Festival and Youth Choirs
 Andrea Hart, flute
 Jeffrey Brody, conductor and organist

Congregational singing

- O Little Town of Bethlehem Blue Hymnal #134
- Silent Night Blue Hymnal #138
- Joy to the World Blue Hymnal #130

The March of the Three Kings from The Christmas Tree

Franz Liszt

Jeffrey Brody, organ

The Festival Choir

Sopranos	Altos	Tenors	Basses
Nina Moe	Anita Malone Clarke	Connie Dugan	Nick Dokos
Kazumi Kobayashi	Linda Cohn	Jill E. Lewis	Dick Erickson
Marilyn McCoy	Julia Lee	Doug Record	Mark Ewen
Merrith Sabo-Jones	Rebecca Saslow	Christopher Aaron Smith	Colman Reaboi
Norma Sherwood	Liz Steinheider	Jeff Steinheider	Keith Truesdale
	Barbara Wagner		

The Youth Choir

Sonia Boonstra	Madeline Domenichella	Jessica Gates	Helen Record
Aaron Colonnese	Gretchen Durning	Reese Hogan	Kayla Sherwood
Hannah Colonnese	Timothy Evans	Santanna Palou	Emma Young
Jonathan Daniels	Claire Ewen	Susanna Palou	

Program Notes

It is a very great pleasure indeed to welcome one and all to this traditional PACC event, the annual Christmas Concert. This year's program is centered on the concept of plain, pure and simple joy, the joy that fills us all at this special time of the year as we celebrate and rejoice in the birth of Christ Jesus. It is now, more than ever, that the shining beacon light of the Nativity brightens our dark world, beset as it is with recession and depressing problems. This afternoon we can dispel this gloom by listening and enjoying the efforts of a multitude of performers in works of great diversity of compositional style and expression. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all involved in this afternoon's performance for the many months of unceasing effort which has made this program of difficult and diverse music possible. May our musical endeavors enable us to enjoy a most blessed and joyous Christmastide as we ponder the Mystery of God's gift to us in the form of his only-begotten Son.

The music of the late Olivier Messiaen (1908-1992), the single most influential and unique French composer of the 20th century, is dominated by a seemingly incongruous mix of Gregorian chant, Hindu rhythm and bird-song. All these disparate elements are yoked together to express an extremely profound and intensely faithful view of basic Christian faith. Indeed, if the Lutheran Johann Sebastian Bach professed his continued faith in each and every of his many works, then surely in Olivier Messiaen we have his 20th century Catholic corollary. The performance of his music today, like many others world-wide, serves to mark the centennial of the composer's birth. On a personal note, I had the pleasure of meeting Messiaen and his wife, the pianist Jeanne Loriod, after attending six enormously successful Boston Symphony Orchestra performances of his massive *Turangalila Symphony* in 1975. My autographed copy of the full score of *Turangalila* is probably the single most prized score in my library and serves as a perpetual reminder of the experience of meeting and talking with, however briefly, the most important French composer of the 20th century. This afternoon's organ prelude, *Desseins eternels*, is the third movement of Messiaen's nine-movement suite for organ, *La Nativité du Seigneur*. It is a profound and mystical meditation on Ephesians 1:5-6 ("He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace

which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved."). The slow, almost static movement of the harmony and melody in *Desseins eternels* (eternal purposes) seems to portray the awe we feel at the presence of the divine majesty.

The *Christmas Oratorio* was written by Bach in 1734, the subject being taken from texts in Luke and Matthew pertaining to the Nativity. It is not an oratorio in the modern sense, but the justification of its appellation as such is to be found in Bach's own title, *Oratorium tempore nativitatis Christi*.

As the entire six parts are very rarely given, a general review of their character will better suit the reader's purpose than a detailed review of each. The entire vocal score embraces no less than sixty-four numbers. In the first three parts, the connecting narratives, recited by the Evangelist, are assigned to tenor and bass, and declare the events associated with the birth of our Lord—the journey to Bethlehem, the birth in the manger, the joy of Mary, and the thanksgiving over the advent of the Lord—the choral parts being sung by the shepherds. The fourth part relates the naming of Jesus, and outlines His career in a grand expression of faith and hope. The fifth illustrates the visit of the three kings, the anxiety of Herod when he hears of the advent of the Lord, and the assurances given him to allay his fears. In the sixth, the visitors depart to frustrate Herod's designs, and choruses of rejoicing over the triumph of the Lord close the work.

The first two parts are the only ones which need special notice for the purposes of the concert-goer. The first opens with a brilliant prelude, introduced by the drum, which Bach, like Beethoven, sometimes treated as a solo instrument. It preludes the narrative bidding Zion prepare to meet her Lord—a simple, touching melody, followed by the chorale ("How shall I fitly meet Thee and give Thee welcome due?") set to the old Passion-hymn ("O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden")—a solemn and even mournful melody, which at first appears incongruous in the midst of so much jubilation. The composer's evident intention was to impress the hearer with the fact that the object of the divine advent on earth was the Passion of our Lord. At the close of the work the same chorale appears, but with another meaning. It is there an exultant expression of Christ's victory over sin and death. As the chorale dies away, the narrative is resumed, leading up to another chorale ("For us to Earth

He cometh poor”), combined with an orchestral symphony and bass recitative. The next number is a bass aria with trumpet accompaniment (“Lord Almighty, King all glorious”), and is followed by a chorale set to the words of Luther’s Christmas hymn, which also occurs in other parts of the work, differently harmonized to suit the nature of the situation, and with which the first part closes.

The second part opens with one of the most delightful instances of Bach’s orchestration, a pastoral symphony. Like the symphony of the same style in Handel’s *Messiah*, it is simple, graceful, and idyllic in character, and pictures the shepherds watching their flocks by night on the plains of Bethlehem. At its conclusion, the Evangelist resumes his narrative, followed by the chorale (“Break forth, O beauteous, heavenly Light”), prelude the announcement of the angel (“Behold, I bring you good tidings”). It is followed by the bass recitative (“What God to Abraham revealed, He to the Shepherds doth accord to see fulfilled”), and a brilliant aria for tenor (“Haste, ye Shepherds, haste to meet him”). The Evangelist gives them the sign, followed by the chorale which closed the first part, in another form (“Within yon gloomy Manger lies”). The bass recitative (“O haste ye then”) prelude the exquisite cradle-song for alto (“Sleep, my Beloved, and take thy Repose”). This lovely song brings us to the close, which is an exultant shout from the multitude of the heavenly host singing “Glory to God in the highest.”

For the Postlude, I offer *The March of the Three Kings* (perhaps a trifle liturgically/historically early!), one of a dozen miniature piano works from *The Christmas Tree*

suite of Franz Liszt (1811-1886). Written between 1874 and 1876 and dedicated to his niece, Daniela von Bülow, this is, according to Liszt scholar Humphrey Searle, a mixed collection of religious and genre pieces, mainly simple in style, and some of them are extremely charming. This year I sought not only a piece brilliant as well as brief, the better to contrast with the two very large blocks of Bach, but also a work that employs a familiar Christmas melody.

Jeffrey Brody

The Youth Choir presents three special works today, in addition to joining the Festival Choir for portions of the Christmas Oratorio. The first selection is an arrangement of a medieval German carol, *Personent Hodie*. The text reads: “On this day, earth shall ring with the songs children sing to the Lord, to our King – born on earth to save us. Him the Father gave us.” This text is sung first in Latin, then in English. In like fashion, Holst’s *The Saviour of the World is Born* is written in mixed-language format. The verses, in English, tell the story of Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem, with each verse ending in a Latin statement of the title phrase: “*Salvator mundi natus est.*” This work, composed in 1907, reflects Holst’s growing interest in modal melodies, and harmonies of early music and folk tunes. To close their set, the Youth Choir performs the beloved *Jesu, Joy of Man’s Desiring*, in keeping with a program honoring the mastery of the great Johann Sebastian Bach. Originally composed as a movement of the cantata *Herz und Mund und Tat und Leben* (BWV 147), this chorale has become one of Bach’s most enduring works.

Andrea Hart

The Skinner Organ

The E. M. Skinner Organ was built for St. Mark’s School in Southboro in the 1920s and moved to PACC in 1961. Skinner was a gifted, innovative and often controversial builder whose work was of the highest quality. In recent years, the musical and historic qualities of these organs have engendered increasing esteem and appreciation from a growing number of organists. Of this particular instrument, Peter Sykes, organist of the First Church in Cambridge, has written, “It’s a grand, beautiful resource; value it, and take care of it. You will never regret it, I can assure you.”

The Concert Series

In 1991 the Music Committee of the Park Avenue Congregational Church undertook the task of restoring our historic Skinner organ. At that time, a price of \$60,000 was quoted for the restoration work. The Committee resolved to raise the necessary funds by holding a series of concerts. This was the start of the PACC Concert Series. In addition to our annual Christmas concert, we have invited a number of soloists and groups, all professionals, to perform in the acoustically vibrant Sanctuary as well as more informally in the Parish Hall. Concerts have ranged from classical, to choral, to folk coffeehouses. Thus far, your contributions have paid for the restoration of the Choir, Swell and Great, the three keyboard divisions of the organ.

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