

A musical prayer for peace in Orleans

Gloriae Dei Cantores sings Ralph Vaughan Williams

By Ellen C. Chahey
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War persists in human affairs no matter how dearly we long for peace. Every day in this summer brings us images of present wars around the world, and as if those are not enough, the summer of 2014 also commemorates the centenary of the start of World War I and the 70th anniversary of D-Day in World War II. But

as much as there has been war, there has also been music.

The Gloriae Dei Cantores choir of Orleans will perform *Dona Nobis Pacem*, a musical prayer for peace written between the world wars (1936) by English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams, among other works, at the Community of Jesus' Church of the Transfiguration in Rock Harbor, July 11 and 12.

The program also offers choral works by Bach (Komm, Jesu, Komm); Mozart (*Misericordias Domini*); and Poulenc (*Litanies a la Vierge Noire*).

Dr. James Jordan, assistant conductor and organist for Gloriae Dei Cantores, called *Dona Nobis Pacem* the "centerpiece" of the concert and explained that its "main thrust" is writings of

American poet Walt Whitman after the American Civil War, including the poet's "Dirge for Two Veterans." But the composer "pulls in Scripture" as well, Jordan said.

Vaughan Williams, Jordan said, was a medic in World War I and from what he saw in that war he was "more scared of the works of man than of the works of God." In Jordan's view, although the Latin name of the work means "Grant Us Peace," it addresses the case of "when war becomes a necessity – this is not an antiwar statement; it's a work of necessity."

The theme of the concert, said Jordan, is that the composer was "crying out to God for mercy."

Jordan said that the Poulenc was also written in 1936. "He's

such an interesting combination of elements – an outlandish life, but an incredible sense of the sacred," the organist said. The inspiration for the piece, the composer's first sacred choral work, was the horrible death of a friend in an auto accident, Jordan said.

Bach wrote the music that will be performed in this concert as a funeral piece that is "actually quite joyous," Jordan said, and added that Mozart wrote, at age 10, something to celebrate the feast of St. Benedict while he was visiting a monastery.

Guest soloists are mezzo-soprano Jossie Perez, who has performed at the Metropolitan Opera and in Europe and Puerto Rico, and bass-baritone Andrew Nolen, who has trained at Oberlin and Julliard and also

performed widely.

Conductor Richard K. Pugsley has directed the chorus for more than 15 years, and produced 24 of their recordings.

Gloria Dei Cantores has performed in Russia and Italy, on the soundtrack of the movie *Lorenzo's Oil*, and at the tree-lighting ceremony at Rockefeller Plaza. They took part in the 900th anniversary of St. Mark's Basilica in Venice.

Concerts are scheduled for 7:30 p.m. on July 11 and 12 at the Church of the Transfiguration, Rock Harbor, 5 Bay View Drive, Orleans. Tickets are \$35, \$30 for seniors, and admission is free for students and for ages 18 and under. A pre-concert lecture is offered at 6:45, and a reception follows the concert. For tickets, call 508-240-2400 or visit gdcchoir.org.

Events

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A&E:5

with artists' reception 7 p.m. July 18.

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Gloriae Dei Cantores performs sacred music from England, Russia

Gloriae Dei Cantores brought to life two composers, from much different backgrounds whose work intersected with shifting world events.



COMMENT

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Recommend

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IN CONCERT

What: Gloriae Dei Cantores
When: Friday and Saturday nights
Where: Church of the Transfiguration, Rock Harbor, Orleans

By KEITH POWERS

Posted Jul. 29, 2014 at 2:00 AM

ORLEANS — When political change and religion cross paths, we hardly think of music as the beneficiary. In singing works from the Russian and English sacred traditions, Gloriae Dei Cantores brought to life two composers, from much different backgrounds, whose work intersected with shifting world events.

The program featured music from 20th-century Russian composer Georgy Sviridov, who wrote under a regime where sacred music was forbidden, and Englishman Herbert Howells, who composed his Renaissance-influenced "Mass in the Dorian Mode" just a few years after a papal encyclical demanded reforms in church music. The choir sang unaccompanied, under the direction of Richard Pugsley, in the Church of the Transfiguration at Rock Harbor Saturday evening.

Sviridov (1915-1998), little known outside Russia, composed largely from literary inspiration, setting texts from Pushkin, Shakespeare, Blok, Lermontov and others. Late in life he turned to sacred settings. Lyrical, unapologetically Romantic and accessible, much of his music finds still finds an audience in his homeland. The program included Sviridov's "Three Choruses," incidental music from a Tolstoy play, and a religious suite, "Ineffable Mystery."

"Three Choruses" offers a clever example of how Russian composers evaded the ban on sacred music. Embedded as part of the action of a play, the music could explore religious devotion while avoiding retribution. The three texts are strikingly diverse: "Molitva" declaims a Marian text, highlighted musically by an arching alto solo by Sister Phoenix Catlin. "Lubov svataya," the most original of the settings, has an otherworldly soprano solo, beautifully developed by Kathy Schuman, accompanied by wordless humming from the ensemble. The apocalyptic finale, "Pokayanniy stih," also features humming, this time supporting chant melodies.

Gloriae Dei Cantores established a personal relationship with Sviridov. The composer heard them sing before his death during the first of the ensemble's three Russian tours, and was moved to send them his "Ineffable Mystery." Sadly, he never heard the group sing it. GDC performed the suite at the composer's grave site during their next Russian visit in 1998, just after Sviridov's death.

The six movements, which begin with a cantor-like call to worship (boldly sung by baritone Brother Timothy Pehta), are hymns of praise to Mary, to Christ and to God. Sviridov colors the simplicity of a cappella voices with striking solo outbursts and brash crescendo/decrescendo phrases. Multiple and varying repeats of the "Svatiy Bozhe" section, and tenor Brother Richard Cragg's robust outburst at "ta velichayem" (we magnify you) in the "Dostoyno yest" third movement, illustrated the technique beautifully.

of Renaissance polyphony and early chant. The "Mass" is unabashedly created in that mode; its composition date of 1912 could easily be 1500.

Elegance and clarity are the key features. There is sophisticated counterpoint in the setting, and shifting tempos, which Pugsley carefully steered. But the overall effect gets created by the overlapping simplicity of the lines, and rich sonic precision. Four soloists, Sister Amanda Ortolar (soprano), Sister Phoenix (alto), Brother Jacob Witter (tenor) and Peter McKendree (bass), feat sporadically but most notably in the first of two concluding "Agnus Dei" sections, enhanced the ensemble's overall quality dramatically. A duet (soprano and alto) phrase in the Credo ("Crucifixi etiam pro nobis") rang out movingly.

The bold architecture of the Church of the Transfiguration, with its long echos and deep resonances, was perfectly suited for most of this elevated vocal writing. Less successful was Bach motet "Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied," a virtuosic work for double chorus.

Not through any fault of the ensemble's musicianship, to be sure. Ambitiously, Bach created a prodigiously challenging work laced with fugues and dazzling counterpoint: In certain sections, the two choruses overlap, singing ornate melismas (elaborations of a single syllable). With the echoing hall maintaining much of the sound as new tones were being sung, articulation suffered.

The performance marked the end of Gloriam Dei Cantores' summer season. The choir performs its All Saints' Concert next on Oct. 31 and Nov. 1. Visit www.gdcchoir.org or call 508-240-2400.

Review: Glorïe Dei Cantores delivers personal, powerful show

By KEITH POWERS

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

July 13, 2014 - 2:00 AM

Sharing the stage with two top-flight soloists and an impressive orchestra of more than four dozen players, Glorïe Dei Cantores began its summer season Friday evening at the Church of the Transfiguration in Orleans' Rock Harbor with a sacred program centered on Ralph Vaughan Williams "Dona Nobis Pacem."

Mezzo Jossie Perez and bass-baritone Andrew Nolen joined the choir and orchestra, which were led by GDC principal conductor Richard K. Pugsley.

In addition to Vaughan Williams' intense pre-World War II cantata, the varied program included a motet by Bach ("Komm, Jesu, komm"), two offertories by Mozart, and Poulenc's sacred setting "Litanie a la Vierge Noire."

The centerpiece of the evening was undoubtedly Vaughan Williams' emotional "Dona Nobis," written in 1936, when the apprehensive English composer and his compatriots anxiously tried to come to grips with an impending war. Vaughan Williams intersperses texts from Walt Whitman and from British orator John Bright, with a simple sacred plea: "Dona Nobis Pacem," which he places intricately, in diverse arrangements, in the voice of the female soloist.

Nolen introduces the most anguished texts: "Reconciliation," a short Whitman prose selection that laments the impending carnage (the chorus repeatedly extolling "sisters Death and Night"); "Dirge for Two Veterans," another harrowing text in which the two tragically dead veterans turn out to be father and son, with unforgettable march accompaniment; and "Angel of Death," a short excerpt from Bright underlining the inevitability of the conflict.

Nolen sang articulately, his lyricism a strong pairing for the powerful words. Perez, a mezzo cast in a soprano's role, showed that an expressive, facile instrument makes a great match no matter what the composer's instructions. Her deeply personal investigations of the varied settings of her simple text — almost as if, musically, Vaughan Williams wanted to explore every way possible to find peace — were an understated highlight. The high A in the "Angel of Death" section left no doubt about her ease in the range.

The work is not without drama, especially instrumentally. A substantial orchestra, rich in brass and percussion, played smartly throughout. Pugsley adeptly guided the large ensemble through the tricky score, which is characterized by overlapping choral lines (sometimes five- or six-part settings), perhaps the composer's way of darkening the text and enhancing the sense of foreboding. The phenomenal slow and delicate reverb in this striking sanctuary added to that effect.

The female voices of GDC were spotlighted in Poulenc's unusual "Litanies a la Vierge Noire," written as a tribute to one of the many shrines of the Black Virgin (in this case, the Chapelle de Notre Dame at Rocamadour, in the French Midi). It is a deeply personal work, written after a pilgrimage to Rocamadour to mourn the sudden death of Poulenc's close friend.

"Litanies" shows the Catholic, introspective Poulenc, not the dance-hall Poulenc. The organ accompaniment (tastefully played by James Jordan) and subtle, liquid settings accent nuance, not force. The voices blended seamlessly.

Briefer works opened the evening. "Komm, Jesu, Komm" offers Bach at his contrapuntal height. The text painting — one example, "der saure Weg" (the bitter path) juxtaposed with "der rechte Weg" ("the way," as in "the way, the truth and the life") — demanded intensity. Pugsley filled out the display of his ensemble's virtuosity with the set of Mozart sacred works: "Scande coeli limina" (written when the composer was 10) also gave a quick glimpse of Perez' gifted instrument; and "Misericordias Domini," for chorus and orchestra, showed Mozart's own skill in counterpoint.

Glorïe Dei Cantores next sings Russian sacred works at the Church of the Transfiguration on July 25 and 26. For tickets and information, go to gdcchoir.org or call 508-240-2400.



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Guest soloists to sing with Orleans choir

Guest soloists Jossie Pérez, mezzo-soprano, and Andrew Nolen, bass, will join principal conductor Richard K. Pugsley and the Gloriæ Dei Cantores choir, with orchestra, for concerts July 11 and 12 at the Church of the Transfiguration at Rock Harbor, 5 Bay View Drive, Orleans.

Pérez has performed with the Teatro Colón Argentina, Buenos Aires, and the Gran Teatre del Liceu, Barcelona. She will perform "Carmen" in Madrid at the Teatro de la Zarsuela. The singer had debuted "Carmen" with the Boston Lyric Opera where she performed in Boston Common for an audience of over 150,000 people. Other past performances include Portland Opera, Teatro de la Opera in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and Les Amis du Lyrique en Bretagne in France.

Nolen, a Juilliard-trained American bass-baritone, has performed a diverse repertoire in opera and concert venues spanning the globe, from Carnegie Hall to the Royal Lyceum Theater in Edinburgh. Since joining the ensemble of Theater Krefeld-Mönchengladbach in Germany, Nolen



Andrew Nolen Courtesy photos

has sung roles such as Leoprello in "Don Giovanni," Orsini in "Rienzi," Herr Reich in "Die Lustigen Weiber von Windsor," Oroveso in "Norma," and the title role in "Le Nozze di Figaro."

In Orleans the two will perform in Vaughan Williams' "Dona Nobis Pacem," written at the dawn of World War II and based on Walt Whitman's poem "Dirge for Two Veterans," and Pérez will also be featured in Mozart's "Scande coeli limina," based

on a 13th century poem about Saint Benedict. Also on the program are: Bach's "Komm, Jesu, komm," an a cappella work, Mozart's "Misericordias Domini," a Poulenc's "Litanies a la Vierge Noire."

Concerts begin at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are \$35 (\$30 for Seniors, free for students and ages 18 and under). A pre-concert lecture takes place at 6:45 p.m., and a reception follows the concert. For tickets, call 508-240-2400 or visit gdc-choir.org.

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Jossie Perez

Gloriae Dei Cantores delivers sacred sounds

By KEITH POWERS
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

ORLEANS – Tucked away in a corner of Rock Harbor in Orleans, the estimable choir Glorae Dei Cantores has for more than 25 years studied, performed and recorded the sacred vocal repertory. On Friday evening the choir, backed by a sturdy band of instrumentalists, performed music by two linchpins of that repertory, Bach and Buxtehude.

The vocal ensemble – drawn from members of the Community of Jesus, the ecumenical monastic group at the church – has an international reputation. That reputation has been built with multiple tours of Europe and the near east, of America, and with dozens of recordings that encompass not only the traditional sacred repertory but challenging contemporary works by composers like Copland, Thomson, Rubbra, Adler and others.

Friday's performance, directed by assistant conductor Richard Pugsley, offered Bach's cantata "Jesu, der du meine Seele," based on the story of the healing of the 10 lepers from Luke, and an earlier work, the oratorio "Membra Jesu Nostri," by Bach's predecessor and mentor Buxtehude.

Both works alternate ensemble vocal sections, some with instrumental accompaniment, interspersed with arias and recitatives featuring soloists drawn from the ensemble.

Bach's great genius pervades all aspects of his composition; one way this gets illustrated most directly is how he marries the meaning of text with the musical accompaniment. "Jesu, der du meine Seele" depicts not only the real, physical suffering of the leper but the suffering of the sinner in similar terms, and the subsequent healing.

Layers of emphasis passed among the vocal sections appear immediately in the choral opening. Soprano (Amanda Ortolani, who sang with clarity, forceful tone and intelligence all

IN CONCERT

What: Glorae Dei Cantores

Where: Church of the Transfiguration, Rock Harbor, Orleans

When: Friday and Saturday at 7:30 p.m.

Tickets: Go to www.gdcchoir.org or call 508-240-2400

evening) and alto (Phoenix Catlin) take up the pleading of the lepers with the canon "O Jesu, O Meister," a duet aria. Tenor Richard Cragg sang notably – with sinuous flute accompaniment from Mariellen Sears – in his aria "Das Blut."

A baritone aria (Timothy Pehta) with oboe obbligato weaving in the background (sturdily delineated by Elizabeth Doriss), and demanding coloratura well wrought by the soloist (at the words "Handen rauben") reveals the promise being fulfilled, bringing to a close multiple settings of rich contrapuntal detail. The finale, the choral "Herr, ich glaube," creates a calming mood, both musically and textually, drawing the work to a close.

Buxtehude's "Membra Jesu

nostri" celebrates the body of Jesus as he suffers through the Passion; each of the seven sections, loosely arranged like a cantata, has an instrumental introduction, a full choir section, individual arias, and then closes with a choral recapitulation.

The orchestra was reduced to strings and harpsichord, keeping the instrumental colors simple. Each section, with the text alternately describing Jesus' feet, knees, hands, side, breast, heart and face, was a complete movement to itself, with its own musical moods and gestures.

There were several outstanding arias, but the ensemble sound dominated. While the music lacked the textural sophistication of the Bach cantata, it grew in complexity and interest as the work progressed.

Of particular note were the aria sections in "Ad manum," with first the soprano soloists (Orto-

lani, Alicia Mitman) and then a trio aria, well wrought, featuring alto (Catlin), tenor (Cragg) and bass (Peter McKendree) singing with a tightly blended sound.

The choir created rich vocal textures throughout. On the instrumental side, the continuo line, established largely by harpsichord (Sharon Rose Pfeiffer) and bass (Alexander Goodin), was consistent and strong.

Glorae Dei Cantores next performs at the Church of the Transfiguration on July 11 and

12. For tickets and information, go to www.gdcchoir.org or call 508-240-2400.

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CAPE COD TIMES

z* Entertainment / Arts*

Sound choice: Glorïae Dei Cantores

By KEITH POWERS

Posted Jul 10, 2014 at 2:00 AM

You don't think of Bizet's earthy opera "Carmen" as a breeding ground for sacred music.

You don't think of Bizet's earthy opera "Carmen" as a breeding ground for sacred music. And truly it's not. But Glorïae Dei Cantores, the top-flight choral ensemble that opens its summer season this weekend in the spectacular Church of the Transfiguration at Rock Harbor in Orleans, has engaged one of the premiere Carmen interpreters, mezzo Jossie Pérez, as a soloist for its two programs.

Pérez, who appears with bass-baritone Andrew Nolen, will solo in Mozart's "Scande coeli limina" before joining Nolen for the centerpiece of the program, Ralph Vaughan Williams' "Dona nobis pacem." The chorus will also perform works by Bach and Poulenc, and the orchestra will present Mozart's "Misericordias Domini," as well. Richard K. Pugsley conducts, accompanied by organist James Jordan.

Pérez made her debut in "Carmen" with the Boston Lyric Opera in an outdoor performance on Boston Common before more than 150,000 people in 2002. She's since come to own the role, realizing the sexy cigarette girl on stages from Barcelona to Shanghai.

But the Puerto Rican-born mezzo has a facile instrument, and when Pugsley wanted to tackle Vaughan Williams' sprawling "Dona nobis," "at first I was thinking about soloists from our own ranks," he says, "but then I decided that wisdom was the better part of valor. The Vaughan Williams is quite large, and even though I would be taking just one voice out of the choir, it seemed too disruptive. So I went looking for a soloist, and I knew Jossie was really able to sing the part."

Although Vaughan Williams technically calls for a soprano in the score, and Pérez is normally described as a mezzo, “she can handle it,” Pugsley says. “She has the ability to fill it out with that warm tone of hers. And I do think the idea of categorizing singers is overrated.”

Vaughan Williams’ cantata, written in 1936, naturally bears the drumbeat of war firmly in its conception. “He was anti-war,” Pugsley says, “and looking at the themes, on the surface you see him investigating the impersonal nature of war and human suffering. But I think he understood the necessity of it, in this case. Perhaps nearing World War II, war had a more honorable sense.”

Vaughan Williams blends sacred texts with poems from Walt Whitman and words from a British orator, John Bright. “I was in the service,” Pugsley says, “and with the D-Day anniversary this year, I got caught up in the piece. There are still men and women serving today, and I think it’s a kind of calling. That was my main desire for programming it.”

As far as the rest of the program, “Bach is a good warm-up,” Pugsley says of the cappella “Komm, Jesu, komm.” “He brings Christ into the concerts, and sets it up for us. Then we go to ‘Scandi coeli,’ which invites heaven to come down. In the next Mozart, the ‘Misericordias,’ there’s a sense of forgiveness. The Poulenc ‘Litanies à la Vierge Noire’ was written the same year he was re-finding his Catholic roots.”

Glorïe Dei Cantores’ summer opening program runs both Friday and Saturday. A second program later in the month features sacred texts from the Russian composer Gyorgy Sviridov, a Bach motet, “Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied,” and Herbert Howells’ “Mass in the Dorian Mode.”

For complete concert series information and tickets: www.gdcchoir.org or 508-240-2400.

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