

**PROGRAM NOTES for THE WAITING SKY**  
**SOUTHERN OREGON REPERTORY SINGERS' 2021 HOLIDAY CONCERT**

**By Ed Wight**

**THERE IS NO ROSE**

by Connor Koppin

Connor Koppin, at age 30, is already an award-winning American choral composer. He dedicates the lovely setting of this 15<sup>th</sup>-century text to the prestigious Wartburg Choir. It consists of two main sections – the verse, and an *Alleluia* refrain – but Koppin subtly expands both as the piece progresses. The first line of text, “There is no rose of such virtue as is the rose that bare Jesu,” conveys the essence of the song. Mary is the rose; it was common in the Medieval era to identify her with the sweetest of flowers.

**ALMA REDEMPTORIS MATER**

by Tomas Victoria

Like an exploding supernova, the final generation of brilliant Renaissance composers remains unmatched in international quality. Palestrina and Giovanni Gabrieli (Italy); Orlando di Lasso (Netherlands/Germany); William Byrd (England); and Tomas Victoria (Spain) all composed music simultaneously throughout the final three decades of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Victoria is unique among them, concentrating solely on Latin sacred music. (Palestrina almost matched him in this, later regretting a few early secular madrigals.) He was unique in another sense as well; Victoria’s stature and esteem reached such heights that, very rare for any Renaissance composer, almost all of his music was published during his lifetime. His first published collection from 1572 features this *Alma Redemptoris mater* (“Loving Mother of our Redeemer.”) It flows gently in the Renaissance style of continual interlocking points of imitation, leavened by his penchant for rich harmony.

**AVE MARIA**

by Pawel Lukaszewski

The music of celebrated Polish choral composer, Pawel Lukaszewski, has been featured on more than fifty CDs, and he also won seven *Fryderyk* Awards. Comparable to the American Grammy Awards, Poland created this award in honor of their most famous composer, Fryderyk Chopin. The third consecutive piece to feature the Mother of Jesus, Lukaszewski focuses exclusively on her. “Ave Maria” (Hail Mary, Full of Grace) constitutes the only text (until the concluding “Amen.”) He sets it in **A B A form**, with variants of the gentle opening section

returning at the end, framing a faster and more powerful contrasting “B” section in the middle. The brief coda closing the piece recaptures that middle-section drama.

## **MAGNIFICAT**

by Charles Stanford

After the death of Henry Purcell in 1695, no major English-born composer surfaced for two centuries. Finally in the late 19<sup>th</sup>-century, a generation of composers (Hubert Parry, Edward Elgar, Walter Parratt, and Charles Stanford) led a Renaissance in English composition. Of those four, “It is arguable that Stanford made the greatest contribution to this renaissance...a prolific composer in almost all musical forms and for all combination of forces” (1980 New Grove Dictionary). As the teacher of many important English composers, including Ralph Vaughan Williams, Gustav Holst, Frank Bridge, and Herbert Howells, he helped continue the renaissance far into the next generation as well.

Stanford wrote four settings of Morning, Communion, and Evening Services, and this one in G Major, Op. 81 from 1902, is the third. The *Magnificat* is the first of two canticles in the Evening Service, and Stanford set it for treble or soprano solo, choir, and organ. His arpeggiated organ accompaniment “immediately recalls the imagery of Schubert’s *Gretchen am Spinnrade*, but it is Mary with her exultant song...at the Annunciation who is placed at the spinning wheel,” writes critic, Jerome Dibble. Stanford depicts lyrical joy throughout this piece, especially with the recurring high G pitches in the solo line.

## **THE CHRIST CHILD’S LULLABY**

by Gwyneth Walker

Prolific American composer Gwyneth Walker’s achievements speak for themselves, a prominence confirmed with over 130 commissioned works. Her success allowed her to leave the Oberlin Conservatory faculty at age 35 to devote herself to fulltime composition (while living on a dairy farm in Braintree, Vermont).

She bases *The Christ Child’s Lullaby* on a traditional Scottish folksong, “Hebrides Lullaby.” Listen for the lowered 7<sup>th</sup> pitch, reflecting that folk influence, as it opens with an extensive alto solo. This soon broadens to three parts for the entire alto section before the full choir enters. The breadth of this piece, lasting over 250 bars, generates the most extensive, dramatic scope of the concert. It extends beyond the sweet lullaby style which opens and closes it, to the richer harmony and greater drama in the middle. Walker’s sophistication and career-long accomplishments guide its unfolding, as it builds upon itself (early melodies and motives recur). And it often fashions them in dialogue with each other, forming both melody and faster accompaniment simultaneously. The various alto and soprano solos depict Mary’s voice.

## **ROMANCE OF THE ANGELS**

by Howard Goodall

British composer Howard Goodall combines his choral music skills with a rare penchant, among composers, for education as well. He wrote six hour-long specials on music history for BBC. This enthusiasm for history perhaps led him to this 15<sup>th</sup>-century text by Spanish poet and priest, Fray Indigo de Mendoza, that Goodall translated for this setting. A light-hearted and joyful focus on the Savior's birth, the verses proclaim, "Let there be joy on earth and heaven...Banish all sadness on this glorious day." Goodall varies the verses in sophisticated fashion, writes a lively organ interlude which recurs, and spices up *Romance* with some modal jazz harmony.

## **THE WAITING SKY**

by Oliver Tarney

Oliver Tarney received a Masters in Music Composition from Manchester University and currently teaches at Winchester College in Hampshire as head of the composition faculty. He sings in their college choir and also participates in "Sing for Pleasure," a national organization that promotes choral singing. Known for writing tonal music with nonetheless challenging harmonic effects, this prominent British composer provides the title song for today's concert. It features the contrast between mundane pastoral life and that shining star in the heavens signifying Jesus' birth, enlivened with his penchant for sweetly expressive harmonic clusters.

## **JINGLE BELLS**

Let's be honest for a minute. Aside from its symbolism for the welcome return of the Christmas season, do any of us really need to hear *Jingle Bells* again? (It was James Pierpont's single memorable song, from 1857.) Well, composer J. David Moore offers surprisingly convincing evidence for a resounding "Yes!" He both parodies and revels in the traditional function of the bass voice, offering every cadential cliché in the book – and they all work! Many of them briefly suggest wrong keys and modes, and Moore of course saves the best example for last - the final cadence of the piece. Against nonsense accompaniment syllables in almost every bar, each section in the choir gets a brief shot at the melody in this lively and delightfully humorous setting.

## **MY LORD HAS COME**

by Will Todd

Few composers also write their own lyrics. The great Broadway composer, Stephen Sondheim, was one (along with his celebrated predecessors, Irving Berlin and Cole Porter.) Prominent British composer, Will Todd, also wrote the lyrics for his Christmas composition, *My Lord Has Come*. Unlike most composers, Todd's talents additionally extend to performance as well, as an accomplished jazz pianist. He sets this piece in **A A B A** form, similar to thousands of Broadway tunes that jazz players love. Todd gives the first verse (the "A" section) to sopranos, and the second to tenors. The "B" section provides dramatic contrast in music, lyrics ("His love will hold me"), and *fortissimo* dynamics before the third verse offers a powerful variant for the music's final "A" section.

### **SUO GAN**

Like so much folk music, the words and music for this Welsh lullaby are lost to history. They remain anonymous. Poet, composer, and Welsh folklorist Robert Bryan collected the lyrics around 1800. George Guest's arrangement retains an authentic, folk-like simplicity. Mostly it focuses on the melody, often presented as an unaccompanied solo. Guest sets it in a standard **A A B A** format with consistent 4-bar phrasing throughout. While the structure matches thousands of Broadway and pop tunes (which it shares with the previous piece in today's concert), its simplicity and sweetness clearly reflect the lullaby genre. The three "A" sections feature an identical melody, while the "B" section functions as a bridge, with the only contrasting melody and harmony. Guest repeats the entire A A B A structure three times, each with a different verse – but all focus on the sleeping Babe.

### **WINTER**

by Alvin Trotman

Alvin Trotman earned a Masters in Composition at Southern Methodist University. This piece, a setting of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem, *Snowflake*, serves as the Winter component in his choral cycle for the four seasons. The deceptive simpleness and quiet of the opening introduces a harmonic complexity found nowhere else on the concert. This creative African-American composer also employs complex rhythms as well, with frequent metric shifts, and unmetered chance patterns. Trotman also provides the only collaborative parts extending beyond keyboard in today's concert, as he additionally draws upon clarinet and percussion and provides visual effects as well in this remarkable piece.

### **AULD LANG SYNE**

Like so many folksongs serving as traditional Christmas carols, the words and music appeared separately - at different times, created by different hands. Scottish poet Robert Burns wrote the lyrics in 1788, basing them on an earlier Scottish folksong. They were coupled with the now familiar tune eleven years later, in 1799. Traditionally sung at the stroke of midnight on New Years Eve, its emphasis on sentimentally looking back (at the old year) also accounts for its performances at funerals, graduations, and the closing moments of festivals.

After the Repertory Singers' absence of almost two years from the stage, there is much to look back on, but also to celebrate this concert's fresh beginning for the time ahead. Such a wonderfully appropriate piece; Composer-in-Residence Jodi French captures that dual essence, and also helps end the concert with a flourish.