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Ensemble Concerts: The University Concert Choir, December 4, 1974

Donald Armstrong Conductor

Tong-Sook Han Piano

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The Moods
of Christmas

The University
Concert Choir

Donald Armstrong, Conductor

Tong-Sook Han, Pianist

Capen Auditorium

Illinois State University

Wednesday, December 4, 1974

8:15 p.m.



PROGRAM

AVE REGINA CAELORUM (1967)

Gordon Binkerd
B. 1916

TWO CHRISTMAS MOTETS
AVE MARIA
O MAGNUM MYSTERIUM

Thomas Luis de Victoria
1540-1611

THE CHRISTMAS STORY, Opus 10 (1933)
Evangelist—Greg Kunde

Hugo Distler
1908-1942

- I. Introduction "The People That Walked In Darkness"
- II. The Christmas Story
 1. Chorale "Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming"
The Annunciation
 2. Chorale "Isaiah 'Twas Foretold It"
The Magnificat
 3. Chorale "O Savior, Hear Our Pleading"
The Birth of Christ
 4. Chorale "This Flower Whose Fragrance Tender"
The Shepherds and the Host of Angels
Chorus of Angels "Glory to God in the Highest"
Chorus of Shepherds "Let Us Go Now"
 5. Chorale "At Once the Shepherds Answered"
Herod and the Wise Men
Chorus of Wise Men "Where Is the New-born King"
Chorus of Chief Priests and Scribes "In Bethlehem"
 6. Chorale "All Thanks to God the Father"
Simeon
 7. Chorale "Now Sing We All, So Be It!"
- III. Final Chorus "For God So Loved the World"

INTERMISSION

THE MANY MOODS OF CHRISTMAS

Arr. Robert Shaw &
Robert Russell Bennett

WHITE CHRISTMAS

Irving Berlin
Arr. Erik Leidzen

NOTES

Gordon Binkerd, born May 22, 1916, in Lynch, Nebraska, is at once one of the most prolific twentieth century choral composers and one of the least performed. His instrumental works—including several chamber pieces, three symphonies, and a number of keyboard works—have been played more often in New York and Chicago. From 1949 until only recently, he was on the faculty at the University of Illinois.

Ave Regina caelorum is an excellent example of the thick polyphonic texture found in much of Binkerd's unaccompanied choral works. Scored for divided soprano and alto and single tenor and bass lines, the piece is canonic in four upper voices in the opening portion, while the middle section weaves a total six part polyphonic texture. The result can only be described as lush to the point of saccharine, ably describing the love-song-type text to the Virgin Mary.

Unlike his older contemporaries, Palestrina and Lasso, the Spanish renaissance composer Tomas Luis de Victoria composed only for the Catholic liturgy. In technique and texture, his music is almost undistinguishable from Palestrina, being in the highest realm of counter-reformation Catholic liturgical polyphony. The oft quoted characteristic of "passion" is difficult to point out in his music. The music is indeed ethereal and devoid of any secular (i.e. worldly) adulterations.

The two motets sung here are not only familiar, but absolute hallmarks of that technique described above. The *Ave Maria* is closely based upon the chant melody for that text, and the *O magnum mysterium* is more freely descriptive of the different text phrases. This motet became the basis for Victoria's parody mass, composed twenty years later.

With the revival of interest in choral music, principally that for the church, experienced in Europe and America during this century, Hugo Distler is at last gaining the widespread fame he so justly deserves. During his brief lifetime, he enjoyed the fulfillment of producing extensive music for the Lutheran church service, and seeing that that music, along with the huge Lutheran literature from the 17th and 18th centuries, received frequent and loving performance. When the pursuit of these aims was no longer possible because of the political persecution and conscription pushed upon him, he tragically ended his own life at the age of 34, leaving a wife, two children, much fine music for chorus and organ, and many dozens of loving admirers and disciples.

Die Weihnachtsgeschichte (literally The Christmas History) is in the form of a chorale partita, or suite of variations. It can neither be called oratorio nor cantata, since it contains no arias or even soloistic singing. The chorus is the principal musical entity, presenting extended free choruses based on the relevant old and new testament scriptures, as well as the seven variations on the chorale *Es ist ein Ros' entsprungen*, known to us as *Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming*. The composition of course owes much to both Heinrich Schutz and Sebastian Bach primarily in the construction of the narrative character of the recitative music. Its nearest progenitor is found in the passions of Schutz, in which the early baroque master actually invented a recitative style to suit his needs and desires for the austerity of the story. Distler uses this same rather unadorned, yet highly expressive, technique in the unaccompanied recitatives. The whole is an experience of the greatest magnitude for singer and hearer, moving the nativity story into that realm of emotion and thought not entered by any other musical setting.

MOTET TRANSLATIONS

AVE REGINA CAELORUM (Hail Queen of Heaven)

Hail Queen of Heaven, Mother of the King of angels, O Maria!

O Maria, flower of virgins, like a rose or a lily,

Pour forth prayers unto the Lord for the salvation of the faithful.

Hail Queen of Heaven, Mother of the King of angels. Amen.

AVE MARIA (Hail Mary)

Hail Mary, plenteous in grace; the Lord is with Thee.

Blessed art Thou among women,

And blessed is the fruit of Thy womb, Jesus Christ!

Holy Mary, Mother of God,

O MAGNUM MYSTERIUM (O Great Mystery)

O great mystery and wondrous sacrament,

That animals should see the birth of our Lord,

Lying in a poor manger

O blessed Virgin, whose body was worthy to bear the Lord Jesus Christ.

Alleluia!