

THE CATHEDRAL OF SAINT PAUL

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

CHORAL CONCERT

STAFF SINGERS OF CATHEDRAL CHOIR

DECEMBER 13, 2020 4:30PM



INTROIT: GAUDETE IN DOMINO SEMPER

GREGORIAN CHANT, MODE I

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say, rejoice. Let your kindness be known to all men; the Lord is near. Be anxious over nothing, but in every prayer make your petitions known to God. —Philippians 4:4-5

“MEDITABOR” FR *VIER SECHSSTIMMIGE MOTETTEN, Op. 133*

JOSEF RHEINBERGER (1839-1901)

A MARIAN OFFERING DURING THE OCTAVE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY AND THE FEAST OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE, PATRONESS OF THE AMERICAS

“QUIA FECIT MIHI MAGNA” FROM *MAGNIFICAT, BWV 243*

J.S. BACH (1685-1750)

AVE MARIA

CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS (1835-1921)

AVE MARIA, VIRGO SERENA

JOSQUIN DES PREZ (c.1450-1521)

O SACRUM CONVIVIUM

OLIVIER MESSIAEN (1908-1992)

“DIDN’T IT RAIN”

TRAD. AFRO-AMERICAN SPIRITUAL/ARR. BOB CHILCOTT (B. 1955)

TU ES PETRUS À 6

GIOVANNI PIERLUIGI DA PALESTRINA (c. 1525–1594)

IN THANKSGIVING FOR OUR NEW BISHOP, THE MOST REV. STEVEN J. RAICA, LCD

ABOUT THIS EVENING’S REPERTOIRE

Today’s concert is performed by Colin Alexander, Michael Becher, Sarah Labriola, Merissa Laite, Siobhan Russell, and Joseph Sargent: the staff singers of Cathedral Choir, our chief, semi-professional choral ensemble. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for social distancing to sing safely in our small choir gallery, these singers have been the acting choir at 11AM Masses and major feasts since March 2020. While we greatly look forward to the resumption of the entire Cathedral Choir, we are nonetheless thankful for this dedicated and skillful group of singers. 2020 has presented the unexpected opportunity to perform many polyphonic Mass ordinaries, motets, and the like that would usually not be programmed at the Cathedral. Today’s concert is a survey of some of the stand-alone pieces of this repertoire. No concert on Gaudete Sunday would be complete without performance of the introit, **Gaudete in Domino semper**, that gives this Sunday its colloquial name, Rheinberger’s **Meditabor** comes from a set of four Latin motets which use texts from the offertory of the Mass. This motet is especially expressive and is set in rich, six-voice texture. Rheinberger, a master composer (*cont.*)

and key musical figure in 19th Century Romanticism deserves to be much better-known in the US. A formidable musician in charge of the premieres of Wagner's operas, a prolific composer of sacred music, and a close friend of Brahms, Rheinberger's music offers an attractive use of traditional forms and texts within a tasteful Romantic idiom. This week finds us in the Octave of the Immaculate Conception, and so we pay tribute to the Mother of God in a special way today. Bach's Magnificat is surely one of the most beautiful pieces ever written on the text, and the aria **Quia fecit mihi magna** for bass is a highlight. A delightful miniature is Saint-Saëns' **Ave Maria**. It is one of at least six settings of the text by the French composer, but is surely one of the most beautiful. Its masterful handling of modest choral forces recalls Saint-Saëns' pupil Fauré's similar skill in this very French genre of small-motet-with-organ-assistance. The other setting of the Ave Maria could not be more different, but is one of the great compositions of Western music—by one of the greatest composers of Western music. Josquin des Prez stood at the top of the heap of early Renaissance composers, to the point that he is more well-known simply by his first name. He composed at the highest level in every genre of music, but one of his most famous works is this **Ave Maria**. It foreshadows many later “givens” in Renaissance music (imitative counterpoint entries in each choral voice; paired or grouped voices in dialogue; homophony for emphasis of important texts) but also uses many calling cards of earlier repertoire (“open” harmonies; texture of treble plus three lower voices; cadences that sound more Medieval to modern ears, and so on). However, like all great music, it transcends stylistic analysis in its brilliant presentation of an ornamented version of the text of the Hail Mary prayer. **O Sacrum Convivium** is one of the texts of the Mass of Corpus Christi most often set by composers since its composition in the 13th Century by St. Thomas Aquinas. Jumping a mere seven centuries ahead brings us to this setting by the young Olivier Messiaen. Messiaen in a controversial figure in 20th Century music; widely regarded as one of the greatest composers of the century by experts, his music is incomprehensible to many at first hearing. All the same, Messiaen, a daily communicant, is surely one of the most devout and explicitly Christian composers—all of which makes it more shocking that this early work is his ONLY liturgical composition. Such was his devotion to Gregorian chant that he simply didn't compose further in the polyphonic genre: a great testament to the Faith, but perhaps a poverty to us, the listeners! This piece bears the hallmarks of Messiaen's work, especially the feeling of timelessness, which so well-reflects this Eucharist text in which we are invited to meditate upon the eternal reward that awaits the faithful who center their lives around the Most Sacred Banquet. Any musician who has performed in another country knows that our great treasure as American musicians is the Afro-American Spiritual. This repertoire, founded in “work songs” in plantation fields, helped generations maintain hope among the scourge of slavery. However, they have become a lasting gift to Americans in their straightforward presentation of the truths of God's love for His people. This recent arrangement of “**Didn't it rain**” was sung at the installation of our bishop, the Most Reverend Steven J. Raica, JCD. 2020 has had a lot of “rain”, existentially if not in reality. This arrangement by Bob Chilcott uses famous arranger Henry Burleigh's arrangement as a model. It sings of the Biblical flood, as a reminder to live with faith and virtue. While 2020 has been mixed, a great blessing of the year was the installation of Bishop Raica. We see in our bishop, our “Peter”, the visible head of our local Church. One of the great Petrine motets is Palestrina's **Tu es Petrus à 6**. One of Palestrina's most famous compositions, we know it was a personal favorite, too, as it gave birth to a “parody” Mass (that is, a Mass that uses the motet as its model) that is as famous as the motet. It foreshadows, in some ways, the Venetian practice of the next century: “choirs” set in opposition (or in this case, complementarity), hemiola, and a general sense of homophony. The text “*claves regni caelorum*” receives special treatment—a reminder that this work is by the most Roman of Roman composers!

THE FINAL STRETCH OF OUR ORGAN PROJECT...

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