

PROGRAM NOTES
By Brock McElheran

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BRAHMS, "O Saviour, Throw the Heavens Wide" op.74 No.2

The two motets which comprise opus 74 are dedicated to Philipp Spitta, the great biographer of Bach. Brahms is obviously paying homage both to Spitta and to Bach, as these motets are more in the style of the Baroque than the Romantic Era.

It is interesting to note that the Bach motets were originally thought to be unaccompanied, but later evidence indicates that instruments doubled the voices.

One detail may puzzle the listener. Why did Brahms set the words, "as gentle dew from Heaven", to vigorous music? It is possible that he was determined to set the over-all spirit of the hymn and not give way to the temptation to "word-paint." Spitta was a leading exponent of the absolute music wing in the raging controversy with the Wagnerites.

BRITTEN, "Rejoice in the Lamb."

Britten's remarkable ability to select obscure but great poetry for his vocal works, so obvious in "War Requiem", is also apparent in this cantata. The words are by Christopher Smart, an eccentric Eighteenth Century poet whose peculiarities caused him to be locked up in Bedlam Insane Asylum.

The poem's chief point is that there is divinity in all of God's creations. After a quiet invocation, a vigorous dance in complex rhythms summons various Old Testament animals to worship God. After a short Hallelujah section, solos for soprano, alto and tenor describe the divinity of God as seen in familiar objects - the grace of the cat, the bravery of the mouse in defending his mate against the cat, and the beauty of flowers.

The mood darkens. The chorus sings a recitative in which the poet takes comfort in drawing certain parallels between his misery and that of Christ - "they said, He is besides himself, "the watchman smites me with his staff, for silly fellow is against me - - -." The section ends with a heart-rending canon on the words, "for I am in twelve hardships, but he that was born of a virgin shall deliver me out of all." Then the baritone soloist describes divinity as shown by several letters of the alphabet. On "M" for music", the chorus commences a riotously joyous section rhyming musical words from the Bible, anticipating Twentieth Century writers like Gertrude Stein. The cantata closes with a peaceful ending.

McELHERAN, "Patterns in Sound."

Many people are unaware of the gigantic upheaval which has taken place in music, mostly in the last five years. The new music, called "avant-garde" for lack of a better name, has jolted the musical world just as did the revolutionary ideas of the Florentines in 1600 and Debussy in the 1890's. New philosophies, sounds, and techniques are shaking traditional concepts. Composers now use all pitches instead of just the twelve notes of the scale, and pitches may slide or bend instead of staying on one level. Rhythms, for centuries consisting chiefly of simple multiples of 2 or 3, are now capable of infinitely complex relationships. Tone colors not normally considered part of organized music are now heard in concert halls. The performer has regained the freedom to create notes, a freedom lost for 150 years (except in jazz). Humor is back in instrumental music, an element almost totally lacking since the jokes (scherzi) of Haydn and Beethoven.

"Patterns in Sound" is an attempt to use avant-garde sounds in a structure more organized than in many recent works. The movement included on this program is slow and legato in style. Several vocal sounds and sliding melodies are used in canon and canon by inversion, and there is a cadenza for performers (where they select material from the movement) and one for the conductor (in which he indicates the pitch changes of sentence loops)

Streams of sentences are used, selected in several languages by the singers individually. These are not for conveying verbal meaning but are to provide an assortment of highly varied sounds which pour forth in a stream like grains of sand.

The work has been performed by adult and school choruses and was recently heard in Pittsburgh at a festival of contemporary arts.

HANDEL, Utrecht "Te Deum"

This early but great work anticipates in form the Beethoven masses of a century later. It is in seven main sections, with numerous sub-sections flowing freely from one to another, with solos, ensembles for solo singers and choruses intermingling. There are no self-contained arias, and no sections are repeated.

The sonority is exceptional, as Handel frequently uses three violin sections and divides his chorus into four, five, six, and at one point seven parts.

Of particular interest are the sublimely beautiful "We believe that Thou shalt come", (the only movement calling for flute), the antiphonal chorus, "Day by Day", with echo effects designated by Handel in the trumpet parts, and the short but glorious finale, "O Lord, in Thee Have I Trusted."

For this performance the University Singers are joined by twenty-five high school students. These fine young musicians have been members of a laboratory chorus meeting for two hours a day for a month to assist the University's summer project in music education. Their work has been invaluable and is much appreciated.