

Destination Iowa, Saturday, April 26, 2008

Program Notes

Song of the Heartland; Nick Lane

Born and raised in Marshalltown, Iowa, **Nick Lane** is an accomplished trombonist who has resided in Los Angeles for the past 25 years. Lane graduated from Boston's Berklee College of Music and later went on to perform with Maynard Ferguson's band from 1977 to 1981. He has been a contributing artist on hundreds of CDs and enjoys continued involvement in music for TV, movies, and commercials. He was recently involved in the recording of a collection of his original works, *Songs of the Heartland*, which features ***Song of the Heartland***, a song inspired by the wide-open prairie land and boundless blue sky of mid-America which we are happy to call home.

"Growing up in Marshalltown, IA we had two claims to fame—Jean Seberg and Nick Lane. *Song of the Heartland* is just one of several songs Nick wrote for orchestra and full choir that celebrate this great state that we call home. There's something about the swell of the song just before we sing 'Iowa, oh Iowa' that reminds me of the rolling hills and breathtaking valleys of eastern Iowa. He truly captured our Heartland in this piece. It reminds me of why I stay here. And it's such a beautiful name to sing!" (Laura Thomas)

"I've always loved the warmth of the *Song of the Heartland*. It's a simple piece but conveys the deep love that Iowans have for our home." (Sue Breen-Held)

Psalm 117 (Laudate Jehovam, omnes gentes); Georg Philipp Telemann

German Baroque composer **Georg Philipp Telemann** (1681-1767) was known throughout Europe as the leading German composer and musician during his lifetime. A contemporary of J.S. Bach, Antonio Vivaldi and G.F. Handel, Telemann was a self-taught musician, composing his first opera by age twelve. Telemann wrote in many forms during his career, including cantatas, passions, oratorios, operas, chamber music, and instrumental music. He also served in several prominent music positions, including music director of the five largest churches in Hamburg for more than four decades. ***Psalm 117*** was composed during Telemann's last creative period in 1758.

"I particularly love singing prayers set to music. When written and performed well, the music becomes an extension of the meaning, expressing feeling beyond the text alone. And there are a couple parts in the alto line of Telemann's *Psalm 117* that thrill me when I get them just right." (Tiffany Tolman)

Liebeslieder Waltzes 6 and 11; Johannes Brahms

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897), German composer of the Romantic period, began his lifelong pursuit of excellence in music as a young child. By the age of seven, he was studying piano and was soon called upon to support the family income with his musical talents. Brahms had a longstanding friendship with Romantic composers Robert Schumann and his wife Clara, who recognized his talents at age twenty. Never marrying, Brahms spent his life composing music, conducting, and teaching. While he maintains a reputation as a serious composer of large, complex musical designs, some of his most successful compositions are small scale and were written to the thriving contemporary music market of his time. Included in these smaller works are the ***Liebeslieder Waltzes***, of which we are performing numbers 6 and 11 tonight.

“The *Liebeslieder Waltzes* by Brahms are very special to me. I sang the whole collection in college as part of the Drake Chamber Choir. Brahms wrote them with much care, and they are beautiful songs that talk about many stages and feelings associated with love. It is fun to share two such contrasting songs of love tonight. I especially love the piano parts -- they add so much to the songs.” (Ashley Coopriider)

“I can’t think of too many things more fun than sharing the keyboard accompaniment to these pieces with a musical colleague and friend in piano duet. Brahms wrote two sets of the *Liebeslieder Waltzes* and I’ve never had the privilege of performing the full set of either one. Put that on my wish list for a future Choral Society program! These two provide just a sampling of the charm inherent in these works.” (Elaine Wedeking—accompanist)

“The *Liebeslieder Walzes* are wonderful works that express a broad spectrum of emotions... all dealing with various aspects of LOVE. We’ve chosen two excellent selections from the larger work to perform. As fun as they are to listen to, they’re even more fun to perform!!” (Nathan McKellar)

***Panis Angelicus*; Cesar Franck**

Composer, organist, and music teacher **Cesar Franck** (1822-1890) was born in Belgium but spent the majority of his life in France, becoming a great figure in romantic music during the second half of the 19th century. Franck taught both privately and institutionally and held many posts as organist. He is best known for a small number of compositions written in his later years, including his *Symphony in D minor*. ***Panis Angelicus*** is one of his best known shorter works.

“*Panis Angelicus* is a new piece for me, and I love to sing it. As a tenor, it's great to have such a beautiful counter-melody all to ourselves, set against the backdrop of the larger choral parts.” (Nathan McKellar)

***Cantique de Jean Racine Op. 11*; Gabriel Fauré**

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924) was a French composer, organist, pianist, and teacher. When Fauré was nineteen years old, he wrote *Cantique de Jean Racine Op. 11*, which won him first prize at his graduation from the Ecole Niedermeyer, the Paris school for church organists and choir directors. It was at this school that he first started to develop his strong understanding of harmonic structure. Throughout his life, Fauré studied and employed new techniques in harmonic and melodic language that would later influence many twentieth-century composers. He was the foremost French composer of his generation and was active as a composer and teacher in various settings.

“This is the third time I’ve had a chance to sing *Cantique de Jean Racine* and this is the best experience. While the melodies and harmonies in and of themselves are lovely and lyrical, the music is richer for our work on style and nuanced expression. This is so fitting a piece to accompany a text about utopia.” (Ann Selzer)

“Fauré writes such beautiful music; it makes it worth all the pain of trying to pronounce French!” (Chris Wilde)

“Fauré’s *Cantique* has special meaning for me. I’ve had a special love for France’s rich heritage and culture for many years, ever since I had the wonderful opportunity to live and work alongside my host families in rural France during my stay there as a 4-H exchangee after college. I remember well how I struggled at first with the new language, and how music was the one language that could bridge the gap when my French skills came up short. Many times throughout my six month stay in France I was asked to sing and play American folk songs on guitar, and I remember being surprised at how many of the American songs that we grew up with here in Iowa were already quite familiar to my French hosts. Imagine just how stunned I was the first time I heard one of my host families howl out the chorus ‘Glory, glory Hallelujah!’ as I closed out each verse of our own Battle Hymn of the Republic!” (Guy McCaw)

***High Ground*; Ben Allaway**

Local composer **Ben Allaway**, composer-in-residence at Graceland University and First Christian Church in Des Moines, draws on his passion for cross-cultural experiences in his original compositions. Allaway’s works have been featured on programs featuring the likes of Garrison Keillor, Maya Angelou, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Hillary Clinton, and Hal Holbrook. ***High Ground*** is the final movement of his *Tallgrass Canticles*, a work commissioned by the Des Moines Choral Society, which is devoted to the Meskwaki and the settlement of Iowa. In this final movement of the Iowa experience, he deals with the clash between cultures as the Native Americans and European settlers learn to live together in peace. According to Allaway’s website, “The work ends with a hopeful invitation to continued dialog between peoples.”

“*High Ground* reflects on all that could keep our cultures apart, and a wish for us to find reasons to pull together—to find high ground. The mid-point where the men’s voices rise and the women’s voices descend to find the same note—peace—seems relevant to so many cultural divides, real and imagined.” (Ann Selzer)

“I was part of the Choral Society when we premiered the *Tall Grass Canticles* many years ago. It was an exciting time to premiere a piece commissioned just for us. I love the work, and feel that the music complements the words to help paint a picture of the prairie, with the grasses waving in the breeze. The poetry is beautiful, the message is one of reconciliation and hope and the music sets one right in the middle of the tall grass prairie.” (Vivian Mogensen)

***O Fortuna Imperatrix Mundi*; Carl Orff**

German composer **Carl Orff** (1895-1982) is perhaps best known for *Carmina Burana*, a collection of 24 Latin poems set to original music. During 1935 and 1936, Orff composed this work for texts from a collection of poetry written in the thirteenth century and later discovered in a Bavarian monastery in 1803. The most recognizable movement from this work, ***O Fortuna Imperatrix Mundi*** (O Fortune, Empress of the World) recollects the capricious power of Fortuna, the Roman goddess of fortune, as she plays with the fate of man. Orff’s musical setting for this poem has become so well known that it has been performed by countless ensembles and has become a musical icon in pop culture.

My favorite piece is *O Fortuna* by Orff. It’s such a dramatic piece that I have had the pleasure of enjoying many times in concert (and television), and singing it on this concert is an even more enjoyable experience.” (Ashley Coopridner)

“Who doesn’t thrill to the opening movement of *Carmina Burana*? While bits of this show up in movies, TV shows and even commercials, we rarely hear the full movement with the contrasts of soft and loud, bright and dark, and the triumphant final moments.” (Ann Selzer)

“*O Fortuna* is the opening number to Orff’s *Carmina Burana*, which is sometimes criticized as the equivalent of ‘fast food’ in the fine-dining world of classical music. But, it’s a very popular theme that you’ll almost certainly recognize as the background music to a great many commercials. I like this number because it allows us to do something that choral conductors rarely permit: sing REALLY LOUD!!!!” (Chris Wilde)

“Some of my earliest childhood memories are running wild around the house with *Carmina Burana* cranked up on the stereo. My parents tell me I used to wave a stick around, and basically ‘conduct’ the whole piece as a two-year old. And yes, I could probably still do it today (though not as well as Dr. Rodde)! Who doesn’t love *Carmina Burana*!?” (Nathan McKellar)

***Tjuv, ja, tjuv*; Arr. by Hugo Alfvén**

Hugo Alfvén (1872-1960) was a Swedish composer, conductor, and violinist. He studied at the Stockholm Music Conservatory and earned a living playing violin at the Royal Opera in Stockholm and the Swedish court orchestra. Later in his career, he traveled much throughout Europe as a conductor. He is also known as one of Sweden's principal composers, producing a considerable amount of programmatic music, some of which evokes the landscape of Sweden. Additionally, Alfvén rounded out his interest in the arts by painting and writing. This arrangement of ***Tjuv, ja, tjuv*** is Alfvén's rendition of a traditional Swedish folk song.

"Learning to sing in all of the languages has been a challenge, especially when we don't always have the translation right away. At first, singing *Tjuv, ja, tjuv* made me feel like the Swedish Chef from the old Muppet Show (one of my favorite characters!)." (Sue Breen-Held)

"As a Scandinavian Minnesotan, I suppose I should be able to explain *Tjuv ja tjuv*., so I'll try. I guess when you live someplace that's dark and cold so much of the year, you compensate by writing 'happy' sounding music—even when the title of the song translates as 'Thief, yes thief.'" (Chris Wilde)

***The Ring*; Antonin Dvorák**

Czech composer **Antonin Dvorák** (1841-1904) often drew on the traditional folk music of his native Bohemia in creating his original compositions. While Dvorák spent most of his life in his beloved homeland, he traveled throughout his life. From 1892 to 1895 he lived and worked in New York City. While in America, he and his family spent the summer of 1893 in the Czech-speaking community of Spillville, Iowa, where some of his cousins had previously immigrated. ***The Ring*** is an original duet, taken from his *Moravian Duets*. When Dr. Rodde first introduced this piece to the choir, he relayed his translator's interpretation, who said it was the story of an "airhead" who accidentally left the wedding ring at home locked in his mother's trunk on his wedding day. At that point, a member of the choir raised his hand to say that he had done that very thing on his wedding day. To which Dr. Rodde responded, "Like I said, he was NOT an airhead."

***Gloria*; Ariel Ramirez**

Composer **Ariel Ramirez** (b. 1921) draws inspiration from the music of the gauchos and creoles of the mountains of his homeland Argentina. While he studied classical music in Madrid, Rome, and Vienna from 1950 to 1954, he has also devoted significant study to the traditional rhythms and sounds of South America. ***Gloria*** was composed in 1964 as part of *Misa Criolla*, one of the first masses to be celebrated in a modern language (Spanish), and has been

recorded by such singing legends as Jose Carreras (1990) and Mercedes Sosa (1999). Currently, Ramirez is the president of the Society of Authors and Composers of the Republic of Argentina.

“I first performed this piece when I was in the Iowa High School All-State Chorus years ago. This was the first WOW moment I experienced with choral music, and is one of the things that inspired me to stay with vocal music. I can say that before or since, I've not heard a *Gloria* sound quite like this one; it is uplifting and a joy to perform.” (Dave Short)

“The Ramirez *Gloria* will always have a place in my heart and mind. I first performed it as part of the Iowa All-State Choir in, I believe, 1972; Dr. Howard Swan was the conductor. For me it was a ‘first’; that is, the first time performing a piece of concert music that was not directly from either the European or American musical traditions. I found the ethnic character of the music most exciting. I am glad to be performing it again, 35 years later.” (Jack Mithelman)

***Amazing Grace*; Traditional**

Amazing Grace is a well-known traditional hymn. The words were originally penned by Englishman John Newton in 1772. The text was based on an Old Testament passage coupled with reflections of his personal conversion while on his slave ship, the *Greyhound*, in 1748. Popular with both Christians and non-Christians alike, *Amazing Grace* is a favorite among supporters of freedom the world over.

***This Land is Your Land*; Woody Guthrie, Arr. Robert De Cormier**

American songwriter and folk musician **Woodrow Wilson “Woody” Guthrie** (1912-1967) drew on his first-hand knowledge of the hardships of life during the Dust Bowl era to write hundreds of folk songs and ballads. Guthrie grew up in Oklahoma during the Great Depression and later traveled the country, from California to New York, learning and performing traditional folk and blues songs. As a political response to the popular *God Bless America*, Guthrie wrote the lyrics to ***This Land is Your Land*** for an existing melody in 1940. Today, it is one of the most recognizable folk songs in America.

A graduate of The Julliard School of Music, **Robert De Cormier** is an American musical conductor, arranger, and director. De Cormier currently directs Counterpoint, an eleven-member choral group, and has arranged music for many singers and groups, including Harry Belafonte and Peter, Paul, and Mary. He has also been a member of the choral panel for the National Endowment for the Arts.