

Masterworks of Hope, February 23, 2008

Program Notes

Mass in Time of War; Franz Joseph Haydn

Franz Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) is one of the most well-known composers of the classical period, often referred to as the “Father of Symphony.” A life-long resident of Austria, Haydn began his musical training at a young age, being apprenticed to a relative at the age of six for musical instruction. He spent his youth performing and studying music, often under harsh conditions, before establishing his career as a court musician to the wealthy Esterhazy family. Throughout his career, Haydn produced a flood of compositions, for his employer as well as for general publication and commissions abroad.

Mass in Time of War (*Missa in Tempore Belli*, sometimes known as the *Paukenmesse* or *Kettledrum Mass*) was composed in August 1796 during the European war which followed the French Revolution. At this time, Napoleon’s troops were gaining ground in Italy and Germany, and Austria feared invasion. As a response to this troubled time, Haydn integrated references to battle with the use of the kettledrum in the *Benedictus* and *Agnus Dei*. But the music ultimately brightens and invokes a spirit of peace. Haydn was a deeply religious man and when confronted about the cheerful nature of the *Kyrie*, particularly in the current setting, he replied, “When I think of God, I get happy.”

“As a piano student for many years, I was exposed to several Haydn compositions. Now, as a singer learning this Mass, I am reminded how much I enjoy his works. The *Kyrie* has dance-like qualities which strongly contrast the *Sanctus* and its ominous qualities. This particular Mass provides something for everyone. Listen to the story within this work and let your imagination go.” (Julayne Sankot)

“The *Agnus Dei* is one of my favorite movements of the Haydn Mass. It has a strong, beseeching tone as we ask the ‘Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world’ to have mercy on us. As we sing ‘dona nobis pacem’ (grant us peace), we begin to soar into a sense of the promise of peace in our lives.” (Jane Rider)

Requiem; John Rutter

Born in London in 1945, **John Rutter** is one of most well-known choral composers and arrangers of his generation. Rutter earned degrees in music at Clare College of Cambridge University and later held the title of Director of Music at Clare College from 1975 to 1979. He left his post to devote more time to composing and conducting. He founded the Cambridge Singers in 1981, helping them establish their own record label and leading them to international acclaim. While Rutter has composed instrumental and orchestral works, opera and

children's music, he is best known for his extensive choral compositions. Rutter frequently travels to the United States, where he regularly appears as guest conductor and often debuts his own work.

Requiem was composed in 1985 and debuted in its entirety at Lovers' Lane United Methodist Church, Dallas Texas under Rutter's direction. (Movement 6, *The Lord is My Shepherd*, was originally written in 1976 for the First United Methodist Church Choir in Omaha, Nebraska and was later incorporated into the larger work.) *Requiem* is an adaptation, combining elements of the Roman Catholic Requiem with English texts from the *Anglican Book of Common Prayer*. In this piece, a work he composed following an undisclosed personal bereavement, Rutter provides a lyrical choral line that, even in its darker moments of meditation on life and death, evokes a message of hope and comfort through beautiful, uplifting music.

"I've wanted to sing the *Requiem* for a number of years now. John Rutter's haunting melodies and satisfying resolutions are both a joy to sing and to listen to. Rutter is one of the best in modern choral music!" (Derrick Hawks)

"John Rutter's *Requiem* was one of the first major choral works I got to perform as a freshman singer in my college choir. It has stuck with me ever since. Now singing it for a second time, 20 years later, I find the uniqueness of its poignant melodies and chromatic surprises have never been supplanted in my mind's ear, and they come back to me readily. Like all of the great Requiem mass settings, Rutter's composition touches movingly on themes of death, eternity, and the cry of humankind for peace and God's mercy. Yet, it is the only Requiem I know of that, right in the middle, notably departs from the traditional Latin text, and sets to music these words of Christ from the 11th chapter of the Gospel of John: '*I am the Resurrection and the Life....He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. And whosoever live and believeth in me shall never die.*'" (Chris Wilde)

Choral Fantasy; Ludwig van Beethoven

Ludwig van Beethoven (1770-1827) greatly influenced the transition between the Classical and Romantic eras of Western classical music and remains one of the most famous musicians of all time. Born in Germany, Beethoven studied music from a young age, for a short while under Joseph Haydn, and quickly gained a reputation as a piano virtuoso. Unlike many musicians of his time, Beethoven did not work for a church or noble court, but rather supported himself through gifts and proceeds from concerts, lessons and sales of his compositions. Although Beethoven began to lose his hearing in his early twenties, which eventually led to total hearing loss, he continued to compose music throughout his life.

Beethoven's **Choral Fantasy** (Fantasia in C minor for Piano, Chorus, and Orchestra, op. 80) was written as a finale for the December 1808 concert

premiere of his Fifth and Sixth Symphonies and is regarded as a colorful showcase for a piano soloist. Beethoven composed it rather quickly by his own standards during the latter part of December and commissioned the German text from poet Christopher Kuffner to fit the existing parts. *Choral Fantasy* is Beethoven's first complete attempt to combine instrumental and choral music and is a precursor to his famous Ninth Symphony (*Ode to Joy*) which he composed sixteen years later in 1824. Throughout the work, the music and lyrics are both joyous and uplifting. Tonight only the finale of the *Fantasy* will be performed, which will highlight Elaine Wedeking, the Choral Society's accompanist, along with vocal soloists and chorus.

"I sang *Choral Fantasy* in New York with the University of Cincinnati Conservatory Chorus and the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra at Carnegie Hall and the Philharmonic Hall (later called Avery Fischer Hall). Everything was overwhelming. There were a lot of firsts - New York, the Beethoven, the concert halls. It was wonderful." (Cheryl Fraracci)

"As a new member this season, I am thrilled to be singing these songs. I know each member takes something different from each song, whether emotionally or spiritually. For me, one song in particular sings a wonderful chord. *Choral Fantasy* brings back so many wonderful memories of when I sang it in the Czech Republic with the Palacky University Ateneo Choir. This is such a wonderful piece and I'm thrilled to be singing and enjoying it once more." (Andrea Alexander)

"Last year, I was watching the Kennedy Center honors and enjoying a wonderful piano performance when suddenly the curtain rose and there was the Washington DC Choral Society. What IS that music? Powerful—indeed formidable. And when the altos hit that wonderful, exciting note—it's just a goose bump moment. The melody was *almost* Beethoven's 9th. I eagerly awaited the list of music in the credits, and I even rewound and reviewed several times looking for the name of the piece to no avail. A friend of mine in the DC Choral Society finally ended the mystery: Beethoven's *Choral Fantasy*. Listen for that magic alto note, and enjoy!" (Ann Selzer)

"I'm particularly eager to hear Elaine Wedeking's portion of the Beethoven which features her musical talents. This piece requires much precision with the language and is a grand celebration of life's harmonies!" (Jane Rider)

