

Program Notes

Welcome to the North Shore Choral Society's first concert of our 80th season! Our theme for the season is one that is so meaningful for our country and the world – Songs of Peace – Sing, Share, Inspire! This concert brings together music that is representative of the types of works that the NSCS has performed over our 80 year history. From a cappella octavos to extensive oratorios with orchestral accompaniment, the NSCS has enjoyed introducing our singers and audiences to new works along with the more popular and standard works of the choral canon.

Today the focus of our varied repertoire is on Peace, and especially the idea of Peace as it resonates in our community. From the Latin words of yearning *Dona Nobis Pacem* – Grant Us Peace - to biblical texts, spirituals, and new compositions, these pieces all call for a greater understanding of our world, our planet, and our neighbor. This ideal is one that the NSCS has always held as we've been a part of the North Shore for the last 80 years. We're grateful to Dr. Kennette Benedict for framing this repertoire with her comments, and we hope that you not only enjoy the music, but that this concert will encourage you to become involved in efforts for peacemaking in your community.
~Julia Davids

The choral music of Francis Poulenc (1899-1963) has only recently begun to share the recognition that his instrumental works and solo songs have always enjoyed with the listening public. ***Gloria***, commissioned by the Koussevitzky Foundation of the Library of Congress, had its premiere in Boston in 1961, just two years before the composer's death. The listener who associates sacred music with solemnity may be momentarily taken aback by sections of Poulenc's *Gloria*, particularly the lighthearted second and fourth movements. Poulenc himself commented: "The second movement caused a scandal. I wonder why? I was simply thinking, in writing it, of the Gozzoli frescoes in which angels stick out their tongues; I was thinking also of the serious Benedictines whom I saw playing soccer one day." This revealing statement says much about Poulenc's multi-faceted musical personality for many of his works include passages of high lyrical and emotional intensity standing cheek-by-jowl with sections of playful caprice. It also confirms Poulenc's own religious conviction. "I have the faith of a country pastor," he said; indeed, a work such as his *Gloria* demonstrates a joyous faith totally lacking in ostentation. The North Shore Choral Society last performed Poulenc's complete *Gloria* with the Evanston Symphony and Conductor Lawrence Eckerling in 2007 and will perform these two movements with them in December.

An active conductor and educator, Larry Nickel (b. 1952) directs the Jubilate Vocal

Ensemble and owns Cypress Choral Music Publishing which promotes the music of almost 100 Canadian composers. Nickel wrote *Requiem for Peace* as his doctoral thesis at the University of British Columbia. It is an extensive work for soloists, chorus, and orchestra in twelve languages, and it recently received its European premiere in Stockholm, Sweden. The NSCS will perform the entire *Requiem* on May 14th, 2016. There are four movements of the *Requiem* especially written for a cappella chamber choir. The “**Kyrie**” is rich and poignant with suspensions that illustrate the pleading of the text. Along with the traditional ‘Kyrie’ text (Lord, have mercy), Nickel also includes the Latin ‘*Miserere nobis*’ (Have mercy on us) and ‘*Dona nobis pacem*’ (Grant us peace).

By the time he was in his twenties, Mendelssohn was already enjoying an international reputation as a composer, pianist, and conductor. The warm reception which greeted the composer’s oratorio *St. Paul* in England in 1837 was a clear indication that the appetite for oratorios was, a century after Handel’s death, still strong among the English. Mendelssohn had planned to write several more oratorios with an eye to pleasing his English audience. Although *Elijah* was already in Mendelssohn’s mind as early as 1837, he began work only in 1845 after he had received the requisite text from the poet Julius Schubring. Within seven months Mendelssohn completed the entire score. The text of the oratorio is drawn for the most part from the First Book of Kings. “**Blessed Are the Men Who Fear Him**” is the ninth movement of the first part and utilizes two main themes – a lyrical statement of peace and a rising declamation of the triumph of light over the darkness. The North Shore Choral Society last performed *Elijah* in 2008 as the final concert with Music Director Donald Chen, and the NSCS is honored to have him conduct this movement as part of our 80th anniversary celebration.

Dr. Michael Horvit is Professor of Composition and Theory at the University of Houston Moores School of Music. For twenty-five years he served as music director at Congregation Emanu El, Houston. During his studies at Yale University (B. MUS. and M. MUS.), Tanglewood, Harvard, and Boston University where he received his DMA degree, his teachers included Aaron Copland, Lukas Foss and Walter Piston. Widely performed in the U.S., Europe, Japan, and Israel, Michael Horvit's works range from solo instrumental and vocal pieces to large symphonic compositions and operas. While a departure from the mass ordinary text, “**Even When God Is Silent**” is definitely a creed, or statement of belief. The words were found scrawled on a cellar wall where Jews had hidden in World War II in Cologne, Germany. Horvit wrote this setting for the fiftieth anniversary of Kristallnacht, The Night of Broken Glass, in November 1988. The North Shore Choral Society first performed this with Music Director Julia Davids on her first concert with the ensemble in 2008.

Randall Thompson (1899 – 1984) is one of America’s best-known composers. He was

educated at Harvard and received his doctorate from the Eastman School of Music. He later held positions at the University of California, Princeton University, and the Curtis Institute of Music. He composed three symphonies but is best known for his choral works. **“Have ye not known?”** and **“Ye shall have a song”** are the last two movements of *The Peaceable Kingdom*, a large a cappella work for double chorus. *The Peaceable Kingdom* was inspired by the painting by Edward Hicks and was written in 1936. The texts come from the book of Isaiah. The NSCS last performed these choruses on a program entitled *A Song of Peace* presented at Temple Ezra Habonim in 2010.

Karl Kroeger is a nationally known musicologist and editor of early American choral music. He studied at the Universities of Louisville and Illinois and at Brown University, and has taught at Ohio University, Moorhead State University, Wake Forest University, and Keele University in England. He headed the music collection at the New York Public Library (American), at Moravian Music Foundation, and at University of Colorado in Boulder where he was also a professor. Dr. Kroeger has composed more than 100 works for a variety of vocal and instrumental ensembles. He is a past member of NSCS, and his wife continues to sing with the choir. Conductor Thor Johnson, founder and director of the Moravian Music Festivals until his death in 1975, conceived the idea of presenting both 18th and 20th century musical perspectives on peace and persuaded the Moravian Music Foundation to commission *Pax Vobis*. Its first performance was given at the 1976 festival along with “Psalm of Joy.” *Pax Vobis*, means “Peace be with you,” the greeting that Jesus gave to his disciples at their first meeting after the Resurrection, Gospel of John (20:19). The cantata, in nine movements, employs Biblical texts, hymns, and poems to explore peace between nations as well as peace within oneself. The ninth movement is a choral finale, **“God of the Nations.”** This paean of praise is a setting of two hymns – the first by W. R. Bowie and the second by R.Y.B. Scott – and ends the cantata triumphantly. Cast in three parts, the movement opens with a solemn processional, leading to a spirited central section, and concludes with an exuberant “Alleluia” coda. NSCS performed the Chicago premiere of *Pax Vobis* in May of 2004.

Stanley M. Hoffman (b. 1959), a graduate of the New England Conservatory of Music and Boston University, lives and works as a conductor, vocalist, and lecturer in Boston, MA. **“Grant Us Peace”** for SATB chorus received an Honors citation in 2002 in the Waging Peace Through Singing project sponsored by iwagepeace.com.

American composer and conductor Mack Wilberg (b. 1955) is known world-wide as the director of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir, a volunteer chorus of over 300 members affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Wilberg attended Brigham Young University and completed his graduate studies at the University of Southern California. His compositions and arrangements have been performed by many classical

and popular artists, in addition to the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. Wilberg is especially gifted at arranging works for large choral forces, such as **“Peace Like a River,”** an African-American spiritual performed on the NSCS’s “Ring” holiday concert in 2014.

Dr. Larry L. Fleming, noted conductor and composer of instrumental and choral music, founded and directed the National Lutheran Choir and made many recordings with this ensemble. **“Give Me Jesus”** is part of a trilogy, *Three About Jesus*, arrangements of traditional spirituals with thoughtful use of the voice parts based on their vocal color. **“Give Me Jesus”** was last performed by the NSCS on our “Swing” concert in 2015.

Although generally referred to as “traditional,” **“We Shall Overcome”** is most likely derived from either the gospel hymn, “I’ll Overcome Someday,” by African American Methodist minister Charles Albert Tindley or the gospel hymn “If My Jesus Wills,” written between the 1930s and 1942 by African American Baptist choir director Louise Shropshire. At least part of the music comes from the pre-Civil War spiritual “No More Auction Block for Me.” It was adapted by Zilphia Horton, music director of the Highlander Folk Center, further revised by folksingers Guy Carawan and Frank Hamilton, and popularized by Pete Seeger to become the anthem for the Civil Rights movement.

Uzee Brown, Jr. is a published composer, arranger, and a respected researcher and lecturer on African-American vocal music. He is the former chair of the Department of Music at Clark Atlanta University, Professor of Music at Morehouse College, President of the National Association of Negro Musicians, and co-founder and chairman of the Board of Directors of Onyx Opera Atlanta. He is a member of the Board of Trustees at Morehouse College and has been engaged in a variety of church music activities. Dr. Brown’s arrangement of “We Shall Overcome” was commissioned by National Public Radio for the 70th birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The father of New Age music, Paul Winter has spent his career exploring the convergence of music and environmental causes. In the 1970s, he sailed with Greenpeace to learn more about whales and their songs. He brought along his saxophone, too, so he could improvise duets with the ocean-bound singers. Throughout his career, this sense of creating and collaborating with Nature has defined much of his work. Winter’s masterpiece in this ecomusicological style remains the 1980 Earth Mass, or *Missa Gaia*. Commissioned by St. John the Divine Cathedral in New York City, the work was composed collaboratively by the members of the Paul Winter Consort, a group founded in the early 1960s at Northwestern University as the Paul Winter Sextet. The core members at the time of the Earth Mass included: Paul Winter (saxophone), Nancy Rumbel (oboe/English horn), Paul Halley (organ and piano), Eugene Friesen (cello), Jim Scott (guitar), and Ted Moore (percussion). For the Earth Mass, they were also joined by guitarist Oscar Castro-Neves. In the same spirit of community, the work

itself is conceived in the broadest possible terms: ecumenical, global, and environmental. **“The Blue Green Hills of Earth”** was composed by Kim Oler and is now hymn #163 in the Unitarian Universalist hymnal. It is the second to last movement of *Missa Gaia* and invites the audience to sing with the chorus on the soaring melody paired with inspiring words. The North Shore Choral Society performed *Missa Gaia* in the Spring of 2014, working together with visual artists, dancers, the Evanston Children’s Choir, and area environmental groups in a joyful collaboration.

Frank Ticheli (b. 1958) is a Los Angeles composer with publications in choral, orchestral, band, and chamber mediums. He is Professor of Composition at the University of Southern California. He writes of **“Earth Song”**:

“‘Earth Song’ is one of only a few works that I have composed without a commission. Instead it sprang out of a personal need during a time when so many in this country, include myself, were growing disillusioned with the war in Iraq. I felt a strong impulse to create something that would express my own personal longing for peace. It was this longing which engendered the poem’s creation. Normally, I would spend countless hours, weeks, perhaps months, searching for the perfect poem to set. But in this case, I knew I had to write the poem myself, partly because it is not just a poem, but a prayer, a plea, a wish—a bid to find inner peace in a world that seems eternally bent on war and hatred. But also, the poem is a steadfast declaration of the power of music to heal. In the end, the speaker in the poem discovers that, through music, he is the embodiment of hope, peace, the song within the Song. Perhaps music has the power not only to nurture inner peace, but also to open hearts and ears in a world that desperately needs love and listening.”

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750) was born in Eisenach, Germany, a center of Lutheranism. He became an excellent organist and violinist, despite being largely self-taught. He held three major positions in his life, never leaving Germany. He began as organist to the Duke of Weimar in 1708. In 1717 he took the position as chapelmaster to the Prince of Anhalt and finally in 1723 he became cantor at St. Thomas’s Church in Leipzig. The Mass in B Minor was not conceived of as a whole, but rather Bach wrote it in sections from 1724 – 1747, seemingly for his own satisfaction. Liturgically, it includes all of the elements for the Roman Catholic service but is too long to be used as such. The first two movements (*Kyrie* and *Gloria*) can function as a Lutheran short Mass. **“Dona Nobis Pacem,”** the text for which is taken from the last line of the Agnus Dei, is the final movement of the roughly two hours of music in this mass. It is quintessentially Bach with its clear fugal structure, stately theme, and majestic orchestration. The North Shore Choral Society has performed Bach’s Mass in B Minor numerous times, most recently in celebration of our 75th anniversary in 2011. ~ Julia Davids,

Donald Draganski, Karl Kroeger, Karen Rigotti, and Colin Roust