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Graduate Conducting Recital: James Wolter, graduate conductor

James Wolter

Ithaca College Madrigal Singers

Ithaca College Choir

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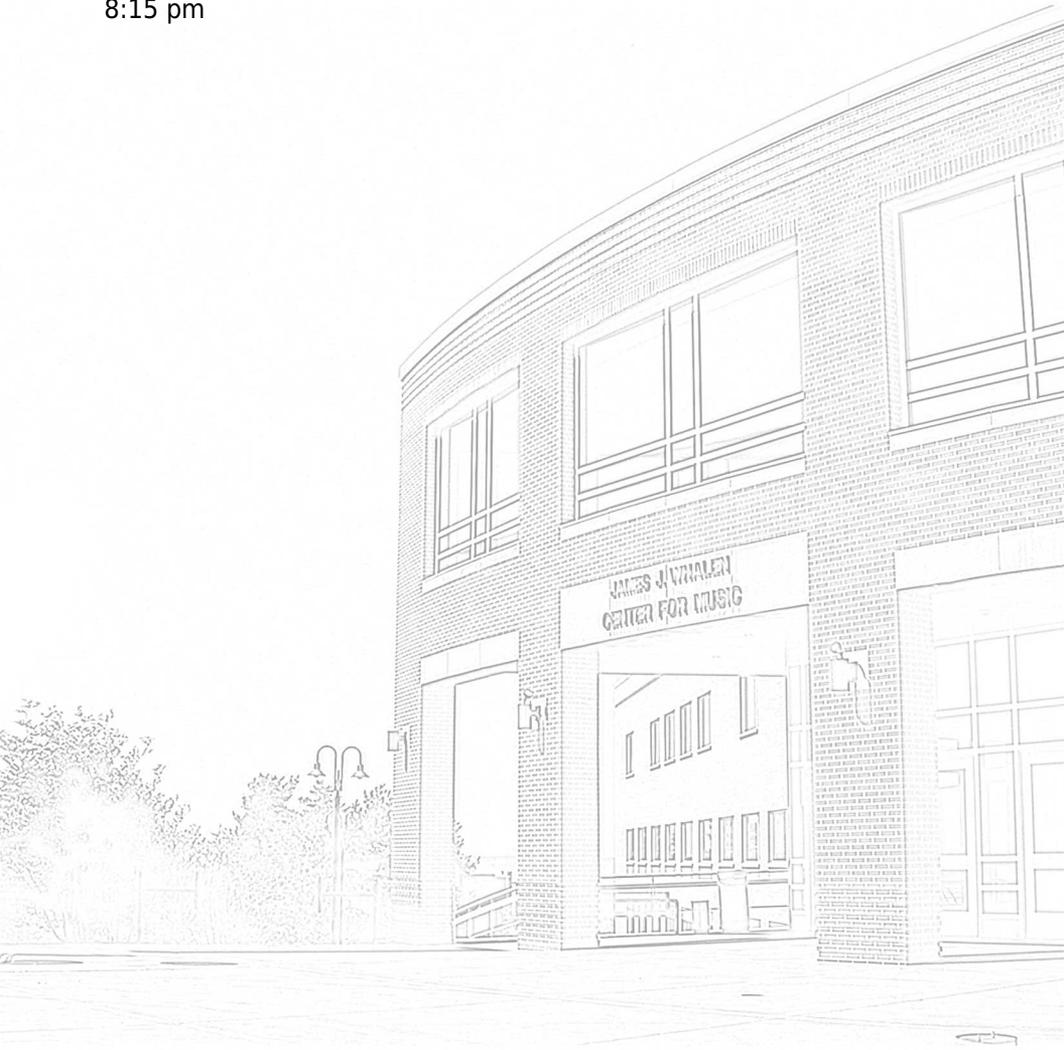
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Graduate Conducting Recital
James Wolter, graduate conductor

**Ithaca College Madrigal Singers
Ithaca College Choir**

Ford Hall
Saturday, April 7th, 2018
8:15 pm



ITHACA COLLEGE

School of Music

Of Death and Faith

The program is built around Bach Cantata 161, *Komm, du süße Todesstunde* (Come, sweet hour of death). As the title suggests, this work centering on death does not look upon the end as something to be feared. Other works emerged that dealt with our limited existence on earth in ways beyond the wailing and gnashing of teeth. Perhaps by viewing the human condition through different perspectives, life becomes even more precious and resplendent through an acceptance of our mortality.

Komm, du süße Todesstunde

The text comes from Salomon Franck, the Weimar court poet during the same time when Bach worked as Konzertmeister at the ducal court. Though the work was composed in 1716 for the 16th Sunday after Trinity, Bach reused the composition at the Thomaskirche in Leipzig where slight variations were made due to the availability of performing forces. While the vast majority of recordings adhere to the Weimar edition, this performance utilizes known Leipzig practices in an edition prepared specifically for this recital.

One of the main differences pertains to the use of sopranos during the opening alto aria. Originally, Bach had only the organ play the chorale melody in the background. With the soprano forces of the Thomerchor in Leipzig, the voice was added to the movement. Aurally, a listener can effortlessly hear the tune alongside the alto's contrapuntal interplay with the melody. Though structurally it remains the same, the audience, or in Bach's day the congregation, can also more readily appreciate the bookend structure of the work being based directly on the chorale. Bach clearly had an affinity for this famous chorale tune, "O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden" (O sacred head, now wounded) as he also set it five different times in his monumental work, *St. Matthew Passion*.

As mentioned above, the work does not tremble before death; instead each movement fully embraces the afterlife. This directly stems from the strong Lutheran belief in redemption by faith alone. With such steadfast conviction, each section of the text yearns for the participant to be reunited with Jesus. The text reading for that particular Sunday included Ephesians 3:13-21 and Luke 7:11-17. The former asks for faith where the latter deals with the deceased son from Nain of an unnamed mother. In this passage, Jesus raises the son to living, and in view from early 18th century Lutheran theology, this symbolizes how death reunites a believer with Christ.

Beyond expounding the main reading, other biblical references abound. In the first movement, the alto soloist exclaims "Da mein Geist Honig speist, aus des Löwen Munde" (there my spirit dines on honey from the lion's mouth). This alludes to the story about Samson in Judges when he killed a lion with his bare hands in defense, left the carcass only to return and find a beehive in the lion's mouth. From this, he gathered the honey and gave it to his family.

The following tenor recitative throws worldly desires aside. He claims that sugar to him is like poison, and plucked roses yield thorns without number! Through this suffering, the tenor declares his wish to depart from this world as the cello ends the secco recit with an elaboration of a descending C-minor

arpeggio. The ensuing tenor aria then clarifies that the longing is to be with Christ. The climax of the aria arrives after an extended melisma repeating the phrase "dennoch gleich den Engeln prangen" (to be resplendent like the angels).

Bach uses both forms of recitativo in this cantata as the alto gets a full accompagnato (using strings, flutes, and continuo) compared to the tenor secco recit (using only continuo). While the tenor observes all the suffering on earth, the alto seemingly taunts death: "So brich herein, du froher Todestag, So schlage doch, du letzter Stundenschlag!" (So break forth, you cheery death-day, so strike, you last hour!). At the invitation, the strings begin to strike their strings with pizzicati in an almost taunting manner.

The next movement sets the full chorus for the first time. Unlike many of his other vocal works, Bach uses the chorus in a primary homophonic setting; no fugues or extended melismas are found. The opening melodic material is an inversion of the opening alto aria. The ending chorale succinctly summarizes the theological message of the previous movements utilizing visceral language of worms consuming the body. More pleasant imagery soon follows with the description of the transfigured soul shining like the sun. The chorale ends with a question: if the afterlife is filled with such bliss, what harm can death do to me?

I. Alto aria with soprano chorale

Come, you sweet hour of death,
there my spirit dines on honey
from the lion's mouth

Heartily do I long for a blessed end
because here I am surrounded with affliction and misery

Make my departure sweet,
Tarry not, last light,
so that I can kiss my Savior.

I have desire to depart from this evil world,
I long for heavenly bliss; O Jesus, come quickly!

II. Tenor recitativo

World, your desire is an encumbrance,
your sugar to me is hated like a poison,
your light of joy is my comet,
and where one plucks your roses,
are thorns immeasurable to my soul's torment.

The pale death is my dawn
with which rises the sun of glory and heavenly delight.

Thus truly I sigh from the depth of my heart only for the last hour of death.

I have desire to soon graze with Christ.
I have desire to leave this world.

III. Tenor aria

My longing is to embrace the Savior
and to be with Christ soon.

Though I shall be broken
into mortal ash and earth through death,
the soul's pure radiance
will be resplendent like the angels.

IV. Alto recitativo

The end is already done,
World, goodnight!
And I can only take consolation
to die in Jesus's arms.
He is my gentle sleep.
The cool grave will cover me with roses
until Jesus will raise me,
until He leads His sheep to the sweet heavenly pasture
that death will not divorce me from Him,
So breakforth, you cheery death-day,
so strike, you last hour!

V. Chorus

If it is my God's will,
I wish the even today
the burden of the body would occupy the earth,
and the spirit, the body's guest,
clothe itself with immortality
in the sweet joy of heaven.
Jesus, come and take me away!
This is my last word.

VI. Chorale

Indeed, the body will be consumed
by worms in the earth.
Yet it shall be resurrected
beautifully transfigured through Christ,
Will shine like the sun,
and live without affliction
In heavenly joy and bliss.
What harm then can death do to me?

Sixty-Seventh Psalm

Charles Ives grew up with a father who would constantly test his son's thinking. This included having young Charles sing a familiar song in one key while his dad played accompaniment on the piano in a different key. It thus follows that Ives's own compositions experimented with bi-tonality. In his memos, he writes, "And also, if you can play a tune in one key, why can't a feller, if he feels like, play one in two keys?" In his lifetime, choirs would struggle with the acquisition of notes, so although he desired it completely a cappella, an organ would often assist in performance.

This reasoning soon applied to choirs. In this Psalm setting, the sopranos and altos sing in C-major while the tenors and basses sound in G-minor. To an audience in the twenty-first century, the resulting sonorities at times resemble tone-clusters made popular by choral composers of the last few decades. Other times, the clashes between the two keys become quite dissonant. A middle section begins with an ascending F-major chord with the sopranos and altos in canon at the octave; however the vocal lines slowly diverge to get back to the original bi-tonality.

The work ends with a chant-like incantation. The Psalm's text praises God while asking for mercy and blessing. Though death is not mentioned

explicitly, noting God's righteous judgement surely indicates a faithful plea for salvation during the end times.

Ave Maria

After Ives, a clear, tonally conventional Mendelssohn motet is used to cleanse the aural palette. A self-proclaimed Classicist, Mendelssohn wrote with elements of the Romantic Era (long sweeping lines, lush harmonies), but remained in classical form.

In this motet, the middle section starting "Sancta Maria" harkens back a hundred years to Bach fugues, a style which Mendelssohn intimately knew. Indeed, one year before publishing this work at the youthful age of twenty, Mendelssohn conducted the entirety of Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*. This is credited for bringing a fervor and adulation of Bach from amateur and professional musicians alike. Another Baroque trait is found in the scoring of continuo with the choir. All but the bass line of the organ is dropped when the choir enters; however, as with Ives, in case the choir could not hold pitch, the organ would assist.

The opening minor third sung by the tenor uses just the third and fifth of the main key, A-major. It is not until the choir enters that the key center is clearly established. The soloist and chorus then alternate the expansive phrases. The middle section uses the relative minor. While the basses and tenors continue the text, the sopranos and altos keep repeating the faithful plea, "ora pro nobis" (pray for us). A fugue then emerges followed by the opening minor third statement in the tenor soloist. This serves as a bridge back to the opening. This time the lines are brilliantly infused with soloists from all voice parts injecting "ora pro nobis" reminiscent of the previous section.

This well-known prayer is beloved by many Catholics. Central to the heart of the prayer is "Holy Mary, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of death." The supplicant acknowledges the presence of mortality. In this setting, Mendelssohn omits one line of the prayer - "et benedictus fructus ventris tui, Jesus" (and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus).

Hail Mary, full of Grace
The Lord is with you
Blessed are You among women

Holy Mary, mother of God
Pray for us sinners
Now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Leron, Leron Sinta

This popular Filipino folk song has a playful, rhythmic nature. By alternating measures where the text and meter align (the main text emphasis resides on strong beats) and where the text emphasis lies on an offbeat, the piece has an innate syncopated quality. Choi composes an opening rhythmic figure that exploits this characteristic.

Being primary a children's song, the words are open to various meanings and are often silly. One meaning asserts that when the boy falls from the tree picking fruit, he dies and the girl shrugs the notion away and looks for another boyfriend. Other interpretations claim "have to search for another" is

the climber's realization about trying to find another route to reach the fruit.

The tenors and basses interrupt this story with a call to wake up. Perhaps none of the trials described in the previous verse happened; however the mortal danger of a breaking branch remains. Faith and courage is needed to step out and grab the fruit! Another unexpected plot twist occurs when the girl describes the ideal man. Although starting with the fearless male hero archetype, the image suddenly gets turned upside down when the "enemy" is revealed to be a plate of noodles on the table!

Many thanks to Mimi Melegrito for pronunciation assistance as well as sharing her personal connections to the work!

Leron, Leron my dear
blossoms of the papaya tree,
with a bamboo basket,
he'd gather some fruits.
But when he reached the top (of the tree),
the branch broke.
Oh, what a trick of fate,
[I] have to search for another!

Wake up, neneng*
let's pick some tamarind fruits.
Take the bamboo baskets
to put the ripe ones in.
Upon reaching the top (of the tree)
the branches swayed heavily.
Hold on tight, neneng,
As you might fall.

The one I will love
is a fearless man.
He has seven guns
and nine knives.
The journey he will take
is the distance of a table.
A plate of noodles
is his foe!

*neneng refers to a girl

Bach Instrumental Ensemble

Violin I

Shelby Dems
Emilie Benigno
Henry Smith

Violin II

Peter Nowak
Daniel McCaffrey
Gabriella Stout

Viola

Michelle Metty
Jacob Shur

Flute

Kristina Shanton
Nicole Murray

Organ

Jean Radice

Cello

Craig Mehler

Bass

Emani Barber

Ithaca College Madrigal Singers

Soprano

Juliana Child
Allison Fay
Imogen Mills
Madeleine Parkes
Laura Stedje

Alto

Catherine Barr
Nicole Rivera-Díaz
Leah Sperber
Jessica Voutsinas
Nicole Wills

Tenor

Raul Dominguez
Will Fazzina
Shaun Rinkunas
Grant Wheeler

Bass

Ethan Barr
Caleb Bates
Logan Mednick
David Shane

Ithaca College Choir

Soprano I

Lucrezia Ceccarelli
Magdalyn Chauby
Juliana Child
Jamila Drecker-Waxman
Allison Fay
Imogen Mills
Erin O'Rourke

Soprano II

D'Laney Bowry
Annie Brady
Hannah Cayem
Molly Ferguson
Julia Gershkoff
Megan Jones
Sarah Kieran
Sage Stoakley
Aquiala Walden

Alto I

Virginia Douglas
Emily O'Connor
Bergen Price
Leah Sperber
Laura Stedje
Jessica Voutsinas
Nicole Wills

Alto II

Catherine Barr
McKinny Danger-James
Emily Dimitriou
Hannah Martin
Nicole Rivera-Díaz
Michelle Shaubi
Abby Sullivan

Tenor I

Seamus Buxton
Daniel Carney
Frankie DiLello
Brendan Duffy
Will Fazzina
Jacob Kerzner
Adam Tarpey
Grant Wheeler

Tenor II

Matthew Coveney
Raul Dominguez
Joshua Dykes
Lucas Hickman
Max Keisling
Benjamin Monacelli

Baritone

Nicholas Duffin
Matthew Moody
Anthony Pilcher
Marshall Pokrentowski
Samuel Sauer
Josiah Spellman, Jr.
Andrew Sprague
Michael White

Bass

Luke Armentrout
Cameron Costello
Ethan Fisher
Johnathan Fulcher
Sean Gatta
Kevin Harris
Logan Mednick