4-28-1998

Concert: Ithaca College Women's Chorale

Ithaca College Women's Chorale

Ginette Van Der Voorn

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"It is my plan to build a school of music second to none."

—William Grant Egbert (1867–1928) Founder, Ithaca Conservatory of Music
ITHACA COLLEGE WOMEN'S CHORALE

Ginette Van Der Voorn, conductor
Stephanie Kane, accompanist
Kerry Watkins, accompanist
Barbara Dechario, harp
Brian Czach, drums
Nicholas Wehr, double bass
Michael Lippert, organ
David Mayotte and Eric Smith, percussion

How Merrily We Live

Choral Hymns from the Rig Veda - 3

Hymn to the Dawn
Hymn to the Waters
Hymn to Vena
Hymn to the Travellers

Old MacDoodle Had a Band

INTERMISSION

Messe Basse pour voix de femmes

I. Kyrie

Meagan Boeing, soprano

II. Sanctus

III. Benedictus

Joan Stafford, mezzo soprano

IV. Agnus Dei

Michael Este
(c. 1580-1648)

Gustav Holst
(1874-1934)

David J. Elliott

Gabriel Fauré
(1845-1924)
A Girl’s Garden

Randall Thompson
(1899-1984)

Nigra Sum

Pablo Casals
(1876-1973)

Salom/ A Goja

Traditional Ewe Songs of Ghana

Grandmothers’ Lullabye

Tuscarora Native American Song
Pura Fe

African Celebration

African Folksongs
arranged by Stephen Hatfield

Blessing

Bart

Ford Hall Auditorium
Tuesday, April 28, 1998
8:15 p.m.
Gustav Holst: 1874-1934

Holst was exposed to music at an early age: his mother, Clara Lediard, was a pianist. Since the family boasted a number of professional musicians already, Holst's decision to enter the Royal College of Music in 1893 seemed quite natural. There he studied piano with Herbert Sharpe, organ with Hoyt, theory with William Smith Rockstro (1852-1924). Holst also played trombone, and had the sort of pit experience that was of considerable use to him later in life. In 1895, while a student at the college, Holst befriended Vaughn Williams. The two were not only close friends but also musical consultants one to another throughout their careers.

In 1903, Holst took a position as music director of St. Paul's Girls' School in Hammersmith. The importance of his first-hand experiences with female voices at St. Paul's cannot be overestimated. Indeed, many of Holst's finest works could not have been written without this background. Holst held a number of other teaching positions concurrently with his post at St. Paul's. In 1919, he joined the faculty of the Royal College of Music. He taught simultaneously at Reading College for some time.

Holst's earliest serious compositions were heavily influenced by both the musical and poetic styles of Richard Wagner (1813-1883).* But Wagner had already said the last word in late Romantic, sequence-packed, chromatic harmony. Holst soon realized that his Wagnerian imitations were futile.


Holst's opera, Sita (Op. 23, 1899-1906) which is based on Hindu epic poetry, was another blind alleyway. The musical style was still too much influenced by Wagner, but instead of Teutonic Legends, Holst returned to colorful legends of India—in this case, the Ramayana, an epic relating the tale of Rama (who was the seventh incarnation of the Hindu god, Vishnu), whose wife, Sita, was abducted by a demon. Rama ultimately recovers his Sita and is restored to his kingdom.

Although Holst made little progress insofar as developing a personal musical idiom was concerned, he did, nevertheless, discover in various Hindu texts a fruitful source of poetry that was congenial to musical setting. In this respect, his appreciation of Wagner was fortuitous. Wagner had realized that texts of the 19th-century, Italian, operatic sort were too much tied to specifics of time and place and to trivial details. In his exploration of folklore, Wagner discovered a certain timeless body of literature that would be internally fresh to its hearers. Similarly, Holst discovered in the writings of India a similar treasure trove that would serve him well in subsequent compositions.
In 1907, Holst began work on the solo songs from *Rig Veda*. Vedas are the sacred texts of the Hindus. There are four vedas: the *Vajur Veda*, *Sama Veda*, *Atharva Veda*, and the *Rig Veda*. Of these, the oldest is the *Rig Veda*, which was written in Sanskrit sometime before 1000 BC. Holst knew the various vedas in English translations, but these seemed contrived and awkward to him. He therefore undertook a study of Sanskrit and produced his own translations of selected *Rig Veda* hymns.

The *Rig Veda* contains 1,028 hymns to various Hindu deities. Holst must have been attracted to these texts not only because of their timelessness, but also because orthodox Christianity was problematical for him. His mother had been a theosophist. From her, Holst inherited a respect for spirituality—a respect that he shared with his lifelong friend, Ralph Vaughan Williams. Like Vaughan Williams, Holst often chose contemplative and introspective texts as the basis of his vocal compositions, but he generally avoided liturgical Christian texts. Undoubtedly, the pinnacle of Holst’s compositions based on the sacred writings of the Hindus were the four series of *Rig Veda* hymns which he composed between 1908 and 1912. The first series is for mixed chorus and orchestra and consists of (1) The Battle Hymn, (2) To the Unknown God, and (3) The Funeral Hymn. The second series is for women’s chorus and orchestra and consists of (1) To Varuna (God of the Waters), (2) To Agni (God of the Fire), and (3) Funeral Chant. The third series is for women’s chorus and harp and consists of (1) Hymn to the Dawn, (2) Hymn to the Waters, (3) Hymn to Vena, and (4) Hymn of the Travellers. The fourth and final series is for men’s chorus and orchestra and consists of (1) Hymn to Agni, (2) Hymn to Soma, (3) Hymn to Manas, and (4) Hymn to Indra.

Most of Holst’s settings of the *Rig Veda* hymns suggest a state of suspended animation. This ephemeral quality is achieved not only by the scoring and dynamics, but also by the harmonic style and the voicing of the harmonies. Holst does not use any particular scale consistently, but rather, uses scales containing pien tones (i.e. suspension tones) so that the precise form of the scale is always changing. These variable scales give the melody a certain unpredictableness that seems not only appropriate but also quite natural in combination with these texts. Unusual meters are also employed to good effect. These rhythms are often a byproduct of Holst’s fidelity to the accentuation of the texts themselves. In the Hymn to Agni (second series, no. 2), Holst uses various combinations of 3+2 and 2+3 within a quintuple time signature; perhaps the most bizarre meter is 21/8 used in the Hymn to the Waters (third series, no. 2). Even in hymns that contain predictable musical events, Holst introduces unusual features that throw the listener off guard. In the basso ostinato figure that dominates much of the Hymn to the Unknown God (first series, no. 2), for example, we find a scale that fills in an octave between e1 and e2; but the scale consists of the pitches e, d, c, b, a-sharp, g-sharp, f-natural, e. The pitch content is incompatible with E minor, E major, or the Phrygian mode, even though the various features of each of these scales are alternately emphasized or deemphasized. The half-step motion in the lowest voice, for instance, repeatedly suggests the Phrygian cadence pattern, however, the whole-step motion that is expected in the upper voices with this cadence formulae is often missing as Holst places a B-flat in the soprano (above the F-natural in the bass) which
moves by half-step to B-natural (above the E in the bass). Harmonies likewise lack traditional functional relationships, nevertheless, the chordal juxtapositions—which probably would have pleased Gesualdo—seem to the listener so appropriate that they are accepted even upon the first hearing.

The Rig Veda hymns are Holst’s finest choral compositions. They are also important because it was in these hymns that Holst found his way out of the labyrinth of the Wagnerian style and began to develop a characteristic voice of his own.

Notes by Mark A. Radice

TEXTS and TRANSLATIONS

Choral Hymns from the Rig Veda

Hymn to the Dawn

Hear our hymn O Goddess,
Rich in wealth and wisdom
Ever young yet ancient,
True to Law Eternal.

Wak’ner of the songbirds,
Ensign of th’Eternal,
Draw though near O Fair one,
In thy radiant Chariot.

Bring to her you off’ring,
Humbly bow before her,
Raise your songs of welcome,
As she comes in splendour.

Hymn to the Waters

Flowing from the firmament forth to the ocean,
Healing all in earth and air, never halting.
Indra, Lord of Heav’n formed their courses,
Indra’s mighty laws can never be broken.
Cleansing waters flow ye on, hasten and help us.

Lo, in the waters dwelleth One.
Knower of all on earth and sea.
Whose dread command no more may shun,
Varuna, sovran Lord is He.

Onward ye waters, onward hie,
Dance in the bright beams of the sun,
Obey the ruler of the sky who dug the path for you to run.
Flowing from the firmament forth to the ocean,
Healing all in earth and air, never halting.
Indra, Lord of Heav’n formed their courses,
Indra’s mighty laws can never be broken.
Cleansing waters flow ye on, hasten and help us.

**Hymn to Vena**

Vena comes born of light,
He drives the many colour’d clouds onward
Here where the sunlight and the waters mingle
Our songs float up and caress the newborn infant
Vena comes.
The child of cloud and mist appeareth on the ridge of the sky,
He shines on the summit of creation
The hosts proclaim the glory of our Common Father
Vena comes.
He hath come to the bosom of his beloved.
Smiling on him to the highest heav’n.
With yearning heart on thee we gaze,
O gold-wing’d messenger of mighty Gods.
Wise men see him in their libations
As the sacrifice mounts to the eternal heights,
He stands erect in the highest heav’n,
Clad in noble raiment, armed with shining weapons,
Hurling light to the farthest region,
Rejoicing in his radiant splendour.

**Hymn of the Travellers**

Go though on before us, guide us on our way, Mighty One.
Make our journey pleasant, never let us stray.
Wonder-worker harder, came in thy splendour, come in thy mighty pow’r.
Trample on the wicked, all who would oppose, Mighty One.
Drive away the robber, drive away our foes.
Wonder-worker harken, come in thy splendour, come in thy mighty pow’r.
As we journey onward, songs to thee we raise, Mighty One.
Thou didst aid our father, guard us all our days.
Wonder-worker harker, come in thy spendour, come in thy pow’r.
Feed us and inspire us, keep us in thy care, Mighty One.
Lead us past pursuers unto meadows fair,
Wonder-worker harken, come in thy splendour, come in thy mighty pow’r.
Messe Basse pour voix de femmes

I. Kyrie

Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy, Lord have mercy.

II. Sanctus

Holy, holy, holy Lord, Lord God of Sabaoth, Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.

III. Benedictus

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

IV. Agnus Dei

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world. Have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world. Have mercy on us.
Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world. Grant us peace.

Nigra Sum

I am black, but beautiful, A daughter of Jerusalem:
The King rejoices in me, and leads me into his chamber,
And said to me: rise up and come my friend, now winter has passed over,
Rain is going away and recessing, flowers appear on our earth,
The time for renewal is come. Alleluia.

African Celebration

We are crying for our land, our country, that was taken from us by the robber-wolves. Zulu, Mxhosa, Msuthu, come together! Unite! Listen!
We say be joyful with Jesus! Lord Bless Africa. Exhalted by its fame.
Hear our prayers. Lord, grant us the blessing. We are the youth. We say, play!
Have a good time, Solly! Go underground, get out of sight cunningly, Mandela.
Use the stick. You’ll hear from us when we are ready.
ITHACA COLLEGE WOMEN'S CHORALE
Ginette Van Der Voorn, conductor

Soprano I
Michelle Lorenz
Rebecca Schaberg
Rachel Whitcombe

Soprano I-II
Theresa Andersen
Sarah Bartolome
Maria Biffer
Meaghan Boeing
Ann Chrastina
Sharon Costianes
Alyson Cury
Lauren Dragan
Anna-Elizabeth Gerbi
Elizabeth Karam
Carrie MacDonald
Christine Pratt
Sonia Rodriguez
Laura Roy
Beth Scalonge
Jaime Schlosser
Margaret Schneipp
Mary-Lynn Sindoni
Sara J. TerBeek
Alison Yeager

Soprano II
Colleen Anna
Heather Barmore
Adriana Lomysh
Adrienne Lovell
Rebecca Masters
Elizabeth Sullivan

Soprano II-Alto I
Amanda Blamble
Marcie Boyd
Elizabeth Fallesen
Kathleen O'Connor
Lauren Pokroy
Emily Rider
Brittany Sawdon
Joan Stafford

Alto I
Laurie Alaimo
Schuyler Aldrich
Michele Gerge
Becky Holcomb
Jeanette Kolb
Maria Portello-Swagel

Alto I-II
Emily Berg
Elizabeth Getlik
Stephanie Kane
Jennifer Pertgen
Tiffany Rahig
Katie Sims

Alto II
Rachael Allen
Nicole Asel
Deana Saada
Amy Sanchez
Heather Tryon
Kerry Watkins
Jeanine Yako