



Robert L. Harris, conductor
Edie Hockspeier, organ
Leah Nestor, piano

presents

A Merrie English Christmas

Friday, December 6, 2013 – 7:30 pm
St. Peter's Episcopal Church

Monday, December 9, 2013 – 7:30 pm
St. Paul's Episcopal Church

I Cantori – Savannah's premier chamber choir
23rd Anniversary Season

Beata Progenies	Leonel Power (c.1375-1445)
Nova, Nova Brian Dean, tenor	anonymous (15 th century)
Nova! Nova!	Bob Chilcott (1955-)
Lullaby, My Sweet Little Baby	William Byrd (1540-1623)
The Lamb	John Tavener (1944-2013)
Candlelight Carol	John Rutter (1944-)
What Child Is This? Andrew Hillis, tenor Gregory Martin, baritone	Shaw/Parker
Alleluia, A New Work Is Come on Hand	Peter Wisehart (1921-1984)
A Boy Was Born	Benjamin Britten (1913-1976)
A Babe Is Born	William Matthias (1934-1992)

INTERMISSION

Once in Royal David's City Senja Petersen, soprano	Bern Herbolzheimer (1948-)
In the Bleak Mid-Winter Marie Stark soprano	Gustav Holst (1874-1934)

The Boar's Head Carol	Shaw/Parker
Deck the Hall	John Rutter
Wassail Song	Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)
A Soalin' Allison Drinkard, soprano	Ronald Staheli (1947-)
Twelve Days of Christmas Catherine Rogers, soprano	Ian Humphris (1927-2012)
We Wish You a Merry Christmas	Arthur Warrell (1883-1939)

personnel

soprano

Allison Drinkard
Karin Kanneberg
Molly Kennedy
Senja Petersen
Catherine Rogers
Lana Marie Stark

alto

Peggy Breese
Jan Curtis
Stacy Eblin
Edie Hockspeier
Kenna Kinsey
Susan McCain

tenor

Randall Canady
Brian Dean
George Fidler
Andrew Hillis
Billy Wooten
Grady Zित्रauer

bass

Zachary Blaylock
Dan Bolta
Raymond R. Ellis, jr.
Jamie Hillen
Gregory Martin
Steven Schulte

Leah Nestor, rehearsal accompanist
Robert Harris, conductor

program notes

The English choral tradition is a rich one indeed. While we tend to hear a few renaissance composers and Henry Purcell, most of our choral performances of English music cover repertoire from the 20th century. Our program tries to mix noteworthy original works by neglected composers with works by contemporary composers, as well as arrangements of folk music from the English tradition. Hopefully the information about some composers who are not well known will help bring them and their music to life.

Leonel Power was one of the leading composers in Europe at the beginning of the 15th century. He was "up to date" for the time and aware of contemporary developments in France and the rest of the continent. He and his English contemporaries went beyond the austerity of the previous generation making more use of thirds and sixths as consonant intervals and relying less on fourths and fifths.

Nova, Nova is a true carol. The term is used by music historians to refer to a song which has numerous verses alternating with a repeating chorus. These joyous songs (which were used year-round, not just at Christmas) often provided music for the singers to dance simple circle dances.

Bob Chilcott is one of England's leading young composers. Many of his compositions and arrangements were commissioned and first performed by the Kings Singers. Today his style features contemporary harmonies combined with intricate rhythms. *Nova! Nova!* features many meter changes and syncopation which is very well integrated with the text and mood of the piece.

William Byrd is considered the greatest English composer of the Renaissance. It was particularly significant that during the years when England swung back and forth between the Church of England of Henry VIII and the Catholic church of his daughter Queen Mary, Byrd managed to stay in favor with both sides when many lost their lives because of their religious beliefs. The text in English would indicate that this was written during the (protestant) reign of Queen Elizabeth I. Byrd is often compared favorably with Palestrina because of his expressive, chant-like, melodic part writing.

John Tavener was one of the greatest living English composers until his death last month. His passing was even noted by the Savannah Morning News which speaks volumes about his stature world-wide. A child prodigy he composed many challenging works early in his career prior to his conversion to the Orthodox faith. From that point onward most of his choral works showed a strong influence of Eastern, Byzantine music. *The Lamb* is more traditional. The compositional technique demonstrated in this simple anthem is quite impressive. It was written for the third birthday of his son.

John Rutter is quite possibly the most successful English composer of the last half of the 20th century. Both Rutter and Tavener have been honored by Queen Elizabeth II with the Order of the British Empire. In a rather startling coincidence they were actually high school classmates! (They must have shaken the confidence of their school music teacher!) While Rutter has been best known for church anthems which feature beautiful melodies and predictable warm harmonies, he has also composed several major works for chorus and orchestra. As the conductor of the Cambridge Singers he has released numerous recordings on the Collegium label.

Alice Parker and Robert Shaw are two of the giants of American choral music. Their lifelong collaboration featured many arrangements and editions of choral music from a broad range of styles and style periods. These arrangements were first performed and recorded by the Robert Shaw Chorale and later published for use by eager choral conductors around the world. While Shaw was better known as a choral conductor and later as the conductor of the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Parker was willing to remain more in the shadows. Now in her 90's she still attends choral conferences and has accepted a commission by the American Choral Directors Association for performance at its 2015 national convention.

Peter Wisheart was one of many of his generation who studied with the great French pedagogue, Nadia Boulanger. Among Boulanger's students were Aaron Copeland, Leonard Bernstein, Gian Carlo Menotti and Quincy Jones(!). Among his works were operas, orchestral and chamber pieces and a large quantity of church music. Among the influences on his music was Igor Stravinsky, whom he greatly admired. *Alleluia! A New Work Is Come on Hand* is the third in a set of contemporary settings of medieval texts. It features joyous cascading Alleluias alternating with the men providing the text in strong, rhythmic unison.

Benjamin Britten was, at the time of his death, perhaps the leading composer in the world. His *War Requiem* is generally considered to be among the masterworks of the 20th century. His opera *Gloriana* was commissioned as part of the celebration of the coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. The *Ceremony of Carols* for treble chorus and harp was written on board ship in 1943 as he returned to England from the United States, and has become a Christmas staple of choirs around the world. He is among the few composers of the second half of the 20th century whose operas have claimed a spot in the standard repertoire of major opera companies. His solo songs and chamber works are also frequently performed. *A Boy Was Born* is actually the chorale on which a larger work of the same name was based. Each succeeding movement was a variation of the original chorale theme.

William Mathias was a child prodigy playing the piano at age three and composing at age five. He was a prolific composer of church music, much of it featuring very interesting organ accompaniment. *A Babe Is Born* utilizes a text similar to that in the Britten work which precedes it on the program. In addition to his choral works he also composed a significant body of orchestral compositions and a great deal of chamber music for a variety of instrumental ensembles. In addition to composing he was also a dedicated educator who was a fellow of the Royal Academy of Music and professor and head of music for the University of Wales.

Bern Herbolzheimer is an American composer who is based in Seattle. He has produced operas and symphonies in addition to many works for chorus. *Once in Royal David's City* is found in every Episcopal hymnal. Students of the English choral tradition may recognize it as the opening music for each broadcast of the Christmas Lessons and Carols service which is broadcast world-wide from Kings College, Cambridge. Like the broadcast version our arrangement begins with a solo voice singing without accompaniment. The boy treble who sings the solo from Kings is, by tradition, informed that he has been selected for the solo about 10 minutes prior to the broadcast so that he won't be *too nervous*. Rest assured that Senja has had better notice than that prior to our performance this evening.

Gustav Holst was one of the most respected English composers of the first half of the 20th century. He was a colleague and disciple of Ralph Vaughan Williams and shared his friend's love and study of the folk music of the British Isles. While he is perhaps best known for his orchestral suite, *The Planets*, he also composed a wealth of choral music. *In the Bleak Mid-Winter* is not an arrangement of a traditional carol, but rather an original composition.

Ralph Vaughan Williams was and is the most beloved English composer of the 20th century. Over his long career he was a pioneer ethnomusicologist, collecting and preserving the folk music of his country; he was the editor of the hymnal of the Church of England, and the Oxford Book of Carols; he was a leading symphonic composer; and he was a prolific choral composer. Among his many works for choir are several oratorios and mass settings including the sadly neglected Christmas work *Hodie!*, and his *Mass in G*. His orchestral works include the *Fantasia on Greensleeves* and *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis*, both of which are frequently performed by orchestras around the world. His two suites on English folk songs for concert band are among the most frequently performed works for wind ensembles.

Ronald Staheli is an American choral conductor and composer. He is currently the director of choral activities at Brigham Young University. He holds degrees from Brigham Young University and the University of Southern California. Choirs under his leadership have performed around the world. *A Soalin'* is a creative choral arrangement of a "classic" from the repertoire of the American folk trio Peter Paul and Mary. He has managed to keep a great deal of the flavor of the original while transforming it into a choral work. It is based on three English folk carols.

Ian Humphris lived a varied and busy musical life. He was known throughout England as a featured performer and host for the BBC. Early in his career he was a highly successful professional choral singer, performing, recording and touring with several choral ensembles. His sense of humor comes through in his delightful arrangement of the traditional carol, *The Twelve Days of Christmas*. He employs many meter changes and varies the texture to keep the piece alive through all twelve verses.

Arthur Warrell is something of a mystery. He was the arranger of the most frequently performed version of *We Wish You a Merry Christmas*. That being said, search engine provide virtually nothing else for his biography. He seems to have been a church who composed and published a great deal of choral music virtually all of which is out of print and, sadly, forgotten. However, as long as choirs celebrate the Christmas season, he will be remembered for this joyous (and challenging) arrangement of a holiday favorite.