

PROGRAM NOTES

Quincy Symphony Chorus & Quincy Area Youth Chorus
December 4, 2021 Dr. Carol Mathieson

Poulenc's *Gloria* expresses the depth of sincere faith as well as its joyful exuberance in a musical language that moves with untroubled ease between ancient forms and modern vocabulary. Francis Poulenc was French, and he embodied the characteristics French composers have always valued: mischievous wit and a clear sensitivity to timbre. He associated with like-minded modernists in a group known as Les Six, who admired Erik Satie's mixture of sweet lyricism and quirky titles rather than the motionlessness of Impressionism, heavy seriousness of German Romanticism, or jarring dissonances that spoke to the intellect but not the senses. Poulenc loved the human voice and used the orchestra in what he called primary colors of strings, woodwinds, and brass to support voices in washes of color.

Poulenc loved historic forms because he still found meaning in them. Thus, he announced to the modernists, "...I think there's room for *new* music which doesn't mind using other people's chords." He turned to religious music almost exclusively following the tragic death of a dear friend in an automobile accident in 1936. But the Catholicism he simultaneously returned to emphasized playful joy rather than pretentiousness. Poulenc was described as "half monk, half rascal." These contrasting characteristics take turns expressing the text in his *Gloria*.

When the Koussévitzky Foundation commissioned an opera from Poulenc in the 1950's, he said he wasn't interested. So, the exasperated Foundation told him to write whatever suited him. A memorial based on the 5th century Ordinary text for the Christmas Mass suited him very well. He was inspired by the Vivaldi *Gloria* which was to be performed "in the French fashion"—light and syncopated. However, this monkish Poulenc was also a rascal. He confided that he had frescos with angels sticking out their tongues in mind...and some solemn Benedictines playing football. Decide for yourself if each movement brings out the monk or the rascal. But be assured, either way, the musical expression will be lyrical, witty, and intrinsically French.

Christmas Fanfare incorporates the carol *Hark! the Herald Angels Sing* by Felix Mendelssohn to words by Charles Wesley as a centerpiece, flanked by verses of arranger Joseph M. Martin's song, *Rejoice! Sing an Alleluia*. North Carolina composer Martin, who numbers his published compositions at over 2,000, serves on the editorial board of Hal Leonard Corporation.

Carol Him Sweetly incorporates a carol composed quickly for a Christmas Eve service and accompanied by guitar because the organ broke down...or so the legend goes. Whatever the case, *Silent Night* fits beautifully with award-winning Pennsylvania composer Ruth Schram's lullaby of barely contained excitement that the Christ Child has come at last. In homage to the guitar, the harp provides the accompaniment, and a flute adds a beautiful obbligato.

Sing Noel! offers familiar carol words, but composer Alfred Sturgis has set them to his own melody and pairs it with another dancelike tune. All the voices pass around a little song snippet as a hocket handoff, and basses and tenors add a segment of musette-like droning to reinforce the effect of a rural shepherd dance. Sturgis serves as Music Director of North Carolina Master Chorale.

I will light candles this Christmas, commissioned by LutheranArts, was dedicated to the 2017 St. Olaf College Christmas Festival. Growing up in Norway's Nidaros Cathedral Boys' Choir, and educated at the Music Conservatory in Trondheim, composer Kim André Arnesen has a deep love for and considerable experience in choral music. He is currently one of the most frequently performed Norwegian composers worldwide. *I will light Candles* sets 2 of African-American theologian Howard Thurman's poems which call on humanity to keep Christmas's light of Peace on Earth as a beacon all year long.

Echo Christmas Joy honors the age-old tradition of arranging familiar carols in new ways...sometimes even in combination. Kansas composer Craig Curry has paired Lowell Mason's *Joy to the World* with the traditional German carol *While Shepherds Watched*, adding a trumpet obbligato to enhance the festive nature of both. 19th-century composer Mason

modified 18th-century composer Handel's *Messiah* chorus *Lift Up Your Heads* as setting for 17th-century composer Isaac Watts' versification of Psalm 98. What a magnificent result from revisiting older material! Curry has retranslated the German text more commonly known as *While By My Sheep* to keep to the theme of Psalm 98, which a trumpet obbligato reinforces as well.

Christmas Lullaby reminds us that, although Jesus would be King of Kings in the future, he was a tiny baby in the manger. Minnesota guitarist and composer Jeffrey Van emphasizes the rocking nature of the lullaby in what renowned director Dale Warland calls "the style of a Venetian barcarolle." Indeed, the guitar-like accompaniment and finger cymbal pulse bring to mind the gentle rocking of a gondola on the canals of Venice.

Exultate Justi seems like a grand liturgical piece, but it comes from a movie. Composer John Williams' decades of experience and shelves of trophies salute his expertise at balancing beautiful melody and luscious harmonies with just enough roiling rhythms and jarring dissonances to make his cinematic scores masterpieces that engage audiences immediately and satisfy them artistically. *Exultate Justi* comes from the 1987 Stephen Spielberg film *Empire of the Sun*. With text based on Psalm 32, it celebrates the American forces' liberation of a Shanghai internment camp at the end of WWII. The Psalm text translates: *Exalt in the Lord who takes away the sins of the world. Sing to Him a new song.*

What Child is This comes from a setting of 3 stanzas of William Chatterton Dix's *The Manger Throne* (1865) to the popular 17th century ballad tune *Greensleeves*. Shepherds have gathered around the manger, but they need to call to mind for each other what they are seeing. Chatterton's poem was published while he was deep in illness and depression and may have served that same purpose for him. This arrangement by Dale Warland uses harp and flute to emphasize the ethereal sense of the melody.

Night of Silence came to composer Daniel Kantor while he was on a religious retreat as a junior in college. Lonely for his hometown, he was trying to follow the holy practice of patient waiting. *Night of Silence* is an Advent carol and reminds earnest souls that they must prepare for wonder; that the rose blooms after the snow. *Night of Silence* is a quodlibet, a partner song with the carol *Silent Night*. QSC is pleased to partner with the Youth Chorus and Kinderchor in *Night of Silence*.

Nutcracker Jingles could be called a quodlibet, but in modern parlance, the term is "mashup." Arranger Chuck Bridwell has found tunes from Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker* that have the same chord changes as James Pierpont's iconic winter holiday song *Jingle Bells*, and the result is delightful. As you listen to this performance by the Quincy Area Youth Chorus (QAYC), see if you can identify the bits of *Nutcracker* that mash up with the traditional dash through the snow.

Jingle all the Way is a medley rather than a mashup. In a medley, the songs come one after the other. Arranger David Clydesdale orchestrated a hymn for his church when he was in 7th grade and went on to compose and arrange music for shows for Six Flags, Disney, the U.S. Army, and Hallmark. QSC welcomes QAYC and our audience for songs of the season, old and new.