

PROGRAM NOTES FOR JUNE 2011 CONCERTS

William Boyce was the most prominent and influential native-born English composer of the mid-18th century, an era when musical life in Britain was dominated by Händel. Born in London, Boyce became a choirboy at St. Paul's Cathedral, where he studied music with the cathedral organist and composer Maurice Greene. His first professional appointment came in 1734, when he was employed as an organist at the Oxford Chapel. He went on to take a number of similar posts before being appointed Master of the King's Musick in 1755 and becoming one of the organists at the Chapel Royal in 1758. With advancing age came increasing deafness, which eventually left him unable to continue in his organist posts. He then retired and worked on completing the three-volume compilation *Cathedral Music* that his teacher Greene had left unfinished at his death. Boyce was thus responsible for editing and preserving works by William Byrd, Henry Purcell, and many other great English liturgical composers. Many of the pieces in the collection are still used in Anglican services today.

As a composer Boyce is best known for his set of eight symphonies, his church anthems, and his odes. His so-called "symphonies" pre-date the large-scale concert symphony as we know it (developed by Haydn and perfected by countless others). They were instead overtures to theatrical and choral works. "Symphony" and "overture" were interchangeable terms in English usage at the time: the only distinction between them was that the overture imitated the French *ouverture*, a single-movement piece with a slow, dotted-rhythm introduction, a fast (usually fugal) middle section, and a slow final section; whereas the symphony imitated the Italian *sinfonia*, a piece in three separate, brief movements that took the form fast-slow-fast. **Symphony No. 4 in F** served as the overture to the pastoral opera *The Shepherd's Lottery*, commissioned in 1751 by David Garrick for the Drury Lane Theatre. Its exuberant first movement is followed by an *andante* in which bassoons and horns are skillfully deployed for coloristic purposes. The melodious and memorable *gavotte* finale has become perhaps the most widely recognized of Boyce's symphonic movements.

Boyce was largely forgotten after his death, and he remains a greatly under-performed composer today. His eight symphonies were rescued from oblivion in 1928 by composer, conductor, and musicologist Constant Lambert, who recognized that they were "not only of great technical and historical interest but have a vigor and charm rarely found together."

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José Melchor Baltasar Gaspar Nebra Blasco was born into a musical family in the town of Calatayud in northeastern Spain. He began his musical training under his father, José Antonio Nebra Mezquita, who in 1711 became the organist, master of the choirboys, and finally *maestro de capilla* at the Cuenca Cathedral. Two brothers were also musicians: Francisco Javier Nebra Blasco (1705–1741), who held organ posts at La Seo Cathedral in Zaragoza and later in Cuenca; and Joaquín Ignacio Nebra Blasco (1709–1782), who was organist at La Seo from 1730 until his death.

In 1724, Nebra became principal organist of both the Descalzas Reales Convent and the Royal Chapel in Madrid, as well as the assistant head of the Royal Choir School. During the years 1723-30 and 1737-51, he composed nearly sixty stage works to both sacred and secular librettos that were performed to critical acclaim in Madrid and Lisbon. (Nebra's enduring fame, in fact, rests on his reputation as the father of Spanish opera and zarzuela.) He temporarily abandoned his theater activities almost completely to dedicate himself to composing sacred music when the archives of the royal chapel were destroyed by fire in 1734. He contributed seven Salve Regina settings, nineteen masses, fourteen orchestral Lamentations, a Requiem, and a Stabat Mater, plus psalms, litanies, cantatas, villancicos, and numerous keyboard works. In all, more than 170 works by Nebra survive.

The performance parts for Nebra's **Polychoral Mass in G** were discovered in 1995 in the archives of the cathedral in Puebla, Mexico, by Dr. Craig Russell, a native of Los Alamos and graduate of UNM who teaches music history at Cal Poly University in San Luis Obispo, California. Dr. Russell, a world-renowned authority on the music of colonial Spanish America, has discovered, edited, and published many of the works of Hispanic origin that Canticum Novum has performed in the last several years. He tells us that he subsequently discovered another copy of the mass in the archives of the Mexico City

Cathedral, and that yet a third copy has surfaced in the library of El Escorial, the royal palace and monastery near Madrid. Scored for double choir, orchestra, and three vocal soloists, the mass is still waiting for someone with the time and energy to transcribe and edit the “Credo,” “Sanctus,” and “Agnus Dei” movements! In the “Kyrie” and “Gloria” the two antiphonal choirs alternate between “conversing” with one another and combining into a single, large, orotund ensemble. The orchestration is light, comprising just violins, horns, and continuo, and as Dr. Russell says, “There are a couple of ripping good fugues, not only in the ‘Amen’ but also in the ‘Christe.’”

I. KYRIE

Kyrie eleison.

Lord, have mercy.

Christe eleison.

Christ, have mercy.

Kyrie eleison.

Lord, have mercy.

II. GLORIA

Gloria in excelsis Deo,

Glory to God in the highest,

et in terra pax

and on earth peace

hominibus bonae voluntatis.

to those of good will.

Laudamus te, benedicimus te,

We praise Thee, we bless Thee,

adoramus te, glorificamus te.

we worship Thee, we glorify Thee.

Gratias agimus tibi

We give Thee thanks

propter magnam gloriam tuam.

for Thy great glory.

Domine Deus, Rex caelestis,

Lord God, heavenly King,

Deus Pater omnipotens.

God the Father Almighty.

Domine Fili unigenite, Jesu Christe.

Lord, the only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

Domine Deus, agnus Dei, Filius Patris.

Lord God, lamb of God, Son of the Father.

Qui tollis peccata mundi,

Thou that takest away the sins of the world,

miserere nobis.

have mercy on us.

Qui tollis peccata mundi,

Thou that takest away the sins of the world,

suscipe deprecationem nostram.

receive our prayer.

Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris,

Thou that sittest at the right hand of the Father,

miserere nobis.

have mercy on us.

Quoniam tu solus sanctus;

For Thou alone art holy;

tu solus Dominus;

Thou alone art the Lord;

tu solus altissimus, Jesu Christe.

Thou only art the most high, Jesus Christ.

Cum Sancto Spiritu,

With the Holy Spirit,

in gloria Dei Patris. Amen.

in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

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Antony le Fleming, the son of composer Christopher le Fleming, was born in Wiltshire, England, in 1941 and was educated as a chorister at Salisbury Cathedral, at the Uppingham School, and at Cambridge University, where he studied under Raymond Leppard. His early composition teachers included Herbert Howells and Malcolm Arnold. He has pursued a full-time career in education, both as a teacher and an administrator, and has also developed a successful freelance career as a performer and conductor. As a composer he has been (as he puts it) “a late developer,” producing little of significance before the age of forty. Over the past two decades he has produced a steady stream of works for piano and strings, string orchestra, and chamber choir, most of them in a style that has been called “unashamedly English Romantic.” Canticum Novum performed his gorgeous *Nocturnes* and *Nunc dimittis* in February 2008 as part of our concert of English music.

Mr. Le Fleming writes, “Composed in 1994 and premiered by the English Mozart Singers & Players during a tour of Spain, my *Magnificat* employs an orchestration of strings, two oboes, and two horns that

matches many of Mozart's smaller-scale works. This setting follows the precedent of giving prominence to a solo soprano (it is, after all, "Mary's Song") and by omitting the doxology, which invites performances in a non-liturgical context. The opening words are repeated at the end, reaffirming the music's essentially lyrical qualities. (Not for nothing is my second name Ralph – after my father's teacher, Ralph Vaughan Williams!)

"I am delighted that Ken Knight and Canticum Novum have chosen to include the *Magnificat* in tonight's programme, and I send to all the performers my warmest good wishes for the whole evening. -- Antony"

*My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior.
For he hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaiden;
for behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed.
For he that is mighty hath magnified me, and holy is his name.*

*And his mercy is on them that fear him throughout all generations.
He hath showed strength with his arm;
he hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.
He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble and meek.
He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he hath sent empty away.*

*He remembering his mercy hath holpen his servant Israel,
as he promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed, forever.
My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior.*

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Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-flat, Op. 19, by **Ludwig van Beethoven** was composed primarily between 1787 and 1789, when the composer was in his late teens. It was premiered on March 29, 1795, with the then 24-year-old composer at the piano, at a charity event for widows and orphans at Vienna's Burgtheater. Beethoven worked on the score until the last minute, finally completing it a mere two days before the concert. The performance marked Beethoven's public debut as a pianist; he had previously performed only in the private salons of the Viennese nobility, but word of his virtuosity had spread, and the public was eager to hear him. The new concerto became an important display piece for him as he sought to further his reputation as a pianist both in Vienna and on his European tours.

Despite its number, Piano Concerto No. 2 was actually the first of Beethoven's piano concertos to be composed. It was withheld from publication until 1801, while it underwent frequent and considerable revisions. In the meantime, his Piano Concerto No. 1 (actually second in order of composition) had already been published. With what was perhaps false humility, the composer told his publisher that No. 2 was "a piano concerto which, to be sure, I do not claim to be among my best," and he apologized to the printer for his "not very legible handwriting." The concerto is nonetheless a work of substantial charm and considerable elegance – very much in the style of Mozart, but with a more robust orchestration and a sense of drama and contrast that hint at many of Beethoven's later works. There are several Haydn-like surprises as well, including an abundance of themes and a classical adherence to form. In the opening *allegro con brio* movement, the principal themes are distinctly Beethoven's in their cheerful confidence, originality, and strength. The second movement – a serene *adagio* in E-flat major – is, in effect, an accompanied fantasia that resembles a carefree theme and variations, with a solo recitative-like passage at the end. The twice-rewritten finale, *molto allegro*, combines sonata and rondo forms, with perhaps the nicest surprise saved for last: a brief, gentle solo rumination, which the orchestra brusquely interrupts with a final martial flourish.

