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The Trinity Singers: I Sing of a Maiden

Saturday 23rd November, 2024 | 3.00pm Trinity College Chapel

PROGRAMME

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| FELIX MENDELSSOHN
(1809–1847) | Ave Maria, arr. Jonathan Watts (2001–) |
| FANNY MENDELSSOHN
(1805–1847) | Allegretto, <i>String Quartet in Eb major</i> |
| ALISON WILLIS
(1971–) | I Sing of a Maiden |
| THOMAS BARRETT
ARMSTRONG
(1929–2009) | To One that is so Fair and Bright |
| PETER-ANTHONY
TOGNI
(1959–) | Totus Tuus |
| ISABELLA LEONARDA
(1620–1704) | Sonata Decima, Op. 16, No. 10 |
| FRANCESCO DURANTE
(1684–1755) | Magnificat á 4 in Bb |
| | I. Magnificat, anima mea Dominum |
| | II. Et misericordia |
| | III. Deposuit potentes |
| | IV. Suscepit Israel |
| | V. Sicut locutus est |
| | VI. Sicut erat in principio |

PERFORMERS

Damien Macedo conductor
Frederica Davies, Milena Malcharek.....soprano solo
Michele Hare alto solo
Bjarne Bergh tenor solo
Andrew Dobson bass solo

Flora Clapham, Rosemary Zhang violin I
Jonathan Watts, Juliet Wong violin II
Sam Travis, Benedict Randall Shawviola
Sarah Henderson cello

PROGRAMME NOTES

The programme this afternoon features a host of diverse composers setting texts that reflect on the Virgin Mary alongside instrumental works by female composers. While this concert is free to attend, we encourage you to donate to the Cambridge City Foodbank in our retiring collection.

Felix Mendelssohn's tender Ave Maria opens the concert, with the tenor soloist saluting the Mother of God. A lyrical call-and-response section is followed by a more rousing passage that sees the voices pleading for succour. After the choir crescendos to the climax of the piece with some of Mendelssohn's most stirring polyphonic writing, the section closes and we return to the gentle salutation from the opening of the work, but with numerous soloists from the choir interjecting to call for Mary's prayers on our behalf.

Text translation: *Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death.*

Fanny Mendelssohn is the oft-overlooked sister of musical prodigy Felix Mendelssohn, but was a remarkable composer and performer in her own right. We hear the second movement of her String Quartet in Eb, a charming work that deserves a more prominent place in the repertoire.

The title of today's programme comes from Allison Willis's I Sing of a Maiden. The composer sets the Middle English lyric poem using a combination of duple and triple metres, often over a bass drone, giving the work a haunting, chant-like quality in passages. Moments of rich harmonic colour interrupt this feeling throughout with modern sentiments, giving the piece a timeless feel.

Monseigneur Thomas Barrett Armstrong was briefly my teacher in Toronto when I was a choirboy at St. Michael's Choir School. His sense of humour and his love of jazz are readily apparent in his setting of the macaronic text To one that is so fair and bright, alternating between a soloist singing in English and the choir responding in Latin.

Text translation: *To one that is so fair and bright like the star of the sea; brighter than the day is light, both mother and maiden. I pray to thee to call to me, Lady, pray thy Son for me (so pure) that I may come to thee, Mary. In sorrow, counsel thou art best, happily blest with offspring; for all the weary, thou are rest, an honoured mother. Beseech Him in thy mildest mood, who for us didst shed his blood in the cross, that we may come to him in light. All this world was forlorn because of Eve, a sinner, till our Saviour Lord was born of you, His Mother. With thy ave sin went away, dark night went and in came day of salvation. The well of healing sprang from thee of virtue. Lady flower of everything, rose without thorns, thou bore Jesu, Heaven's King by divine grace. Of all I say thou bore the prize, Lady Queen of Paradise chosen; maiden mild, mother you are made.*

Peter-Anthony Togni was also one of T.B. Armstrong's former pupils at St. Michael's in Toronto, albeit long before I was there, and is the son of the late organ virtuoso Victor Togni. His kaleidoscopic motet

Totus Tuus sets the apostolic motto of Saint Pope John Paul II and was composed for the late Pope's visit to Toronto in 2001 for World Youth Day. Text translation: I am entirely yours, Mary. Mother of our Redeemer, Virgin Mother of God, Mother of the Saviour of the world. I am entirely yours, Mary.

Isabella Leonarda's 12 sonatas for chamber orchestra are among her most notable works. Her Sonata Decima (10) is my personal favourite, despite being among the shorter of the sonatas, showing Leonarda at her most playful and comical in a single movement comprising multiple contrasting sections.

The concert ends with Francesco Durante's sprightly Magnificat a 4 in Bb. A multi-movement work that was once mistakenly attributed to Pergolesi, this setting of the Canticle of Mary includes solos from the choir and particularly strenuous efforts from the basses who sing many long running passages.

Movement 1: My soul doth magnify the Lord and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. 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.

Movement 2: And his mercy is on them that fear him throughout all generations. He hath shewed strength with his arm. He hath scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

Movement 3: 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.

Movement 4: He remembering his mercy hath holpen his servant Israel,

Movement 5: As he promised to our forefathers, Abraham and his seed for ever. Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost;

Movement 6: As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be world without end. Amen.

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