

Music Notes for April 14, 2024

The service music during the Easter season includes the Presentation Hymn (Alleluia, give thanks to the Risen Lord), the Sanctus by William Mathias (1934-1992) and the Fraction Anthem ("The disciples knew the Lord Jesus") by Mark Sedio (b. 1954). Mathias was born in Wales and was a musical prodigy who began playing the piano at age 3 and composing at age 5. He has an extraordinarily large musical output has written works for choir, organ, and orchestra, including symphonies and operas. His anthem "Let the people praise thee" was written for the wedding of Charles and Diana in 1981 and was televised to an audience of over 1 billion people. The Sanctus is from the "Communion Service Series III," published in 1976. Sedio is Director of Music at Central Lutheran Church in Minneapolis and also serves on the music staff at Luther Seminary in Saint Paul.

The Psalms during Easter will be sung using settings that were composed by Peter Hallock, longtime organist and music director of St. Mark's Cathedral in Seattle, WA.

Today's prelude is a piece from the Romantic Era entitled "Trio," by Gustav Merkel (1827-1885). Merkel was given piano lessons by Robert Schumann and then spent most of his career in Dresden, concentrating on organ-playing from about 1858. He was a Lutheran, but held a position in a prominent Roman Catholic church, the Catholic Church of the Court of Saxony, from 1864 until his death. His musical style was conservative, and many have likened it to that of Mendelssohn.

In place of a sequence hymn, this Easter season we will be singing the "Festival Alleluia," by James Chepponis (b. 1956). Chepponis is a priest of the Roman Catholic Pittsburgh Diocese, ordained in 1985. The Festival Alleluia was commissioned for the 1999 Papal mass of John-Paul II in St. Louis. Each week's Alleluia will have a different verse appropriate to that Sunday, sung by the choir.

Today's anthem is "The Apple Tree" by Mark Schweizer. The text is from "Divine Hymns or Spiritual Songs," compiled by Joshua Smith, New Hampshire, 1784. Often used for a Lessons and Carols service at Christmastide, the text is very appropriate for the Easter Season. The song may be an allusion to both the apple tree in Song of Solomon 2:3 which has been interpreted as a metaphor representing Jesus, and to his description of his life as a tree of life in Luke 13:18-19 and elsewhere in the New Testament including Revelation 22:1-2.

The postlude today is entitled "Church Window: The Eclipse," by John Behnke. The piece is the third movement of a three-movement work that are reflections on stained glass windows in Peace Lutheran Church in St. Louis. The window is called the Eclipse, and it is meant to symbolize the empty cross with victory over death and the grave. That sentiment is expressed in the hymn, "At the Lamb's high feast we sing," the melody on which the reflection is based. Behnke was the organist and choir director for 29 years at Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church in downtown Milwaukee, WI. He was also on the faculty of Concordia University in Mequon, WI, and now resides in Port Charlotte, FL.