

Music Notes for April 21, 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 is the fourth Sunday of Easter, usually known as "Good Shepherd Sunday," due to the focus of the Lectionary readings on Jesus' image as our guiding shepherd. In addition, today's service recognizes our place in God's creation as a celebration of Earth Day on April 22nd. Of course, not only are we thankful for creation, but we also bear responsibility for its stewardship and care. As such, the music for today combines these two themes of creation and shepherding. In addition, the music today features the works of J.S. Bach.

Today's prelude is an arrangement several movements from Bach's Cantata number 4, "Christ lag in Todesbanden, (Christ Jesus lay in death's strong bands)." Although we rarely sing this German Chorale at St. A's, it is a majestic Easter hymn that describes the struggle between life and death that underpins the Easter story. The tune is based on the plainsong Easter sequence hymn "Victimae paschali laudes." This melody provides the basis for both the German hymn "Christ is arisen" and the tune on which today's prelude is based.

The anthem today is "Awake, O Wintry Earth," which continues the theme of earth coming to life again in spring. This piece From Cantata 129. Setting of the chorale tune "Gelobet sei der Herr, mein Gott." The English text (by Beverly Easterling) is for Easter (rather than the original Trinity Sunday). It is bright and celebratory as only Bach can render it!

The opening hymn today is "All Creatures of our God and King," written by St. Francis of Assisi. Virtually blind and unable to endure daylight, Francis (1182-1226) wrote this nature hymn during the summer of 1225. Known as the "Song of all creatures" or "The canticle of the sun," the translation we will be singing today is a relatively new one, removing archaic language and using a more inclusive text. The tune "Lasst uns erfreuen" is believed to be a 17th century German folk melody, and the harmonization is that published by Ralph Vaughn Williams in 1906. The "alleluias" were added to make the hymn fit the tune, but they are an appropriate addition to Francis' existing text, emphasizing the scope of continual praise lifted to God from all creation.

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.

The communion hymn is "For the beauty of the earth," written by English writer Folliott Sandford Pierpoint. This hymn was originally written to be sung during communion as a token of God's gift to us, a "sacrifice of praise." Pierpoint wrote three volumes of sacred poetry published in 1878, but this hymn is the only one of his vast output still in use today. The tune, "Lucerna Laudoniae" was written by Welsh composer David Evans (1874-1948).

The closing hymn today is "Day of delight and beauty unbounded," written by Delores Dufner (b. 1948), a member of St. Benedict's Monastery in St. Joseph, MN. Delores is a writer of liturgical, scripturally based hymn and song texts which have a broad ecumenical appeal and are contracted or licensed by 34 publishers in the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Australia, and China. The text, emphasizing creation and rebirth, is sung to the German Chorale, "In dir ist Freude," although that tune was originally written by Italian composer Giovanni G. Gastoldi around 1600. The form of the melody is a "baletto," a dance-like song which originally had a "fa-la-la" type refrain. The original German text reflects a celebration of New Year, but the tune is paired equally well with Delores' Eastertide text.

The postlude, also by J.S. Bach, is based on the tune of the final hymn. It is a familiar work that comes from Bach's "Orgelbüchlein (Little Organ Book)," a collection of 46 chorale preludes, all but three of which were written between 1708 and 1717 when Bach was the ducal court organist at Weimar. The Orgelbüchlein was originally supposed to have 164 settings of chorale tunes covering the entire liturgical year.