



Early Music in St Luke's Cathedral Chapel

Sunday 12 December 2010, 2 pm

with

Music's Quill

Timothy Neill Johnson, tenor

Timothy Burris, lute

Elliott Cherry, 'cello

Mary Jo Carlsen, violin

Lisa Kay Moore, reader

Carols

Puer nobis nascitur

O, come Emmanuel

Joseph Lieber

Es ist ein Roess entsprungen

O, Jesulein süß

Sweet was the song

While shepherds watched their flocks by night

What child is this

Ein Kindlein in der Wiegen

Ich steh an deiner Krippe

Past 3 o'clock

The holly and the ivy

Gaudete

Readings

George Wither—A Christmas Carol (excerpt)

John Milton—On the Morning of Christ's Nativity

Samuel Pepys celebrates Christmas—Tuesday 25 December 1666

The Music

Setting popular songs to seasonal texts for Christmas and other Christian feasts is an old custom—indeed, it most likely stems from pre-Christian celebrations. “Puer nobis nascitur” was based on “resjoissons nous aujourd’hui”, and dates from the 9th century, although the version we are using comes from the Moosburg Gradual, 1355-60. In ensuing centuries, this tradition continued to grow, sometimes producing macaronic Christmas songs (i.e., songs using more than one language, including Latin and patois).

In the Middle Ages, a form called the ‘carol’ was peculiar to England. As a form, it began with a refrain known as a ‘burden’, which was followed by stanzas of uniform structure. Texts might be in English, Latin, or a macaronic mixture. Not all carols had Christmas words (the Agincourt Song celebrates the English victory over the French in 1415, for instance). Many made direct reference to the Christmas season, however, and eventually ‘carol’ would be applied to any Christmas song, whatever the form.

A piece of later vintage is John Attey’s “Sweet was the song”, which appeared in his *First Book of Ayres* (1622), the last such book published in England. Attey was more capable writing for the voice than for the lute, unfortunately—the lute writing is far from idiomatic, and the accompaniments, as written, are awkward (or even include notes outside the range of the instrument). Still, there is a tunefulness about “Sweet was the song” that outweighs its technical shortcomings.

The German pieces on the program come from various sources:

- The Bach chorales are from the Gesangbuch published by Georg Christian Schemelli in 1736.
- “Ein Kindlein in der Wiegen” is based on a text by David Gregor Corner (1585-1648), published in *Geistliche Nachtigal*.
- “Joseph, lieber Joseph mein” is based on a 14th century folk-song, a tune first recorded in 1544.
- The author of the text to “Es ist ein Roess entsprungen” is unknown, the piece first appearing in print in the late-16th century. Both Catholics and Protestants have used the hymn, focusing on either Mary or Jesus.

The most familiar version to modern audiences is from the Speyer Hymnal (printed in Cologne in 1599), with a harmonization by German composer Michael Praetorius. The tune was used by Johannes Brahms as the basis for a chorale fantasy for organ, later transcribed for orchestra by Erich Leinsdorf, and by Hugo Distler as the basis for his 1933 oratorio *Weihnachtsgeschichte* (“Christmas story”).

New Englanders in this Christmas season might be surprised to hear that celebrating the holiday in the Massachusetts Bay Colony of the mid-17th century would have resulted in a fine!

"For preventing disorders, arising in several places within this jurisdiction by reason of some still observing such festivals as were superstitiously kept in other communities, to the great dishonor of God and offense of others: it is therefore ordered by this court and the authority thereof that whosoever shall be found observing any such day as Christmas or the like, either by forbearing of labor, feasting, or any other way, upon any such account as aforesaid, every such person so offending shall pay for every such offence five shilling as a fine to the county."

From the records of the General Court, Massachusetts Bay Colony, May 11, 1659

The Texts

George Wither (1588–1667) was an English poet and satirist. A prolific writer, George Gilfillan wrote that "Wither was a man of real genius, but seems to have been partially insane". He spent some time in prison, most likely for offending people of high station with his satirical writings.

John Milton (1608–1674) was an English poet, polemicist, and civil servant under Oliver Cromwell, best known for his epic poem *Paradise Lost*. A scholarly man, he wrote in Latin and Italian, as well as English, and had an international reputation during his lifetime.

Samuel Pepys (1633–1703) was an English naval administrator and Member of Parliament, who is now most famous for the diary he kept for a decade while still a relatively young man. Although Pepys had no maritime experience, he rose by patronage, hard work and his talent for administration, to be the Chief Secretary to the Admiralty under both King Charles II and subsequently King James II.

The Artists

Timothy Neill Johnson—tenor

Mr. Johnson has performed and recorded with many ensembles here and abroad. These include the Los Angeles Baroque Ensemble, La Petite Bande, Collegium Vocale, Handel Society of Baltimore, Le Concert Spirituel of Paris, and the Portland Symphony. His repertoire ranges from English ayres to the song cycles of Benjamin Britten. He is on the faculty of both Bowdoin College and the University of Maine in Augusta.

Timothy Burris—lute

Mr Burris has performed widely in Europe and the US, including appearances with world-renowned early music specialists Derek Lee Ragin and Julianne Baird. His recordings include modern premieres of 18th-century works including lute and written for the Dresden court (the subject of his dissertation—Duke, 1997). Lute instructor at the Royal Flemish Conservatory of Music in Antwerp from 1990-96, he is currently on the faculty of the Portland Conservatory of Music.

Mary Jo Carlsen—violin

Mary Jo, a native of Montana, earned her degrees from the University of Washington. After studying with Itzhak Perlman and Ora Shiran in New York, she moved to Maine in 1982. Mary Jo taught at Bates College for three years and at Colby College for 20 years. She has performed as violinist, violist, and baroque violinist along the entire east coast, and in Italy. Currently she performs with several orchestras and chamber ensembles. She continues to teach in her home studio.

Elliott Cherry—'cello

Elliott Cherry was born and raised in New York City, with first music lessons from his father, who was a cellist in the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra. His studies continued at the Cathedral Boy's Choir School, High School of Music and Art, Leonard Davis Center for the Arts of City College, and with numerous private teachers. He moved to Maine in 1984 and has been active as a composer, cellist, and teacher. He was also a classical music radio host for many years.

Lisa Kay Moore—reader

Ms. Moore performed as a professional actress for many years in New York City prior to her move to Maine. Her most memorable role was one written for her; God in the Sharon Fogarty Dance Theater's production of an original musical comedy, On the Ark. Recently Lisa has been involved in forming and performing with the Great Diamond Island Players.