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# WESTMINSTER CHOIR: LEGENDS

Joe Miller, *conductor*

Cathedral Church of St. Luke and St. Paul

May 29 and June 1 at 5:00pm

SPONSORED BY CHARLESTON PLACE HOTEL

I.

*Elegy*

Nicola Bertoni, *soprano*

Jessica Moreno, *soprano*

Jorie Moss, *soprano*

Matthew D. Brady, *conductor*

Daniel Elder (*b* 1986)

*Legend of the Walled-Up Woman*

Ensemble: Lena Andreala, Vinroy D. Brown, Jr.,

Dominic Lam, Trevor Sands and Shane Thomas, Jr.

Eriks Ešēnvalds (*b* 1977)

Soprano Soloists: Nicole Fragala and Allison Miller

*Nänie*, op. 82

Johannes Brahms (1833-97)

*Alleluia*

Alejandro D. Consolación (*b* 1980)

II.

*Pater Noster*

Jacob (Gallus) Handl (1550-91)

Quatre Motets, op. 10

"Ubi Caritas"

Patrick Dunnevant, *baritone*

Maurice Duruflé (1902-86)

"Buffalo Gals"

arr. Alice Parker (*b* 1925)

"Nelly Bly"

Stephen Foster (1826-64), arr. Jack Halloran

*Three Nocturnes*

"I. Ballade to the Moon"

Daniel Elder

*Elegy*

Daniel Elder

III.

"Hark, I Hear the Harps Eternal"

arr. Alice Parker

"Shenandoah"

arr. James Erb (*b* 1926)

"My Soul's Been Anchored"

Justin Fatu Su'esu'e, *tenor*

Moses Hogan (1957-2003)

PERFORMED WITHOUT AN INTERMISSION.

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## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

"Sometimes the best way to tell a story is to begin at the end." The inspiration for this program came while watching Andrew Stanton, director/writer of *Toy Story* and *WALL-E*, present a TED Talk on the clues to telling a good story. In a quest to break the barrier between stage and audience, artists search for ways to allow the audience to experience a variety of styles, colors, and acoustics as we share our story with them. Andrew Stanton's statement about reversing a story's sequence reminded me of some favorite novels and movies that begin at the end and tell the story backward, such as F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button*, Tim Burton's setting of Daniel Wallace's *Big Fish*, or Barbara Kingsolver's *The Poisonwood Bible*. As this idea was flying in my artistic airspace, I began to think about music that told a story, but more importantly music that expressed an even larger untold story.

Eriks Ešenvalds is a gifted young Latvian composer. The Westminster Choir performed his *Long Road* on our 2011 tour, and his music was a natural fit for our ensemble and audiences. The work that anchors this concert is his *Legend of the Walled-Up Woman*. Based on an Albanian legend, this text describes the entombment of a young bride by her husband and his family to ensure the successful construction of a castle to protect their village. Her life ended with this astounding sacrifice at a young age.

The program begins with Daniel Elder's *Elegy*, a setting of a poem by Horace Lorenzo Trim in which we imagine "Taps" being played to memorialize the young bride as the sun is setting. This is followed by *Legend of the Walled-Up Woman*. Thus we begin our story told from the end.

I invite you to listen to this tale as it is told from three perspectives. One, a small group serves as the narrators. Their music has a folk-like quality based on an actual Albanian folk song. In the second, the choir represents the soul of the girl trapped in the wall. They express deep sorrow, fear, and pain. The third is the closing section, a setting of Martin Camaj's poem *My Land* sung by two soprano soloists, reminding us of the girl's youth and her sacrifice for her village.

Our journey continues with a lament and a view inside the life of this girl. Brahms's setting of the elegiac text by Friedrich Schiller evokes the stories of Greek gods and the universality of death, which comes to us all, even to beauty. A *nenia*—the Latin equivalent to the German *Nänie*—is a lament that would have been sung in a Roman household to mourn the dead.

The final piece on the first half is a new setting of *Alleluia*. An alleluia can have many meanings, but in this setting the music takes us ever back in time to a happier moment in this girl's life. Alejandro D. Consolación based this composition on Randall Thompson's famous *Alleluia*, and in this program it represents an emotional doorway from the tragedy and transformation of death to the innocence of a young girl dreaming of a life filled with love and promise.

Part two of the program finds us at the couple's wedding. Jacob Handl's setting of *Pater Noster*—the Lord's Prayer—paired with Maurice Durufle's "Ubi Caritas," represents the ceremony and the commitment of two lovers.

Two folk songs on themes of young women follow. "Buffalo Gals," set by Alice Parker, and Stephen Foster's "Nelly Bly," set by Jack Halloran, remind us of the carefree nature of this young girl.

The legend is one that continues to haunt us. We bring our story to a close by entering a world of dreams and a memory of where the story began. "Ballade to the Moon" invites us to dream and to accept that we must return to reality and understand that this life comes to an end. And yet, we continue to dream of the mystical life that continues and the life of this young girl.

—Joe Miller

## PROGRAM NOTES

*Elegy*, Daniel Elder

Inspiration to set this simple yet profound text came from its relation to the taps bugle call, played traditionally in the military to signal "lights out" at the end of the day. This call is now played often at military memorials, poignantly symbolizing the closing of the last of days. This seldom-heralded poem captures the beauty of taps and alludes to the search for comfort after the loss of a loved one.

This musical setting is two-fold: the choir in the first and third sections serves to paint a frail and immediate human grief, while in section two the soprano soloists echo the taps call to depict a distant place of comfort and set up an ethereal mixture of emotions. The closing of each section features a startlingly mortal lament for those we have lost, slowly fading at the end into a lasting silence.

—Daniel Elder

*Legend of the Walled-Up Woman*, Eriks Ešenvalds

It is believed that this Albanian legend dates back some 2,700 years to the building of Shkodër Castle in northern Albania. It tells of three brothers who were building a castle to protect themselves from Roman and Greek invaders. As the brothers built during the day, their work was mysteriously destroyed each night. Even more hardship befell them as their mother had a vision: the only way the castle would stand, was if one of them sacrificed his wife. Tricked by his siblings and mother, the youngest brother sent his wife to the castle, and she was sacrificed by building her into the foundation of the castle.

The work was commissioned and premiered by the Latvian Radio Choir in 2005. In it, Ešenvalds sets the ancient folk song "Légend de la Femme Emmurée" for choir and small ensemble and layers the poem *My Land* above it with soprano soloists. This treatment of the modern Albanian poem by Martin Camaj gives the "walled-up woman" a voice from the beyond.

*Nänie*, op. 82, Johannes Brahms

From 1862 until his death in 1897, Brahms associated himself with Viennese musical culture. Written in 1881, *Nänie* belongs to his later Viennese years when Brahms was focused on larger forms, writing predominantly orchestral and symphonic works. For this elegiac piece, Brahms selected a Schiller text to memorialize his friend Anselm Feuerbach. Brahms uses the work as a forum to comment about death, as well as to immortalize Feuerbach. Schiller's text touches on the theme of human destiny, more specifically the fleeting nature of beauty. Brahms elevates these sentiments by using strong contrasting textures and key centers to illuminate the text.

*Alleluia*, Alejandro D. Consolación

Filipino composer Alejandro D. Consolación is currently a candidate for a master's degree in organ performance at Westminster Choir College. His setting of *Alleluia* was premiered in 2002 by the Asian Youth Choir in Tokyo, Japan, and revised for the Westminster Choir in 2013. Though the work employs only a few words of text, the composer explores many different layers of introspective interpretation for the listener.

*Pater Noster*, Jacob (Gallus) Handl

Jacob (Gallus) Handl spent most of his life living and working in monasteries, and the majority of his works are settings of sacred Latin texts. His polychoral settings show Venetian *cori spezzati* influence as well as Italian madrigalisms through his use of chromaticism and text painting. In this work, Handl uses two choirs in canonic style passing text between choirs, and it employs homophonic textures for important textual ideas. He concludes the work with an eight-voice imitative polyphonic "Amen" heralding deliverance.

"Ubi Caritas," Quatre Motets, op. 10, Maurice Duruflé

"Ubi Caritas" is the first of four works in Duruflé's Quatre Motets, op.10 composed in 1960. In this work the composer uses Gregorian Chant as a model, quoting material from the final antiphon chant sung at Maundy Thursday Mass. This unaccompanied scoring summons influence from the simplicity of melodic contour and free rhythm of chant. Entrusted to the altos for the majority of the work, the "Ubi Caritas" chant is used like a melody floridly moving above mainly stepwise harmonies. These tender techniques combine with Duruflé's unique harmonic palette allowing the work an intimate beauty framing the amorous message of the text.

"Buffalo Gals," arr. Alice Parker

"Buffalo Gals" is a traditional American song made popular by the minstrel singers of the mid-1800s. Originally published as "Lubly Fan" in 1844, the song's lyrics were often altered to suit the local audience, so it might be performed as "Buffalo Gals" in Buffalo, New York, or...

"Nelly Bly," Stephen Foster

Stephen Foster, one of the most important figures in American music, is primarily known for his parlor and minstrel music. Though he never lived in the southern United States, many of his songs have folk themes. "Nelly Bly," arranged by Jack Halloran, is an endearing attempt to win over a southern gal. Through the work, Halloran uses the tenor voices to try and win over Nelly as the rest of the choir fervently supports their efforts.

"Ballade to the Moon," from *Three Nocturnes*, Daniel Elder

"Ballade to the Moon" is the first in a cycle of nocturnes for mixed chorus and piano, exploring both observational and psychological experiences associated with love, nature, darkness and light. Each text is original and covers these ideas in different ways—"Ballade" depicts a narrator's moonlit walk through woods and fields as he explores his love for everything around him. The beauty comes in its obscurity, as at many times the narrator could be referring to either nature or a romantic attraction in his life. The night seems to call to him, "Come, dream in me!" and as he finds himself under deep forest cover, he entreats the stars, "O share thy light!" until the twinkling stars in open meadow gleam upon him, luring them to "Come, sing with me!" His love for the dusky beauty around him causes him to "weep with joy" with the moon as his only witness.

—Daniel Elder

Program notes by Matthew D. Brady, unless otherwise indicated.