

### Program Notes for *Shakespeare in Spring* Concert March 28, 2009

Here are the expanded program notes for our March 28<sup>th</sup> Concert. They are intended to give you added insights into the music we sing and those gifted composers and lyricists who created it.

#### *Fancie*

Benjamin Britten

Words by William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*



Edward Benjamin Britten (1913-1976) received England's Order of Merit for his contributions to music as a composer, conductor, violist, and pianist. In the song *Fancie* taken from a scene from the Merchant of Venice, fancie (or its equivalent "fancy") refers to loving or being infatuated (fancied) by someone. Shakespeare's song debates the issue of whether love comes from the heart or the mind. At the moment this is sung, it weighs heavily on the character Bassanio and other suitors who have to decide between three caskets to win Portia (as stipulated in her father's will or be bachelors forever). Bassanio looks past the appealing appearance of the glittering gold and silver caskets and finds a portrait of Portia in the leaden casket. His wise choice proves Shakespeare's aphorism "all that glitters is not gold."

#### *Three Madrigals*

Emma Lou Diemer

Words by William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night II*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Much Ado About Nothing*

The American composer Emma Lou Diemer (born 1927 in Kansas City, MO) wrote this piece for the senior high schools of Arlington, Virginia in 1962 as composer-in-residence for Virginia schools under the Ford Foundation Young Composers Project. She later taught music at the University of Maryland and University of California, Santa Barbara. In this collection of madrigals, she presents passages of the Bards' thoughts on love from three of his comedies.



#### *Shall I Compare Thee to a Summer's Day?*

Z. Randall Stroepe

Words by William Shakespeare, *Sonnet XVIII*



Z. Randall Stroepe is one of today's the most popular American composers and conductors whose compositions sell over 200,000 copies a year. The chorale sang his song "Winter" a few years ago at its December concert. In this song, Stroepe sets this famous Shakespearean love sonnet to four part choral music with piano. Harvard University Professor Stephen Greenblatt helps us understand the poet's love for the young man in this sonnet. Greenblatt in his NYT bestseller *Will in the World* (2004) writes that in Shakespeare's romantic comedies the go-between becomes romantically entangled. In this sonnet, the poet has "displaced the woman he was urging the young man to impregnate; the poet's labor, not the woman's, will

bring forth the young man's enduring image." The poet's sonnet not the fleeting summer day shall endure and "give life to thee."

***Blow, Blow, Thou Winter Wind***

George Shearing

Words by William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*



A blind English jazz pianist now living in the US in his nineties, George Shearing has been making music as a pianist, composer and bandleader for six decades. His most famous composition was "Lullaby of Birdland" - a jazz classic. Sir George was knighted in 2007. In this song, he sets Shakespeare's song "Blow, Blow, Thou Winter Wind" from *As You Like It* to a cheerful beat. This seems at odds with the downbeat lyrics, which decry man's ingratitude toward one another as being more painful than a winter wind. Yet Shearing's beat and Shakespeare's repeated insertion of the phrase "Heigh-Ho" tell us that that we should keep our hopes up. Check the dictionary. The alternative meaning of the term is a cry of encouragement not solely an expression of weariness or sadness. It is the intent here as the music and the lyrics tell us that despite unfriendly acts "life is most jolly" and we should sing!

***It Was a Lover and His Lass*** (from *Liebeslieder Polkas*)

P.D.Q. Bach/ Professor Peter Schickele

Words by William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*

Peter Schickele, born in Iowa, was raised in Washington D.C. and Fargo, North Dakota. It is hard to imagine him as a serious musician although he graduated from the Julliard School with an M.S. in musical composition. This is due to his fame as a parodist playing the role of the fictitious P.D.Q. Bach - "youngest and the oddest of the twenty odd children of Johann Sebastian Bach." If it had not been for the diligent scholarly research of Professor Schickele, the musical contribution of J.S. Bach's offspring to the Baroque period may have followed him into oblivion. P.D.Q. Bach composed this song from *As You Like It*, for the services of five pianist hands (to allow the sixth to turn pages) along with selected acoustical effects. Thanks to the insights of Shakespeare and the scholarly research of Professor Schickele, this song confirms the affection sweet lovers have for springtime.

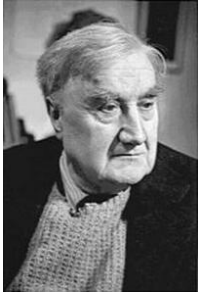


***Serenade to Music***

Ralph Vaughan Williams

Words by William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) remains one of England's greatest composers by virtue of the breadth of his work, the variety of his styles in his search for his own musical voice, and the distinctly English roots to his music. He was his own man. At the age of 42, he could have declined military service in World War I or sought a commission. Instead, he volunteered as a private serving as a stretcher bearer in the Royal Army Medical Corps at Flanders Field. His



exposure to battle caused a hearing loss which became more pronounced in his later years. In his early 60s, he declined knighthood but did accept the Order of Merit. Rather than being hailed as Sir Ralph (or "Rafe" as he preferred to be called), he was awarded the Order of Merit for distinguished service in the Arts. At the award ceremony, he took off his jacket and garland, and proceeded to coach the choir on how to properly perform the piece. His ashes were interred in Westminster Abbey.

He composed *Serenade to Music* in 1938 during the lyrical phase of his career. Williams took the scene of the young lovers Lorenzo and Jessica from Act 5 of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* and set it to music. Its images of the moon, rural landscape, and sweet musical harmony, connect the composer's folk music past, his lyrical style (reminiscent of his violin concerti *Lark Ascending*) and his affinity for the common person's ability to appreciate the finer things in life whether it is good music or gazing at the soft moon rising over the deathly stillness of human carnage at Flanders Field.

### ***The Creation (Part 1)***

Joseph Haydn



Joseph Haydn (1732-1809) is sometimes considered the "Father of the Symphony" having written 104 of them. This Austrian composer worked as a court musician on a remote estate of his Hungarian patron for many years thus isolating him from other musical influences. As he put it, "set apart from the world, there was nobody in my vicinity to confuse or annoy me, and so I had to become original." For some, Haydn is credited with being the first major force in moving classical music from the church to the palace and then to the public concert platform ushering in more individualism and less formality for the oncoming Romantic period of the 19th Century.

Having composed a multitude of symphonies, string quartets (which greatly influenced the young Mozart), sonatas, and operas, Haydn produced what most critics believe was his greatest composition *The Creation* in 1798 when he was in his late sixties. By then, he was no longer working on a deadline to please royalty. He took eighteen months to write this great oratorio because he "wanted it to last." Last it did. This performance of *The Creation (Part 1)* is one of many concerts revisiting this beautiful work as choruses around the world celebrate the 200th year of Haydn's death. We will take you through the first four days of creation starting with the explosive first day's statement "And there was light." Frederik Samuel Silverstolpe, a friend of Haydn's reported of the premiere: "No one, not even Baron van Swieten, had seen the page of the score wherein the birth of light is described. That was the only passage of the work which Haydn had kept hidden. I think I see his face even now, as this part sounded in the orchestra. Haydn had the expression of someone who is thinking of biting his lips, either to hide his embarrassment or to conceal a secret. And in that moment when light broke out for the first time, one would have said that rays darted from the composer's burning eyes. The enchantment of the

electrified Viennese was so general that the orchestra could not proceed for some minutes.” We conclude Part 1 with the majestic choral ending singing "The Heavens are Telling" the glory of God.

*Program Notes by Ted Cummings*