

Square Notes and Shapes

St. Augustine Schola Cantorae With Organist Shannon McKay

August 7, 2009, 6 p.m.

Cathedral-Basilica of St. Augustine, St. Augustine, Florida

The audience is kindly requested to turn off cell phones,
and to refrain from applause until the end of the program. Thank you!

Part One From the Vespers of the Blessed Virgin Mary

Lucernarium - O Gladsome Light, *Phos Hilaron*, 4th c. (Igor Dvoretzky/arr. M. J. Ballou)

This hymn was traditionally sung at the lighting of lamps as vespers began in the Eastern Churches as well as the Ambrosian Rite of Milan. Found in the Apostolic Constitutions, “Phos Hilaron” praises Christ as the “light of the holy glory of the Immortal Father.” It is the earliest known Christian hymn outside the Bible that is still in use today. Some believed it was composed by St. Athenogenes on the way to his martyrdom, his executioner’s arm miraculously unable to move until the song was completed. In the 4th century, St. Basil the Great referred to it as an ancient hymn. This setting by Dvoretzky is one of the most popular in the Russian Church.

Hymn – Ave maris stella, Gregorian Chant with organ versets by Jehan Titelouze

This 8th century hymn is always sung at Vespers of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Both the author and composer are unknown. Hailing Mary as “the star of the sea” and “happy gate of heaven,” this was one of the most popular hymns in medieval Europe as devotion to the Virgin blossomed. Its supple melody and metrical text have been the inspiration of composers as varied as Josquin, Palestrina, Byrd, Victoria, Grieg, Liszt, and 20th century composers Chan Ka Nin and Peter Maxwell Davies.

*Interspersed with the sung verses of Ave Maris Stella are three organ versets, based on the plainchant melody, by French composer Jehan Titelouze (1563-1633). Ave Maris Stella is one of twelve Gregorian hymns elaborated by Titelouze in his first published work, *Hymnes de l’Eglise pour toucher sur l’orgue* (1623). These sets of variations were intended to be performed during the liturgy, either in alternatim with the schola or as “stand-alone” processions or Communion music.*

Typically, Titelouze treated the plainchant melody either as a cantus firmus “en valeurs longues” (“in long notes”) in the organ’s pedal division, embellished by colorful keyboard accompaniment; or as a fugue, with fragments of the plainchant melody serving as the fugue’s subjects. This evening you will hear the “valeurs longues” in the first and third versets, and the fugal treatment in the second verset.

Antiphon “Jam hiems transiit” and Psalm 127, Gregorian Chant, Tone 8

At the core of Vespers are psalms from the Bible, each preceded by an antiphon. An antiphon is a verse sung before and after the psalm that relates to the feast or saint being celebrated. Early liturgical writers gave a Marian interpretation to the Old Testament Song of Songs, identifying the Virgin as the female beloved in that love poem. This antiphon and its psalm are representative of that style. The verse comes from Chapter 2: “Lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone: rise up, my love, and come away.” The companion Psalm 127 is one of the “songs of ascent,” a set of fifteen joyful psalms associated with Jerusalem, the Feast of Tabernacles, and God’s protection of Israel.

Magnificat, Gregorian Chant, Tone 8 Solemn Form with falso bourdoni

A canticle is a Biblical hymn that is not a psalm and the greatest of these is the Vespers Magnificat, taken from the Gospel of Luke. Meeting her cousin Elizabeth, Mary sings her delight with the Lord’s power and mercy toward Israel.

There are many famous concert versions of the text by composers as various as Bach and Monteverdi to the contemporary Arvo Part and John Taverner. Simpler liturgical arrangements also abound because this piece was and often is still sung daily by European cathedral choirs. This setting alternates verses of Gregorian chant with a polyphonic setting by Ciro Grassi (1868-1952). Writing in the 19th century, Grassi employed a harmonic style that flourished in the Renaissance, showing his allegiance to efforts to uproot operatic influences in sacred music and restore earlier styles.

Hymn to the Virgin – O Virgin Pure (Αγνή Παρθένε) St. Nektarios, (English by Nancy Chalker Takis)

“O Virgin Pure” is a wonderful introduction to Byzantine hymnody. Written in the late 19th century, it combines traditional imagery of the Blessed Virgin with a rhythmic folk-like melody. Its accessibility and beauty have made the hymn popular throughout the Orthodox world, with versions appearing in Greek, Serbian, English, and Slavonic. The repeated refrain, “O Rejoice, Thou Unwedded Bride” is taken from the 6th century Akathist Hymn to the Virgin and reflects the sacred paradox of Mary’s virginity and motherhood.

Nancy Chalker Takis is a Michigan-based chanter of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America and holder of the Patriarch Athenagoras medal for notable service to her church in music. Her New Byzantium Publications’ goal is to offer ecclesiastical music in English put in common staff notation that is accurately translated, poetic, close to the rules of Byzantine Chant, and can alternate easily with the traditional Greek versions.

Part Two

Songs from *The Sacred Harp* and *The Social Harp*

North Port –John Cennick, 1743/R.R. Osborne, 1850, arr. M.J. Ballou, 2009

*This “revival song” appeared in the first appendix to *The Sacred Harp* in 1850. John Cennick (1718-1755) was first a Quaker, then a Methodist, and finally a Moravian missionary to Northern Ireland. Taking Cennick’s popular hymn, the composer inserted an internal refrain, easily sung by a large crowd while the leader “lined out” the verses.*

Weeping Mary – John G. McCurry and Power, 1853 Social Harp, arr. M.J. Ballou, 2009

John McCurry (1821-1886) was a self-taught composer, farmer and publisher in Hart County, Georgia. McCurry apologized for publishing “still another music book,” but he claimed that he did not feel satisfied that his “views upon the science of music...should lie hidden in mystery for ages yet to come, while, by an exposition of them, he may enlighten millions yet unborn.” In “Weeping Mary,” he combined a high-energy tune with a text from the 1823 Primitive Methodist Hymnbook.

The Morning Trumpet – B. F. White, 1844, arr. M.J. Ballou, 2009

Benjamin Franklin White (1800-1879) was born in the “Up Country” of South Carolina. Farming, teaching singing schools and composing his own sacred songs, as well as raising nine children with his wife, Thurza, White dreamed of publishing his own collection of shape-note tunes. The first edition of The Sacred Harp was published in 1845. Numerous revisions later, it remains the staple book for shape-note singers throughout the United States. The “Cooper Book” (also known as the “blue book” from its cover) is the favored edition in Florida, southern parts of Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, and Texas.

My Home – Samuel Stennett, 1787/C. F. Letson, 1869 with organ prelude by Gardner Read

“On Jordan’s Stormy Banks” was one of the “hits” of the 19th century American shape-note texts. Paired with a variety of refrains and tunes, there are six settings in The Sacred Harp collection alone. Author Samuel Stennett (1727-1795) was a prominent English Seventh-Day Baptist minister whose grandfather had also written numerous hymns. Sadly, nothing is known of C. F. Letson the composer of the tune.

American composer and musicologist Gardner Read (1913-2005) published two volumes of preludes for organ based on hymns from the 1902 edition of The Sacred Harp. “On Jordan’s Stormy Banks I Stand” is drawn from the first volume, Opus 90. Read’s aim was to preserve “the quaintness and somewhat primitive quality of the original hymn-tunes,” and in this he certainly succeeded; but his settings also feature a cleverly wrought and distinctly modern tonality which sheds an intriguing light on the beautiful old melodies.

Parting Friends – John G. McCurry, 1846, arr. M. J. Ballou 2002

John McCurry said that he learned this tune at the age of 8 (1829) from Mrs. Catherine Penn. Filled with open fourths and fifths, the song is a doleful reminder of the continual farewells to friends and family that were a part of the search for land and prosperity in the rural South with reunion to be hoped for in Heaven.

About the St. Augustine Schola Cantorae

Founded in 2007, the Schola is devoted to the rich heritage of a cappella (unaccompanied) sacred music with a special emphasis on Gregorian chant. In addition to monthly Vespers at the Shrine of La Leche, the Schola has sung at the Founder’s Day Mass, as well as weddings and special Masses. Its members are a mix of professional and amateur singers on the First Coast.

Director Mary Jane Ballou has over 30 years of experience in directing choirs and independent vocal ensembles in California, New York, and Florida. Beginning with conservatory training as a pianist and organist, Ms. Ballou continued her studies in Eastern and Western liturgical music with Fr. Lawrence Heiman, C.P.P.S., Scott Turkington, William Mahrt and others. An active member of the Church Music Association of America, Ms. Ballou writes and speaks on the past and future of sacred music. She is the organist at Immaculate Conception Church in Jacksonville and also performs on lever harp and salterio.

Shannon McKay has been principal organist at the Cathedral Basilica for 18 years. She also serves as organist at St. Benedict the Moor Catholic Church and accompanist for the St. Augustine Community

Chorus. She will be the featured soloist for the next First Friday Concert on September 4, when she will perform works of Lebegue, Bach, Locklair and Durufle.

To learn more about the Schola
Log onto www.cantora.com

Members of the Schola

Mary Jane Ballou, Director
Elyse Brady (on leave)
Beverly Barker
Elizabeth Duran Gessner
Jean Goodwin

Cindy Lauritsen
Shannon McKay
Ernani Morgan
Katherine Owens
Sally Riley

Upcoming Friday Vespers at the Shrine
August 21st, September 25th, October 23rd
Beginning at 6 p.m. with the Angelus

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produced and hosted by Mary Jane Ballou on WFCF 88.5 FM
Flagler College Radio
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