

London Concord Singers
Conductor - Malcolm Cottle

Clare Nelson & Tuomo Sunni - Violin
Nicholas Stringfellow - Cello

St. Mary's Church, Cadogan Street, Chelsea
Thursday 3rd December 1998

Heinrich Schütz (1585 - 1672)

Saul, Saul, was verfolgst du mich?

*for six solo, two choruses, obligato violins and
continuo from the Symphoniae Sacrae III
1650, Op 12*

Choirboy, law student, pupil of Gabrieli, fan of Monteverdi, Heinrich Schütz was twenty-one years younger than Shakespeare and would have been a hundred years older than Bach. His published music - largely to German texts and almost exclusively sacred - shows his strong support for Luther's endeavours to establish the vernacular as a literary and liturgical language. Schütz also introduced Italian musical developments to Germany and in so doing laid the foundations of eighteenth-century German sacred music.

Schütz spent most of his working life as Kapellmeister at the electoral court of Dresden. But the Thirty Years War wreaked havoc on his musical resources. Singers' numbers dwindled and those remaining lived like pigs. Even after the war's end - just before tonight's motet was written - Schütz was finding his ingenuity and forbearance so tested that Saul's umbrella work [the *Symphoniae sacrae III*,] could be read as a plea to be allowed to retire.

Saul, Saul, for six solo voices, two choruses, obligato violins and continuo, is a piece of spectral dramatic art. The story is well known. The fanatically and murderously anti-Christian Saul is on his way to Damascus, when he is struck blind by a flash of light. Falling to the ground, he hears a terrible voice from Heaven. In Schütz's version the stern call rumbles up from the depths, but then vanishes like a repressed foreboding, only to return with full force. Then the warning: It is hard for you to kick against the goads; that is, to resist the pressures compelling you to change your whole life. The sound-picture, of disorientation and menace, is immeasurably enhanced by Schütz's precisely indicated dynamics. (And it works of course. Saul, sight regained, is remembered as St. Paul, and this incident marks a turning-point for the early church.)

J.S. Bach

Lobet den Herrn, alle Heiden, BWV 230

Praise the Lord, all ye Nations

In the Lutheran liturgy, the motet was far less important than the cantata. Latin motets were sung at Vespers on Sunday afternoons, at the beginning of the main morning service and sometimes during communion. The ordinary repertory of the Leipzig choir consisted of simpler sixteenth and early seventeenth century motets and Bach used his less able singers for these motets, reserving the best singers for the cantatas.

Bach's six or seven surviving motets are of considerably greater difficulty than the Leipzig choir's regular repertoire. They were mainly written for funeral or memorial services. For these services Bach could call upon a greater number of singers so a number of the motets are for eight part chorus. The surviving motets are all late works, composed for the Thomaskirche in Leipzig, and are the only works of Bach which have enjoyed an unbroken tradition of performance: succeeding Cantors valued them highly, and they were regularly brought out for use.

Bach's vocal writing derives in essence from an instrumental, or organ, style. In such music, the limited scope for cantabile phrasing leads naturally to a prominence of purely harmonic effects, and flowing melodic movement. This goes some way to explain the taxing nature of Bach's vocal parts, and it may encourage the modern performer to learn that his own choristers found such works as *Singet dem Herrn* and *Der Geist hilft* notoriously difficult. They were undoubtedly helped by some instrumental underlay, or at least a continuo part - a practice which was usual by this time, when the motet had begun to borrow from other forms. True *a cappella* music was little heard in Bach's day.

The motet *Lobet den Herrn, alle Heiden* consist of words from Psalm 117 and an attached Alleluia. It is the only one of Bach's motets composed throughout in four parts, and lacking Bach's much-loved chorale - both possible indications of an earlier (pre-Leipzig) date. It has a single movement, which falls naturally into three sections: two powerful fugal pillars, framing a gentler central episode.

Handel

Trio Sonata Opus 2 No. 5 in G

Johannes Brahms

Fest- und Gedenksprüche, Op. 109

Festal and Commemorative Sentence

Johannes Brahms was inspired by his studies of Bach and other Baroque composers and he wrote motets for unaccompanied choir throughout his creative life. These three motets for double choir were written as an acknowledgement of Brahms having been given the rare honour of Freedom of the City of Hamburg, his native city. They were first performed at the opening of an industrial exhibition in the city in September 1889. The motets show clearly, through the antiphonal and polyphonic writing, Brahms' interest in the music of the Renaissance, particularly the works of Schütz which had just been published in Spitta's new edition.

The work is of a patriotic nature and each motet refers to a specific event in fairly recent German history. No. 1 refers to the Battle of Leipzig in 1813 and the relief from Napoleonic bondage. No. 2 is concerned with the war of 1870 which was again a disaster for the French. No. 3 is both a celebration of German unification and a warning to its people.

INTERVAL

Telemann

Trio Sonata in F

Peter Cornelius (1824-1872)

3 Chorgesänge, Op 11

Choral Songs

Peter Cornelius studied music at Weimar under Liszt and for a period he worked as a kind of secretary to Liszt. Weimar remained Cornelius' spiritual home and he devoted his literary abilities to supporting Liszt's art. Though he is the best known member of Liszt's circle, Cornelius was never a blind partisan and developed into an independent artistic figure. Liszt, at first, saw him as a promising composer of religious music, but Cornelius soon changed this and began writing his most famous work, the opera *Der Barbier von Bagdad*. The opera's first performance in Weimar, under Liszt, caused a scandal and Liszt, weary of constant scandals, left Weimar. Cornelius moved to Vienna, where he became friendly with Wagner.

In 1865, Wagner invited him to Munich. Cornelius' second opera, *Der Cid*, received its successful first performance in Munich. But the sources of his creativity seemed to be running dry and he died without completing his last opera. But during these last years he wrote a number of masterly lieder, duets and choruses and continued to write poetry and essays.

The *Choral Songs* Opus 11 were written in 1871 and are settings of poetry by Heine and Rückert.

Arnold Schoenberg (1874-1951)

Friede auf Erden, Op13, 1907

Peace on Earth

Arnold Schoenberg is famous as the pioneer of the style of composition popularly known as "atonal", in which there is no overall key centre, all twelve notes of the chromatic scale are given equal status and there is no expectation that dissonances will be resolved. He did not see this as a revolutionary idea, but as the next logical stage of musical evolution from the romantic tradition to which he belonged.

Schoenberg's first atonal works date from the years 1908 to 1913. Therefore his 1907 setting of Conrad Meyer's poem *Friede auf Erden* (Peace on Earth) for eight part chorus was one of his last romantic compositions before he embarked on this new course. The composer later described the piece as an illusion written when he still thought that harmony among people was conceivable. With hindsight one can see some signs of the coming developments: the piece makes use of extreme modulations and highly chromatic passages, stretching the framework of romantic harmony to its limits. Nevertheless as a whole it is firmly centred around the key of D to which it several times returns, especially for the optimistic refrain "*Friede auf der Erde*" at the end of each verse.

Schütz - Saul, Saul

'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads.'

Acts 26

Bach - Lobet den Herrn

O praise the LORD, all ye nations: praise him, all ye people.
For his merciful kindness is great toward us:
and the truth of the LORD endureth for ever. Praise ye the LORD.
Alleluia

Psalm 117

Brahms - Fest- und Gedenksprüche

1) Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them.
They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded.
The LORD will give strength unto his people; the LORD will bless his people with peace

Psalms 22 & 29

2) When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace
But he, knowing their thoughts, said unto them,
Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation;
and a house divided against a house falleth.

Luke 11

3) For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the LORD our God is in all things that we call upon him for?
Only take heed to thyself, and keep thy soul diligently, lest thou forget the things which thine eyes have seen, and lest they depart from thy heart all the days of thy life: but teach them thy sons, and thy sons' sons;

Deuteronomy 4

Cornelius - Three Choral Songs

Death is the cool night

Death is the cool night.

Life is the sultry day.

It now grows dark; I'm drowsy,

The day has wearied me.

Above my bed rises a tree,

The young nightingale sings there, it seems;

She sings of naught but love -

I hear it even in my dreams.

Heinrich Heine

To The Storm Wind

Mighty One who forcefully bends the tree tops

Speedily rising from crown to crown

Wander Oh storming one, wander along

Tear out my stormy breast and take it with you

Like the clouds that fly away like thunder

swaying on your crushing wing

Lead the spirit from the earthly house

into eternity storming outside.

Lead me to a place where the quaking world

shatters everywhere into wasteland and ruins

Over the wasteland with ghoulish lust

I feel God in my pounding breast.

Friedrich Rückert

The Three Days of Spring

Youth, High Spirits and Love

are like three beautiful spring days.

Instead of bemoaning their flight

Hear, enjoy them quickly.

Friedrich Rückert

Schoenberg - Friede auf Erden

While the shepherds left their flocks
to bring the angel's word
through the lowly gate
to the mother and child,
the heavenly servants sang
in the starry sky
and heaven continued to ring:
Peace, peace on earth!

Since the angelic annunciation,
oh, how many bloody deeds
did the armour-clad perform
in battle on wild horses.
During how many holy nights
did the ghostly choir of the ghosts sing
hesitatingly, urgently pleading, quietly lamenting
Peace, peace.... on earth!

But it is eternally believed
that the weak will not at all times
fall prey to every brazen murderous deed.
In murder and in horror,
something like justice works and acts.
A new kingdom will appear
and it will seek for
peace on earth.

Gradually it will grow
to carry out its holy duty
forging weapons that aren't dangerous,
flaming swords for justice,
a royal house that is blooming
with strong sons
whose bright tubas roar
Peace, peace on earth!

Conrad Meyer