

Notes, Texts & Translations

A Ceremony of Carols, Op. 28, 1943, by Benjamin Britten

One of the most famous choral works for choir and harp, *A Ceremony of Carols* was drafted by Benjamin Britten in 1942 on board ship while crossing the Atlantic, heading home to England from the United States. During a landing at Halifax, Nova Scotia, Britten purchased a book of poetry, *The English Galaxy of Shorter Poems*, and here found the texts of medieval and Renaissance poetry, that were to become *A Ceremony of Carols*. He first conceived the piece for women's voices and it was women who first sang it in Norwich, England on December 5, 1942. Britten added a few more movements and in 1943 published the work for "trebles." Framed by the plainchant "Hodie Christus natus est" (Today Christ is born), the *Ceremony* contains ten short interior movements of stunning contrast.

I. Procession

<i>Hodie Christus natus est:</i>	Today Christ is born;
<i>hodie Salvator apparuit:</i>	today the Savior has appeared.
<i>hodie in terra canunt angeli:</i>	Today the angels sing on earth;
<i>laetantur archangeli:</i>	the archangels rejoice.
<i>hodie exsultant justi dicentes:</i>	Today the righteous exult, saying:
<i>gloria in excelsis Deo.</i>	Glory to God on high!
<i>Alleluia!</i>	Alleluia!

II. Wolcum Yole! [Welcome, Yule!]

Wolcum be thou hevne king,
Wolcum Yole!
Wolcum, born in one morning,
Wolcum for whom we sall [shall] sing!
Wolcum be ye Stevene and Jon,
Wolcum innocentes every one,
Wolcum Thomas marter one.
Wolcum be ye good Newe Yere,
Wolcum, Twelfth Day both in fere,
Wolcum, seintes lefe and dere,
Wolcum Yole!
Candelmesse, Quene of bliss,
Wolcum bothe to more and lesse.
Wolcum be ye that are here,
Wolcum, wolcum, make good cheer.
Wolcum alle another yere.
Wolcum!
- Anon. 14th c.

III. There is no Rose

There is no rose of such vertu
As is the rose that bare Jesu.
Alleluia.
For in this rose conteined was
Heaven and earth in litel space,
Res miranda. [Marvelous thing.]
By that rose we may well see
There be one God in persons three,
Pares forma. [Equal in nature.]
The aungels sungen the shepherds to
Gloria in excelsis Deo,
Gaudeamus. [Let us rejoice.]
Leave we all this werldly merth
And follow we this joyous birth,
Transeamus. [Let us pass over.]
- Anon. 14th c.

IVa. That yongë child

That yongë child when it gan weep
With song she lulled him asleep:
That was so sweet a melody
It passed alle minstrelsy.
The nightingalë sang also:
Her song is hoarse and nought thereto:
Whoso attendeth to her song
and leaveth the first then doth he wrong.
- Anon. 14th c.

IVb. Balulalow

O my deare hert, young Jesu sweet [sweet],
Prepare thy creddil in my spreit [spirit],
And I sall rock thee to my hert,
And never mair from thee depart.
But I sall praise thee evermoir
with sanges [songs] sweet unto thy gloir;
The knees of my hert sall I bow,
And sing that richt [right] Balulalow.
- James, John and Robert Wedderburn, (1548), 1561.

V. As dew in Aprille

I sing of a maiden
That is makèless [matchless]:
King of all kings
To her son she ches [chose].
He came al so stille,
There his moder was,
As dew in Aprille
That falleth on the grass.
He came al so stille
To his moder's bour [bower],
As dew in Aprille
That falleth on the flour [flower].
He came al so stille,
There his moder lay,
As dew in Aprille
That falleth on the spray.
Moder and mayden was
Never none but she:
Well may such a lady
Goddess moder be.
- Anon. c. 1400

VII. Interlude

This movement is a harp solo with thematic material from the first movement.

VIII. In Freezing Winter Night

Behold, a silly* tender babe,
In freezing winter night,
In homely manger trembling lies,
Alas, a piteous sight!
The inns are full; no man will yield
This little pilgrim bed.
But forced he is with silly beasts
In crib to shroud his head.
This stable is a Prince's court,
This crib his chair of State;
The beasts are parcel of his pomp,
The wooden dish his plate.
The persons in that poor attire
His royal liveries wear;
The Prince himself is come from heav'n;
This pomp is prized there.
With joy approach, O Christian wight [being],
Do homage to thy King,
And highly praise his humble pomp,
which he from Heav'n doth bring.
*helpless, pitiable
- Robert Southwell (1561?-1595)

VI. This little Babe

This little Babe so few days old,
Is come to rifle Satan's fold;
All hell doth at his presence quake,
Though he himself for cold do shake;
For in this weak unarmed wise
The gates of hell he will surprise.
With tears he fights and wins the field,
His naked breast stands for a shield.
His battering shot are babish cries,
His arrows looks of weeping eyes,
His martial ensigns Cold and Need,
And feeble Flesh his warrior's steed.
His camp is pitched in a stall,
His bulwark but a broken wall;
The crib his trench, haystalks his stakes;
Of shepherds he his muster makes;
And thus, as sure his foe to wound,
The angels' trumps alarum sound.
My soul with Christ join thou in fight;
Stick to the tents that he hath pight
[pitched].
Within his crib is surest ward;
This little Babe will be thy guard.
If thou wilt foil thy foes with joy,
Then flit not from this heavenly Boy.
- Robert Southwell (1561?-1595)

IX. Spring Carol

Pleasure it is
to hear iwis [certainly],
the Birdes sing,
The deer in the dale,
the sheep in the vale,
the corn springing.
God's purvayance
For sustenance,
It is for man;
Then we always
to give him praise,
And thank him than [then].
- William Cornish (14??-1523)

X. Deo gracias!

And all was for an appil,
an appil that he tok [took],
As clerkes finden
written in their book.
Deo gracias!
Ne [never] had the appil take ben,
The appil take ben,
Ne hadde never our lady
a ben hevene quene.
Blessed be the time
That appil take was.
Therefore we moun [must] singen
Deo gracias!
- Anon. 15th c.

XI. Recession

Hodie Christus natus est...

***Salve Regina* by Javier Busto**

One of the four Marian Antiphons for the Roman Catholic liturgy, the text for *Salve Regina* was most likely written in the 7th century by an unknown author. This contemporary setting is by Basque composer Javier Busto. Busto has a degree in medicine and is a prolific, self-taught composer.

*Salve Regina, Mater misericordiae
vita, dulcedo et spes nostra salve.
Ad te clamamus, exules filii Hevae.
ad te suspiramus, gementes et flentes
in hac, lacrymarum valle.
Eia ergo, Advocata nostra,
illos tuos misericordes oculos ad nos converte.
Et Jesum, benedictum fructum ventris tui,
nobis post hoc exsilium ostende.
O clemens, O pia, O dulcis, Virgo Maria.*

Hail, holy Queen, Mother of Mercy;
our life, our sweetness, and our hope: hail!
To thee do we cry, poor banished children of Eve.
To thee do we send up our sighs,
groaning and weeping in this valley of tears.
Hasten therefore, our Advocate,
and turn your merciful eyes upon us.
And show us Jesus, the blessed fruit
of your womb, after this exile.
O merciful, O pious, O sweet Virgin Mary.

***Bogorotise devo, raduyisia* by Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943)**

This selection is one of the most widely-known hymns in Rachmaninoff's *All-Night Vigil, Op. 37* (commonly called, *Vespers*), a work written in 1915 for a cappella mixed chorus. Author and conductor Vladimir Morosan writes, "The *Vespers* stand as the crowning achievement of the "Golden Age" of Russian Orthodox sacred choral music. This period, which began in the 1880s and lasted until the communist takeover in 1917, was a time when dozens of Russian composers turned their creative energies to composing choral music on texts drawn from the Russian Orthodox liturgy." Originally for mixed chorus, this treble arrangement is by Russian choral conductor Nadezhda Averina. The hymn text is a setting of the "Ave Maria" in Church Slavonic.

Rejoice, O Virgin Theotokos,
Mary full of Grace, the Lord is with Thee,
Blessed art Thou among women,
And blessed is the Fruit of Thy Womb,
For Thou hast borne the Savior of our souls.

***Magnificat* by Christine Donkin**

Canadian composer Christine Donkin writes an unusual setting of the *Magnificat* (Mary's Song). Most settings of the *Magnificat* are about joy, but this one seems to be more about Mary's fear and the burden put upon her to birth Jesus. The chorus creates a kind of swirling sound (angel wings?) around the soloists who represent Mary.

*Magnificat anima mea Dominum
Et exultavit spiritus meus
in Deo salutari meo.*

My soul doth magnify the Lord:
And my spirit hath rejoiced
in God my Saviour.

*Gloria Patri et Filio,
Et Spiritui Sancto.
Sicut erat in principio, et nunc
Et semper et in saecula saeculorum.
Amen.*

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,
And to the Holy Spirit:
As it was in the beginning, is now,
And ever shall be, world without end.
Amen

- text from Luke 1: 46-55

***Pueri Hebraeorum* by Randall Thompson (1899-1984)**

American Randall Thompson composed *Pueri Hebraeorum* in 1928 for the Wellesley College Choir. Thompson scores the piece for two antiphonal choirs resembling pieces from the Renaissance and Baroque periods. The Palm Sunday text is taken from Matthew 21: 8-9.

*Pueri Hebraeorum,
portantes ramos olivarum,
obviaverunt Domino,
clamantes et dicentes:
Hosanna in excelsis.*

The Hebrew children
bearing olive branches,
went forth to meet the Lord,
crying out, and saying,
Hosanna in the highest.