

Mendelssohn Club of Philadelphia

Alan Harler, Artistic Director
John French, Associate Conductor

Golden Voices of the East

PROGRAM

Слава Николай Римский-Корсаков
Slava (Glory) Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov

* *Hark! The Herald Angels Sing* Felix Mendelssohn

Gloria Randol Alan Bass

Спасение соделал Павел Чесноков
Spaseniye sodyelal (Salvation is created) Pavel Chesnokov

Литургия Св. Иоанна Златоуста Сергей Рахманинов
The Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom Sergei Rachmaninoff

Приидите, поклонимся
Priiditye, poklonimsya (Come, let us worship)

Иже херувимы
Izhe kheruvimi (Cherubic hymn)

Тебе поем
Tyebye poem (To Thee we sing)

Хвалите Господа с небес
Khvalitye Gospoda s'nyebyes (Praise the Lord from the heavens)

Вся православния христианий
Fsyа pravoslavniya khristiyani (We ask your blessing)

Diane Walters, soprano Bob Rodgers, tenor
Ryan Tibbets, baritone

* *O Come, All Ye Faithful* John Francis Wade



Богородице Дево Сергей Рахманинов
Bogoroditse Dyevno (Ave Maria) Sergei Rachmaninoff
Bogoroditse Dyevno Arvo Pärt



* *Away in a Manger* James R. Murray
W Żłobie Leży traditional Polish
Lulajże Jezuniu traditional Polish
Erin Swanson, soprano Jennifer Beattie, alto
Щедрик Микола Леонтович
Shchedrik (Song of Good Cheer) traditional Ukrainian
arr. Mikola Leontovich
* *The First Nowell* arr. Sir David Willcocks
The Hall Bedecked Gary Fry
Esti Dal traditional Hungarian
arr. Zoltán Kodály
Erin Swanson, soprano
* *Silent Night* Franz Gruber

Mendelssohn Club of Philadelphia
Alan Harler, conductor
Michael Stairs, organ
The Mendelssohn Brass

December 10, 2011
5:00 pm
St. Paul's Episcopal Church
Chestnut Hill

* The audience is invited to join in the singing of these carols.

The audience is cordially invited to join Mendelssohn Club for a reception immediately following the concert in the back of the sanctuary.

The use of recording or photographic equipment during this concert is strictly prohibited. Please turn off audible cell phones and alarms.

PROGRAM NOTES

In Golden Voices of the East, Mendelssohn Club explores the rich traditions of Eastern European sacred music. It is something of a natural pairing, for Russian sacred music, including the Chesnokov *Spaseniye sodyelal* heard in this concert, was largely introduced to American audiences through the editions, translations and programming of Lindsay Norden, Mendelssohn Club's third music director (1916-1926).

Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov (1844-1908) was the most successful and prolific of the Mighty Five, an extraordinary group of mostly amateur composers whose avowed goal was to create a new musical style of a uniquely Russian character. Although he was largely self-taught, Rimsky-Korsakov soon gained a reputation as a superb orchestrator and musical colorist. He was a career naval officer, but his limited duties afforded him ample time for composition. He was appointed professor of composition and instrumentation at the St. Petersburg Conservatory in 1871 and director of the Free School of Music in 1874. Rimsky-Korsakov's work on *Slava* dates from 1877, when he included it in a compilation of Russian folk melodies. He began setting it as a cantata in 1879 and revised the work to its current form in 1890.



Rimsky-Korsakov always referred to *Slava* as a Christmas song, but with a text praising the glories of Russia and the Tsar and a stirring, majestic melody, it sounds more like a patriotic hymn. Originally, it was not a carol but rather a fortune-telling game song, traditionally sung during Yuletide, roughly the period between Christmas and Epiphany. Unmarried girls would drop trinkets into a bowl of water, cover the bowl with a cloth, and then each would draw one out while singing the song. The often cryptic lyrics would foretell the girl's fortune in marriage. *Slava's* transformation from a light-hearted folksong to a patriotic hymn involved a popular and long-running musical play, *The Old-Time Yuletide*, which featured *Slava* in its original context. It gradually became fashionable to modify the words to honor the charismatic but mercurial Tsar Alexander I. After Napoleon's disastrous invasion of Russia and defeat by the Russian army, Russia unexpectedly found itself a major European power, and the text was further altered to extol the glories of Russia. By the late 1870's its original use had long been forgotten and it was widely accepted as a patriotic hymn. It was used as such in Tchaikovsky's opera *Mazeppa*, Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Tsar's Bride*, and most notably, in Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov*, where it is featured prominently in the coronation scene.

Randol Alan Bass (b. 1953) is a versatile composer, conductor and performer. His compositions have been performed by major orchestras and choruses across the country. *Gloria* was written in 1990 for the New York Pops Orchestra and has become one of his most popular and frequently performed works. Highly rhythmic, syncopated fanfares alternate with long, soaring melodic lines.

Pavel Chesnokov (1877-1944) was one of the great composers of Russian liturgical music. He studied at the Moscow Synodal College and later at the Moscow Conservatory. In addition to composition, he taught, directed many choirs including the Moscow State Choir, and served as a precentor at the Cathedral of Christ the Savior, Moscow's largest Orthodox church. When the cathedral was demolished by Stalin in 1931, Chesnokov, a deeply religious man, took a vow of silence and abandoned composition. The communion hymn *Spaseniye sodelal* is one of his best known works, a rich harmonization of a traditional Kievan chant melody.

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873-1943) was a virtuoso pianist and a gifted conductor, but his first love was always composition. He had already completed an opera and a number of piano and chamber works by the time he graduated from the Moscow Conservatory with the highest honors in composition. But his path was a difficult one. His *First Symphony* was roundly panned by the critics at its premiere in 1897 (one likening it to the ten plagues of Egypt), and Rachmaninoff was so devastated that he was unable



to compose for three years, and then only after psychotherapy which included post-hypnotic suggestion. The work he eventually wrote was his *Second Piano Concerto*, possibly his finest composition and certainly one of his most enduring, and it was enthusiastically received. In December of 1917 he fled Russia with his family, leaving behind most of their possessions, and was forced to resume his career as a pianist to support his family, eventually settling in the United States. His output as a composer dropped precipitously, but he still managed to compose significant works including the *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* and the *Symphonic Dances*.

The Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom is the liturgy commonly used in Russian Orthodox services. Unlike the Latin Mass settings, which focus on just half a dozen prayers from the common of the mass, the Orthodox liturgy consists of numerous small prayers, hymns and choral responses, linked together by the chanting of the priest and deacon. The most striking musical difference, however, is that the Orthodox liturgy is always set for unaccompanied voices; instrumental music is not allowed.

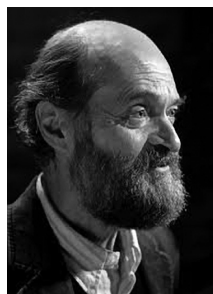
Rachmaninoff composed his setting of the *Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom* in 1910. While not devoutly religious, he was greatly influenced by the music of the Orthodox liturgy and used thematic material from traditional chants in a number of his compositions, including the ill-fated *First Symphony* and the *Symphonic Dances*. Rachmaninoff intended his setting for liturgical use, and even composed choral responses in addition to the hymns. While the *Liturgy* was eventually performed by the Moscow Synodal Choir, church authorities considered the work too modern and theatrical for liturgical use, which was a great disappointment to Rachmaninoff. The music displays not only Rachmaninoff's extraordinary gift for melody but also the carefully worked out structure which is evident in all his compositions. He uses a number of devices to expand the sonority of the voice, including extensive divisi of the

individual voices, doubling of voices at the octave, and a prominent low bass line. This latter was the despair of the director of the Synodal Choir, who wrote to Rachmaninoff, "Where on earth are we to find such basses? They are as rare as asparagus at Christmas!"

Bogoroditse Dyevo is a hymn of devotion to the Virgin Mary, the Orthodox equivalent of the *Ave Maria*, and is heard here in contrasting treatments by Rachmaninoff and Arvo Pärt. Rachmaninoff's setting comes from his 1915 *All Night Vigil*, the vespers liturgy for the day before a major feast day. Like the *St. John Chrysostom Liturgy*, it was intended for liturgical use but again failed to meet the approval of synodal authorities. While Rachmaninoff adapted traditional chant melodies for much of his two liturgical works, the *Bogoroditse Dyevo* is an original (and strikingly beautiful) melody, with a rich harmonization and long, sinuous chant-like music which ends each phrase.

Estonian-born Arvo Pärt (b. 1935) reinvented his compositional style in the mid-1970's after making a name for himself as an avant garde composer. He was looking for a musical style that was more expressive, and began to focus on sacred choral music, either in Latin or the Church Slavonic of the Russian Orthodox liturgy. He also developed a technique he called *tintinnabuli* (little bells), referring to the bell-like reinforcement of sound that consonant pitches make. His music tends to have a simple harmonic structure and fixed rhythmic pattern.

Pärt's 1990 *Bogoroditse Dyevo*, written for Stephen Cleobury and the King's College Choir of Cambridge, features a rhythmic ostinato that brackets a contrasting and more expansive middle section.

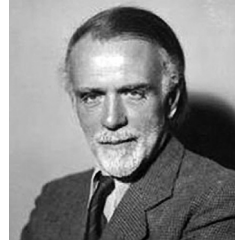


Away in a Manger is often misattributed to Martin Luther. In fact it is an American carol, written in 1883 for the celebration of the 400th anniversary of Luther's birth and meant to represent the type of childrens' hymn Luther might himself have written. It was first published in Philadelphia in 1885 and the tune was composed by song writer and publisher James R. Murray.

Shchedrik is based on a traditional Ukrainian New Year's Eve wassail song. Singers would serenade the householder, praising his prosperity in the hope of receiving an ample libation in return. It was written in 1916 by Mykola Leontovich, a composer, educator and choral conductor, and was featured in concert tours by the Ukrainian National Chorus. It was another educator and choral conductor, Peter Wilhousky, who set Leontovich's music to the familiar *Carol of the Bells* text in 1936. It is heard here in its original Ukrainian.

Gary Fry is an Emmy-winning Chicago-based composer, arranger, producer, and music educator. He has been the composer/arranger for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's annual *Welcome, Yule!* holiday concerts since 1996 and artistic consultant to the Dallas Symphony for their annual *Christmas Celebration* concerts. His 1997 *The Hall Bedecked* is a joyous romp through some not so traditional settings of the familiar carol *Deck the Hall*, along with snatches of other popular Christmas songs that follow one another in a sort of free association.

Zoltán Kodály (1882-1967) grew up in rural Hungary, where he became acquainted with the rich tradition of Hungarian folk music which was to play such an important part in his musical life. While a student at the Hungarian Academy of Music he met Bela Bartók, who became a lifelong friend and collaborator. Kodály had written his doctoral thesis on the structure of Hungarian folksong, and he and Bartók began a serious effort to collect and archive Hungarian folksong.



Their first collection, published in 1906, was an unexpected scholarly success and helped validate the fledgling discipline of ethnomusicology. *Ésti Dal* is a setting of one such traditional folksong. The text, about a weary traveler in the woods imploring God to send an angel to watch over his rest, is reminiscent of the *Evening Prayer* in Humperdinck's *Hänsel und Gretel*, a perennial Christmas favorite. Kodály's unusual harmonization reflects his very eclectic musical palette.

Silent Night is probably the most beloved of all Christmas carols. It was written in 1818 by Joseph Mohr and Franz Gruber, assistant pastor and choir director, respectively, of the aptly named St. Nicholas Church in the little town of Oberndorf, high in the Austrian Alps. It is in the form of a *ländler*, a traditional Austrian country dance. Although the music was not published, the carol soon entered the repertoire of several touring folk groups. It achieved wide popularity throughout Europe as a traditional Tyrolean folk carol, much to the annoyance of Gruber, who never received proper credit during his lifetime. The familiar English setting was provided in 1859 by an Episcopal priest, John Freeman Young, who served not only as Bishop of Florida but also as an ecumenical envoy to the Russian Orthodox Church.

– Michael Moore

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