Trinity: Moran and Bruckner

This concert is dedicated to the memory of Duane Kight, a wonderful singer, colleague, and friend.

PROGRAM

Angele Dei .................................................. Robert Moran

world premiere

John French & Ryan Tibbets, conductors
Rachel Surden, glass harmonica

Mass No. 2 in E minor ....................................... Anton Bruckner

1. Kyrie
2. Gloria
3. Credo
4. Sanctus
5. Benedictus
6. Agnus Dei

Trinity Requiem ............................................. Robert Moran

premiere of the arrangement for full chorus and treble voices

1. Introit
2. Kyrie
3. Psalm 23
4. Offertory
5. Sanctus
6. Agnus Dei
7. Pie Jesu
8. In Paradisum

Alan Harler, conductor
Mendelssohn Club Chorus
Philadelphia Boys Choir
Jeffrey R. Smith, Music Director
Alexander Hermann, organ

The Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia

Sunday, October 21, 2012, 3:00 pm
Cathedral Basilica of Sts. Peter and Paul
Philadelphia

The commission for Robert Moran’s SATB arrangement of the Trinity Requiem was made possible through the Mendelssohn Club of Philadelphia Alan Harler New Ventures Fund and the Musical Fund Society of Philadelphia.

The use of recording or photographic equipment during this concert is strictly prohibited. Please turn off audible cell phones and alarms.
Composer Robert Moran’s music is familiar to Mendelssohn Club audiences. Alan Harler turned to Moran for the first commissioned piece of his tenure as Mendelssohn Club’s Artistic Director, and Moran’s critically acclaimed *Requiem: Chant du Cygne* was premiered in this venue in May, 1990. It was an auspicious pairing. *Requiem: Chant du Cygne* became firmly placed in the choral repertoire, with a number of subsequent performances, including one in which it was choreographed. Harler conducted Mendelssohn Club in a recording for the Argo label which was released as part of a compilation of Moran’s works entitled *Rocky Road to Kansas*. And Harler has parlayed this initial commission into a substantial program which has seen more than fifty new works commissioned and premiered over the past twenty-two years.

Robert Moran studied composition with Hans Erich Apostel, Luciano Berio and Darius Milhaud. He has served on the faculties of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music and Portland State University and has been composer-in-residence for the city of West Berlin and at Northwestern University and Buffalo’s Center for the Performing Arts. He has received commissions from numerous artists and ensembles including the Houston Grand Opera, the Minnesota Opera, soprano Renee Fleming and the Ruhrtrienniale International Arts Festival. He enjoyed a very successful collaboration with Philip Glass on the opera *The Juniper Tree*, and his extensive catalog includes performance art city-works, where he marshalled multiple ensembles and thousands of performers across entire cities, as well as ballets, opera, choral works, songs, orchestral music, and innovative multi-media works blending music, dance, theater, acoustics and lighting. Recent projects include *Buddha goes to Bayreuth*, a work for two choruses and two string orchestras premiered in October 2011 at the Ruhrtrienniale; *The Lottery*, a ballet based on a Shirley Jackson short story; *The Game of the Antichrist*, a medieval mystery play set for multiple ensembles, dancers and puppet theater; and *The World is Round*, a mini-opera with a text by Gertrude Stein commissioned by the Philadelphia Boys Choir, which will receive its premiere under the baton of Jeffrey Smith in 2013.

A recurrent theme in Moran’s music is the interplay of sound and the space that contains it. This forms the basis of *Angele Dei*, set for double chorus, orchestra and organ. The composer describes it as “a dream-like sound-scape, something that just floats by, few rhythmic pulsations, with two choruses and two conductors, somewhat like my 2010 *Buddha goes to Bayreuth* for two choruses and two string orchestras.” Like *Buddha goes to Bayreuth*, *Angele Dei* requires a reverberant performance space. The two choruses, orchestra and organ are spatially separated, and the music unfolds in blocks of sound from each of the individual choirs – brass, winds, cellos, harp, organ and the two choruses. The blocks of sound move in waves, overlapping, combining and re-combining with each other, forming ever-shifting chords of changing timbres and tonalities, hovering over the audience and moving about in space. The text is taken from the familiar children’s Prayer to One’s Guardian An-
Anton Bruckner (1824-1896) is one of the most enigmatic of composers – self-effacing and diffident in his personal and professional life, a compulsive student of music who continued studying and collecting diplomas until he was forty, an internationally renowned organ virtuoso with legendary improvisational skills, and the composer of some of the most complex and richly textured music ever written.

He was born in a small village in northern Austria near Linz, the son of a schoolmaster who also served as the church organist and who gave Bruckner his early musical training. Following the death of his father, the 13-year old Bruckner was enrolled in the choir school of the Augustinian monastery of St. Florian, where he studied voice, organ and violin. Despite his interest in music, Bruckner chose teaching as a career and eventually secured a position at St. Florian’s. While he was able to polish his organ skills and begin his first serious compositions, he began to chafe at the limited prospects at the monastery. Still, when a position as organist at the cathedral in Linz opened up in 1855, he was reluctant to apply and only auditioned at the insistence of friends.

While in Linz, Bruckner began private studies in harmony and counterpoint with Simon Sechter, then a professor at the Vienna Conservatory, carrying on most of the studies by correspondence. After six years, Sechter awarded him a certificate of completion of studies, but Bruckner petitioned the Conservatory to be allowed to stand for an examination, during which he displayed an encyclopedic knowledge of music and improvised a fugue at the organ. Hofkapellmeister and conductor Johann Herbeck, one of the examiners, remarked that Bruckner should have examined them instead. Not satisfied with his diploma from the Conservatory, Bruckner undertook a further two years of private study in orchestration. It was only in 1863, at the end of this long, self-imposed tutelage, that Bruckner deemed himself ready to compose in earnest and began numbering his compositions. One of the fruits of this new compositional assurance was the Mass in E minor.

The Mass No. 2 in E minor was commissioned in 1866 by the Archbishop of Linz for the dedication of the Votive Chapel of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. Bruckner completed the work in the space of two months, but the completion of the chapel was repeatedly delayed and the Mass was not premiered until September, 1869, with Bruckner conducting the performance. While the premiere was a great success, Bruckner could not resist tinkering with the Mass and produced a total of four revisions to “tighten up the structure.” Today’s performance uses the final version of 1886.
The Mass is set for chorus, winds and brass; there are no soloists and the orchestra lacks the usual strings, timpani and organ. There may have been a practical reason for this unusual combination of forces. The Mass was performed outdoors so the use of what is essentially a wind band would make sense. But it is also likely that Bruckner was trying to accommodate some of the precepts of the Cecilian movement, which attempted to reform liturgical music. The musical mass form had become increasingly dissociated from the underlying liturgy, and with an orchestra and soloists and mass parts divided into a series of arias, duets, trios, quartets and choruses, it seemed to the Cecilians more theater than worship. Their ideal was a mass set in the a cappella, polyphonic style of the Renaissance master Palestrina. Bruckner may have been accommodating in this instance, but his other two Linz masses were massive works set for full orchestra and soloists.

The influence of Palestrina is immediately apparent from the a cappella, polyphonic opening of the Kyrie, which Bruckner sets antiphonally for four-part women’s and men’s choirs. The Kyrie represents a sort of microcosm of the full work, composed of individual blocks of music, each with its own dynamic and character, and displaying an extreme range of dynamics from the quietest a cappella music to massive walls of sound. The openings of the Gloria and Credo are not set but rather are meant to be intoned, as in a liturgical mass. The music here is much more homophonic and is accompanied throughout, except for the beautiful “et incarnatus est” of the Credo. The sole fugue of the Mass is the “Amen” of the Gloria. Unusual in a fugue, the subject and countersubject have similar rhythms and contours, disguising the usual compositional legerdemain of juxtaposing the themes and developing them by presenting them upside down or backwards. Bruckner returns to Palestrina-like polyphony more explicitly in the Sanctus, where the thematic material is actually taken from the Sanctus of Palestrina’s Missa Brevis in F, the only example of a non-original theme in Bruckner’s music. Throughout the Mass, Bruckner displays a technical mastery of counterpoint and complex, eight-part vocal writing, an expansive and idiosyncratic harmonic freedom, and a wonderful lyricism which has made the Mass in E minor one of his most frequently performed choral works.

Robert Moran’s beautiful and deeply moving Trinity Requiem was commissioned and premiered by Robert Ridgell, thenOrganist and Director of Music Education at Trinity Wall Street Church, and the Trinity Youth Chorus as part of a 10th anniversary commemoration of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The historic Trinity Wall Street Church is located scant blocks from Ground Zero. Its St. Paul’s Chapel is directly across the street from the World Trade Center site and served as the center of an extraordinary volunteer effort to aid the victims of the 9/11 disaster. The Trinity Requiem has already become one of Moran’s most popular works, with a number of subsequent performances. It has been released on CD on the Innova label, with the Trinity Youth Choir and organist Alexander Hermann under the direction of Robert Ridgell. On Sept. 11, 2011, the recorded Trinity Requiem was broadcast over more than 450 radio stations across the United States.
Moran was originally a little reluctant to write a requiem for children’s voices, but began recalling anecdotes of children who had lost their loved ones in war or violence or natural disasters. Moran explains, “I remember so many past stories of children who had lost their parents, their families, in fact lost everything to wars, famine, vicious governments, natural catastrophes such as Katrina that this would have some meaning for the young singers (99% of the chorus at Trinity was born in the year 2000). . . . Trinity Requiem is a reflection upon those thousands of children throughout the world with no future and little if any hope.”

In creating a work of consolation and hope, Moran took the opportunity to reimagine the Requiem, selecting parts to set and parts to omit. He leaves out the Sequence, Offertory and Libera Me texts, with their graphic images of the Day of Judgment and the pains of Hell. Like Fauré, he includes the In Paradisum, a promise of eternal life which he considers the most important part of the Requiem, and he also adds the text of Psalm 23. The orchestration is spare, organ, four cellos and harp, and the vocal lines are set in unison or two-part harmony. It is a beautifully lyrical setting which conveys a sense of purity and innocence that makes the music all the more evocative and moving.

In creating a version of the Trinity Requiem for four-part adult chorus as well as treble chorus, Moran strove to maintain that same simplicity and innocence, avoiding thick textures and contrapuntal writing. The adult and treble choirs sing alternate movements throughout most of the work, only singing together in the final In Paradisum. Moran also takes advantage of the reverberant space and the opportunity to have ensembles spatially separated: the adult choir and orchestra are placed at the front of the church while the treble choirs sings from the loft with the organ.

The work opens with a brief introduction, a crashing organ chord which fades away, revealing the cellos underneath. A second chord fades to reveal the harp, which segues directly into the Introit. In the Introit, set for the adult chorus, the text moves freely between Latin and English. The treble choir is divided into two choirs with two conductors for the Kyrie. They each have similar material, but deliberately sing independently of each other, creating a floating sound in which pitches move in and out of synchrony. The central movement, the Offertory, is purely instrumental. The organ intones what everyone will recognize as the ground bass from Pachelbel’s Canon in D. In fact, it is hardly a unique harmonic progression; Moran reminds us that the first four notes are also the chimes in Wagner’s Parsifal. Here he uses the ground bass for his own very lyrical canon, set for the cellos. The Pie Jesu is used for processional music, sung by the treble choir as they move to the front of the church to join the rest of the ensemble for the In Paradisum, which brings the Trinity Requiem to its close.

– Michael Moore

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