Mendelssohn Club of Philadelphia  
Alan Harler, Artistic Director  
John French, Associate Conductor

The Sound of Spirit

honoring Ellie Elkinton for her eleven years of service  
as Chair of the Board of Directors

PROGRAM

Salve Regina ................................................................. Arvo Pärt

American premiere

Adam’s Lament ............................................................... Arvo Pärt

Intermission

Missa in Tempore Belli ................................................... Josef Haydn

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

Barbara Berry, soprano  
Roy Hage, tenor

Jennifer Beattie, alto  
Brandon Cedel, bass

Estonian Lullaby............................................................. Arvo Pärt

American premiere

Alan Harler, conductor

Mendelssohn Club Chorus  
Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia

Sunday, February 23, 2014  
4:00 pm  
Church of the Holy Trinity  
Rittenhouse Square

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

The Classical master Josef Haydn and the idiosyncratic minimalist Arvo Pärt may seem like a musical odd couple, but this afternoon’s pairing brings together two composers who share some fundamental characteristics. Both are men of a deep personal faith which is often reflected in their music. And both were unafraid to reference contemporary events in their music. Haydn’s title Missa in Tempore Belli (Mass in a Time of War) was his own, and refers to the Napoleonic wars, which were played out in large measure on Austrian soil. Pärt dedicated his 2008 Symphony No. 4 “Los Angeles” to Mikhail Khodorkovsky, the Russian oil magnate, philanthropist, and vocal critic of the Putin government, whose imprisonment was widely thought to be politically motivated, and his selection of the text for Adam’s Lament is his response to the ongoing tensions between Islamic and Christian worlds.

Estonian-born Arvo Pärt (b. 1935) reinvented his compositional style after making an early name for himself as an avant garde composer. His early compositions were fiercely atonal and serial, but he also experimented with aleatoric music, where he might indicate the range of pitches for a given voice but not specify discrete pitches, rhythms or durations, and collage music, in which he layered phrases of music from composers like Bach onto his own 12-tone music. The premiere of Pärt’s 1968 Credo, a choral collage piece, caused something of an uproar. The use of the liturgical text had not been approved by the Soviet composers’ union and the work was subsequently banned in the Soviet Union. He stopped receiving commissions and was forced to support himself by writing film scores. He retreated from composing for several years, devoting himself to an intensive study of Gregorian chant and medieval sacred music. He also became a convert to the Russian Orthodox Church.

Pärt’s musical style was considerably altered when he returned to serious composition in the mid-1970’s. He focused increasingly on choral music, much of it of a religious character and set either in Latin or in the Church Slavonic of the Orthodox liturgy. And he developed a technique that he calls tintinnabuli, little bells in Latin. Pärt uses the technique to define the relationship between two musical voices or lines, which typically come in and out of consonance with each other. His scores are often spare, with just a few voices, and tend to stay within the key which defines that triad. He explains, “I have discovered that it is enough when a single note is beautifully played. This one note, or a silent beat, or a moment of silence, comforts me. I work with very few elements – with one voice, with two voices. I build with the most primitive materials – with the triad, with one specific tonality. The three notes of a triad are like bells. And that is why I called it tintinnabulation.”

The Salve Regina is a medieval Marian hymn, best known today as the concluding prayer of the rosary and, in paraphrase, as a popular anthem, Hail Holy Queen. Pärt’s setting was composed in 2001 and set for choir and organ.
In 2011, he rescored the piece for choir, string orchestra and celeste. The accompaniment is spare – strings with gently arpeggiated chords like a sort of figured bass provide an unvarying ¾ tactus, with the other-worldly sound of the celeste softly laid over it. The chorus enters first in a quiet, chant-like unison and then in long, drawn out, shimmering chords which barely seem to move. The music slowly increases in intensity, suddenly becoming thicker and “more concentrated” (as Pärt puts it) at the words “turn your eyes of mercy towards us.” The final line of the text is set as a sort of coda, now in 4/4 meter, with each phrase – O clemens, O pia, O dulcis – softly repeated three times. Pärt may be honoring the tradition that the last line of the hymn was inspired by St. Bernard of Clairvaux, who was so moved on hearing the Salve chanted one Christmas Eve that he fell to his knees, improvising that threefold invocation which has been appended to the Salve Regina ever since.

Adam’s Lament, set for chorus and string orchestra, was a joint commission from the Istanbul and Tallin Capitals of Culture to celebrate a Lifetime Achievement Award from the International Istanbul Music Festival in 2010, where it received its premiere at the historic Hagia Eirene (Holy Peace) cathedral. Pärt was looking for a theme that would speak to both the Christian and Islamic worlds, and chose the story of Adam, the father of all mankind. For Pärt, Adam is not just an archetype for humanity, but represents all individuals as well. He explained, “For me, the name Adam is a collective term not merely for the whole of humanity, but for each individual, regardless of time, era, social class or religious affiliation. And this collective Adam has suffered and lamented on this earth for millennia. Our ancestor Adam foresaw the human tragedy that was to come and experienced it as his own guilty responsibility, the result of his sinful act. He suffered all the cataclysms of humanity into the depths of desperation, inconsolable in his agony.” And for a text, he returned to the writings of the remarkable St. Silouan.

St. Silouan (1866-1938) entered the Russian Orthodox Monastery of St. Panteleimon on Mt. Athos in Greece at the age of 27, after completing military service. He initially struggled with his vocation but eventually embraced a life of simplicity and asceticism. He developed a reputation for great humility, compassion and wisdom, and pilgrims flocked to the monastery for his spiritual guidance. His sermons and discourses were collected by a disciple and fellow monk, edited and published, which gained him a wide following among people of diverse religious faiths. Although he was not well-educated, there is a poetic beauty to his writing which can be quite compelling. Silouan was canonized in 1987.

The music of Adam’s Lament is highly expressive, but largely dark and anguished, conveying the deep despair of Adam as reflected in Silouan’s text, with the repeated refrain that he has become estranged from God’s love. The score is much more complex than one might have expected. While the orchestration, set only for strings, is characteristically lean, there are sections
with a thickly textured, divisi chorus, which lend the music an air of gravity and import. The music modulates through a number of keys, and makes extensive use of the Phrygian mode, the early chant mode that is most closely related to a minor key and very fitting for Adam’s long and plaintive lament. Pärt meticulously uses effects like dissonance and polytonality (music set simultaneously in more than one key) to enhance the text. When Adam laments that he will be the father of peoples who live in enmity and seek to slay each other, the orchestra is at its most strident and dissonant, and the choral parts move through a progression of polytonal chords, a very graphic representation of the violence and divisions among men. In the last lines of the piece, Silouan breaks off the narrative and adds his own voice to Adam’s impassioned plea for mercy. The prayer ends quietly, with another polytonal chord gradually resolving to a consonant one, but with the tonal ambiguity of an open fifth. It leaves the listener with the very human feeling of both hopefulness and uncertainty.

Josef Haydn (1732-1809) is a paradoxical figure for us, a truly innovative composer who was content to remain in the employ of four different Prince Esterházys for 48 years. It was Haydn who developed the modern symphony and invented the string quartet. When the impresario Johann Peter Salomon attempted to recruit both Haydn and Mozart to London in 1790, it was the sixty-year-old Haydn who accepted the offer and went on to compose some of his greatest works during his six years in London. It was the seventy-year-old Haydn who revived an art form dormant since the days of Handel, the oratorio, and created one of the most stunningly original works in The Creation. And it was Haydn more than anyone else who developed the concert mass as a musical form.

Haydn’s musical career began as a boy soprano at the Cathedral of St. Stephen in Vienna. He took the opportunity to learn violin and keyboard as well as singing, and was kept on as an instrumentalist after his voice changed. His love of practical jokes proved his undoing, and he found himself at 17 on the streets of Vienna with no job, no lodging and no prospects. He barely supported himself by giving lessons, playing organ at one church and singing as tenor soloist at another and performing with the many impromptu musical ensembles which were a feature of musical life in Vienna. His musicianship progressed well enough that he made important contacts which furthered his career: imperial court poet Pietro Metastasio, who engaged him as a clavier teacher; opera composer Nicolo Porpora, who tutored him in music theory; and the Dowager Princess Esterházy, who persuaded her son to hire Haydn as Kapellmeister.

Prince Nicolas I Esterházy was imperious, as anyone who styled himself “Il Magnifico” might be expected to be, but he respected Haydn and fully appreciated Haydn’s musical genius. He entertained lavishly and lost no opportunity to showcase his increasingly famous Kapellmeister, arranging elaborate musical evenings and even building an amphitheater where Haydn
presented operas. The prince gave Haydn the opportunity to accept outside commissions and to publish, and there arose such an insatiable demand for his music that pirated editions abounded and unscrupulous publishers also affixed his name to music by his brother, his pupils, and even random composers.

The Missa in Tempore Belli was the first of six masses written for the name day celebrations of the wife of Prince Nicolas II, Haydn’s fourth and last Esterházy. It was composed in 1796, during that expansive compositional period that also saw his late symphonies and The Creation, and it is indeed symphonic in concept and scale. It was also the first Mass he had written in fourteen years. As Mass settings had become increasingly elaborate, the musical form had become disconnected from the underlying liturgy. There had been a number of attempts to scale back the musical Mass, but when Emperor Joseph II put strict limitations on the use of instruments in a Mass in the early 1780s, Haydn’s response was to stop writing Masses. Haydn was clearly interested in something more than merely setting the text of the Mass.

The Kyrie opens with a slow, stately introduction, much like a Classical symphony, before moving on to the main thematic material. The opening also marks the first appearance of the timpani which give the Mass its sub-title Paukenmesse (Kettle-drum Mass). The timpani reappear throughout the Mass, especially in unexpected places like the Sanctus and Agnus Dei, like the sound of distant cannons.

It would have been fashionable at the time to divide long sections like the Gloria and Credo into a series of arias, duets, trios, quartets and choruses, but Haydn preserves their essential unity. Music for the soloists and chorus are interwoven here and throughout the Mass, an effect he also used to great advantage in The Creation, which he was writing at the same time. The music does change character according to the sense of the text, generally moving from allegro to adagio to allegro like miniature Italian symphonies. The adagio of the Gloria features an unusually lyrical bass solo and an equally lyrical cello obligato. Haydn foregoes the customary “Cum Sancto Spiritu” fugue, instead closing the movement with a brilliant and elaborate “Amen.”

Haydn’s treatment of the Credo is equally unusual. After the opening phrase, each overlapping voice part enters with a different line of text. This may have been a device to shorten the Mass, but it also quickly dispenses with the more didactic parts of the text, and allows Haydn the opportunity to lavish more attention and musical color on the more dramatic parts relating to Christ’s incarnation, death and resurrection. The “Et vitam venturi” text was another traditional place for a fugue. Haydn starts the fugue but breaks off after the first subject and ends the Credo, like the Gloria, with a magnificent “Amen” stretto.

The war intrudes more insistently in the last three sections. The rather stately opening of the Sanctus is interrupted by the timpani and an ominous forte like a trumpet call on the text “pleni sunt coeli.” A rather subdued Benedictus is the one section set mainly for the solo quartet. The chorus joins the soloists at the end with the Osanna, unexpectedly set to a different melody than the
same text in the *Sanctus*. The sense of foreboding continues into the *Agnus Dei*, with the “*miserere nobis,*” punctuated by the timpani, again sounding ominously underneath, the plea for mercy heartfelt. The music brightens with trumpet fanfares, ending with a joyful, dance-like “*dona nobis pacem.*” The war is over, peace returns, and the people rejoice.

France had been at war with Austria almost continuously since the French Revolution in 1792. Haydn composed the *Missa in Tempore Belli* in 1796 while Austria was mobilizing its troops again after an ineffectual peace accord. If the upbeat ending reflects Haydn’s faith in the Austrian army, it was sadly misplaced, and Haydn would not live to see the end of the war. The Austrians endured a series of resounding defeats by the French, and Napoleon’s armies occupied Vienna twice. Ironically, the French revered Haydn and set an honor guard around his house to make sure he was not disturbed.

Pärt composed the *Estonian Lullaby* and a companion *Christmas Lullaby* in 2002. They were originally set for two solo women’s voices but later were arranged for women’s choir and strings. Pärt writes, “Lullabies are like little pieces of lost Paradise – a small consolation combined with the feeling of profundity and intimacy. I wrote these two lullabies for adults and for the child within every one of us.”

– Michael Moore