

Program Notes

Exsultate justi

Lodovico Grossi da Viadana was a Franciscan monk who held music positions in Mantua, Rome, Cremona, Concordia, Fano, and Venice. His music bridges the gap between the Renaissance and Baroque styles, as he was one of the first composers to use the basso continuo that became prevalent in the Baroque era. The motet “Exsultate justi” was part of a set of 100 pieces finished in 1602 and published in 1609. The text is *Psalm 33:1-3*. The homophonic opening is contrasted by the polyphonic central section of the piece. The motet concludes with a return to the homophonic opening section.

Agimus tibi gratias

A prolific Franco-Flemish composer of the Renaissance era, Cipriano de Rore was active mainly in Italy. It has long been claimed that he was a singer at St. Mark’s Basilica in Venice and a pupil of its *maestro di cappella* (choirmaster) Adrian Willaert, although there is no documentation to support this claim. He was, however, clearly connected with Willaert and his associates throughout his career, and he briefly succeeded Willaert at St. Mark’s from 1563-1564. Rore composed 107 madrigals, 53 motets, and a small number of masses. “Agimus tibi gratias” is a motet for five voices. The work is predominantly polyphonic and, as is typical of Renaissance sacred music, duple meter is interrupted by a shift to triple meter as a nod to the Trinity.

Cantate Domino

“Cantate Domino,” or “Sing to the Lord a new song,” is a text of praise that has been set by composers throughout the centuries. The two settings that we will perform are separated by 100 years.

Claudio Monteverdi was a Baroque composer who is credited with the development of opera. Much of his writing was secular, but he composed a great deal of sacred music when he assumed the position of *maestro di cappella* of St. Mark’s Basilica in Venice in 1613. Monteverdi’s setting of “Cantate Domino” is for six voices. It begins in triple meter with a homophonic statement by the upper four voices, which are then joined by the lower two voices for a similar statement. A switch to duple meter begins a polyphonic section, and Monteverdi alternates three voices in a call-response format. The work continues to build in intensity with canonic entrances, and a gradual lengthening of note values and a descending melodic line brings the work to a close.

Giuseppe Ottavio Pitoni was one of the leading composers in Rome during the latter part of the Baroque era. In addition to a lifelong appointment as *maestro di cappella* for St. Mark’s Basilica in Rome, he also succeeded Domenico Scarlatti as choirmaster for the Cappella Giulia at St. Peter’s Basilica. His astounding compositional output includes more than 3500 works. Pitoni’s setting of “Cantate Domino” begins with a homophonic statement of the title phrase that is rhythmically identical to Monteverdi’s. The similarities end there, however, as Pitoni remains in triple meter throughout and uses very little polyphony.

Regina Coeli

The compositions of Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina are said to represent the culmination of Renaissance polyphony. Prior to Palestrina, much of the music in Italy came from the Franco-Flemish composers of Northern Europe. He was one of the first native Italians to gain widespread notoriety as a composer of polyphonic works. He held a number of church positions, most notably *maestro di cappella* of Cappella Giulia at St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. His compositions number in the hundreds, including more than 300 motets. His motet “Regina Coeli” for four voices is a polyphonic piece that features voice pairings, points of imitation, and moving lines that rise and fall throughout the work.

Kyrie from *Missa Brevis in F*

Although best known as the uncle of the more famous composer Giovanni Gabrieli, Andrea Gabrieli was a notable composer in his own right. His early compositions show the influence of Cipriano de Rore and are marked by the imitative polyphony so popular at the time. After his appointment as *maestro di cappella* of St. Mark's Basilica in Venice, Gabrieli began to explore the sonorities that were capable in such a grand space. He became a pioneer of the Venetian polychoral style of writing, which influenced countries throughout Europe. The Kyrie from *Missa Brevis in F* is in Gabrieli's earlier polyphonic style. Set for four voices, it includes imitative polyphony that changes with each new statement of text, separated by distinct cadences.

Jubilate Deo á 8

Giovanni Gabrieli succeeded his uncle as principal organist and composer at St. Mark's Basilica in Venice from 1584 until his death in 1612. Like his uncle, his choral music took particular advantage of the unique design of the church, and he further refined the Venetian polychoral style. Writing for multiple choirs, Gabrieli placed groups of singers and instruments in each of the choir lofts on either side of the sanctuary. The acoustics of the Basilica are such that, despite the distance between the performers, all the parts can be heard with perfect clarity. "Jubilate Deo á 8" was written for one choir in eight parts (SSAATTBB). Each phrase of text is treated with a different polyphonic gesture, and Gabrieli unifies the work by returning to the melodic material of "Jubilate Deo" multiple times.

O salutaris hostia

Although known primarily as a composer of operas, Gioachino Rossini also wrote a number of sacred works. "O salutaris hostia" is a motet for four voices published in Paris in 1857. Its chromaticism and sudden dynamic changes bear little resemblance to the Renaissance motets that have appeared thus far on the program. Rossini was a composer of the Romantic era, and the dramatic effects he achieves so beautifully in his operas are evident in this moving motet as well.

Ave Maria from *Quattro pezzi Sacri*

Verdi is considered one of the world's greatest composers. He wrote more than 25 operas, and many of these operas are still among the most frequently performed productions around the world, including *Rigoletto*, *La Traviata*, *Il Trovatore*, *Aida* and *Nabucco*. He also wrote a monumental *Requiem* as well as music in other genres. *Quattro pezzi Sacri* (Four Sacred Pieces) was a collection of four choral pieces written by Verdi, with "Ave Maria" being placed first. "Ave Maria" is written on an enigmatic scale published in the late 1800s by Adolfo Crescentini in the *Gazzetta Musicale di Milano*. It was issued as a challenge to composers who enjoyed the study of harmony and, in some senses, as a dare to see if composers could provide harmonic accompaniment to a scale that really did not have many of the characteristics of a typical scale. In this setting, Verdi "solves" the puzzle, providing four solutions by using a different harmonic accompaniment each time the enigmatic scale is sung. The piece begins and ends in C major, with each voice singing the scale up and down: first the basses, then the altos, tenors and sopranos.

Viva! from *Il re pastore*

This chorus provides the finale for Mozart's opera, *Il re pastore* (*The Shepherd King*), composed when he was 19 years old for the Archbishop of Salzburg. Mozart's finale reflects the joyful resolution of star-crossed lovers and mistaken identities. Although composed for an Austrian Archbishop, the work was in Italian because it was an *opera seria*, the noble and "serious" style of Italian opera. The popular rival to *opera seria* was *opera buffa*, the 'comic' opera that took its

cue from the improvisatory *commedia dell'arte*, and was performed in the language of the people. Italian opera seria (invariably set to Italian libretti) was produced not only in Italy but also in Spain, Habsburg Austria, England, Saxony, German states, and other countries.

I gondolieri

After completing his opera, *William Tell*, in 1829, Rossini stopped composing operas. It is not known why he ceased opera composition, but he had achieved fame and riches at a relatively early age, 37, and lived to be 76. From that point on he composed primarily for his own pleasure, producing some sacred works, chamber music and songs, including "I gondolieri."

Humming Chorus from *Madama Butterfly*

Giacomo Puccini has been called the greatest composer of Italian composer after Verdi. His operas *La Boheme*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Turandot*, and *Tosca* are standard repertoire for major opera houses worldwide. Unusual for an opera, the "Humming Chorus" is a vocalise (song without words) that provides the backdrop for Madame Butterfly as she awaits the return of her husband, Captain Pinkerton. She has spied his ship in the harbor, and although US Consul Sharpless has hinted to her that her husband may not return, she realizes that she would rather die than lose his love.

Duet for Two Cats

A humorous duet for two voices, the piece is attributed to Rossini. It was actually written by "G. Berthold," a pseudonym, and was based on Rossini's *Otello*. Although written in feline language, we're sure audience members will be able to translate it for themselves.

That's Amore

Released in 1953 on the soundtrack of the movie, *The Caddy*, "That's Amore" was introduced by Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis. It was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Original Song but lost to "Secret Love" from *Calamity Jane* starring Doris Day.

Nel blu dipinto di blu (Volare)

Released on February 1, 1958, the first recording of "Volare" was named Billboard's number 1 single for 1958. In the first annual Grammy Awards in 1958 it took both Record of the Year and Song of the Year.

Santa Lucia

A traditional Neapolitan folk song, "Santa Lucia" was translated into Italian in 1849 and published as a "barcarolla." The original lyrics of "Santa Lucia" celebrate the picturesque waterfront district, Borgo Santa Lucia, in the Bay of Naples, in the invitation of a boatman to take a turn in his boat, to better enjoy the cool of the evening.

O sole mio

Written in 1898, "O sole mio" is an internationally-known Neapolitan song. Its lyrics were written by Giovanni Capurro and the music was composed by Eduardo di Capua and Alfredo Mazzucchi. "O sole mio" is the Neapolitan equivalent of standard Italian "Il mio sole" and translates literally as "my sunshine."

Funiculi, funicula

"Funiculi, funicula" is a famous Neapolitan song composed in 1880 by Luigi Denza to lyrics by Peppino Turco. It was written to commemorate the opening of the first funicular cable car on Mount Vesuvius. It was presented by Turco and Denza at the Piedigrotta festival the same year. The sheet music was published by Ricordi and sold over a million copies within a year.

Nessun dorma from "Turandot"

Popularized by Pavarotti, this aria is instantly recognizable from its opening phrase. The tenor, Calaf, has won the hand of Princess Turandot by answering three riddles. She does not want to marry him so he tells her that she will be released from the marriage if she can find out what his name is before dawn. She has decreed that none shall sleep until his name is discovered.

Va, pensiero from *Nabucco*

Known as the Chorus of the Hebrew Slaves, this well-known opera chorus recollects the slaves' Babylonian captivity after the loss of the First Temple in c.587 BCE. The opera follows the plight of the Jews as they are assaulted, conquered, and exiled under King Nebuchadnezzar II, the Babylonian king. "Va, pensiero" was immensely popular with the Italian people. When Verdi died, he was initially buried in a private ceremony at Milan's Cimitero Monumentale. A month later, his body was moved to the crypt of the Casa di Riposo. On this occasion, "Va, pensiero" was conducted by Arturo Toscanini with a chorus of 820 singers. A huge crowd was in attendance, estimated at 300,000.

Anvil Chorus from *Il trovatore*

This rousing opera chorus depicts Spanish gypsies striking their anvils at dawn and singing the praises of hard work, good wine, and Gypsy women. They live a life of freedom in the mountains, in contrast to those who serve a ruler in the cities and fields.

Brindisi from *La Traviata*

A *brindisi* is often used in opera. Typically, in an operatic *brindisi*, one character introduces a toast with a solo melody and the full ensemble later joins in the refrain. In *La Traviata* the *brindisi*, "Libiamo ne' liete calici" ("Let's drink from the joyful cups"), is sung in the first act by the tenor Alfredo, the soprano Violetta, and the ensemble. It is a fan favorite and is performed by singers from the Three Tenors to Andrea Bocelli.