INTO THE NIGHT
Contemporary Choral Music
Whitacre • Paulus • Childs • Pärt • Tavener
Betinis • Lauridsen • Ticheli
Vox Humana • David N. Childs
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Whitacre’s dramatic setting of twentieth-century Spanish poet Federico García Lorca’s poem With a Lily in Your Hand (Con un lirio en la mano te dejo, translated by Jerome Rothenberg) is somewhat uncharacteristic of the composer’s later compositional style. Often known for slower-tempo works that employ lush, atmospheric, and often-complex tonalities, this early composition of Whitacre’s, while still very affecting, has a more agile, playful, lyrical and more melodic quality to it than other works in his oeuvre. The opening line immediately grabs the listener’s attention before promptly shifting to an accompaniment figure that employs an array of alternating or mixed meters and syncopated Spanish rhythms. Although the poem (most likely written in 1921) is colored or mixed meters and syncopated Spanish rhythms.

The true beauty of this work is found in its simplicity. Predominantly a work featuring melodic contours, the flowing lines ‘draw in’ the listener just as one is drawn in to the words of Longfellow.

The day is done, and the darkness Falls from the wings of night. As a feather is wafted downward From an eagle in his flight. I see the lights of the village Gleam through the rain and the mist, And a feeling of sadness comes o’er me That my soul cannot resist:

That is not akin to pain, And resembles sorrow only As the mist resembles the rain.

Come, read to me some poem, Some simple and heartfelt lay, That shall soothe this restless feeling, And banish the thoughts of day.

Read from some humbler poet, Whose song is gilded by his heart, As showers from the clouds of summer, Or tears from the eyelids start;

Then read from the treasured volume The poem of thy choice, And lend to the rhyme of the poet The beauty of thy voice.

And the night shall be filled with music And the cares, that infest the day, Shall be banished like restless feelings And silently steal away.

(Edited from John Henry Newman 1801–1890)

Whitacre’s larger work Paradise Lost: Shadows and Wings. The composer has a dramatic flair for text painting, a creative and rich treatment of harmony, and electrifying ministration of melody, all of which are found in Nox Aurumque. Also characteristic of the work is the repeating opening section “Aurum” (gold) theme, which returns in the middle of the piece at the interval of a perfect fourth higher, and again in conclusion of the work, at the opening pitch level.

And an angel dreams of dawning, and of war. She weeps tears of the golden times Tears of the cost of war.

O shield!

O gilded blade!
You are too heavy to carry
Too heavy for flight.
Gold, tarnished and weary,
Awaken!
Melt from weapon into wing!
Let us soar again,
High above this wall;
Angels reborn and rejoicing
With wings made
Of dawn,
Of gold,
Of dream.
Gold,
Singing of wings,
Singing of shadows...

(Charles Anthony Silvestri, b. 1965 – Used by permission)

Dylan Thomas became acutely aware of his mortality after contracting an illness in his teenage years, and being told by the attending physician he probably had only four years to live. His angst and foreboding is palpable in his poem: “Do not go gentle into that good night. / Old age should burn and rave at close of day…” Childs plays upon this theme with unsettling, shifting harmonic platforms throughout the piece. In an attempt to convince his dying father to fight against death, Thomas cites examples to support his argument: “You are too heavy to carry / Too heavy for flight.”

Gold, tarnished and weary, / Awaken! / Melt from weapon into wing! / Let us soar again, / High above this wall; / Angels reborn and rejoicing / With wings made / Of dawn, / Of gold, / Of dream.

Gold,
Singing of wings,
Singing of shadows...

(From the Psalms)

In William Blake’s poem To the Evening Star the poet addresses themes of innocence and experience, subject to the inevitable moment of resignation – being taken by the night – brings the piece to a quiet, placatory close; “…dying of the light.” The only other work utilizing organ accompaniment is John Tavener’s You mantle yourself in Light, an anthem from his larger work The Veil of the Temple, a seven-hour All Night Vigil. Similar to Pärt’s treatment of his Littlemore Tractus, Tavener uses the organ in a very minimal style, employing pedal point throughout much of the work. Only at the climactic “young lions roaring for their prey; seeking food from God,” does the organ demonstrate more melodic interest, doubling the chorus in the most dramatic and ecstatic climax of the work.

You mantle yourself in light,
stretch out the skies as a curtain;
the clouds your chariot,
you tread the ways of the wind,
making winds your messengers,
flaming fire your servant,
on a firm base establishing the earth,
which forever will not be moved:
the deeps enrob’d it;
the waters stood above the mountains.
At your rebuke they flee,
at the voice of your thunder they rush away.
Mountains rose, valleys sank down
to the place you established for them.
You filled the bounds they may not pass,
not return to cover the earth.
You made the moon for its seasons,
the sun knows the hour of its setting.
You made darkness, and it is light
in which beasts of the field prowl forth,
young lions roaring for their prey;
seeking food from God.

Thou fair-hair’d angel of the evening,
Now, whilst the sun rests on the mountains,
Thy bright torch of love: thy radiant crown
Put on, and smile upon our evening bed!
Smile on our loves, and while thou drawest the
Blue curtains of the sky, scatter thy silver dew
On every flower that shuts its sweet eyes
In timely sleep. Let thy west wind sleep on
The lake; speak silence with thy glimmering eyes,
And wash the dusk with silver. Soon, full soon,
Dost thou withdraw; then the wolf rages wide,
And then the lion glares through the dun forest:
The fleece of our flocks are cover’d with
Thy sacred dew: protect them with thine influence!

(William Blake 1757–1827)

Morten Lauridsen’s lush and poignant setting of James Agee’s Sure On This Shining Night text from the Tennessee-born poet’s only published volume of poetry, Permit Me Voyage (1943), is perhaps one of his most recognised choral works, and arguably the most celebrated arrangement ever, second perhaps, only to Samuel Barber. From the outset Lauridsen relishes rubato in his hauntingly beautiful melodic contours: “Sure on this shining night of star-made shadows round, kindness must watch for me this side the ground, on this shining night.” The melodic lines are captivating, none more so than the tenor and bass “The late year lies down the north, / All is healed, all is health. / High summer holds the earth.” The piano accompaniment, rather facile upon first glance, enhances and embellishes the flowing, mellifluous and captivating lines, a facet that is rather typical of the composer’s writing. The dynamic contrasts found in Lauridsen’s setting are bold and stirring, ranging from the very loud fortissimo to the sotto voce and almost inaudible ppp at the final whispered “Sure on this shining night.”

Ticheli’s setting of another Teasdale poem, There Will Be Rest, is almost as dramatic as Lauridsen’s setting of Agee’s poem. Composed for his friends Carl and Susan St.Clair following the drowning of their toddler son Cole St.Clair, Ticheli captures the element of hope that is present in Teasdale’s words so beautifully, whilst employing such a rich melodic and harmonic texture, that one is left emotionally drained at the conclusion of the piece. That being said, one is also left with a sense of eternal hope. Despite all the tragedies in life, there is eternal promise and assurance that we will all find our “crystal of peace.”

There will be rest, and sure stars shining
Over the roof-tops crowned with snow
A reign of rest, serene forgetting.
The music of stillness, holy and low.
I will make this world of my devising
Out of a dream in my lonely mind,
I shall find the crystal of peace; and above me
Stars I shall find.

(Sara Teasdale 1884–1933)

David N. Childs
Vox Humana

Vox Humana is a twenty-four voice chamber choir that seeks to draw people from all corners of the world into the embrace of the musical arts through superior choral performances and recordings, by exploring avenues of music innovation, and by engaging new and diverse audiences in extraordinary musical and educational experiences. The ensemble draws together musicians representing the finest vocal talent in the United States to present performances of the highest professional quality. In doing so, Vox Humana seeks to preserve choral masterpieces, encourage new composition, foster the advancement of the choral art, and nurture the development of musical interest and talent. The organization was founded in 2010 by New Zealand-born Artistic Director and President, David N. Childs.

Sopranos: Rachel Carlson, Lesley Childs, Julie Kay Johnson, Gitanjali Mathur, Meredith Ruduski, Mary Scheib  
Altos: Katrina Burgraff-Kledas, Dianna Grabowski, Cecilia Kittley, Liz Knight, Keely Rhodes, Jennifer Whately  
Tenors: Michael Boswell, Brandon Brack, Paul D'Arcy, Paul Hondorp, Jeff Manns, Gene Olvera  
Basses: Jason Aebrey, Cameron Beauchamp, Steve Olvares, Shreyas Patel, Michael Peters, Paul Tipton, Gil Zilkha

Kara Kirkendoll Welch

Kara Kirkendoll Welch is a flutist in the Dallas Symphony and Adjunct Assistant Professor of Flute at Southern Methodist University. She has played Guest Principal Flute in the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra and has also played as a soloist with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra. She earned her Bachelor of Music in Flute Performance from the University of Cincinnati, College-Conservatory of Music and her Master of Music from Southern Methodist University. Her first recording, Ballade, has been critically acclaimed in Fanfare magazine, American Record Guide, and BBC Music magazine.

Bradley Hunter Welch

Bradley Hunter Welch is in demand as a recitalist, concerto soloist, and collaborative artist. A native of Knoxville, TN, he holds the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Organ Performance from Yale University. He is the 2003 First Place winner of the Dallas International Organ Competition and was also awarded the Audience Prize for the second time, having previously won it in 2000. He currently serves as Director of Music & Arts/Organist at Highland Park United Methodist Church in Dallas, TX, and he performs approximately twenty concerts annually under the exclusive artistic management of Phillip Truckenbrod Concert Artists, Hartford, CT. His first recording was the first solo organ recording on the 1996 Casavant at Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, TX.
INTO THE NIGHT

5. WHITACRE: Nox Aurumque (2009) 6:34
6. CHILDS: Do Not Go Gentle (2011) (World Première Recording) 5:16

Vox Humana • David N. Childs

Kara Kirkendoll Welch, Flute¹ • Bradley Hunter Welch, Piano² / Organ³

Recorded at Highland Park United Methodist Church, Dallas, Texas, USA, from 3rd to 5th October 2011
Available sung texts are included and can also be accessed at: www.naxos.com/libretti/572511.htm

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