

Program Notes

*Prais'd be the Fathomless Universe**

*Walt Whitman *Leaves of Grass*

Whitmania

Saturday, March 1, 2008 at 8:00 p.m.

Sunday, March 2, 2008 at 3:00 p.m.

*Church of the Redeemer
36 South Street, Morristown*

Dona Nobis Pacem Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)
I. Agnus Dei
II. Beat! beat! drums!
III. Reconciliation
IV. Dirge For Two Veterans
V. The Angel of Death
VI. Nation Shall Not Lift Up a Sword
Leslie Adler, soprano; Mark Hewitt, baritone; John Lamb, bass

INTERMISSION

Carols of Death William Schuman (1910-1992)
1. The Last Invocation
2. The Unknown Region
3. To All, To Each
The Chamber Singers

Song of the Open Road Mark Andrew Miller (b. 1967)
World Premiere
Soloists (in order of appearance): Peter James Livesey, Rachel Clark, Laura Kosmich, Matthew Shurts, Emily Wolper, Beth Lohner, Ben Schroeder, David Green. Additional ensemble singers: Linda Clark, Linda Eriksen

Violin I: Ruth Zumstein
Violin II: Nathan Thomas
Viola: Linda Blanche
Cello: Anita Hil
Bass: Jim Buchanan
Flute: Kris Lamb
Oboe: Oscar Petty
Clarinet: Dorothy Duncan
Horn: Ann Mendoker
Trumpet: Charles Bumcrot
Harp: Merynda Adams
Timpani/percussion: Jim Thoma
Additional percussion: Joe Keefe, Diane Pivarnik
Piano: Mark Miller
Organ: Chris Hatcher, Mark Miller (Vaughan Williams)

Three years ago, when Mark Miller, our great friend and Composer-in-Residence, told us he wanted to write a work of length and substance (orchestra) on the words of Walt Whitman, we began preparing for this day. It seemed so appropriate to pair the work with Vaughan Williams' moving *Dona Nobis Pacem* and use a chamber orchestra that would work with both works. Amazingly enough, in the fall of 2007 a choral singer in San Francisco had the idea to create a website www.songofpeace.org on which choirs from around the world could join in raising their voices for world peace in the month of March 2008. Endorsed by Alice Parker, Sir David Willcocks and many others, we decided to add our voices to the project, which is described thus:

Music is a powerful force. It can inspire, fill with joy and awe, and move hearts. Music can also warn and plead, and it can lament. Music – and indeed all art – that aspires to something greater than mere beauty has always made a great impression, and can be a voice of warning or commemoration in society. **In March 2008, we are seeking to create an international musical appeal for peace, using words that have been sung for centuries: *Dona Nobis Pacem* - Grant Us Peace, or a call for peace in another language.**

As of this writing, the website shows choirs in seventeen different states and six other countries participating in the project. Since this is the beginning of the month, there is still lots of time for other choruses to add their voices.

Ralph Vaughan Williams: *Dona Nobis Pacem* (notes by Michael Moore)

When Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) was asked by the Huddersfield Choral Society to write a piece in celebration of their centennial in 1937, he produced an eloquent plea for peace in *Dona Nobis Pacem*. The prospect of renewed war in Europe was all too real with the rise of Nazism and Fascism, with civil war in Spain and the Italian invasion of Ethiopia, and was of immense concern to those like Vaughan Williams who had personally experienced the carnage and destruction of World War I. Like many others, Vaughan Williams had been caught up in patriotic fervor and enlisted in 1914, even though he was already forty-two. He served as an ambulance driver with the medical corps and later as an artillery officer. The war was a profound disillusionment to those who had thought to find something noble or heroic in personal combat, for they experienced instead the widespread use of technology whose sole purpose was mass killing: poison gas, aerial bombardment, automatic weapons. The toll in lives was staggering, with an estimated eight and a half million people killed, but the toll in human spirit was far greater.

In selecting text for *Dona Nobis Pacem*, Vaughan Williams turned to the poetry of Walt Whitman as well as to the scriptures. Vaughan Williams always felt a great affinity for Whitman. He set Whitman in his first major work, *A Sea Symphony* (1911) and continued to return to his poetry throughout his career. Whitman had lived through the Civil War, which rivaled the First World War in ferocity and carnage. Whitman had volunteered in the military hospitals outside Washington, serving not only as an unofficial nurse but also as a sort of morale officer, visiting with the injured men and writing letters for them. The

experience was profoundly moving for Whitman and found its way into much of his poetry.

Dona Nobis Pacem is nominally divided into six sections, but the music proceeds without pause. Part I opens with the “Agnus Dei” (“Lamb of God”) text from the Latin mass, sung first by the soprano solo. The music becomes increasingly anguished as the full orchestra and chorus enter, repeatedly crying out “dona, dona nobis pacem” (“grant, grant us peace.”) The chorus fades away leaving the soprano solo to continue repeating “dona nobis pacem” a cappella. As her last note dies away, you can begin to hear the drum beats which begin the next section.

The drum beats and trumpet calls swell as Part II opens, a setting of Whitman's poem “Beat! beat! drums!” The choral writing is economical, mostly parallel fourths, reinforcing the martial character of movement. The relentless pounding of the drums and the trumpet fanfares increase in intensity at each reiteration of the “Beat! beat! drums!” text, a wonderfully graphic image of the irresistible, inexorable force of war as it overwhelms all aspects of everyday life. In spirit this movement seems very close to the portrait of Mars, the Bringer of War from *The Planets*, by Vaughan Williams' close friend Gustav Holst. It may seem odd to think of *The Planets* in the context of anti-war music, for Holst clearly had no intent in that direction, but when it was first performed in 1919 most listeners believed that there was a direct allusion to the recent events of World War I. Vaughan Williams clearly understood how that effect was produced.

As Holst had done in *The Planets*, Vaughan Williams provides an immediate contrast with Part III, which opens with a beautiful, peaceful melody featuring a solo violin obligato. The text is Whitman's wonderful poem of consolation, “Reconciliation,” sung first by the baritone solo and then by the chorus. The return of the “dona nobis” music for the soprano solo provides a segue into Part IV.

Vaughan Williams returned to a setting of Whitman's “Dirge for Two Veterans” that he had originally written between 1911 and 1914. The poem is one of Whitman's most poignant and contains some of his most vivid imagery. It is also full of subtle, unsettling contrasts, right from the opening lines:

The last sunbeam
Lightly falls from the finished Sabbath,
On the pavement here, and there beyond it is looking
Down a new-made double grave.

The movement opens with a funeral march, the steady beat of the drums echoing the second movement. Vaughan Williams' music matches both Whitman's graphic imagery and sense of contrast. When he describes the son and father, falling simultaneously in the same battle, he has the outside voices softly echo the inside voices, a chillingly effective technique. The music swells to a heroic march, but is followed immediately by the spectral image of a grieving mother bearing silent witness to the proceedings, and suddenly the heroic music rings a little hollow. Although the music was largely written before the war began, it eerily reflects Vaughan Williams' own experience in the war.

The next section opens with a baritone recitative of an excerpt from a speech made by John Bright, a member of the House of Commons, during the debate on the Crimean War. After another interjection of anguished “dona nobis” music, the chorus enters on a text from *Jeremiah*, who was describing the destruction of Judah at the hands of the Babylonians. The text is set in a close canon, as if the listener is hearing both sides in a conflict saying exactly the same words, "We looked for peace, but no good came."

The last section begins again with the baritone, this time invoking the words with which the angel comforted the prophet Daniel. The chorus enters quietly with a reassurance of peace. The music swells and brightens, becoming a brilliant and jubilant paean of praise and glory. The orchestra and chorus fade as the soprano enters again, softly repeating “dona nobis pacem”, with the a cappella chorus quietly adding their assent, an ending not of unbridled optimism, but of hope and possibility.

Michael Moore

Program Editor, Mendelssohn Club of Philadelphia

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I. Agnus Dei

Agnus Dei qui tollis peccata mundi Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world,
Dona nobis pacem. grant us peace.

II. Beat! beat! drums!

Beat! beat! drums! – blow! bugles! blow!
Through the windows – through the doors – burst like a ruthless force,
Into the solemn church, and scatter the congregation,
Into the school where the scholar is studying;
Leave not the bridegroom quiet – no happiness must he have now with his bride,
Nor the peaceful farmer any peace, ploughing his field, or gathering in his grain,
So fierce you whirr and pound you drums – so shrill you bugles blow.

Beat! beat! drums! – blow! bugles! blow!
Over the traffic of cities – over the rumble of wheels in the streets;
Are beds prepared for the sleepers at night in the houses? No sleepers must sleep
in those beds,
No bargainers' bargains by day – would they continue?
Would the talkers be talking? would the singer attempt to sing?
Then rattle quicker, heavier drums – you bugles wilder blow.

Beat! beat! drums! – blow! bugles! blow!
Make no parley – stop for no expostulation,
Mind not the timid – mind not the weeper or prayer,

Mind not the old man beseeching the young man,
Let not the child's voice be heard, nor the mother's entreaties,
Make even the trestles to shake the dead where they lie awaiting the hearses,
So strong you thump O terrible drums – so loud you bugles blow.

Walt Whitman

III. Reconciliation

Word over all, beautiful as the sky,
Beautiful that war and all its deeds of carnage must in time be utterly lost,
That the hands of the sisters Death and Night incessantly, softly, wash again and ever
again this soiled world;
For my enemy is dead, a man divine as myself is dead,
I look where he lies white-faced and still in the coffin – I draw near,
Bend down and touch lightly with my lips the white face in the coffin.

Walt Whitman

IV. Dirge for Two Veterans

The last sunbeam
Lightly falls from the finished Sabbath,
On the pavement here, and there beyond it is looking
Down a new-made double grave.

Lo, the moon ascending,
Up from the east the silvery round moon,
Beautiful over the house-tops, ghastly, phantom moon,
Immense and silent moon.

I see a sad procession,
And I hear the sound of coming full-keyed bugles,
All the channels of the city streets they're flooding
As with voices and with tears.

I hear the great drums pounding,
And the small drums steady whirring,
And every blow of the great convulsive drums
Strikes me through and through.

For the son is brought with the father,
In the foremost ranks of the fierce assault they fell,
Two veterans, son and father, dropped together,
And the double grave awaits them.

Now nearer blow the bugles,
And the drums strike more convulsive,
And the daylight o'er the pavement quite has faded,
And the strong dead-march enwraps me.

In the eastern sky up-buoying,
The sorrowful vast phantom moves illumined,
'Tis some mother's large transparent face,
In heaven brighter growing.

O strong dead-march you please me!
O moon immense with your silvery face you soothe me!
O my soldiers twain! O my veterans passing to burial!
What I have I also give you.

The moon gives you light,
And the bugles and the drums give you music,
And my heart, O my soldiers, my veterans,
My heart gives you love.

Walt Whitman

V. The Angel of Death

The Angel of Death has been abroad throughout the land; you may almost hear the beating of his wings. There is no one as of old ... to sprinkle with blood the lintel and the two side-posts of our doors, that he may spare and pass on.

John Bright

Dona nobis pacem.

We looked for peace, but no good came; and for a time of health, and behold trouble!
The snorting of his horses was heard from Dan; the whole land trembled at the
 sound of the neighing of his strong ones; for they are come, and have devoured
 the land and those that dwell therein
The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved
Is there no balm in Gilead?; is there no physician there? Why then is not the health
 of the daughter of my people recovered?

Jeremiah 8:15-22

VI. Nation Shall Not Lift Up a Sword

'O man greatly beloved, fear not, peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong.'

Daniel 10:19

'The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former and in this place will I give peace.'

Haggai 2:9

'Nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. And none shall make them afraid, neither shall the sword go through their land. Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from heaven. Open to me the gates of righteousness, I will go into them. Let all the nations be gathered together, and let the people be assembled; and let them hear, and say, it is the truth. And it shall come, that I will gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and see my glory. And I will set a sign among them, and they shall declare my glory among the nations. For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, so shall your seed and your name remain for ever.'

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men.

(Adapted from Micah 4:3, Leviticus 26:6, Psalms 85:10 and 118:19, Isaiah 43:9 and 66:18-22, and Luke 2:14)

Dona nobis pacem.

William Schuman: *Carols of Death* (notes by Anne Matlack)

The Chamber Singers will open the second half of the concert with William Schuman's *Carols of Death*. Schuman was born in the Bronx in 1910. Although he played bass in a dance band and wrote some popular songs with Frank Loesser, he was enrolled in NYU's School of Commerce and working at an ad agency when a trip to Carnegie Hall in 1930 to hear the New York Philharmonic (under Toscanini) changed his life. He decided to become a composer and dropped out of school to study at Malkin Conservatory and privately with Roy Harris. Harris introduced Schuman's work to Koussevitsky, who championed it. From 1935 to 1945 he taught composition at Sarah Lawrence College, and in 1945 he became president of Juilliard, leaving in 1961 to become the first president of Lincoln Center. In 1962 he appeared on *What's My Line?* and stumped the panel.

Schuman was a prolific composer, writing eight symphonies, piano and violin concertos, band music such as his popular work, *George Washington Bridge*, ballets, string quartets,

and operas, including *The Mighty Casey* (reflecting his first passion, baseball). He was also a master at re-using pre-existing music. His most performed works include his arrangement for orchestra (1963) of Ives' *Variations on "America"* (originally an organ work) and the *New England Tryptich* on themes by William Billings.

It is easy to see how such a quintessentially "American" composer could be drawn to the poetry of Walt Whitman. Of his three a cappella choral works, two set texts by Walt Whitman (while the third, *Mail order Madrigals*, set words from the 1897 Sears-Roebuck Catalogue!). In 1943 Schuman won the Pulitzer Prize for his cantata *A Free Song* (Whitman text).

The *Carols of Death* were commissioned in 1958 for the Laurentian Singers of St. Lawrence University. They are small yet powerful modern madrigals intended to be sung as a set. The first, "The Last Invocation," uses rests to create a breathing effect, and has great contrasts in dynamics. The chords manage to be both dissonant and beautiful. In "The Unknown Region," Schuman creates a rhythmic canon based on only 4 notes (one for each voice part) for the first six pages, as if setting the words "darest thou?" to mean "darest thou break away from the bounds of this harmonic restraint..." Finally on the words "O Soul" the chord change seems especially dramatic. After a few faltering repeats of "walk out...walk out..." the music breaks into a frenzy and the rest of the poem is set. In the third movement, "To All, To Each," after some initial wandering, death is embraced with the mostly tonal setting of "Undulate round the world, serenely arriving....". This is clearly in A minor, and also metrically calm, so that the slightest change has significance of expression.

1. The Last Invocation

At the last, tenderly,
From the walls of the powerful, fortress'd house,
From the clasp of the knitted locks,
From the keep of the well-closed doors,
Let me be wafted.

Let me glide noiselessly forth;
With the key of softness unlock the locks with a whisper,
Set ope the doors, O Soul.

Tenderly! be not impatient!
Strong is your hold O mortal flesh,
Strong is your hold O love.

2. The Unknown Region

Darest thou now O soul,
Walk out with me toward the unknown region,
Where neither ground is for the feet nor any path to follow?

No map there, nor guide,
Nor voice sounding, nor touch of human hand,
Nor face with blooming flesh, nor lips, nor eyes, are in that land.

I know it not O soul,
Nor dost thou, all is a blank before us,
All waits undream'd of in that region, that inaccessible land-
The unknown region.

3. To All, To Each

Come lovely and soothing death,
Undulate round the world, serenely arriving,
In the day, in the night, to all, to each,
Sooner or later, delicate death.

Mark Andrew Miller is known throughout the country as a dynamic music teacher, performer, and composer. He serves on both the faculties of the Drew Theological School in Madison, New Jersey and the Yale Institute of Sacred Music in New Haven, Connecticut. Mark is also the Minister of Music at Covenant United Methodist Church in Plainfield, New Jersey. Since 1998 he has been Composer-in-Residence for Harmonium. Mark has also been the Director of Contemporary Worship at Marble Collegiate Church and the Assistant Organist at The Riverside Church, both in New York City.

Composing is one of Mark's passions. His music appears in the 2007 songbooks, *Zion Still Sings*, *All Loves Excelling*, and *Bidden, Unbidden*, published by Abingdon Press. Mark has a catalogue of over twenty choral works published by Abingdon Press in the *Mark Miller Anthem* series. As Composer-In-Residence for Harmonium Mark has written four works for the choir and now premieres his fifth, ***Song of the Open Road***, this weekend.

Mark received his Bachelor of Arts in Music from Yale University and his Master of Music in Organ Performance from Juilliard.

Mark Andrew Miller: *Song of the Open Road* (notes by the composer)

If I am writing with music and words I inevitably begin with the words first. The musical choices I make are always informed by the words, so I am very careful in choosing texts. In this case, the poetry of Walt Whitman had been “working” on me for many years, so I

took the leap with creating a musical setting of one of his great works, “Song of the Open Road.” Right off I knew I couldn't set the entire text (a straight-through reading is twenty minutes) so the first and perhaps most difficult task was deciding what I should NOT set to music. In fashioning these excerpts I have made my best attempt at preserving what I felt was the spirit of Whitman's poem.

The imagery and feeling of the poem “Song of the Open Road” is a good reflection of how Whitman viewed nineteenth century America: large, bold, expansive, energetic, alive, full of possibility and potential, filled with all different kinds of people bringing with them their experiences and hopes. I wanted to capture this broad, sweeping vision in the music of the opening theme that is carried first by the French horn, then by the baritone and soprano soloists. Whitman's no-nonsense approach to journeying on the open road comes through when he writes “henceforth I ask not good fortune, I myself am good fortune,”-- there will be no more postponing or complaining! I enjoyed setting this passage to a syncopated jaunty tune marked with rhythmic and harmonic surprises.

Whitman loves to make lists. He creates inventories of people and their professions, he reels off activities and categories until the page overflows with his signature prose. In the music I sought to capture the urgency of his writing when I composed what I thought of as a spinning wheel of notes, played with almost mechanical precision churning out the same motif. This goes on as the choir sings through the lists ("listen! I will be honest with you..." and "let the paper remain on the desk unwritten.")

The poem is full of the mystery and beauty of things unknown. At times it reads more like holy scripture, asking us to deny the material pleasures of society in order to truly live for what is real in Whitman's eyes. At many points Whitman uses the French word “Allons!” (“We go!”). He wants us to keep moving, not stopping too long in any one place. Musically speaking, we also do not stop for long at any one place - although there is a moment before the closing movement for an all-out ballad ("Allons! the road is before us! It is safe - I have tried it...") There are no discreet movements: the piece is meant to be performed without stopping.

In the end the poem is a travelling song. The poet, full of bravura and confidence ready to take to the road, suddenly shows vulnerability in the form of an unguarded question. "Will you come travel with me? Shall we stick by each other as long as we live?" After all this, we realize the journey of a lifetime is made meaningful when we don't travel it alone. Ultimately the music does not resolve- I opted for the final notes to linger on the dominant chord so we might reflect on the sweet surprise of the poet's intimate and open-ended invitation to us.

**Afoot and light-hearted I take to the open road
Healthy, free, the world before me
The long brown path before me leading wherever I choose.**

**Henceforth I ask not good-fortune, I myself am good-fortune,
Henceforth I whimper no more, postpone no more, need nothing,
Done with indoor complaints, libraries, querulous criticisms,**

Strong and content I travel the open road.

You road I enter upon and look around, I believe you
are not all that is here,
I believe that much unseen is also here.

I inhale great draughts of space,
The east and the west are mine, and the north and the south are mine.

I am larger, better than I thought,
I did not know I held so much goodness.

Allons! whoever you are come travel with me!
Traveling with me you find what never tires.

Listen! I will be honest with you,
I do not offer the old smooth prizes, but offer rough new prizes,
These are the days that must happen to you;
You shall not heap up what is call'd riches,
You shall scatter with lavish hand all that you earn or achieve,
You but arrive at the city to which you were destin'd, you
hardly settle yourself to satisfaction before you are call'd
by an irresistible call to depart,
you shall be treated to the ironical smiles and mockings of those
who remain behind you,
what beckonings of love you receive you shall only answer with
passionate kisses of parting,
you shall not allow the hold of those who spread their reach'd
hands toward you.

Allons! the road is before us!
It is safe- I have tried it- my own feet have tried it well- be
Not detain'd!

Let the paper remain on the desk unwritten, and the book
on the shelf unopen'd!
Let the tools remain in the workshop! let the money remain unearn'd!
Let the school stand! mind not the cry of the teacher!
Let the preacher preach in his pulpit! let the lawyer plead in the
court, and the judge expound the law.

Camerado, I give you my hand!
I give you my love more precious than money,
I give you myself before preaching or law;
Will you give me yourself? Will you come travel with me?
Shall we stick by each other as long as we live?