

Program notes by Peter Roennfeldt – Brisbane Chorale 1987-1990

No.1 - JS Bach *St Matthew Passion*, 3 April 1987

Of all Bach's sacred works, it is the *St Matthew Passion* which most successfully addresses the conflict between universal truths and personal realities. Christ's passionate humanity and the inevitability of the dramatic events leading up to his death are vividly contrasted with the frailty of humanity and the sincere responses of the trusting believer.

Conceived on grandiose scale, Bach's *St Matthew Passion* is arguably the finest of all Passion settings. Composed for Good Friday services in Leipzig in 1727, it stands as a peak in a long tradition that has its roots in the Middle Ages. More specifically though, Bach's Passions (he composed at least two others, the St John of 1724 and the now lost St Mark of 1731) continued and culminated the north German 'Oratorio Passion' of the Baroque period. This type of setting which became popular in cities such as Hamburg around 1700, combines the Italian opera/oratorio practices of using recitative, arioso and aria, with the Lutheran tradition of incorporating the vernacular hymn-tunes into large musical forms.

Thus in the *St Matthew Passion*, a diversity of musical and textual elements is present. One's enjoyment of this work is enhanced by an appreciation of these elements, and how they co-exist on four levels, each independent yet complementary to the others.

The dramatic - The Biblical text, taken from St. Matthew's Gospel, Chapters 26 and 27, is divided between the vocal forces according to their relative importance in the drama. The Evangelist (tenor) delivers the narrative portions of the text in poignant recitative, assisted by the characters of Peter, Judas, Pilate and his wife, and the two false witnesses. The principal role of Christ (bass) is highlighted by the appearance of the string orchestra during all of his utterances. Symbolically this 'halo' is absent when Christ cries from the cross "My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?". The chorus participates in the drama as the crowd of onlookers, shouting cries of "Crucify", "His blood be on us", "Hail King of the Jews", etc. Sometimes it acts as the group of apostles, such as in "Lord, is it I?". The phrase is sung a total of eleven times, signifying Judas' silence, and his alienation from the group through the betrayal of Christ.

The reflective - The unnamed soloists sing ariosos and arias which comment on the events of the Passion. By Bach's time, such interpolations of non-Biblical texts was customary, owing in part to the Pietistic movement of the church, which advocated intense personal devotion and soul-searching. Bach's settings of Picander's texts are sublime creations, combining wonderfully expressive vocal lines with richly varied instrumental combinations, from flute or oboe solos and duets to the incomparable violin solo obbligato in the Alto aria "Have mercy Lord".

The congregational - In Lutheran tradition, the chorales stand next to the Scriptures as a source of inspiration. Both the texts and tunes were well known to Bach's congregation and thus their inclusion in the oratorio served to involve the listeners in a most direct way (whether or not they would have joined in the singing of the chorales, which is doubtful). Each one is harmonised to perfection, with subtleties of the texts underlined - the most familiar of course is the "Passion chorale" which occurs five times.

The monumental - Here the full forces of the double choir, each with its own orchestra, are rallied to provide the musical 'pillars' to the work. The opening and closing choruses of Part One are huge chorale fantasias, with the melody presented in long notes by the sopranos. In the initial chorus "Come ye daughters", the choral "Lamb of God" is given to a third choir of treble voices, while the two mixed choirs continue in dialogue with each other. For many, the most moving chorus is the finale. Above the throbbing bass line, which uses the stately rhythms of the sarabande, are heard "tears of grief" symbolised by sighing motives, the "Hearts Cry", and finally the comfort and resignation of "Lie Thou softly, softly here".

No.2 - Mendelsohn *Elijah*, 5 June 1987

Widely regarded as Mendelssohn's vocal masterpiece, *Elijah* is surely one of the great romantic oratorios. Lyrical and dramatic elements are juxtaposed in this vivid and moving portrayal of the major events in the life of the prophet, a character with whom Mendelssohn felt some affinity. After the success of *St Paul* in 1836, the idea of a second oratorio was greeted enthusiastically by the composer, but owing to problems of constructing a satisfactory libretto, the project took ten years to complete.

Although Mendelssohn's friend Schubring took this task seriously, it appears that the two men were often working at cross-purposes - the composer wished to emphasise the dramatic elements, while avoiding the purely narrative approach, and the librettist wished to build a musical sermon out of the plot, even to the extent of introducing characters and quotations from the New Testament. Finally, an external stimulus was needed to complete the work - it was commissioned by and performed for the first time at the Birmingham Music Festival in August 1846. Mendelssohn had made frequent visits to England where he was greatly admired, thus it is not surprising that *Elijah* was welcomed as a nineteenth century descendant of the Handelian oratorio which it resembles in many ways.

The plot develops through a series of scenes or tableaux rather than by a continuous sequence of narrative recitative, as in Bach's Passions. Several of the scenes are extremely vivid - for example the duel with the prophets of Baal and the breaking of the drought in Part I and the confrontation with Queen Jezebel in Part II. With the exception of Elijah (baritone), the characters are not clearly identifiable by voice types alone - the alto soloist acts both as an Angel and as the Queen, while the soprano is both the Widow and an Angel. All the soloists have proportions of recitative and ensembles where their role is more universal than specific in a dramatic sense. The arias contain some of the oratorio's most lyrical music ("If with all your heart", "O rest in the Lord") as well as some of its most uplifting ("Hear ye Israel - I am He that comforteth"). Two of Elijah's arias show Mendelssohn's love for his Baroque predecessors - "Is not His Word like a fire" resembles in mood and colour "For He is like a refiner's fire" from *Messiah*, while the vocal line and cello solo in "It is finished" is reminiscent of "It is fulfilled" from Bach's *St John Passion*.

As in most oratorios, the choruses contain many highlights. Lyrical numbers such as "For He shall give His angels" and "He watching over Israel" are counterbalanced by the positive affirmation of "Thanks be to God" and "Lord our Creator" which conclude each Part respectively. The crowd scenes contain some of the most tension-filled climaxes Mendelssohn ever wrote, such as in the "Hear and answer, Baal" sequence. At other times the people of Israel offer poignant pleas for deliverance ("Help Lord", "Yet doth the Lord see it not"). Towards the end of the work, Mendelssohn approaches mystical and visionary heights ("Behold God the Lord passed by" and "Holy, Holy, Holy").

Other points of interest are the innovative device of introducing Elijah right at the beginning of the work, without introduction, and the fugal overture which builds in tension until it culminates in the opening chorus. Pervading musical motives throughout the work including the 'curse' which is heard in various forms from Elijah's first speech to the chorus "Yet doth the Lord", and Elijah's own 'leitmotif' of four introductory chords in the low brass which precedes several of his utterances. Word-painting can be discerned in "Thanks be to God" where the strings depict 'the stormy billows' and the galloping of the horse which carry the 'fiery chariots' near the conclusion of Part II.

Although individual movements from *Elijah* have unfortunately passed into the realm of the all-too-familiar, when viewed in its entirety, this oratorio is a stirring piece of musical drama, and should certainly be ranked as one of the greatest choral-orchestral works of all time.

No.3 - Mozart *Marriage of Figaro* overture K.492, *Clarinet Concerto* K.622, *Requiem* K.626, 21 November 1987

Mozart's operas are generally regarded as a pinnacle of achievement both within the composer's output and the history of music drama generally. A large part of their success is due to the overwhelming unity and balance achieved by a perfect marriage of plot, character development, musical logic and formal design. It is no accident that in all of Mozart's mature operas, the overture and the finale are in the same key, and that the midpoint of the drama is heightened by a modulation to an unrelated key. Thus in *The Marriage of Figaro*, the overture and the finale of Act IV are in D major, one of the traditional festive keys, while Act II concludes in E flat major, just as the plot and subplots are becoming more entangled. While the overture to *Figaro* does not preview any of the melodies or motives from the opera (such as occurs in *Così fan tutte*), it is an appropriate curtain raiser with its sense of expectancy tinged with nervousness. *The Marriage of Figaro* was first produced in 1786 amidst controversy, just as Mozart's popular success was waning, and the courtly intrigues against him were intensifying. Both were major factors which caused Mozart suffering during the last five years of his life.

Despite financial troubles and physical hardship the composer continued to produce masterworks to the last. The *Clarinet Concerto* K.622 and the *Requiem* K.626 parallel each other, not only in the time of their composition (late 1791), but also in their complementary emotional levels - the joy of life and the austere reality of death. At times though, both works exude a peaceful serenity that is characteristic of Mozart's finest compositions including those produced under extreme stress. Ever since his first visit to Mannheim in 1777, Mozart had been fascinated with the clarinet and its tonal possibilities. However, it was not until 1785 that the clarinet was to be featured regularly in his symphonic works. Possessed of an inherent dramatic sense as an operatic composer, Mozart was destined to become a major exponent of the classical concerto, wherein the elements of conflict and dialogue are synthesised, and both the soloistic and symphonic aspects are in perfect balance. Nevertheless, as is the case with most music of his day, an external stimulus was often needed as a catalyst for the creation of his works in concerto form. Thus whether in writing piano concertos for himself or his students, flute concertos for patrons such as the Comte de Guines, or horn concertos for his old friend Leutgeb, Mozart was writing for an immediate situation with a specific performer in mind. So too in the case of the Clarinet Concerto - his friend Anton Stadler was the recipient, for whom the Trio K.498 and the Quintet K.581 were also composed. The exuberant writing found throughout most of the Concerto is counterbalanced by the subdued scoring (two flutes, two horns, strings) and the warmly expressive phrases of the second movement. Some commentators have noted a similarity of mood with the well-known motet *Ave verum corpus* K.618 composed the same year. Technical virtuosity and characteristic rapid changes of register are confined mainly to the lively finale, but throughout the work, it is the mellifluous tone of the clarinet that is most evident.

By the time Mozart came to write the Requiem he had not written any church music for nearly ten years. The reasons for this are mainly circumstantial - after working to order in producing many masses, motets and psalm settings during his days at the Salzburg court, the cosmopolitan life in Vienna saw Mozart producing music for the concert-going public and the private connoisseur, and therefore was more active in the fields of opera, concerto, and chamber music. It is coincidental that a commission for a requiem setting from one Count Walsegg zu Stuppach came during the final months of Mozart's short life. In this final work, he was thus able to draw on the rich tradition of Austrian church music that had been so much a part of his youth, in addition to making a musical statement on the life and death issues he was confronting in a very real way at the time.

The frenzy of activity in 1791 which saw the completion of two operas including *The Magic Flute*, the *Clarinet Concerto* was combined with financial hardship complicated by his own and his wife's illness. It is not surprising that the Requiem remained unfinished at the time of his death, considering the circumstances of those final weeks. In order not to lose the commission, Constanza sought the aid of Joseph Eybler and Franz Süssmayr to complete the sketches and supply the missing movements. Controversy remains as to how much of the orchestration was in fact completed by Mozart, and whether the latter of the *Lacrimosa*; and the *Sanctus-Benedictus* movements are stylistically consistent with the rest of the work. In recent years, several attempts have been made by scholars such as Richard Maunder to revise the score of the *Requiem* with a view to clearing up these issues, even to the point of omitting entire movements. The version that will be heard tonight, however, is the edition prepared by Franz Beyer, and subsequently used by Nikolaus Harnoncourt in his recent recording of the work. The revisions include a detailed reworking of the instrumental parts and some minor changes in the vocal lines, thus eradicating the harmonic irregularities and stylistic inconsistencies found in Süssmayr's version. It is believed that this is the first performance in Australia of the Beyer edition.

Mozart drew heavily on tradition in his setting, including the use of traditional plainchant in the soprano solo "te decet hymnus" and the fugue subject for the Kyrie eleison (used many times by various composers including Handel in "And with His stripes" from *Messiah*). The terror of the day of judgement is portrayed with great energy in the "Dies Irae" and

the "Rex tremendae", though not without the more personal tone of passages such as *salve me* (in "Rex tremendae") and the "Lacrymosa". An inspired portrayal of the conflict between the demonic and celestial elements is found in the "Confutatis" - here the male voices with tensely jarring intervals are relieved by the serenity of the female voices a few bars later. Throughout, the chorus is the centre of attention, notwithstanding the importance of orchestral motives which underscore many of the details of word setting mentioned above. Particularly interesting is the very opening - the sighing clarinet and bassoon lines are later covered by the threatening entry of the trombones, the instrument traditionally associated with funeral rites. The solo voices are featured mainly as a quartet, particularly in the "Tuba mirum" and the incomparable "Recordare" with its masterly interweaving of lines.

Although it can be viewed as a piece of church music in the traditional sense, Mozart's Requiem is indeed a personal statement. While it may not be as overly dramatic as its nineteenth century counterparts (the Berlioz and the Verdi settings particularly), it is still a masterpiece capable of communicating essential concepts of life and death, clothed in music of the highest inspiration.

No.4 – Vaughan Williams *Mass in G minor*, Bruckner *Mass in E minor*, 8 October 1988

The Mass has been, for many centuries, a source of inspiration to composers, both for its religious significance and as a vehicle for ceremonial grandeur. While the Latin text has long been established as a 'classic' statement of faith, any given musical setting of the Mass has tended to reflect the personality of the composer, and often the particular time and place for which it was conceived. This is especially true in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries, when Mass settings were normally composed only for special festive occasions, rather than the regular Sunday service. Nevertheless, the predominantly conservative environment within the church over the centuries has meant that composers have to a greater or lesser extent acknowledged the traditional liturgical basis in their musical settings. In many cases, composers have deliberately imbued their work with the flavour of a bygone era, and thus identified their own style with the great heritage of church music. The two works being performed tonight are fine examples of a composer successfully uniting his personal idiom with the techniques and style of what is arguably the greatest period of church music, the late Renaissance.

Anton Bruckner (1824-1896) is a curious case in nineteenth century music - for many years he worked as a church musician in provincial Austria, but was later to become one of the great Romantic symphonists, resident in Vienna. Steeped in Classical harmony and counterpoint, he later fell under the spell of Liszt, Wagner and the 'music of the future'. Bruckner's romantic orientation in his church music, however, is heard primarily through the richness and boldness of his harmonies, though these are often the result of the interweaving of successive layers of independent vocal lines. Thus both aspects of his musical personality are present in such a work as the *Mass in E minor* - Renaissance style counterpoint and lush chromatic harmonies. Composed for Linz Cathedral in 1866, at a time when Bruckner was the resident organist, the work is scored for an eight-part choir and an orchestra of wind and brass. Noticeably missing are strings, organ, timpani and vocal soloists. The purity of this tonal conception, together with the so-called conservative use of counterpoint in the style of Palestrina, caused a very positive response by members of the Cecilian Movement - a group dedicated to ridding church music of 'secular' influences.

While in its external features the *Mass in E minor* is a devoutly inspired work, there are many moments of brilliance and several dramatic climaxes such as the middle section of the Kyrie, the "Et resurrexit" section of the Credo and the "Hosanna" conclusion of the Sanctus. Expressive a cappella sections are to be found in each movement, notably the opening of the Kyrie and the "Et incarnatus" section of the Credo. The instrumental forces are combined most effectively with the voices, with occasional passages featuring an instrument in an obbligato role to the voices. Particularly interesting is the moving arpeggio figure in the clarinets and oboes in the Benedictus. Bruckner's skill with counterpoint is seen most clearly in the ethereal Sanctus and the exhilarating Amen fugue at the conclusion of the Gloria.

In similar vein, Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) recreated something of his historical heritage in the *Mass in G minor*. Composed for the Westminster Roman Catholic Cathedral in 1923, it was designed for liturgical use by the choir and its conductor Dr Richard Terry, who had done much to revive the church music of the Tudor period. In this way, the Mass is a perfect counterpart to the well-known *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, composed thirteen years earlier. Both works show an understanding of modal harmony, and are influenced by the melodic style of plainsong and Anglican chant.

The *Mass in G minor* is scored for soloists and double choir a cappella. The possibilities of alternation between the two sides of the choir as in English cathedral practice would have been known to Vaughan Williams, and he uses this to great effect. Many moments of brilliance, particularly in the Gloria and the Credo are created by the effects of overlapping one with another, as well as combining all the voices in eight part block harmony. Full twelve part harmony, including the soloists is reserved for one brief moment - the final *Dona nobis pacem*. The soloists function as individuals, with occasional single line phrases, or as a mixed ensemble on equal terms with the choir such as in the *Christe eleison* and *Agnus Dei*. While the *Mass in G minor* is obviously a piece of church music, Vaughan Williams takes every opportunity to colour the word-setting - particularly poignant is the central section of the Credo - *Et homo factus est - passus et sepultus est*. Similarly, the mystery of the Eucharist is expressed in the weaving lines of the treble voices in the Sanctus.

Thus in these two works the Renaissance meets the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Age old ritual and theology are reinterpreted and given new meaning by two composers who both respected their traditional past and who spoke with energy, conviction and vision to their contemporaries. Though separated by differences to cultural heritage and outlook, in these works Vaughan Williams and Bruckner seem to have achieved a common goal.

No.5 - A Choral Christmas, 11 December 1988

Praetorius *In Dulci Jubilo*

G.Gabrieli *Hodie Christus Natus Est*

Vaughan Williams *Fantasia on Christmas Carols*

Rutter *Gloria*

Brumby & WG James *Australian Christmas Carols*

Daquin *Noëls*

Traditional Christmas Carols

The Christmas season has been a source of inspiration for musicians from every historical period and cultural tradition. The message of "peace, goodwill to men" has been set to music of varying degrees of complexity, from the simplest carol to the most expansive oratorio. Today's programme features a selection of seasonal music from the Renaissance to the present day.

With the rising wealth and opulence of Venice in the 16th century, the music of its churches, particularly St Mark's, became more brilliant and colourful than any of its rivals. A significant feature of this emerging musical style was the use of divided choirs of contrasting timbre, thus creating possibilities for both soloists and massed vocal effects. Giovanni Gabrieli's (1557-1612) motet *Hodie Christus Natus Est* (On this day Christ was born) employs a solo group of lower voices in the verses in contrast to the full ten parts chorus in the refrains. The Venetian polychoral style had its imitators throughout Europe, and particularly in Germany. Michael Praetorius (1571-1621), who incidentally never visited Italy, was a master of massed effects, composing for double, triple, and even quadruple choirs. A representative of the Lutheran tradition, he often employed Latin hymns and German chorale tunes, such as his double choir motet *In Dulci Jubilo*.

Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) was greatly indebted to English folk song, arranging many tunes throughout his career. Furthermore, his own melodic style is imbued with a timeless quality, somewhat akin to plainchant and folk song. The *Fantasia on Christmas Carols* for chorus and solo baritone incorporates this style in an extremely well structured medley of English Carols. Dating from 1912, and thus the time of his folk music research, the *Fantasia* uses four carols from Sussex, Somerset and Herefordshire, in addition to fragments from other well-known carols. Characteristically, Vaughan Williams frequently calls for quasi-instrumental effects from the voices, such as humming and pure vowel sounds, as an accompaniment to the solo lines.

John Rutter (born 1945) is a good example of a contemporary composer with an ability to produce works of vocal and orchestral brilliance, with immediate audience appeal. The use of brass, organ and percussion in the *Gloria* gives opportunity for some exciting rhythmic effects, a layering of mildly dissonant harmonies, and expressive vocal lines. Based on the song of the angels to the shepherds at the time of Christ's birth, the text of the *Gloria* is here divided into three movements, which culminate in an energetic fugato on the words "Cum Sancto Spiritu". The *Gloria* was commissioned by the Voices of Mel Olson and was first performed in May 1974 in Omaha, USA. The work has since become a very popular addition to festive occasions.

Instrumental music has the ability to communicate a spiritual message despite the absence of words. The chorale preludes of Bach, for example, bear an obvious connection to the texts associated with the hymn tune being set. In a more general way, works such as Daquin's (1694-1772) *Noëls* convey the mood and spirit of the Christmas season. The French Baroque organists, like their modern counterparts, have a great flair for timbre and colour via organ registration, and these *Noëls* are no exception.

The tradition of carol singing dates back to medieval times, with composers from every generation contributing to the repertoire. Today's selection of carols includes several of Renaissance origin and some from our own Australian composers. Praetorius' *Es ist ein Ros' entsprungen* and the Latin responsary *O Come Emmanuel* convey the solemnity and dignity of the season, while *Ding, Dong Merrily on High* is overtly joyous, with its florid refrains. The celebration of Christmas, with the associated literature and visual imagery has for obvious reasons been bound up with the seasons and climate of the Northern Hemisphere. Nevertheless, residents of the Southern Hemisphere have upheld many of the 'winter' traditions despite the obvious inconsistencies. So too have many Australian composers such as William G James and Colin Brumby endeavoured to invest a feeling for local climate, vegetation and wildlife into their carol settings.

No.6 - Bach *St John Passion*, 17 March 1989

Bach's *St John Passion* is arguably his most dramatic work, capturing as it does the direct, yet personal approach of St John's gospel account. Whereas the St Matthew version contains many subsidiary events and characters, the St John concentrates on the essential ingredients of the story. This difference is borne out by Bach, who chooses in this work to portray on the one hand a rapid succession of vivid scenes, with an emphasis on the chorus, and on the other hand, minimise the reflective aspects - hence the inclusion of relatively few arias and ariosos which often impede the swift flow of action.

Another feature which makes the *St John Passion* more direct and personal in impact is the economical use of musical resources - for example, the moderate size orchestra which only occasionally highlights the individual distinctive colours of the solo instruments. With the exception of the monumental opening and closing choruses, the chorus is generally most concise in its delivery of the text. In spite of this careful concentration of thought and design, the *St John Passion* contains some of Bach's most memorable music. The powerful entry of the choirs at the first chorus "Lord and Master" is as arresting as the final chorus "Lie still" is subdued and serene. In a similar vein, the cheerful innocence of the first soprano aria "I follow with joyful attention" is an effective counterbalance to the grief-laden "With torrents of weeping" and intense pathos of the alto aria "All is fulfilled". The varying moods of these arias is effectively portrayed in the instruments used - flutes for innocence, viola da gamba for pathos. The normally reserved style of recitative delivery is interrupted at the points where Peter weeps and where Christ is scourged - here the Evangelist forsakes his formal role as narrator and breaks into almost self-indulgent arioso style.

Because of the nature of St John's account, the work is unevenly divided at the point where Peter denies Christ - the much longer second part, however, contains much of interest, including a succession of crowd scenes. At this point, Bach achieves a masterstroke of musical architecture - an almost symmetrical layout of choruses surrounding the chorale "Thy bonds O Christ", where identical music is used for three pairs of choruses, including the vehement "Crucify" chorus.

The *St John Passion* was first performed in Leipzig on Good Friday in 1723, soon after the beginning of Bach's appointment there. Although he obviously wished to make a good initial impression in supplying the traditional large scale oratorio, it appears that Bach worked in great haste to complete the work, apparently writing some of the arias texts himself, and adapting others from another Passion libretto by the contemporary Brockes. Nevertheless, Bach returned to the *St John Passion* in subsequent years, making some minor revisions. A sincere believer himself, it is without question that his personal faith was expressed as fully here as in the later more grandiose *St Matthew Passion*. Proof of this can be found in the incomparable chorale settings in the *St John Passion* - including perhaps the finest harmonisation of all, the final "Ah, Lord when my last end is come".

No.7 - Verdi *Four Sacred Pieces*, 1 June 1989

After completing the *Requiem* in 1874, Giuseppe Verdi, who was then sixty-one years old, went into a voluntary semi-retirement. Apparently content with the universal successes of *Aida* and the *Requiem*, the composer, who had almost thirty operas to his credit, resolved to spend more time involved with domestic affairs and various philanthropic projects.

The self-enforced retirement did not last however, and Verdi, who had spent a lifetime composing almost exclusively for the stage, returned to public life with two of his finest operas - *Otello* (1887) and *Falstaff* (1893). Around this time Verdi was approached by his librettist Boito with a challenge to compose a work based on an 'enigmatic scale' which had been published in a music journal. The result, the *Ave Maria* for a *cappella* chorus, is a unique experiment in chromatic harmony, but it appears that the composer never intended it to be performed. Nevertheless, it was published in 1989, along with three other late choral works that make up the *Quattro Pezzi Sacri*. (A curious coincidence of music history is that another great 19th century Romanticist, Brahms, chose to complete his oeuvre with a set of four sacred vocal works - the *Four Serious Songs* dating from 1896).

Verdi was fully aware of his heritage of Italian church music, and though he did not have the same rigorous 'academic' training that many of his colleagues had, he could write counterpoint with as much skill as any composer. The *Four Sacred Pieces* are not composed in an academic or antiquarian style, but nevertheless one is reminded of both the world of plainsong and the cultivated Renaissance polyphony of Palestrina.

Although the intervals of the 'enigmatic scale' of the *Ave Maria* are entirely unconventional, Verdi uses the scale in the traditional *cantus firmus* style, in long notes, while the other three voices weave countermelodies around it. Each voice part presents the scale in turn (bass, alto, tenor, soprano) accompanied by an extraordinary series of harmonies. The other *a cappella* work in the set, the *Lauda alla Vergine* calls for solo voices, but is usually performed by a chorus. Based on a section of Dante's *Paradiso*, the *Lauda* presents the Italian text in a most straightforward style, refreshing in its simplicity. The two orchestrally accompanied works are based on longer liturgical texts, but here too Verdi is surprising in his economy of musical means, refraining from any attempt to expand or unnecessarily repeat lines of text. Thus both the *Stabat Mater* and *Te Deum* are impressive in their directness, and the vividness of the word setting. Examples abound, but the stark opening of the *Stabat Mater* and its glorious climax with the sopranos soaring to a high B on the words "paradisi gloria - the glory of paradise" are among the most memorable. The *Te Deum* uses a double choir, recalling the massive late Renaissance and Baroque style with great effect. Similarly Verdi's liturgical roots are most evident here, in quoting and manipulating two strands of plainchant.

Verdi may not have been a religious person in the conventional sense, but these works, written in his twilight years, are inspired works that no doubt drew on his youthful experiences as a choirboy and organist. The *Quattro Pezzi Sacri* thus complete the cycle - and are a fitting epilogue to a brilliant career of composing for the voice.

No.8 - Mozart arias K.583, K.505, Beethoven *Choral Fantasy* Op.80, Haydn *Nelson Mass*, 23 September 1989

Vienna in the late 18th century - the mere mention of the time and the place is sufficient to conjure up the names of Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven. While these composers were not natives of the city, its pre-eminence as the focal point of one of the largest and most influential courts of Europe with a rich musical culture, was sufficient to draw many into its orbit. While Haydn lived for most of his adult life outside Vienna, it was here that he met Mozart in the 1780s, developing a close friendship and mutual respect as colleagues. Likewise Beethoven's first years in Vienna were marked by close contact with Haydn, though without the same degree of intimacy.

Tonight's performance highlights these composers' skill at writing for voice and orchestra in works of great brilliance. As a composer of operas, Mozart became acquainted with many singers throughout his career, and often moulded his writing to suit their individual capabilities. It is natural therefore, that when called upon to do so, he would write occasional arias for these same singers for inclusion in either a concert performance, or as was the custom, or insertion into another opera in which the singer was appearing. The arias heard tonight were composed for such situations. *Vado, ma dove?* K.538 was written in 1789 for Louise Villeneuve (who was later to be the original Dorabella in *Così fan tutte*), for insertion into a comic opera by Martin. The text by Da Ponte, Mozart's favoured librettist, gives opportunity for beautifully expressive vocal lines, especially in the final andante section. In like manner, *Ch'io mi scordi di te?* K.505 was composed in 1786 for the original Susanna in *Le nozze di Figaro*, Nancy Storace. The sister of one of his composition pupils, it appears that she and Mozart were close friends with much in common, both personally and artistically. Their relationship is immortalised in this aria which features a close interweaving of the voice and the obbligato piano part. It appears that Mozart had a special affection for this concert aria, inscribing it in his catalogue as being composed specifically "for Mamselle Storace and myself."

Haydn, in contrast to Mozart, was less noted for his vocal writing until the final stage of his career. Despite intensive activity in opera at Esterhazy, his symphonies and chamber music had formed the major part of his output. Upon returning from his second visit to London in 1795, Haydn found himself writing more and more for voices, with such works as *The Creation*, *The Seasons* and a series of six masses. His last employer, Prince Nicholas II required little of his composer other than to write a special mass each year for the name-day of the Princess Marie, to be performed in the Bergkirche in Eisenstadt. Each mass has not only a nickname, but also several unique features, depending of the instrumental and vocal resources available each year. The Mass No.3 in D minor, composed in 1798, has a rather dramatic opening, reinforced by the austerity of the instrumentation - only 3 trumpets, timpani and organ combined with strings.

Indeed, the mood throughout the work is alternately one of great brilliance and great urgency - hence the "in Angustiis" of the subtitle. All of Europe was engulfed in war at this time, chiefly with Napoleon, and so it is understandable that Haydn should be compelled to make a musical reference to the current situation. The menacing fanfares in the Kyrie and Benedictus, both in the sombre key of D minor are pure strokes of genius. Just prior to the first performance of the mass, the news of Lord Nelson's great victory over the French forces at Alexandria reached Eisenstadt, giving cause for great celebration. However, the second and more familiar subtitle (*Lord Nelson Mass*) was conferred on it two years later. Lord Nelson, together with Lady Hamilton (herself an accomplished singer), were received as honoured guests throughout Austria during 1800 and were privileged to hear in Eisenstadt a revival of the mass which has ever since borne his name.

The Beethoven works, like the rest of tonight's programme, can also be traced to a particular set of circumstances and a specific performance. Having just composed a series of masterworks following acceptance of his approaching deafness, Beethoven was becoming more of a public figure, presenting on occasion, concertos of his own orchestral works. Such an event took place in December 1808, when both the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies and the Fourth Piano Concerto were given their premiere. Singers were also present, contributing a concert aria and selections from the *Mass in C*. Notwithstanding the growing impatience of an audience subjected to an over-long programme in a poorly heated hall, Beethoven composed a grand finale, incorporating all the performing forces into a single work. Hence the rather unusual, if not unique combination of a piano soloist who opens with a stormy cadenza, an orchestra, six soloists and a chorus. The *Choral Fantasy* Op.80 may not rank as one of his greatest works, but is intensely interesting because of the similarity between its principal theme and that of the *Ode to Joy* from the Ninth Symphony, composed fifteen years later. Both themes are subjected to a series of variations and are followed by a coda of great energy and brilliance.

No.9 - Monteverdi *Vespro della beata Virgine* 1610, 29 April 1990

The traditional *Office of Vespers* comprises a number of Psalms each framed by an antiphon or response, a Hymn, and the Cantic of Mary - the *Magnificat*. Monteverdi follows this plan with the exception that in place of the antiphons, movements for soloists are inserted, and other movements are added such as the introductory response utilising the instrumental toccata from *Orfeo*, and the incidental sonata on *Sancta Maria* preceding the Hymn.

Throughout the *Vespers* the composer successfully combines all the current musical styles, producing a rich interplay of ideas. On the one hand, the oldest contrapuntal technique of all, the *cantus firmus*, is used throughout to give a sense of cohesion. This is most clearly seen in the *Magnificat*, which is a set of variations on the plainchant - each verse is set as either a chorus, solo duet, or an orchestral interlude, but in each case the clearly audible *cantus firmus* binds the texture together. Monteverdi also employs the old style Renaissance polyphony. In the *Dixit Dominus*, alternate stanzas are treated as short motets, with each of the six parts moving independently in imitation of each other, while the intervening stanzas are brilliant solo flourishes. Monteverdi was also conversant with the so-called Venetian school of composition, whereby separate choirs are pitted against each other in dialogue, and combining with each other for climaxes. For the most brilliant psalm, *Lauda Jerusalem*, Monteverdi divides each choir into three parts, while the *Cantus firmus* is sung by all the tenors in unison. The solo writing is as contemporary as any of Monteverdi's operas or madrigals. Expressive word-setting, with a sparse accompaniment allowing maximum freedom of interpretation, is clearly seen. The solo movements are virtually sacred madrigals, but are here described as *concerti* - a free-ranging term that only later acquired its usage as an exclusively instrumental genre.

This performance, while not exactly 'authentic', employs several instruments of Monteverdi's day, particularly in the continuo section. In addition to the organ and harpsichord, two lutes provide harmonic support, with a dulcian (an early form of bassoon) and gamba reinforcing the bass line. The performance is from the Jürgen Jürgens edition, published by Universal.

No.10 - A Choral Smorgasbord, 28 July 1990

Brahms *Fest- und Gedenksprüche* Op.109, *Geistliches Lied* Op.30

Carissimi *Jephte*

Copland *Sing Ye Praises*

Barber *Agnus Dei*

Grainger *I'm Seventeen come Sunday*, *Irish Tune from County Derry*, *Tribute to Foster*

The title of today's concert suggests a varied and interesting menu of musical delights - such a feast has been prepared for today's audience by the Brisbane Chorale. The intimacy of a small auditorium such as the Basil Jones Theatre is an ideal setting for the smaller scale works on today's programme from a *cappella* motets to a Baroque chamber oratorio as well as lighter items with piano accompaniment. The choice of composers and works highlights the variety of the choral repertoire - from old and new, on texts sacred and secular, from the 17th to the 20th centuries.

Brahms had a lifelong interest in choral music, with a vast output of works for chorus in a variety of combinations. *Geistliches Lied* Op.30 shows how skilfully Brahms conceals the intricacies of counterpoint within a setting that is full of textual sensitivity. The listener is unlikely to be aware of the strict double canon in the voice parts (the soprano and alto imitated a bar later by tenor and bass). Dating probably from around 1856 at the time of Schumann's death, the text's words of comfort were obviously intended for the grieving Clara. In contrast the *Fest- und Gedenksprüche* Op.109 of 1889 are bold, joyous motets for double choir in the style of Brahms' baroque idols, Schütz and Bach. Composed on the occasion of his being granted the freedom of his native city of Hamburg, lush harmonies and broad sweeping phrases.

Carissimi's *Jephte* is a landmark in the history of the oratorio. While seemingly conceived on a small scale, it contains a musical drama and characterisation on a deeply personal level. The tragic Old Testament story is the inspiration for a series of dramatic recitatives, lively choruses and arias, culminating in the heartfelt lament "Plorate". With an economy of means Carissimi here creates a skilful handling of the voice that is unsurpassed in the 17th century.

The other composers represented on this programme have contributed an individual voice to the development of music in our own age, while working largely outside the mainstream European centres of culture. The Americans Copland and Barber and Australia's Percy Grainger sought inspiration from both their culture of their homelands and the musical language of western Europe, creating an interesting blend of styles.

Like many Americans of his generation, Aaron Copland studied for a time under Nadia Boulanger in Paris. This great composition teacher continually encouraged her students to develop their own musical style, and it was under her guidance that the *Four Motets*, including *Sing Ye Praises* were composed in 1921. While not perhaps the mature Copland, these early works point towards later notable successes with the choral medium, such as the cantata *In the Beginning*.

Copland's contemporary Samuel Barber also achieved his initial successes between the wars, particularly with his *Adagio for Strings*, which remains to this day his best known work. Originally scored as a movement of his string Quartet (1936), Barber returned to it in 1967, producing this vocal setting, which is basically a vocalise on the text *Agnus Dei*.

Percy Grainger's colourful career took him at an early age to Europe and England where in addition to a brilliant performing career as a pianist, he became known as an interesting, if somewhat eccentric composer. One of his many passions was folk song research, and in this his work parallels that of Vaughan Williams, Bartok and others in the years after 1900. Two of his best settings are presented today. *I'm Seventeen come Sunday* is a folk song from Lincolnshire and Somerset, noted from the singing of a Mr Fred Atkinson in 1905. The well-known *Irish Tune from County Derry* was set by Grainger in several versions between 1902 and 1920, of which this one for wordless chorus is arguably the most effective. *Tribute to Foster* on the other hand is an imaginative set of variations on the Stephen Foster song *Camptown Races*, which Grainger recalls was often sung to him as a lullaby by his mother in 'Adelaide town'. Both the lullaby and dance - song aspects are captured here, with added interest of a brilliant solo piano part, a solo quintet and various unusual effects such as tuned musical glasses. The free juxtaposition of seemingly incompatible elements is part of Grainger's genius, as well as his rather innovative ideas of free rhythm, elastic scoring and notation. Working as he did in virtual isolation from the traditional musical establishment, these aspects of his work have earned for Grainger the nickname of the 'Charles Ives of Australia'. It is probably no coincidence that he spent much of his career in the United States, without losing contact with the people and culture of Australia.

The Brisbane Chorale presents this programme today with a sense of adventure and excitement - we hope you, the audience, enjoy the musical feast.

No.11 - Handel *Organ concerto Op.4 No.2*, Haydn *Te Deum in C*, Mozart *C minor mass K.427*, 29 September 1990

Incomplete masterworks continue to confront performers and scholars with seemingly insoluble puzzles. Various unfinished symphonies, including Schubert's Eighth, Mahler's Tenth, and for that matter the sketches for Beethoven's Tenth are tantalising inconclusive. Any latter day attempts to complete these works will be no more than just that - an attempt to piece together the full work from fragments that have survived. Mozart's *Requiem* is another example, though here the completion of the missing portions by his student Süssmayr, at the request of the composer's widow, is slightly more authoritative, it not totally satisfactory.

The *C Minor Mass* K.427 is even more problematic, since great sections of the liturgical text are missing, and so performers must either choose to ignore such considerations, or include additional movements from other works, in the manner of the 18th century 'pasticcio' opera. Modern-day consensus appears to be that the 'magnificent torso' (to use Robbins Landons' phrase) is satisfying in itself, and any attempt to supply the missing parts of the Credo and Agnus Dei would be futile. Despite the existence of the earlier *Mass in C minor*, K.139 from around 1768-70, an attempted amalgamation of the two works would cause obvious inconsistencies by combining early and mature writing styles.

The so-called "Great" *C minor Mass*, irrespective of its incomplete state, gives further cause for musicological musing - why would Mozart, who had recently broken the ties with his Salzburg employer Archbishop Collaredo, be writing a Mass in 1782? As a resident of Vienna he was becoming known as a pianist and opera composer and moreover, Emperor Joseph II's 'enlightened' views on church music precluded any elaborate ceremony or liturgical performance. A letter from Mozart to his father indicates that he wished to bring his new bride Constanze to meet the family in Salzburg and compose a special mass for the occasion. Further proof of the personal element in the creation of this work is the prominence given to the soprano solos intended for Constanze herself to sing. Thus the work probably only had one performance in Mozart's lifetime, at St Peter's Church in Salzburg in October 1783. The composer obviously had a certain affection for it, since he later reworked it as an oratorio, *David Penitente* K.469 two years later.

Composed on a grander scale than any of his other church music, this mass combines Austrian classical sophistication with Italian operatic brilliance and neo-Baroque grandeur. Much of the solo writing could have been transplanted from an *opera seria*, with virtuosic passages and cadenzas (Laudamus Te) and movements of great expressive beauty (Et incarnatus est). The choral movements are largely Baroque in conception - fugues abound in the Kyrie, Gloria, Cum Sancto Spirito and Osanna, a ground bass dominates the Qui tollis and concerto grosso style is seen in the Credo. The Handelian double choir format is also utilised in several places (Qui tollis, Sanctus, Osanna). Likewise, some of the ensembles are tinged with the Baroque spirit - the Domine Jesu is a rather spritely minor-key Minuet, while the Quoniam and Benedictus abound with canonic imitation between the voices. Despite these Baroque features, the melodic invention, harmonic richness and skilful orchestration found throughout the work are unmistakably the work of the mature Mozart.

The companion works on this programme present slightly different facets of the 18th Century, though each could be in some way related to the major work. Haydn's *Te Deum in C* was composed around the time of his six late Masses which, like the Mozart *C Minor Mass* combine Viennese classicism with high Baroque techniques. Haydn had learned much from Handel's choral writing, after being profoundly inspired by some oratorio performances during his visits to London in the 1790s. He went on to create his own masterpiece in the genre, *The Creation*, soon afterwards. The *Te Deum* is a concise essay in choral-orchestral writing, with a most effective and efficient setting of the long text. Only in the culminating double fugue does Haydn allow himself to expand beyond the crisply articulated syllabic approach used throughout the work. The first authenticated performance took place in 1800 in Eisenstadt, and like the *Mass in B flat* of the previous year, is dedicated to the Empress Marie Therese.

A clear parallel exists between Handel's and Mozart's careers - both were trained in a provincial German speaking city in the rigours of counterpoint and church music, yet felt compelled to travel south to Italy to visit the source of their greatest musical love, opera. Both composers were also great keyboard virtuosos, exemplified in their concertos for organ and piano respectively. Handel's organ concertos were commonly performed in the intervals of his oratorios, with the composer as soloist. This *Concerto in B-flat* from Opus 4 was first performed during a performance in 1735 of his first English oratorio, *Esther*. After a stately introduction, the typical fast-slow-fast sequence of movements ensues, of which the expressive slow movement is particularly striking.