

Fantasy on Medieval Carols (2005)

SATB chorus, children's chorus w/ piano

Difficulty rating: 3+

Duration: 15'30"

Premiere: Greenwich Village Singers, Children's Aid Society Chorus, conducted by Mark Mangini, Walter Hulse, piano, NYC, 12/16/05

My *Fantasy on Medieval Carols* was composed for the 30th anniversary of the Greenwich Village Singers, an ensemble for whom I served as composer-in-residence for several years and sang in the tenor section for longer. The addition of a children's chorus added a special element to the proceedings.

The *Fantasy* is a through-composed work consisting of substantial re-imaginings of seven medieval carols, some well-known, others more obscure. I have also made use of the "Hodie" chant, which likewise opens Britten's *Ceremony of Carols*, a work of a similar genre, but considerably more ethereal and introverted than mine. The chant is elaborated by the piano to provide introductory and linking material throughout the work.

The celebration of Christmas has long been a synthesis and juxtaposition of the sacred and the profane, and it is that contrast that largely drives the *Fantasy*. Cross-relations--created when one pitch is followed by or played simultaneously with its chromatic alteration (F and F#)--were common in medieval music and crop up often in the *Fantasy*. They add a twist to the light dance of the first carol, sung by the children's chorus to a text that tells of the Immaculate Conception. The next two movements, the annunciation carol "Angelus ad virginem" and the well-known "Personent hodie," endure raucous and borderline irreverent treatments. The latter closes with a section in which the adult women sing their lines randomly underneath the men and children. The austere "Ecce quod natura," another "Marian" carol, provides a stark contrast. The juxtaposition is even stronger between the next two movements, the gentle lullaby of the "Chester Nuns' Song," sung by women and children only, and the rowdy "Song of the Ass." From beneath the braying the children emerge with the "Puer nobis nascitur" which closes the piece with unabashed joy.

Procedenti puero

Procedenti puero
Eya, novus annus est!
Virginis ex utero
Gloria! Laudis!
Deus homo factus est et immortalis.

*To the Boy proceeding,
Eya, this is the new year,
From the virgin's womb,
Give glory of praise;
God is made man and immortal.*

Sine viri semine
Eya, novus annus est!
Natus est de virgine
Gloria! Laudis!
Deus homo factus est et immortalis.

*Without the seed of a man
Eya, this is the new year,
He is born of a virgin
Give glory of praise;
God is made man and immortal.*

Plene non obnoxia
Eya, novus annus est!
Virgo viri nescia
Gloria! Laudis!
Deus homo factus est et immortalis.

*Wholly without taint
Eya, this is the new year,
Is the virgin not knowing man.
Give glory of praise;
God is made man and immortal.*

Angelus ad virginem

Angelus ad virginem
Sub intrans in conclave,
Virginis formidinem
Demulcens, inquit: Ave!
Ave regina virginum;
Caeli terraeque Dominum
Concipies
Et paries intacta
Salutem hominum;
Tu porta caeli facta,
Medela criminum.

Quomodo conciperem
Quae virum non cognovi?
Qualiter infringerem
Quod firma mente vovi?
Spiritus Sancti gratia
Perficiet haec omnia;
Ne timeas,
Sed gaudeas, segura
Quod castimonia
Manebit in te pura
Dei potentia.

Ad haec virgo nobilis
Respondens inquit ei:
Ancilla sum humilis
Omnipotentis Dei.
Tibi caelesti nuntio,
Tanti secreti conscio,
Consentiens,
Et cupiens videre
Factum quod audio;
Parata sum parere,
Dei consilio.

Personent Hodie

Personent hodie
voces puerulae,
laudantes iucunde
qui nobis est natus,
summo Deo datus,
et de virgineo ventre procreatus.

Magi tres venerunt,
parvulum inquirunt,
parvulum inquirunt,
stellulam sequendo,
ipsum adorando,
aurum, thus, et myrrham ei offerendo.

Omnes clericuli,
pariter pueri,
cantent ut angeli:
advenisti mundo,
laudes tibi fundo.
ideo gloria in excelsis Deo.

*When the angel came secretly
to the Virgin in her room,
soothing the maiden's fear,
he said: "Hail!
Hail, Queen of virgins.
While yet untouched by man
you shall conceive and bear
the Lord of heaven and earth,
salvation for mankind.
You have become the gate of heaven,
a remedy for sins."*

*"How can I conceive,
since I have not known a man?
How can I break the vow
I made with firm intent?"
"The grace of the Holy Spirit
shall bring all this to pass.
Fear not,
but rejoice, secure in the
knowledge that pure chastity
shall remain yours
through God's mighty power."*

*To this the noble Virgin
replied, saying:
"I am the lowly handmaiden
of Almighty God.
I bend my will to you,
O celestial messenger,
who share so great a mystery,
and I long to see performed
what I now hear.
I am ready to yield myself
to God's design."*

*On this day earth shall ring
with the song children sing
to the Lord, Christ our King,
born on earth to save us;
him the Father gave us.
For us born on this morn of the virgin Mary*

*God's bright star, o'er his head,
Wise Men three to him led;
kneel they low by his bed,
lay their gifts before him,
praise him and adore him.
Gifts of gold, frankincense, myrrh for their oblation*

*On this day angels sing;
with their song earth shall ring,
praising Christ, heaven's King,
born on earth to save us;
peace and love he gave us.
Ideo, gloria in excelsis Deo
(Trans. Jane Joseph)*

Ecce quod natura

Ecce quod natura
Mutat sua jura,
Virgo parit pura
Dei Filium.

*Behold how nature has changed her laws;
A pure virgin has borne the son of God.*

Ecce novum gaudium,
Ecce novum mirum,
Virgo parit filium,
Que non novit virum;

*Behold, a new joy.
Behold, a new miracle.
A virgin hath borne a son,
She who hath never known a man.*

Que non novit virum;
Sed ut pirus pirum
Gleba fert saphirum,
Dei Filium.

*She who hath never known a man,
But as a pear tree makes a pear
Or a clod earth produces sapphires,
The rose hath brought forth the lily.*

Ecce quod natura...

Mundum Deus flebilem
Videns in ruina,
Rosam dilectabilem
Produxit de spina,

*God seeing the wretched earth
Falling into ruins,
Hath brought forth the flower bright
From beneath the thorn;*

Produxit de spina,
Que cele regina
Nostra medicina
Et salus hominum.

*From beneath the thorn
a virgin who became a queen,
remedy for the world,
health for all the nations.*

Ecce quod natura...

[From Angelus ad virginem:]

Eia mater Domini,
Quae pacem redidisti
Angelis et homini,
Cum Christum genuisti:

*Ah, mother of the Lord,
who gave back peace
to angels and mankind
when you bore Christ....*

Song of the Nuns of Chester

Qui creavit coelum, Lully, lully, lu!
Nascitur in stabulo, By, by, by, by, by,
Rex qui regit seculum, Lully, lully, lu!

*He who made the earth so fair, lully, lully lu,
Slumbers in a stable bare, by by, by by, by,
Warm'd by cattle standing there, lully, lully lu!*

Lactat mater Domini, By, by, by, by, by,
Osculatur parvulum, Lully, lully, lu!
Et adorat Dominum, By, by, by, by, by,

*Jesus sleeps in Mary's arm, lully, lully lu,
Sheltered there from rude alarm, by, by by, by,
None can do Him ill or harm, lully, lully lu!*

Roga mater filium, Lully, lully, lu!
Ut det nobis gaudium, By, by, by, by, by,
In pereni gloria, Lully, lully, lu!

*See his Mother o'er Him bend, lully, lully lu,
Hers the joy to soothe and tend, by, by by, by,
Hers the bliss that knows no end, lully, lully lu!
(Trans. Irene Gass)*

Orientis partibus (Song of the Ass)

Orientis partibus
adventavit asinus
pulcher et fortissimus
sarcinis aptissimus

*In eastern lands,
the ass arrived,
pretty and so strong,
fit for burden.*

“Hez, sire asne, Hez”

Hey, Sir Ass, Hey

Saltu vincit hinnulos
damas et capreolos
super dromedarios
velox madianeos

Hic in collibus Sychen
iam nutritus sub Ruben
transiit per Jordanem
saliit in Bethlehem

Dum trahit vehicula
multa cum sarcinula
illius mandibula
dura terit pabula

Cum aristis, hordeum
comedit et carduum
triticum ex palea
segregat in area

Amen dicas, asine
Iam satur ex gramine
amen, amen itera
aspernare vetera

Puer nobis nascitur

Puer nobis nascitur
rector angelorum;
in hoc mundo pascitur
Dominus dominorum.

In praesepe ponitur
sub foeno asinorum.
Cognoverunt Dominum Christum
Regem coelorum.

Qui natus de virgine
die hodierna
ducat nos cum gratia
ad gaudia superna.

[From *Procedenti puero*:]
Sit laus regi glorie,
Eya, novus annus est!

[From "Laetabundus" chant:]
Laetabundus exsultet fidelis chorus...

O et A et A et O
Cum cantibus in choro,
cum canticis et organo,
benedicamus Domino.

*In his leaps he conquers the mules,
the fallow deer and roebucks,
and surpasses the fast
camels of the Medes.*

*Here in the hills of Sychen,
already suckled below the Ruben,
he crosses the Jordan;
he enters Bethlehem.*

*While he pulls carts,
many with heavy loads,
his jaws
grind tough fodder.*

*He eats barley, beards and all,
and spiny thistles.
He separates the wheat from the chaff
on the threshing floor.*

*You say "amen", ass,
all filled with grass,
"amen", "amen" once again,
spurning the past.*

*Unto us a boy is born!
King of all creation,
Came He to a world forlorn,
The Lord of every nation,*

*Cradled in a stall was He
With sleepy cows and asses;
But the very beasts could see
That He all men surpasses,*

*Now may Mary's Son, who came
So long ago to love us,
Lead us all with hearts aflame
Unto the joys above us,*

*Let praise be to the king of glory,
Eya, this is the new year!*

Rejoice the happy faithful choir...

*Alpha and Omega He!
Let the organ thunder,
While the choir with peals of glee
Doth rend the air asunder.
(Trans. Percy Dearmer)*