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The Gregg Smith Singers

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HENDERSON STATE
COLLEGE

and

OUACHITA BAPTIST
UNIVERSITY

Arkadelphia, Arkansas

CONCERT SERIES 1968-1969

THE GREGG SMITH SINGERS

Mitchell Hall Auditorium

November 1, 1968, 8:00 P.M.

THE GREGG SMITH SINGERS

Gregg Smith, Conductor

Raymond Beegle, Accompanist

SOLOISTS

Esther Martinez-Soprano

Priscilla Magdoma Abraham-Alto

William Lyon Lee-Tenor

William Feuerstein-Bass

PART 1

Carols of Death

WILLIAM SCHUMAN

The Last Invocation

Toward an Unknown Region

To All, To Each

Known as one of America's most important 20th century orchestral composers, William Schuman has also made major contributions to the choral repertoire. His own experience as choral director at Sarah Lawrence College in his early professional career seems to have given him a special understanding of choral textures and sounds. Of his many a cappella pieces the *Carols of Death* are the most stunning and beautiful; the choral colors, the careful detail given to each word and mood, make these settings of Walt Whitman texts true 20th century masterpieces.

Selections from "Celestial Country"

CHARLES IVES

(Soloists, Organ or Piano and Chorus)

From the age of 12, Charles Ives was extremely active as organist, choir director - and - composer for the church. This association continued for almost 20 years until his insurance business activity left him only extra time for composing. His first compositions for the church were very simple and in the sentimental style of the day. It is quite certain that his early music was performed often in Danbury, Conn., where he lived as a boy. But even as early as 1895 when Ives was only 21 (and now at Yale University) extraordinarily advanced compositions, mainly set to Psalm texts, were begun. Between 1895 - 1900 Ives incorporated into these Psalms just about every idea that was to occur in 20th century, polytonality, 12 tone music, tone clusters,

polyrhythms, changing meters, etc. It is doubtful that any of these Psalms were performed in a regular service although Ives later remembered trying a couple of the pieces in rehearsals. After Yale, Ives moved to New York (1898) and became organist-choir director at the Central Presbyterian Church. In 1902 his Cantata, "Celestial Country", was given its first public performance. Ives must have realized the limitations of his choir (and congregation) because he seems to have returned to the more simple, romantic style of his youthful pieces. Even so, the reviewers did comment on the modernism and complexity of his work - noting the rather "wild" harmonies employed. To present ears, the work sounds very Wagnerian with its abundant use of chromatic harmony, and also very impressionistic - the total result being lovely and charming.

Psalm 90

CHARLES IVES

(Chorus, Organ or Piano, Bells, Chimes and Gong)

This work could rightly be called Ives' sacred masterpiece, and it is slowly becoming recognized as one of the greatest of 20th century choral works. Finished between 1900-1902, it encompasses all of the innovations of the previous Psalms, 14, 24, 25, 54, 67, 100, 135 and 150, all given to a powerful and sublime expression of text. This ranges from a 22-note tone cluster to express the feeling of wrath to a simple and beautiful hymn expressing the "rejoicing in beauty and work". In a final grand expression of faith, Ives uses varying sets of bells and chimes superimposed over the hymn itself, creating new dimensions of sound.

Short Intermission

PART II

Music for Multidimensional Choirs

Around 1930 Charles Ives wrote an article entitled "Music in the Future" in which he anticipated the stereo revolution that was to occur 25 years later. It was Ives' contention that music should not be confined to one sound-making area but could and would come from all over, as he put it in his own crusty way: "to better bring out the inner content of the music

(assuming there is inner content)". In these presentations the Gregg Smith Singers have endeavored to fulfill Ives' idea both for traditional music and with music written for this medium. For the audience, therefore, there is the new experience of being surrounded by sound not through the phonograph but with live musicians.

Heilig

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

Mendelssohn was one of the most prolific of romantic composers of church music. The great popularity of his oratorio "Elijah" has tended to overshadow the many other beautiful works that he wrote for the church. "Heilig" is one of these — a true miniature masterpiece. Written for two 4-part choirs, the opening is stunning as the notes of a rich eight-part chord are sung one at a time by each part of the choirs. After the chord has unfolded, the two choirs answer each other back and forth in the great antiphonal tradition.

Nymphes Des Bois

JOSQUIN DES PRES

One of the great glories of the early renaissance, "Nymphes Des Bois" is a lament on the death of Josquin's teacher, Johannes Ockeghem. The text implores the nymphes of the woods and master singers of all nations to make their beautiful voices into trenchant cries and lamentations because of the death of Ockeghem. As a four-part madrigal group sings this lament in French, the tenors sing the requiem in Latin. Near the end of the piece the tenors cease and two groups of singers answer each other, and finally all the singers join in a short "Requiescat in Pace".

"Gloria" and "Lauda Jerusalem" from *Vespers of 1610*

CLAUDIO MONTEVERDI

The *Vespers of 1610* is a grandly scaled evening service for Chorus, orchestra and soloists which includes several motets, solos, duets and a full scale Magnificat. Throughout the work Monteverdi uses the traditional magnificat chant, weaving both beautiful melodies and most complex counterpoint about it. In the Gloria two tenors duet in florid opera style, the second is an echo of the first. As they sing, the treble voices spin

out the chant in long sustained notes. In the *Lauda Jerusalem*, Monteverdi employs tenors in the chant, this time in incredibly "jazzy" and complex rhythmic form, while two choirs of 3 parts each weave their complex and rhythmic lines in and around the tenors. *Lauda Jerusalem* is at the same time one of the most complex and most exciting of all renaissance choral pieces.

Three Contemporary Pieces for Multiple Choirs

The three contemporary pieces reflect thoughts and ideas of these times, it being Gregg Smith's strong feeling that not only should a serious concert present the traditional classical music (and even the first 50 years of the 20th century are now traditional!) but it should also in some way be involved with the present in terms of feelings and issues. The three pieces presented here are not intended as any one viewpoint but showing contemporary young artists reflecting ideas of their times.

The Bells of Rhymey

(text by Pete Seeger -
setting by Michael Hennagen)

In this setting of the well-known text by the Folk-singer, Pete Seeger, composer Hennagen utilizes the bell motive through both choir (basses) and instruments to create the ominous feeling of the text. The actual text is sung back and forth between two other choral forces in a polytonal setting.

This is the Word

(text by Woodie Guthrie -
setting by J. Marks)

The text of "This is the Word" is a beautiful expression of the artist's own reason of being. The music itself is completely improvised and yet the organization created by Marks is a true composition: six soloists follow each other singly, then in pairs, then three, four and five — at the end coming together quietly. The rest of the choir sings random chords together using the text backwards. This work was created by Mr. Marks for a forthcoming Columbia Album featuring the Gregg Smith Singers called "Rock and Other Four Letter Words".

Election, 1968

(Music by Dale Jergenson,
Edmund Najera, Gregg Smith)

Election, 1968 is a conglomeration of the words and sounds of the summer of 1968 — a reflection of the bizarre, the banal, the ugly, cheap and even grand and beautiful. The use of three different composers is just an extension of the fact that the conventions themselves juxtaposed the most divergent of personalities and elements. Each composer has written for one of three choirs, each choir having a different personality. Although the total organization was worked out together, each composer wrote for his own choir independently in the hopes that a musical “convention atmosphere” can be realized. The texts were written (or at least spoken) by many different people, some very well known and some not. The music includes much original as well as many “old favorite” melodies.

Long Intermission
PART III

A Catch
Consonance

(Anonymous)
WILLIAM BILLINGS

In returning to the traditional the Gregg Smith Singers present two works of a lighter nature. The *Catch* comes from the renaissance and in round form portrays the street cries of London — the peddler coming from afar selling his wares — approaching and then disappearing. *Consonance* is a lively setting of a text about music by that wonderful American contemporary of George Washington, William Billings. As in most of the music of this time in America, the piece is marked by exuberant rhythms and tremendous spirit.

Alice In Wonderland - Suite II

IRVING FINE

The Knaves Letter
The White Knight's Song
Beautiful Soup

(Women's Choir & Piano)

With his untimely death in 1962, composers everywhere mourned the loss of Irving Fine, a true composer's composer. Every work he wrote was beautifully crafted, and he is especially unexcelled as a choral composer because of his exquisitely careful setting of text. "Alice in Wonderland" is a delightful example — Fine not only captures the whimsical but with complete artistry. An outstanding pianist himself, Fine wrote virtuoso piano parts in his accompaniments.

Two Philippine Folksongs (music collected by
Priscilla Magdoma Abraham and arranged by
Edmund Najera and Dale Jergenson)
(Priscilla Abraham-Alto soloist, Male Chorus and Instruments)

Priscilla Magdoma Abraham is a native of the Philippines and has spent a lifetime collecting and recording the folksongs of her native land. An excellent musician, she is also blessed with a beautiful alto voice.

Three American Folksongs arr. by GREGG SMITH

The Bluetail Fly - American
Gladjens Blomster (Fairest Flowers) - Swedish
The Railroad Corral - American

Folksong presentations have always been a traditional part of the Gregg Smith Singers programs, combining as they so well do important musical expression and yet a wide area of communication. As specialists in the modern, the Gregg Smith Singers have added the modern touch to their arrangements. "Bluetail Fly" employs polytonality in its humorous setting of the favorite southern folksong. "Gladjens Blomster" is poignantly beautiful and yet rich harmonically in this basically simple setting. "Railroad Corral" is a virtuoso setting for chorus. With a strong lively beat, Gregg Smith has added colorful harmonies and fascinating counterpoint, yet never neglecting the various changes of text. The final chord is completely modern, deliberately unresolved to give the feeling of the herd still trudging onward in the dusk to the final corral.