



directed by Leonard Enns

The Poetry is in the Pity

with special guests

CBC Radio network concert host, **Eric Friesen**

KW Symphony first chair cellist, **John Helmers**

and featuring the poetry of **Wilfrid Owen**

music of protest, lament, and reflection

Allegri

Bach

Taverner

Britten

Gorecki

Penderecki

this concert is an associated event of

“**Benjamin Britten: A Celebration**”

Saturday, November 15th, 2003

St. John the Evangelist Anglican Church, Kitchener

PROGRAM

ANTHEM FOR DOOMED YOUTH (OCTOBER 1917) – WILFRID OWEN (1893-1918)
Sarabande from Cello Suite No. 2 in d minor – J.S. Bach (1685-1750)

DULCE ET DECORUM EST – WILFRID OWEN
Amen – Henryk Gorecki (bn. 1933)

THE PARABLE OF THE OLD MAN AND THE YOUNG (JULY 1918) – WILFRID OWEN
Miserere – Gregorio Allegri (1582-1652)

Please hold applause until the end of the concert
intermission

Sarabande from Cello Suite No.5 in c minor – J.S. Bach

AT A CALVARY NEAR THE ANCRE – WILFRID OWEN
Agnus Dei – Kristof Penderecki (bn. 1933)

FUTILITY – WILFRID OWEN
Svyati – John Tavener (bn. 1944)

STRANGE MEETING – WILFRID OWEN
Immortal Bach (Komm, süsßer Tod) – Knut Nystedt (arr.) (bn. 1915)

NOTES & TEXTS

(Program notes written by Leonard Enns except where indicated)

Wilfrid Owen lived a short, troubled life, the victim of the machines of politics, war, and social custom, and the recipient of an amazing and compelling gift of language and poetry. Owen was killed in action, leading his troops in France, in the early morning of November 4th, 1918. The dreaded telegram arrived at his parent's door in England a week later, on November 11th, as the Armistice bells were ringing.

Most of the readings on tonight's concert are selected from the poems used by Benjamin Britten in his War Requiem, and thus, to a large extent, these selections are Britten's. All of the inset excerpts from letters and poems are the words of Owen as well.

ANTHEM FOR DOOMED YOUTH (OCTOBER 1917) – WILFRID OWEN

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
– Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
Can patter out their hasty orisons.

No mockeries now for them; no prayers nor bells;
Nor any voice of mourning save the choirs, -
The shrill, demented choirs of wailing shells;
And bugles calling for them from sad shires.

What candles may be held to speed them all?
Not in the hands of boys, but in their eyes
Shall shine the holy glimmers of goodbyes.
The pallor of girls' brows shall be their pall;
Their flowers the tenderness of patient minds,
And each slow dusk a drawing-down of blinds.

DULCE ET DECORUM EST (MARCH 1918) – WILFRID OWEN

Bent double, like old beggars under sacks,
Knock-kneed, coughing like hags,
we cursed through sludge,
Till on the haunting flares
we turned our backs,
And towards our distant rest
began to trudge.
Men marched asleep.
Many had lost their boots,
But limped on, blood-shod.
All went lame; all blind;
Drunk with fatigue; deaf even to the hoots
Of gas-shells dropping softly behind.

Gas! Gas! Quick, boys!
– An ecstasy of fumbling,
Fitting the clumsy helmets just in time;
But someone still was yelling out
and stumbling,
And flound'ring like a man in fire or lime...
Dim, through the misty panes
and thick green light,
As under a green sea, I saw him drowning.

In all my dreams, before my helpless sight,
He plunges at me, guttering, choking,
drowning.

If in some smothering dreams,
you too could pace
Behind the wagon that we flung him in,
And watch the white eyes writhing
in his face,
His hanging face, like a devil's sick of sin;
If you could hear, at every jolt, the blood
Come gargling from the
froth-corrupted lungs,
Obscene as cancer, bitter as the cud
Of vile, incurable sores on innocent
tongues, –
My friend, you would not tell
with such high zest
To children ardent
for some desperate glory,
The old Lie: Dulce et decorum est
Pro patria mori.*

[*from Horace, Odes: "It is sweet and
decorous to die for one's county."]

*I am furious with chagrin to think that the minds, which
were to have excelled the civilization of ten thousand years,
are being annihilated – and bodies, the product of aeons of
Natural Selection, melted down to pay for political statues.*

(From a letter to Owen's mother, August 1914,
at the outbreak of the war.)

Amen – Henryk Gorecki

The normal sense of "Amen, so be it" here becomes "It is so, but Why, WHY!?" Gorecki's music fairly screams from the misery of an occupied people with a memory of a near-lost past, desperate for meaningful future. Gorecki and Penderecki – whose Agnus is on the second half of our concert – were both born in Poland within two weeks of each other. While Gorecki's Amen seems rough-hewn, and granite-like in its dimensions, Penderecki's Agnus has a much more personal and human quality to it. Both, though, are anguished, and both reach out to a spiritual past while refusing to relinquish a hold on hope for the future.

THE PARABLE OF THE OLD MAN AND THE YOUNG (JULY 1918) – WILFRID OWEN

So Abram rose, and clave the wood, and went,
And took the fire with him, and a knife.
And as they sojourned both of them together,
Issac, the first-born spake and said, My Father,
Behold the preparations, the fire and iron,
But where the lamb for this burnt offering?
Then Abram bound the youth with belts and straps,
And builded parapets and trenches there,
And stretched forth the knife to slay his son.
When lo! an angel called him out of heaven,
Saying, Lay not a hand upon the lad,
Neither do anything to him. Behold,
A ram, caught in a thicket by its horns;
Offer the Ram of Pride instead of him.
But the old man would not do so, but slew his son,
And half the seed of Europe, one by one.

*'The world is washing out its stains,' he said.
'It doesn't like our cheeks for red:
Young blood's its great objection.
But when we're duly white-washed, being dead,
The race will bear Field Marshal God's inspection.'*
(from the poem, *Inspection*, 1917)

Miserere (Psalm 51) – Gregorio Allegri

While the five high C's (shared alternately between our three first sopranos) are only one element of several which make Allegri's setting of Psalm 51 a challenging and memorable one, the poignancy of this text lies particularly in the way the Psalm gains new meaning after we have heard Owen. The final section of Psalm 51 calls for sacrifices of a broken and contrite heart – the "Ram of Pride" in Owen's words – rather than burnt offerings. Owen's chilling poem unmasks our refusal to honour this call, and the Psalmist's words disturb profoundly.

Have mercy on me, O God,
according to your unfailing love;
according to your great compassion
blot out my transgressions.
Wash away all my iniquity
and cleanse me from my sin.
For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is always before me.

Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are proved right when you speak
and justified when you judge.
Surely I was sinful at birth,
sinful from the time my mother conceived me.
Surely you desire truth in the inner parts;
you teach me wisdom in the inmost place.
Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.

Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones you have crushed rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins
and blot out all my iniquity.
Create in me a pure heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me from your presence
or take your Holy Spirit from me.

Restore to me the joy of your salvation
and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.
Then I will teach transgressors your ways,
and sinners will turn back to you.
Save me from bloodguilt, O God,
the God who saves me,
and my tongue will sing of your
righteousness.
O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth will declare your praise.

You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would
bring it;
you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings.
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit;
a broken and contrite heart,
O God, you will not despise.
In your good pleasure make Zion prosper;
build up the walls of Jerusalem.
Then there will be righteous sacrifices,
whole burnt offerings to delight you;
then bulls will be offered on your altar.

AT A CALVARY NEAR THE ANCRE (JANUARY 1918) – WILFRID OWEN

One ever hangs where shelled roads part.
In this war He too lost a limb,
But His disciples hide apart;
And now the Soldiers bear with Him.

Near Golgatha strolls many a priest,
And in their faces there is pride
That they were flesh-marked by the Beast
By whom the gentle Christ's denied.

The scribes on all the people shove
And bawl allegiance to the state,
But they who love the greater love
Lay down their life; they do not hate.

*For fourteen hours yesterday I was at work
– teaching Christ to lift his cross by numbers,
and how to adjust his crown; and not to imagine
he thirst until after the last halt; I attended his
supper to see that there were no complaints; and I
inspected his feet to see that they should be worthy
of the nails...see to it that he is dumb and stands to
attention before his accusers. With a piece of silver
I buy him every day, and with maps I make him
familiar with the topography of Golgotha.*

(From a letter to Osbert Sitwell, July 1918.)

Agnus Dei – Kristof Penderecki

Penderecki's Agnus Dei is extracted from his Polish Requiem – a mammoth work written in stages over a period of three years, initiated by an initially unrelated commission in 1980 from Solidarity leader Lech Walesa. Despite the title of the Requiem, and this seminal motivation, Penderecki insists "I don't write political music. Political music is immediately obsolete. ... The Requiem is dedicated to certain people and events, but the music has a broader significance." The Agnus was written in a single burst in 1981 when Penderecki's friend Cardinal Wyszynski died: "I got the news in the morning and I wrote the Agnus Dei by that afternoon."

The music marks a departure from Penderecki's earlier highly experimental music often consisting of intense sound-blocks, to a new embracing of lyricism, tonality and expression linking back all the way to chant. However, the central cry of the Agnus – "peccata" – is still painted by Penderecki with a raw, almost unbearable intensity. It is a moment of confession – a scream from under the wheel of oppression; at the same time, an agonizing plea for forgiveness and renewal: Agnus dei, qui tollis peccata mundi – Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world. At such points, both Penderecki and Gorecki join hands expressively, in an intensity which grows from deep sorrow and desperate hope – only the cloth of the choral texture differs.

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world,
have mercy upon us.

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world,
have mercy upon us.

Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world,
grant us peace.

FUTILITY (MAY 1918) – WILFRID OWEN

Move him into the sun -
Gently its touch awoke him once,
At home, whispering of fields unsown.
Always it woke him, even in France,
Until this morning and this snow.
If anything might rouse him now
The kind old sun will know.

Think how it wakes the seeds -
Woke once the clays of a cold star.
Are limbs, so dear-achieved, are sides
Full-nerved, still warm, too hard to stir?
Was it for this the clay grew tall?
- O what made fatuous sunbeams toil
To break earth's sleep at all?

I came out in order to help these boys – directly by leading them as well as an officer can; indirectly, by watching their sufferings that I may speak of them as well as a pleader can.

(From a letter to his mother, October 1918,
a month before Owen was killed
on the Western Front.)

Svyati– John Tavener

The text of Svyati is the Trisagion used in almost every Russian Orthodox service and during funerals when the coffin is borne out of the church. Tavener describes the solo cello as representing the Priest, or as the Ikon of Christ, throughout in dialogue with the choir.

O Holy God,
Holy and Strong,
Holy and immortal,
Have mercy on us

STRANGE MEETING (MARCH 1918) – WILFRID OWEN

It seems that out of battle I escaped
Down some profound dull tunnel, long since scooped
Through granites which titanic wars had groined.

Yet also there encumbered sleepers groaned,
Too fast in thought or death to be bestirred.
Then, as I probed them, one sprang up, and stared
With piteous recognition in fixed eyes,
Lifting distressful hands, as if to bless.
And by his smile, I knew that sullen hall, --
By his dead smile I knew we stood in Hell.

With a thousand pains that vision's face was grained;
Yet no blood reached there from the upper ground,
And no guns thumped, or down the flues made moan.

"Strange friend," I said, "here is no cause to mourn."

"None", said the other, "save the undone years,
The hopelessness. Whatever hope is yours,
Was my life also; I went hunting wild
After the wildest beauty in the world,
Which lies not calm in eyes, or braided hair,
But mocks the steady running of the hour,
And if it grieves, grieves richlier than here.
For by my glee might many men have laughed,
And of my weeping something had been left,
Which must die now. I mean the truth untold,
The pity of war, the pity war distilled.
Now men will go content with what we spoiled.
Or, discontent, boil bloody, and be spilled.
They will be swift with swiftness of the tigress,
None will break ranks, though nations trek from progress.
Courage was mine, and I had mystery,
Wisdom was mine, and I had mastery:
To miss the march of this retreating world
Into vain citadels that are not walled.

Then, when much blood had clogged their chariot-wheels
I would go up and wash them from sweet wells,
Even with truths that lie too deep for taint.
I would have poured my spirit without stint
But not through wounds; not on the cess of war.
Foreheads of men have bled where no wounds were.”

“I am the enemy you killed, my friend.
I knew you in this dark; for so you frowned
Yesterday through me as you jabbed and killed.
I parried; but my hands were loath and cold.
Let us sleep now...”

*I suppose I am doing in poetry what the advanced
composers are doing in music.*

I am not satisfied with either.

(From a letter to Owen's mother, January, 1918.)

Immortal Bach – Knut Nystedt (arr.)

(based on the music of Bach's chorale, *Komm, süsßer Tod*)

Nystedt's arrangement gives to Bach's music a texture of timelessness – an image of a sleep in which the marking of minutes and hours, and the turning of pages on a calendar, are no longer relevant.

Come, sweet death!
Come, blessed rest!
Come, lead me into peace!

ARTISTS

DaCapo Chamber Choir

DaCapo is a community chamber choir now in its fifth season, dedicated to exploring unaccompanied music, mainly of the 20th Century.

Our performance season consists of three annual concerts in Kitchener-Waterloo: once in the fall around Remembrance Day, a mid-winter and a spring concert.

In addition, the choir performs on an ad hoc basis at other events.

DaCapo Choir Members

Soprano:

Shannon Beynon

Sara Fretz

Sara Martin

Stacey VanderMeer

Jennie Wiebe

Tenor:

Thomas Brown

Joel Brubacher

J. Alexander Clarke

Tim Corlis

Ron Schweitzer

Alto:

Angie Koch

Shauna Leis

Janice Maust Hedrick

Susan Schwartzentruber

Sara Wahl

Bass:

Donny Cheung

Alan Martin

Kevin Martin

Kevin Smith

Dave Switzer

Special thanks to our guest basses, Friedrich Kuebart, Mark Diller Harder and Tom Yoder Neufeld.

Music Director, Leonard Enns

Conductor and composer Leonard Enns has been a member of the Music faculty at Conrad Grebel University College, University of Waterloo since 1977, where he teaches music theory and composition, conducting, and directs the College Chapel Choir. He is the founding director of the DaCapo Chamber Choir.

Upcoming performances of his music include his choral symphony, *The Silver Cord*, just published by EC Schirmer of Boston. The work will be performed February 28, 2004 by the KW Philharmonic Choir, KW Symphony, baritone Marcel Beaulieu, and conductor Howard Dyck at Kitchener's Centre in the Square

Various CDs including Enns' music have been released in recent years by groups such as The Toronto Children's Chorus, The Winnipeg Singers, Phil Ens and the Faith and Life Male Chorus, The Menno Singers, and others. A forthcoming Canadian Music Centre disc recording of his music is in the planning stages.

Eric Friesen

Eric Friesen is the network classical concert music host for the CBC Radio programs In Performance and Onstage. He joined CBC Radio in Ottawa in 1972 has worked for CBC in various capacities since then, in Ottawa, Winnipeg and Toronto. From 1984 to 1997 he worked for American Public Radio in St. Paul, Minnesota, first as Executive Vice President and then as classical music host.

Eric is active on various boards in the arts, music, and academic communities – currently those of Roy Thomson Hall, Massey Hall, the Toronto Symphony Orchestra; and in the past the Minnesota Opera, the American Composers' Guild, The Minnesota College of the Performing Arts, and Conrad Grebel University College at the University of Waterloo.

John Helmers

A former student of Janos Starker, John Helmers is a graduate of both Queen's and Indiana Universities. He has previously served as principal cellist of both the National Ballet of Canada and the Calgary Philharmonic. Currently he is principal cellist of the Kitchener-Waterloo Symphony (KWS) and a member of the Canadian Chamber Ensemble. He has appeared frequently as soloist with the KWS, and has toured internationally as cellist of the CCE. John also appears regularly as a chamber musician at various summer festivals, including the Elora Festival and the Festival of the Sound, and teaches cello in the Music Department at Conrad Grebel University College, University of Waterloo.

Acknowledgements

DaCapo logo, poster, and program design – Heather Lee

Thank you to Conrad Grebel University College for providing the space for DaCapo's weekly rehearsals.

DaCapo gratefully acknowledges the funding support of the Waterloo Regional Arts Fund for the recording of our first CD, scheduled for release later this season.

Upcoming Performances

Saturday March 13, 2004

– St. John the Evangelist Anglican Church, Kitchener

Sunday May 30, 2004

– First United Church, Waterloo

To inquire about auditions, or for more information e-mail DaCapo at dacapo@canada.com or visit our Web site at <http://grebel.uwaterloo.ca/dacapo>