

Eastman-Rochester Chorus Eastman Philharmonia

William Weinert and Jonathan Mott, *conductors*

Friday, December 6, 2024
Kodak Hall at Eastman Theatre
7:30 PM



EASTMAN
SCHOOL OF MUSIC
UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER

Eastman-Rochester Chorus
Eastman Philharmonia

~ PROGRAM ~

The Music Makers, Op. 69

Edward Elgar
(1857-1934)
38'

Emily Skilling, *mezzo-soprano*

William Weinert, *conductor*

~ INTERMISSION ~

Lobgesang, Op. 52 (“Hymn of Praise”)

Felix Mendelssohn
(1809-1847)
35'

1. All men, all things (chorus)
2. Praise thou the Lord, O my spirit (soprano and semi-chorus)
3. Sing ye praise / He counteth all your sorrows (tenor recit and aria)
4. All ye that cried unto the Lord (chorus)
5. I waited for the Lord (soprano duet and chorus)
6. The sorrows of death (tenor aria)
7. The night is departing (chorus)
8. Let all men praise the Lord (chorale)
9. My song shall be alway thy mercy (soprano and tenor duet)
10. Ye nations, offer to the Lord (chorus)

Karynna Moore-Sobel, *soprano*

Lora Bashmakian, *soprano*

Caleb Meyerhoff, *tenor*

Jonathan Mott, *conductor*

~ PROGRAM NOTES, TEXTS, AND TRANSLATIONS ~

The Music Makers, Op. 69

After his three big oratorios (*The Dream of Gerontius*, *The Apostles*, *The Kingdom*), *The Music Makers* is Elgar's best-known choral work. The ode set by Elgar is the creation for which British poet Arthur O'Shaughnessy (1844–1881) is most famous; it was published in 1877. O'Shaughnessy is an unknown name to most today, and not simply because he died young; he stopped writing poetry at age 30, and in any event he was not one of the great talents of the age (think of Keats, who died at age 26). But his poem attracted Elgar, and the first two lines are enough to make any musician swoon.

Elgar expressed interest in the work as far back as 1902, but did not complete it until 1912; it was not part of a commission but simply a piece he wished to write. For contralto solo, SATB chorus (occasionally splitting into SSAATTBB), and orchestra, the work is his last major choral composition. It premiered at the Birmingham Festival on 1 October 1912.

The text, given below, is in nine stanzas, but Elgar did not simply set it straight through. He alters some words and repeats batches of text, and not simply the immediate repetitions that all composers do. The entire sixth verse is repeated, for example, along with sections from other verses scattered throughout. Elgar's treatment of the final verse is the most complex, and that section also has the most frequent key changes. The most significant repetition, though, is that of the opening couplet, which returns after verse 3, after the first iteration of verse 6, and at the very end of the piece. It is, of course, the most compelling text of the whole ode. The work is given as one long movement, but sections are delineated by tempo changes and often key changes as well. The soloist appears in verses 5, 6, and 9, but it is the choir alone that ends the work.

Overall the work is rather gloomy; it begins and ends in *f* minor and visits that key at various times within; minor mode in general is more common than major. Elgar's Wagnerian influences show up here as well in an overall harmonic restlessness that doesn't make the work especially easy to sing. One of the most striking things about the work, though, is Elgar's use of self-quotation in various places (also a characteristic of Strauss's self-glorifying *Ein Heldenleben*—"A Hero's Life"—of 1899; Elgar knew the work). Elgar cites bits from the Enigma Variations (the theme appears not far into the orchestral introduction of *Music Makers*), the *Dream of Gerontius* (first on the word "dreams"), the *Apostles*, *Sea Pictures* (at "Wand'ring by lone seabreakers"), the Violin Concerto (thus referring to Alice Stuart-Wortley, the inspiration for the concerto), and both symphonies. He also quotes *Rule Britannia* at one of the references to empire that blot the text at certain points; *La Marseillaise* pops up as well). A quotation from the "Nimrod" variation of the Enigma Variations, in verse 5, accompanies the words "But on one man's soul it hath broken, A light that doth not depart," a tribute to August Jaeger (Elgar's Nimrod), who had died in 1909.

In contrast to the braggadocio Strauss expressed in *Heldenleben*, the self-portrait implied throughout *Music Makers* is a much more subdued one. Elgar wrote that the theme from the Enigma Variations, quoted in *Music Makers*, represents the loneliness of the artist; he further added that a quote from Tasso that appeared at the end of the Variations score was equally appropriate here: "I essay much, I hope little, I ask nothing" (Elgar's translation of "Bramo assai, poco spero, nulla chieggi"). And, in general, Elgar was not a cheerful or optimistic person. Byron Adams describes him as a "torturous personality, riven by lacerating self-doubt and envy;" adjectives used to describe Elgar include disillusioned, despondent, depressed, insecure, aggrieved. So the sadness that pervades much of the *Music Makers* reflects Elgar's own melancholy on the fate of the artist. But remember that Elgar also wrote that "music is in the air"—simply there for the taking. And take he did.

Honey Meconi

ODE

by Arthur O'Shaughnessy

We are the music-makers,
And we are the dreamers of dreams,
Wandering by lone sea-breakers,
And sitting by desolate streams;
World-losers and world-forsakers,
On whom the pale moon gleams:
Yet we are the movers and shakers
Of the world for ever, it seems.

With wonderful deathless ditties
We build up the world's great cities,
And out of a fabulous story
We fashion an empire's glory:
One man with a dream, at pleasure,
Shall go forth and conquer a crown;
And three with a new song's measure
Can trample an empire down.

We, in the ages lying
In the buried past of the earth,
Built Nineveh with our sighing,
And Babel itself in our mirth;
And o'erthrew them with prophesying
To the old of the new world's worth;
For each age is a dream that is dying,
Or one that is coming to birth.

We are the music-makers,
A breath of our inspiration
Is the life of each generation
A wondrous thing of our dreaming
Unearthly, impossible seeming...
The soldier, the king, and the peasant
Are working together in one,
Till our dream shall become their present,
And their work in the world be done.

They had no vision amazing
Of the goodly house they are raising;
They had no divine foreshowing
Of the land to which they are going:
But on one man's soul it hath broken,
A light that doth not depart;
And his look, or a word he hath spoken,
Wrought flame in another man's heart.

And therefore today is thrilling
With a past day's late fulfilling;
And the multitudes are enlisted
In the faith that their fathers resisted,
And, scorning the dream of to-morrow,
Are bringing to pass, as they may,
In the world, for its joy or its sorrow,
The dream that was scorned yesterday.

With our dreaming and singing,
Ceaseless and sorrowless we!
The glory about us clinging
Of the glorious futures we see,
Our souls with high music ringing;
O men! It must ever be
That we dwell in our dreaming and singing,
A little apart from ye.

For we are afar with the dawning
And the suns that are not yet high,
And out of the infinite morning
Intrepid you hear us cry...
How, spite of your human scorning,
Once more God's future draws nigh,
And already goes forth the warning
That ye of the past must die.

Great hail! we cry to the comers
From the dazzling unknown shore;
Bring us hither your sun and your summers;
And renew our world as of yore;
You shall teach us your song's new numbers,
And things that we dreamed not before:
Yea, in spite of a dreamer who slumbers,
And a singer who sings no more.
We are the music-makers,
And we are the dreamers of dreams.

Lobgesang, Op. 52

On the first day of the Leipzig Gutenberg Festival in June 1840, Felix Mendelssohn premiered his *Festgesang* in the market square, introducing a tune that would later be adapted to the text, “Hark the Herald Angels Sing,” and heard ubiquitously at Christmastime. On the *final* day of the festival, he premiered his *Lobgesang* (“Hymn of Praise”) in a concert in the Thomaskirche—the church now famous for being J.S. Bach’s workplace for 25 years. *Lobgesang*, by far, had the more successful launch, receiving sixteen international performances in the first three years and twenty-six performances over a seven-year period. At the piece’s first English performance in Birmingham later in 1840, the audience was so moved by the a cappella chorale in the eighth movement that they “rose involuntarily” from their seats—a custom that had been reserved for Handel’s “Hallelujah Chorus.” If they can’t help it, they can’t help it.

Taking the hybrid form of a “symphony-cantata,” *Lobgesang*’s early audiences drew comparisons between it and Beethoven’s 9th Symphony, whose choral finale wowed audiences though posed problems for composers looking to do something new with the form. Mendelssohn, well aware of this challenge, proceeded with caution during the composition of the work, wishing not so much to outdo Beethoven but to fashion a piece that would enhance a contemporary cultural conversation, taking for granted that its message and music would also endure.

Though surface-level similarities connect the two works, *Lobgesang*—especially its cantata (the portion heard tonight)—notably tells a story.¹ Movements 3 through 8 paint a narrative of transforming darkness into light, while the outer movements (1, 2, 9, and 10) place the narrative in a frame of praise and thanks.

In movements 1 and 2, the audience is invited into an active celebration. For those at early performances, the celebration was felt to be about Johannes Gutenberg (c. 1393-1468), the inventor of the moveable-type printing press whose invention facilitated the spread of knowledge and helped lift the population out of metaphorical darkness into light. The celebration then pauses for the narrative: movements 3 and 4 offer meditations on sorrow and God seeing you in your suffering. Movement 5, though beginning with a sense of hope, later depicts the anxiety of uncertainty in “waiting for the Lord.” Sorrow and anxiety become crisis in movement 6 as the tenor wanders through the darkness as death closes around him. His angst culminates in a series of dissonant pleas, wondering if the night will ever pass. At the end of the sixth movement, the soprano announces that the darkness is departing, ushering in a triumphant response from the chorus in the seventh movement. In movement 8, Mendelssohn employs a chorale—a church hymn meant to evoke a strengthening of community—to extend the tenor’s individual triumph over darkness to something that all can celebrate. Movements 9 and 10 return to the audience’s celebration: here, the tenor emerges as an example of someone who has weathered the darkness and is now singing God’s praises. Then, the whole ensemble takes part in a final celebration, fortified with a renewed sense that all can overcome darkness and step into light.

Lobgesang scratched an itch for mid-19th century audiences who were living in a time when art, education, and social life reinforced one another. One wouldn’t necessarily attend a concert simply to hear beautiful music, but to learn and to enter into a conversation with others about their shared history and potential futures. *Lobgesang* is one large invitation: for Mendelssohn’s audiences, perhaps mostly to celebrate Gutenberg and a shared past, though for us, to consider the darkness we’ve gone through, and the joy we experience when we celebrate our triumphs not just as individuals, but together.

Jonathan Mott

¹ This idea comes from John Michael Cooper, whose complete analysis of *Lobgesang* as a “frame story” can be found in “Inner Necessity: Fabulation, Frame, and Musical Memory in Mendelssohn’s *Lobgesang*.” In *Rethinking Mendelssohn*, edited by Benedict Taylor. Oxford University Press, 2020.

1. All men, all things, all that has life and breath,
Sing to the Lord. Hallelujah.
Praise the Lord with lute and harp,
In joyful song extol Him,
And let all flesh magnify His might and His glory.

from Psalm 150, Psalm 33, and Psalm 145

2. Praise thou the Lord, O my spirit,
And my inmost soul praise His great loving-kindness.
Praise thou the Lord, O my spirit,
And forget thou not all His benefits.

from Psalm 103

3. Sing ye praise, all ye redeemed of the Lord,
redeemed from the hand of the foe,
from your distresses, from deep affliction;
who sat in the shadow of death and darkness.
All ye that cry in trouble unto the Lord,
sing ye praise! give ye thanks, proclaim aloud His goodness.
He counteth all your sorrows in the time of need.
He comforts the bereaved with His regard.
Sing ye praise, give ye thanks, proclaim aloud His goodness.

from Psalm 107 and Psalm 56

4. All ye that cried unto the Lord in distress and deep affliction.
He counteth all your sorrows in the time of need.

from Psalm 107 and Psalm 56

5. I waited for the Lord,
He inclined unto me, He heard my complaint;
O blessed are they that hope and trust in the Lord.

from Psalm 40

6. The sorrows of death had closed all around me,
And hell’s dark terrors had got hold upon me,
With trouble and deep heaviness,
But said the Lord, “Come, arise from the dead,
And awake thou that sleepest, I bring thee salvation.”

We called through the darkness,
“Watchman, will the night soon pass?”
The watchman only said,
“Though the moring will come, the night will come also,”
Ask ye, enquire ye, ask if ye will, enquire ye, return again, ask,
“Watchman, will the night soon pass?”

from Psalm 116, Ephesians 5:14, and Isaiah 21

7. The night is departing, the day is approaching.
Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness,
And let us gird on the armor of light.
The day is approaching, the night is departing.

from Romans 13:12

8. Let all men praise the Lord,
In worship lowly bending;
On His most Holy Word,
Redeem'd from woe, depending.
He gracious is and just,
From childhood us doth lead;
On Him we place our trust
And hope, in time of need.

Glory and praise to God,
The Father, Son, be given.
And to the Holy Ghost,
On high enthroned in Heaven.
Praise to the triune God;
With pow'ful arm and strong,
He changeth night to day;
Praise Him with grateful song.

“Nun danket alle Gott” by Martin Rinkart

9. My song shall be alway Thy mercy, singing
Thy praise, Thou only God, my tongue ever
speaks the goodness Thou hast done unto me.
I wander in night and foulest darkness, and
mine enemies stand threatening around;
yet called I upon the Name of the Lord,
and He redeemed me with watchful goodness.

from Psalm 28, Psalm 31 and Psalm 103

10. Ye nations, offer to the Lord glory and might.
Ye monarchs, offer to the Lord glory and might.
Thou heaven, offer to the Lord glory and might.
The whole earth, offer to the Lord glory and might.
O give thanks to the Lord, praise Him, all ye people,
And ever praise His Holy Name.
Sing ye the Lord, and ever praise His Holy Name.
All that has life and breath, sing to the Lord.

from Psalm 96, Psalm 105, and Psalm 150

Upcoming Concerts

Events are free unless otherwise noted.

Tuesday, December 10, 2024

Eastman Messiah Sing!

Handel *Messiah*

with soloists and conductors from the Eastman School of Music
Kilbourn Hall • 7:30PM

Sunday, January 26, 2025

Eastman Bach Cantata Series

BWV 69 & BWV 89

Nathaniel Peets and Yiran Zhao, *conductors*
Hatch Recital Hall • 3:30PM

Sunday, February 2, 2025

Eastman Bach Cantata Series

BWV 90 & BWV 151

Andrew Perricone and Xintong Li, *conductors*
Hatch Recital Hall • 3:30PM

Friday, May 2, 2025

Eastman-Rochester Chorus and Eastman School Symphony Orchestra

Beethoven *Missa Solemnis*

William Weinert, *conductor*

Kodak Hall at Eastman Theatre • 7:30PM



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