

Land of Heart's Desire
April 14 and 15, 2007
Program Notes by Ed Wight

LOVE FOR ALL SEASONS

The concert opens in light and lively fashion. It features one of Shakespeare's most popular texts and the premier performance of this 2007 setting by Craig Kingsbury. It was a lover and his lass, from "As You Like It" has inspired many musical settings. While never departing from a popular, light-hearted style matching the spirit of the text, Craig Kingsbury provides a remarkably complex rhythmic version. The first five bars already feature four changes of meter, from 2/4 to 10/8, 6/8 and 3/4. Such rhythmic flexibility, coupled with rich harmonies, nonetheless results in a lyricism central to Kingsbury's style.

Kingsbury provides an ingenious structure to Chants from the Southwest. The solo flute introduces each of the three Navajo and one Zuni text. He bases the second and fourth texts on the Navajo "Songs of Dawn Boy", and how they relate to each other. The first appearance includes the subtext "With it I wander," while its recurrence at the conclusion features the subtext "With it I return." Kingsbury's sophisticated word-painting also links the first and third texts as well. He sets the piece in C# minor, befitting the opening reference to dark clouds. But the "blossoming clouds" in the third section provide the only cadence in C# major, an effect reinforced in the same text a few bars later with more complex harmonies and the highest vocal pitch in the piece.

From the Springtime of "It was a lover" and the thunder storms, grasshoppers and blossoming flowers of Summer, Kingsbury concludes this set with some remarkable Winter imagery by Wallace Stevens. A Mind of Winter once again employs some marvelous word painting. The only modulations in the piece highlight the false premise of a "January sun" as Kingsbury leaves the tonic, and "The sound of the Land" a few bars later begins the return to it. Unlike the previous pieces, Kingsbury stays in one meter (4/4) throughout. Yet you wouldn't know it with the continuous, un-patterned syncopations of the piece that remains Kingsbury's favorite among all his works.

PRAYERS IN THE NIGHT

Kingsbury's 6-voice, a cappella setting of Come to Me in Silence recalls the points of imitation and continually varied textures of the Renaissance master Josquin Desprez. However, the stacked seconds of the opening contrapuntal motive in all six voices is pure 20th century. This motive returns periodically, and carries the central message of the text: Come [back] to me. Kingsbury lovely melodies remain prominent in one of his densest and most varied works of choral polyphony.

This Ave Maria setting opens with a soft, sweetly piercing chordal motive which (like the previous piece) also recurs throughout this simple, understated setting. For contrast, Kingsbury sets much of the rest in imitative counterpoint. He also employs only one type of chromaticism throughout, the haunting raised 4th of the Lydian mode. Kingsbury creates an extraordinary climax near the end. The forte setting of "Ora pro nobis" (Pray for us) is followed by a hushed entrance for "now at the hour of our death" in this moving work dedicated to the victims of September 11th.

3 SONGS FROM TWELFTH NIGHT

In Twelfth Night, Shakespeare offers one of his greatest comedies of disguise and mistaken identity. However, no one is ever in doubt about Sir Toby Belch, whose jester performs O Mistress Mine for Toby's amusement. Kingsbury sets it in lighthearted fashion, with the solo flute introducing each of the three sections. Listen especially for the contrasting middle section, in which wide-ranging modulations reflect the uncertainty of the text "What's to come is still unsure." He establishes a very different mood for Come Away, Death as the Duke pines for the Countess Olivia. The continuous chromaticism of the music reveals that this unrequited love will never be realized. Shakespeare wrote it as a comedy though, with true identities revealed at the end and another love blossoming for the Duke. Hey, Ho, The Wind and the Rain with its nonsensical text bring the play to a delightful conclusion. Like the first song, Kingsbury seems to write a contrasting middle section in slower tempo and rich, flat-side harmony. But in keeping with the spirit of the play, it's only a ruse. The music quickly rushes on to a joyous conclusion of the song, the set and the play.

FEDERICO GARCIA LORCA

Like so many artists, Federico Garcia Lorca initially pursued a different career. He studied law at the University of Granada, but soon turned to literature, music and painting. According to Webster's 1996 Encyclopedia of Literature "Lorca found his true genius when he collaborated with Spanish composer Manuel de Falla on folk music." His best poetry, as in the fantastic and humorous nocturnal imagery of La Tarde Canta, invites a musical setting. This and two other poems from this premier Spanish poet, provide the genesis for these 2005 compositions by Craig Kingsbury.

Kingsbury wonderfully captures the Spanish flavor of Murio al Amanecer with the modal harmonies so characteristic of Spanish music. The wonderfully evocative flavors of the Phrygian mode appear immediately, in both the piano introduction and the first entrance of the chorus. Listen also for the word painting. Kingsbury creates a quick, jagged motive in 16th notes for the final word of the text - "spinning." He further emphasizes the motive by passing it quickly through all the voices- the only such instance in the entire song.

The piano accompaniments in both "Murio" and La Luna Asoma reveal another of Kingsbury's style. The piano never intrudes or overwhelms the choir. He fashions typically light instrumental effects, often with just a single line. Instead of Spanish modal progressions, "La Luna" offers some lush, jazz-oriented harmonies. And it again highlights Kingsbury's signature rhythmic and metric complexity, this time alternating between 6/8 and 3/4 subdivisions.

The "L" Word

Few people know lyrics better than Oregon Shakespearean Festival dramaturge Barry Kraft. So when he approached Dr. French with the suggestion to write a poem for Craig Kingsbury, the response was immediate. The choir premiered it on the OSF Elizabethan stage in 2005. Kingsbury captures the quickly changing moods, and highlights the text in a primarily chordal style. He also remains true to the verse. The "L" Word is never spoken, just sung in vocalese.

In honor of his wife receiving her Masters Degree, Kingsbury turns wonderfully academic in Tuit Me Penser. He sets a poem by the greatest of all 14th-century composers, Guillaume Machaut, and adopts aspects of Machaut's style and structure. He turns to a popular Medieval dance form, the Virelai. The return of the refrain ("A") establishes an A B A C A D A structure.

Kingsbury bases the B , C, and D sections on the same music, though typically flavored with his penchant for slight metric contrast. He also employs aspects of linear complexity (syncopations between the different voices) as well as 14th-century language and cadence formulas in this delightfully faux-Medieval piece. And though supposedly a dance form, just try to find any pattern with which to twirl your partner!

HEBRIDEAN SONGS

Folksongs often yield simpler settings from composers than their art songs, and Kingsbury approaches these folk songs in that spirit. The harmony provides the first example of this. While he often employs a rich harmonic palette in other works, these folksongs avoid chromaticism almost entirely. The Bens of Jura contains but a single accidental, word painting for "death torpor." The instruments and the ever-changing vocal textures provide all the color necessary. The beautiful simplicity of these folksong settings continues in Land of Heart's Desire, with color stemming from the piano and the alternation between male and female choirs.

The Exile's Dream opens with yet another marvelous vocal color - a textless vocalese in combination with Craig's delicate piano writing. This passage nonetheless introduces the theme, one of many Hebrides folksongs collected into six volumes by the English musicologist Marjory Kennedy-Fraser. The musical setting also remains true to the modal character of the music. Without accidentals, all the major cadences feature the modal lowered-seventh degree, adding a simple richness to the harmony. Lochbroom Love Song also omits chromaticism, but also some of the simplicity as well. To bring the set to a rousing conclusion, Dr. French chose a setting which features lively "scotch-snap" rhythms and contrapuntal artifice. Listen closely; the opportunities to hear a strict canon in any folk setting don't come very often!

A Song for Midsummer's Eve offers a quintessential display of Kingsbury's vocal magic to close the program. Once again we find light yet lyrical piano writing, and Craig's love of metric complexity. This time his metric contrasts define the structure, however. The opening section employs 10/8, 6/8, 5/8 and 7/8, providing contrast to both the slower middle section in 4/4 and the lively 6/8 conclusion with its conflicting duple/triple subdivisions. Even these latter passages in constant meter never fall into predictable patterns. Listen also for Craig's always effective use of the Lydian raised-4th add harmonic richness to the middle section. Yet Kingsbury always veils this artistic mastery, the underlying complexity never interrupting the essential lyricism of his style. This lively conclusion to the concert sends us home to text "Good night to you all."