

# The Boston Musical Intelligencer

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## Excellent Soloists from ranks of Cantata Singers Highlight Schütz

by Larry Phillips

This season the Cantata Singers are celebrating the choral works of Heinrich Schütz. The program on Friday March 12 in Jordan Hall paired motets by Schütz with two pieces by that other 17th-century luminosity, Claudio Monteverdi. Two 20th-century pieces, Stravinsky's *Mass* and Poulenc's *Mass in G*, were sandwiched in the middle.

Schütz (1585-1672) was represented by three Latin pieces drawn from his 1625 *Cantiones sacrae* and three concerted German pieces from his 1650 *Symphoniae sacrae*. The latter featured soloists from the chorus, sopranos Karyl Ryczek, Majie Zeller, Catherine Vaughan, and Angelynne Hinson; alto Lynn Torgove; tenors Jason Sabol and Stephen Williams; and basses Mark Andrew Cleveland and Shelby L. Condray. It is the rare chorus that can find such excellent soloists from its ranks.

The program began with Monteverdi's *Laetatus sum*, which conductor David Hoose describes as "the Bolero of its day." It came across as a wild romp, the singers clearly enjoying themselves, bouncing their words off the sextet of soloists (soprano Lisa Lynch joined Ryczek.) The large audience gave it a rousing reception. The Schütz that followed was slightly more subdued, but the chorus sang these short psalm texts so beautifully that the audience responded in kind. Conducting from memory, Hoose clearly admires this music.

Stravinsky wrote his 1948 *Mass* as a corrective to some Mozart masses he found in Los Angeles in 1943. In his own words, he wanted to write "a real one." The Mass has all the hallmarks of his music at this time, anti-Romantic and severe. It evidently contains the composer's religious beliefs. The chorus and soloists gave it a stellar performance.

Poulenc's *Mass in G* dates from 1937 and is heavily influenced by the early Stravinsky, especially his *Sacre du Printemps*, which Poulenc heard as a boy. Like many composers and listeners alike, he never forgot its impact. The Mass was rendered by a sub-section of the chorus. There is much unison writing. A tenor note at the end of the Gloria was not to be believed. Soprano Luellen Best began the Agnus Dei in a hauntingly hushed fashion.

The Schütz concerted pieces followed. Hoose wisely chose to place the longer texts on either side of the shorter *Saul, Saul, was erfolgt du mich. Wo der Herr nicht das Haus bauet* demonstrated that Schütz is at the height of his powers and also why he is held in such high esteem today. The chorus and orchestra sounded superbly in all three pieces. High points included the abrupt ending of the first piece and the divided chorus of the second. The third piece, based on the familiar text *Nun danket alle Gott* received a particularly notable performance. After completing the *Symphoniae sacrae*, Schütz once again decided to retire, a petition which was rejected throughout his life. He continued to work until the year before he died in 1672.

The final piece, the "Gloria a 7 voci," the sole surviving part of a full mass, returned us to the operatic world of Monteverdi. Befitting the spirit of the text, this was given an exuberant and full-throated performance. The writing bears all the hallmarks of mature Monteverdi: audacious harmonies, dance-like rhythms (especially in the "laudamus" and "glorificamus") and a great sense of form.

The Cantata Singers always assemble fascinating programs, and this one is a good example. Bookended by Monteverdi and two sections from different periods of Schütz's life, the 20th-century pieces, so different from one another, were separated by an intermission. Moreover, the program not only had a nice sweep to it, the composers learned from each other.