

FORBES CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS
JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY®

School of Music

presents the doctoral lecture recital of

Nikos Myrogiannis-Koukos,
choral conducting

featuring

The Madison Singers
The JMU Chorale

with

Jeanette Zyko, *oboe*
Amy Robertson, *piano*
Laura Hoffman, *harp*
Rachel Tan, *violin*
Johnny Park, *violin*
Sunny Robertello, *viola*
Danny Postlethwait, *cello*

Sunday, February 18, 2024
3 pm
Concert Hall



Program

Pedagogical Tools and Techniques for the Development of Harmonic Audiation, Ensemble Intonation, and Textual Imagery through the Choral Music of Ola Gjeilo

Part I

Welcome and Introduction

Purpose and Need for the Study
Ola Gjeilo
Compositional Devices
Pedagogical Applications

Part II

The Madison Singers

Demonstrations

Modality: *Second Eve*, mm 120 - 127
Symphonic Sonorities: *Agnus Dei*, mm 1 - 12
Enharmonic Modulations: *Agnus Dei*, mm 36 - 45
Enharmonic Modulations: *Sanctus: London*, mm 1 - 8

Performances

Agnus Dei
Second Eve (portion)
Sanctus: London

The JMU Chorale

Demonstrations

Modality: *Ave Generosa*, mm 1 - 11
Symphonic Sonorities: *Iam Sol Recedit*, mm 24 - 38

Performances

Ave Generosa
Iam Sol Recedit

Jeanette Zyko, *oboe*
Amy Robertson, *piano*

The Combined Choirs

Demonstration

Modality: *Still*, mm 1 - 8

Summary and Conclusions

Acknowledgements

Performances

Still (arr. Lawson)

Laura Hoffman, *harp*

Sacred Heart (Ubi Caritas III)

Rachel Tan, *violin*
Johnny Park, *violin*
Sunny Robertello, *viola*
Danny Postlethwait, *cello*

*This recital is presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Musical Arts.
Nikos Myrogiannis-Koukos is from the studio of Dr. Jo-Anne van der Vat-Chromy.*

Program Notes

Gjeilo says of his *Agnus Dei*: “The original version of *Agnus Dei*, called *Agnus Dei: Phoenix*, was written for the Phoenix Chorale in 2010. After a few years, the piece had evolved into something more condensed and introspective that felt like the essence of the piece, bookended by the peaceful opening theme.” This peacefulness that Gjeilo refers to stems from both the harmonically ambiguous nature of the opening measures and the lack of a strong melodic line. Harmonically, the A section of *Agnus Dei* is dominated by the presence of the Mixolydian mode and, subsequently, a sense of modal mixture. Combined with a homorhythmic texture, these modes contribute to the section’s overall ethereal and otherworldly feel. While Gjeilo does not counter this impression in the B section, a new, highly disjunct, lightly harmonized melodic pattern gives the impression of a Gregorian chant. This chant soon bursts into a homophonic outcry for mercy as the choir utters the words “*Miserere nobis*” (“Have mercy upon us”), revisiting the Mixolydian harmonic landscape once again. The climax of the B section – and the entire piece – is defined by a breathtaking enharmonic modulation that strikingly emphasizes the importance of this plea once more. The composer uses the A’ section’s tranquility to deliver the piece’s final words (“Grant us Thy peace”). Once more, the prevalence of the Mixolydian mode and its relative harmonic ambiguity, together with the spaced voicing of the final chord, validate the introspective character of the piece that Gjeilo strove to set.

Agnus Dei
qui tollis peccata mundi
miserere nobis;
Agnus Dei
qui tollis peccata mundi
dona nobis pacem.

Lamb of God
who takest away the sins of the world
have mercy upon us;
Lamb of God
who takest away the sins of the world
grant us Thy peace.

Second Eve is a tender yet vibrant praise of the Holy Virgin. As Eve, from the book Genesis, is often considered the mother of humanity in the Christian tradition, the title of this motet for mixed choir a cappella alludes to the renewal of this maternal relationship with humanity through Mary, the Mother of God. Despite its English title, the Latin text used by Gjeilo alludes to aesthetic traditions established during the late Sixteenth century, which ultimately inspire the motet’s distinct contrapuntal elements and eloquent cadential progressions. To express his spiritual contemplations, the composer juxtaposes a homophonic section utilizing an elaborate harmonic vocabulary with a highly polyphonic one that utters the text’s words of utmost praise: “Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you.” Both sections are reinstated within the framework of an A-B-A’-B’ structure, culminating in a glorious C section characterized by extensive modality and wide dynamic ranges. In terms of narrative, the C section is devoted to celebrating Mary’s role as the mother of God. To achieve that, Gjeilo tasks the Alto 2 part with delivering the text of the entire section in the form of a speech-like tonal pattern that stands out from the overall homophonic identity of the section. The motet culminates with a solemn “Amen,” symbolizing impeccable piety and emotional purity.

Ave Maria, gratia plena,
Dominus tecum:
benedicta tu in mulieribus,
et benedictus fructus ventris tui,
Jesus Christus.
Amen.

Hail Mary, full of grace,
the Lord is with you:
blessed are you among women,
and blessed is the fruit of your womb,
Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Commissioned by and dedicated to the Norwegian Uranienborg Vokalensemble, *Sanctus: London* was composed by Gjeilo in 2004 while living in London – hence the reference to the city’s name in the title. In the composer’s words, “*Sanctus* was composed on a cheap plastic keyboard [...] Its primitive but evocative string pad suggested a soundworld I really like exploring, and I’ve loved composing on that keyboard ever since.” The primitive timbral qualities that Gjeilo refers to echo through the homophonic texture of the piece’s opening measure, where simple, stepwise melodies and steady rhythmic patterns contribute to a mixture between calmness and tension. This tension is only amplified through an unexpected enharmonic modulation that transforms the second half of the opening phrase into a true hymn. The calmness of this A section is partially subverted by the character of the B section and the chromatic modulation that introduces it. Despite changing the tempo and the key, Gjeilo chooses to maintain a soft dynamic for the “*Hosanna*” portion of the text, following simple, repetitive harmonic progressions. As the A and B sections are presented again, they follow similar harmonic developments, including a striking enharmonic modulation (A’ section) and a chromatic modulation (B’ section). This time, however, the calmness of the piece’s first half is gone, replaced by an overpowering *fff* maintained through the final chord. This gradual lift from

calmness to profound exclamation truly serves the themes of praise, victory, and consecration evident in the text, accomplishing the ascend from the primitively mystical to the radiantly spiritual.

*Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus
Dominus Deus Sabaoth.
pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria Tua;
Hosanna in excelsis.
Benedictus qui venit
in nomine Domini.
Hosanna in excelsis.*

Holy, Holy, Holy
Lord God of Hosts.
Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory;
Hosanna in the highest.
Blessed is He who comes
in the name of the Lord.
Hosanna in the highest.

Initially conceived as a treble chorus piece and commissioned by the Norwegian Girls' Choir in 2011, Gjeilo prepared the SATB version of his *Ave Generosa* in 2017 under the auspices of a commission by the renowned vocal ensemble Kantorei. Setting into music a text by female Medieval poet and composer Hildegard von Bingen, Gjeilo attempts to emulate certain stylistic elements of Medieval Christian chant in the opening A section. This intention is most evident in the use of the Dorian mode and imitative polyphony. The solemn and pious character of the text is further underlined by a homorhythmic B section and a hymn-like C section, which focuses on the relationship between the human and the Divine (“que Deo placuit” – “which was pleasing to God”). Here, the individual stands out for the first time, as a solo Soprano is tasked to carry a descant at first, and the primary melodic material in the following reiteration of the A section. As the piece unfolds, Gjeilo depends on musical development to create a sense of intensity: the Dorian mode overtakes the structure and identity of the main melody of the A section, uttered by the Alto. At the same time, this melody is, for the first time, juxtaposed with the musical material of the B section. Ultimately, the Soprano and Alto parts echo each other as they whisper the final few notes of the opening chant-like melody, thus reinstating the piece’s initial sense of spiritual and emotional transcendence.

*Ave, generosa,
gloriosa et intacta puella,
tu pupilla castitatis,
tu materia sanctitatis,
que Deo placuit.*

Hail, girl of a noble house,
shimmering and unpolluted,
you pupil of chastity,
you essence of sanctity,
which was pleasing to God.

Iam Sol Recedit was initially conceived as a pair with *Lux Beata Trinitas*. Commissioned by the Singaporean ACJC (Anglo-Chinese Junior College) Alumni Choir, this piece is scored for mixed chorus, piano, and oboe. This instrumentation is crucial to unfolding the piece’s narrative: the piano carries out the rhythmic element of the piece, framed in a 7/8 meter. The oboe, with its more extended, sustained notes and graceful melodic elements, contrasts the rhythmic vitality of the piano, bringing a certain lightness through its uniquely bright timber. Lastly, the choir utters the text of the piece in prolonged chords that allude to Gjeilo’s signature “symphonic sound” and, therefore, contribute to a “cinematic” unfolding of the harmonic and melodic patterns of the piece. This juxtaposition of rhythmic, harmonic, and melodic elements in Gjeilo’s music creates a sense of flow that is not traditionally associated with choral music and appears to take away from the clarity of the text. However, this textural framework seems to be in full accordance with the emotional landscape of the piece’s text, as the latter is a Christian prayer that parallels the Divine with light (“As fades the glowing orb of day, to Thee, great source of light, we pray”). *Iam Sol Recedit* follows a simple A-B-A structure; this is complimented by an introductory section that announces the harmonic patterns and sonorities that characterize the piece in its entirety, as well as a closing “Amen” coda, where the composer manages to encapsulate the lightness, vibrancy, and optimistic spirituality of the text through a quiet, mildly dissonant chord that ultimately resolves in silence.

*Iam sol recedit igneus:
Tu lux perennis Unitas,
Patri, simulque Filio,
tibi que sancta Spiritus,
sicut fuit, sit iugiter
saeculum per omne gloria.
Te mane laudum carmine,
Te deprecamur vespere;
Amen.*

As fades the glowing orb of day,
to Thee, great source of light, we pray;
To God the Father, and the Son,
and Holy Spirit, Three in One,
be endless glory, as before
the world began, so evermore.
At early dawn, at close of day,
to Thee our vows we humbly pray;
Amen.

Originally composed as a short piece for solo piano, *Still* was included in the 2020 album *Night*. Due to its immediate success, a choral arrangement of the piece for 8-part mixed choir and harp or piano was commissioned by renowned choral ensemble VOCES8. The title of this vocalize alludes to

imagery and scenery associated with the tranquility and serenity of nighttime – as the title of the piano album suggests. The musical underscoring that the composer employs to depict this stillness is centered around the Dorian mode and the repetition of a four-chord harmonic pattern throughout the entirety of the piece. The combination of this modal harmonic landscape with the vowels sung by the choir contributes to an especially nebulous and mystical experience that feels both unsettling and cathartic at the same time. The contemplative nature of *Still* is further emphasized by the gracious and peaceful timber of the harp, as well as the repetition of the piece's home tone in the form of an ostinato that the instrument utters throughout most of the piece. At the end of its climactic B section, Gjeilo returns to *Still's* initial harmonic pattern, thus suggesting a simple yet convincingly outlined ternary form (A-B-A'). The stillness of night fades away in absolute silence, demonstrating the piece's ambiguous nature for one last time.

As the title suggests, *Sacred Heart (Ubi Caritas III)* is Gjeilo's third setting of the well-known Christian hymn. Commissioned and premiered by Vocal Ensemble Cantatrix, this setting is the only one of the three to incorporate a string quartet. Paying homage to the antiphonal nature of the hymn, the composer chooses a strophic form here, as the predominantly homophonic A section of the piece functions as a refrain – a constant reminder of the text's key message ("Where charity and love are, God is there"). The texture and relative lack of harmonic tension of the A section are countered by the more tumultuous nature of the B section. Here, Gjeilo manages to create contrast by juxtaposing a conjunct melodic line (delivered by the Bass and later the Tenor part) to a rhythmic ostinato (uttered by the Soprano and Alto voice parts) that alludes to a more "symphonic" rather than strictly choral sound. The text of these choral parts is equally contrasting to the lyrical nature of the melodic line, as it constantly reiterates the words "*Caritas et Amor*," thus confirming their significance. In addition to doubling both the melody and its rhythmic accompaniment, the string quartet contributes an additional gesture that employs 16th notes, adding to the section's intensity. *Sacred Heart* reaches its climax of the piece in the B' section, where an enharmonic modulation prolongs the already forceful modulatory sequence heard earlier. The impact of this modulation is felt until the conclusion of the piece, as the final iteration of the A section is presented a half-step higher than the original. In the end, a combination of optimism and opacity prevails. Gjeilo concludes the final A section with a prolonged deceptive cadence that gradually fades to a moment of reflective silence.

Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est.

Simul ergo cum in unum congregamur:

Ne nos mente dividamur, caveamus.

Cessent iurgia maligna, cessent lites,

et in medio nostri sit Christus Deus.

Where charity and love are, God is there.

As we are gathered into one body:

Beware, lest we be divided in mind.

Let evil impulses stop, let controversy cease,
and may Christ our God be in our midst.

Composer Bio

Composer and pianist Ola Gjeilo was born in Oslo, Norway, in 1978. He received a bachelor's degree in Music from the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo, a bachelor's degree in composition from the Royal College of Music in London, and a master's degree in composition from the Juilliard School of Music. In 2005 Gjeilo was the winner of the Juilliard Composers' Orchestral Work Competition.

Gjeilo has composed over forty published choral works in his compositional career, both a cappella and accompanied, that enjoy lasting worldwide popularity. He has also composed music for solo piano and instrumental ensembles. His compositions encompass a wide range of genres, including jazz, classical music, as well as a fusion of both. His music is published in the United States through Walton Music.

Gjeilo currently works as a freelance composer; in 2009-2010, he was the first Composer-in-Residence for Grammy-award-winning choral ensemble Phoenix Chorale, directed by Charles Bruffy. The collaboration cultivated to the recording of the album *Northern Lights*, consisting entirely of Gjeilo's choral music and with the composer himself participating in the recording as the featured pianist. His most recent professional collaborations include a residency with the British professional choral ensemble VOCESS, the professional choral ensemble Albany Pro Musica, and a residency with music production company Distinguished Concerts International New York.

Gjeilo's music has been performed in over thirty countries. Many of these performances are on-stage collaborations with choral ensembles presenting his compositions. As a recording artist, he released the album *Stone Rose* in 2007, *Piano Improvisations* in 2012, *Night* in 2020, and *Dawn* in 2022. His piano albums reflect his love for improvisation and are characterized by the fusion of jazz, classical, and film music.

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- Cultural equity—which embodies values, practices, and policies that ensure all people have access to, and are represented in, the arts—is critical to the sustained engagement of music in society.
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