

Music Program Notes

Chant de Peine (Song of Sorrow) is the first entry in *Neuf Pièces* (Nine Pieces) by French composer Jean Langlais. The collection is a fine display of Langlais' interest in Gregorian Chant melodies and polymodal harmony. Mournful cries from the Harmonic Flute stop guide this ethereal journey into shadow, despair, and resignation. However, the occasional harmonic resolution to a lonely major tonality seems to imply a glimmer of light amidst all the darkness – hope

O Mensch, beweine dein Sünde gross ("O man, bewail thy sin so great") is a Lutheran Passiontide chorale text written by Sebald Heyden in 1530. The verses, in twenty-three stanzas with twelve lines each, offer a narration of the Stations of the Cross and humankind's salvation from sin through Jesus Christ. Bach's celebrated chorale prelude setting from *Orgelbüchlein* employs elaborate ornamentations to the hymn tune in twelve distinct phrases reflecting the first twelve lines of the first verse. Bach's deep faith and creative text painting results in moments of profound beauty such as the unexpected brief modulation to C flat major when the text refers to the cross ("kreuze lange") in the work's penultimate measure.

Herzlich tut mich verlangen (translated "I do desire dearly") was a text written in 1599 during the plague and intended as a prayer for the dying. It was joined to a melody adapted from a secular tune by composer Hans Leo Hassler in 1613. The tune eventually became known as the "Passion Chorale" after being paired with the 1656 text "O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden" (O Sacred Head, Now Wounded.)

Brahms' "Eleven Chorale Preludes" includes two settings of the tune of which both will be heard this afternoon. As an admirer of Bach, the similarities in Brahms' contrapuntal approaches and form are no less than a tribute to The Master but through a 19th century lens. The first setting's utterance of the melody is only suggested amidst dramatic symphonic gestures of heartfelt angst and beauty closing on a consoling Picardy third. The second setting utilizes the cantus firmus mainly in the pedal with Romantic era flourishes in the manuals and gorgeous chromatic expressions.

Pari intervallo was originally composed in 1976 for no specific instrumentation in four equal parts. The present setting for organ was published in 1980. The music invokes a space of calm and transparency characteristic of Pärt's minimalistic compositional approach. Two distinct voices move fluidly in parallel motion throughout the work and become the basis for the piece's Latin title translated as "in the equal distance." Pärt's composition is in memoriam of his stepfather with this excerpt from Paul's letter to the Romans serving as further inspiration: "For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord."

- Mark Heiskanen