INTO THE NIGHT

Contemporary Choral Music

Whitacre • Paulus • Childs • Pärt • Tavener
Betinis • Lauridsen • Ticheli

Vox Humana • David N. Childs

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Whitacre's dramatic setting of twentieth-century Spanish poet Federico García Lorca's poem *With a Lily in Your Hand (Con un lirio en la mano te dejo,* translated by Jerome Rothenberg*)* is somewhat uncharacteristic of the composer's later compositional style. Often known for slower-tempo works that employ lush, atmospheric, and often-complex tonalities, this early composition of Whitacre's, while still very affecting, has a more agile, playful, lyrical and more melodic quality to it than other works in his oeuvre. The opening line immediately grabs the listener's attention before promptly shifting to an accompaniment figure that employs an array of alternating or mixed meters and syncopated Spanish rhythms. Although the poem (most likely written in 1921) is colored by Lorca's own struggle with his homosexuality – there is abundant imagery of longing, ecstasy, and intimacy, all the while tinged with a sense of melancholy – the quick tempo, driving rhythms and intense dynamic shifts give the work a sense of rapture rather than sorrow; of elation and not sadness. García Lorca's poem invokes a luminescent lover in the night as a principal protagonist. The climactic ending of the opening Spanish rhythmic motif is preceded by an increase of intensity in a setting of the highly descriptive text, at which point the two lovers reunite in ecstatic harmony.

Set in an uncomplicated 'simple-triple' meter, and predominantly sitting very comfortably in a D major tonality throughout, Stephen Paulus's *The Day Is Done* is a bewitching arrangement of Longfellow's popular poem. Paulus captures the elegant imagery of the poem through long, lyrical melodies that have a yearning quality to them. The poem has a sad undertone to it; a sense of longing for such simple pleasures of poetry being read, and of music filling the night, which contrasts the harsh realities that day brings. Effective text-painting is characteristic of this work, where, for example, the melody effortlessly, steadily and evenly descends on "*As a feather is wafted downward*", and again at "*As showers from the clouds of summer*". The true beauty of this work is found in its simplicity. Predominantly a work featuring melodic contours, the flowing lines 'draw in' the listener just as one is drawn in to the words of Longfellow.

The day is done, and the darkness
Falls from the wings of Night,
As a feather is wafted downward
From an eagle in his flight.

I see the lights of the village
Gleam through the rain and the mist,
And a feeling of sadness comes o'er me
That my soul cannot resist:

A feeling of sadness and longing,
That is not akin to pain,
And resembles sorrow only
As the mist resembles the rain.

Come, read to me some poem,
Some simple and heartfelt lay,
That shall soothe this restless feeling,
And banish the thoughts of day.

Read from some humbler poet,
Whose songs gushed from his heart,
As showers from the clouds of summer,
Or tears from the eyelids start;

Then read from the treasured volume
The poem of thy choice,
And lend to the rhyme of the poet
The beauty of thy voice.

And the night shall be filled with music
And the cares, that infest the day,
Shall be banished like restless feelings
And silently steal away.

(Henry Wadsworth Longfellow 1807–1882)

Sara Teasdale lived a sickly life as a child, was unlucky in romance, unhappy in marriage, and chronically depressed to the point she took her own life in 1933. In *The New Moon* the composer opens in dramatic manner with *a cappella* chorus powerfully stating the crux of the poem's theme, "*Day, you have bruised and beaten me*." Yet, typical of Teasdale's style, there are moments of light and hope; in this instance it is the moon that rises up above the drudgery and tribulation that the speaker experiences. The piano descriptively adds 'backdrop' to the work (the rolling sea; the 'blurred' harmonies of the clouds), while still maintaining independence throughout.

Day, you have bruised and beaten me,
As rain beats down the bright, proud sea,
Beaten my body, bruised my soul,
Left me nothing lovely or whole —

Yet I have wrested a gift from you,
Day that dies in dusky blue:
For suddenly over the factories
I saw a moon in the cloudy seas —

A wisp of beauty all alone
In a world as hard and gray as stone —
Oh who could be bitter and want to die
When a maiden moon wakes up in the sky?

(Sara Teasdale 1884–1933)

Arvo Pärt's musical style is firmly rooted in minimalism, where the simplest or fewest elements are used to greatest effect. This setting of John Henry Newman's sermon titled *Wisdom and Innocence* that was delivered in Littlemore, England on February 19, 1843, is one of only two works on this album that feature the organ. The repeated right hand motifs serve as an effective introduction to the choir, one that creates an atmosphere of dusk. The choral writing is in contrast to the repeating organ part; the long, drawn-out melodies lead to a climax at the words "*Then in his mercy may He give us safe lodging*." The work ends almost as it begins, with the same right hand repeated motif, but this time the sound fades into the night.

May He support us all the day long, till the
shades lengthen, and the evening comes,
and the busy world is hushed, and the fever
of life is over, and our work is done! Then
in his mercy may He give us a safe lodging,
and a holy rest, and peace at the last.

(John Henry Newman 1801–1890)

Nox Aurumque draws on themes (such as 'angels') from the companion piece *Lux Aurumque* as well as from Whitacre's larger work *Paradise Lost: Shadows and Wings*. The composer has a dramatic flair for text painting, a creative and rich treatment of harmony, and electrifying ministering of melody, all of which are found in *Nox Aurumque*. Also characteristic of the work is the repeating opening section "Aurum" (gold) theme, which returns in the middle of the piece at the interval of a perfect fourth higher, and again in conclusion of the work, at the opening pitch level.

Gold,
Tarnished and dark,
Singing of night,
Singing of death,
Singing itself to sleep…

And an angel dreams of dawnings, and of war.
She weeps tears of the golden times
Tears of the cost of war.

O shield!
O gilded blade!

You are too heavy to carry
Too heavy for flight.

Gold, tarnished and weary,
Awaken!
Melt from weapon into wing!
Let us soar again,
High above this wall;
Angels reborn and rejoicing
With wings made
Of dawn,
Of gold,
Of dream.

Gold,
Singing of wings,
Singing of shadows…

(Charles Anthony Silvestri, b. 1965 –
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Dylan Thomas became acutely aware of his mortality after contracting an illness in his teenage years, and being told by the attending physician he probably had only four years to live. His angst and foreboding is palpable in his poem: "*Do not go gentle into that good night, / Old age should burn and rave at close of day…*" Childs plays upon this theme with unsettling, shifting harmonic platforms throughout the piece. In an attempt to convince his dying father to fight against death, Thomas cites examples to illustrate his message; of wise men, good men, wild men, and grave men: "*Though wise men at their end… do not go gentle*", and "*Good men, the last wave by, crying how bright… Rage against the dying of the light.*" Just as harmony plays a vital role in the work, melody also is an integral feature of *Do Not Go Gentle*. The melodic contour, broad and sweeping at the beginning, more compact and restrained in the middle section, finally rises to a climax in the dying moments of the work. Here it is depicted by two more iterations of *"Rage against the dying…"* before descending in pitch and weakening in intensity. The inevitable moment of resignation – being taken by the night – brings the piece to a quiet, placatory close; *"…dying of the light.*"

The only other work utilizing organ accompaniment is John Tavener's *You mantle yourself in Light*, an anthem from his larger work *The Veil of the Temple*, a seven-hour *All Night Vigil*. Similar to Pärt's treatment of his *Littlemore Tractus*, Tavener uses the organ in a very minimal style, employing pedal point throughout much of the work. Only at the climactic "*young lions roaring for their prey, seeking food from God*," does the organ demonstrate more melodic interest, doubling the chorus in the most dramatic and ecstatic climax of the work.

You mantle yourself in light,
stretch out the skies as a curtain;
the clouds your chariot,
you tread the ways of the wind,
making winds your messengers,
flaming fire your servant,
on a firm base establishing the earth,
which forever will not be moved:
the deeps enrobed it;
the waters stood above the mountains.
At your rebuke they flee,
at the voice of your thunder they rush away.
Mountains rose, valleys sank down
to the place you established for them.
You filled the bounds they may not pass,
nor return to cover the earth.
You made the moon for its seasons,
the sun knows the hour of its setting.
You made darkness, and it is light
in which beasts of the field prowl forth,
young lions roaring for their prey,
seeking food from God.

(From the Psalms)

In William Blake's poem *To the Evening Star* the poet addresses themes of innocence and experience, subject material the Romantic English poet exploits in other works of his. Betinis captures the essence of the poem beautifully, from the ethereal opening and dramatic flute solo, to the reverent and obeisant "*evening angel*" theme, to the transcendent "And wash the dusk with silver", and finally, to the rapturous "*Alleluia*!" section.

Thou fair-hair'd angel of the evening,
Now, whilst the sun rests on the mountains, light
Thy bright torch of love; thy radiant crown
Put on, and smile upon our evening bed!
Smile on our loves, and while thou drawest the
Blue curtains of the sky, scatter thy silver dew
On every flower that shuts its sweet eyes
In timely sleep. Let thy west wind sleep on
The lake; speak silence with thy glimmering eyes,
And wash the dusk with silver. Soon, full soon,
Dost thou withdraw; then the wolf rages wide,
And then the lion glares through the dun forest:
The fleeces of our flocks are cover'd with
Thy sacred dew: protect them with thine influence!

(William Blake 1757–1827)

Morten Lauridsen's lush and poignant setting of James Agee's *Sure On This Shining Night* text from the Tennessee-born poet's only published volume of poetry, *Permit Me Voyage* (1943), is perhaps one of his most recognised choral works, and arguably the most celebrated arrangement ever, second perhaps, only to Samuel Barber. From the outset Lauridsen relishes *rubato* in his hauntingly beautiful melodic contours; "*Sure on this shining night of star-made shadows round, kindness must watch for me this side the ground, on this shining night.*" The melodic lines are captivating, none more so than the tenor and bass "*The late year lies down the north, / All is healed, all is health. / High summer holds the earth.*" The piano accompaniment, rather facile upon first glance, enhances and embellishes the flowing, mellifluous and captivating lines, a facet that is rather typical of the composer's writing. The dynamic contrasts found in Lauridsen's setting are bold and stirring, ranging from the very loud *fortissimo* to the *sotto voce* and almost inaudible *ppp* at the final whispered "*Sure on this shining night.*"

Ticheli's setting of another Teasdale poem, *There Will Be Rest*, is almost as dramatic as Lauridsen's setting of Agee's poem. Composed for his friends Carl and Susan St.Clair following the drowning of their toddler son Cole St.Clair, Ticheli captures the element of hope that is present in Teasdale's words so beautifully, whilst employing such a rich melodic and harmonic texture, that one is left emotionally drained at the conclusion of the piece. That being said, one is also left with a sense of eternal hope. Despite all the tragedies in life, there is eternal promise and assurance that we will all find our "*crystal of peace*."

There will be rest, and sure stars shining
Over the roof-tops crowned with snow
A reign of rest, serene forgetting,
The music of stillness, holy and low.
I will make this world of my devising
Out of a dream in my lonely mind,
I shall find the crystal of peace; and above me
Stars I shall find.

(Sara Teasdale 1884–1933)

David N. Childs

Vox Humana

Vox Humana is a twenty-four voice chamber choir that seeks to draw people from all corners of the world into the embrace of the musical arts through superior choral performances and recordings, by exploring avenues of music innovation, and by engaging new and diverse audiences in extraordinary musical and educational experiences. The ensemble draws together musicians representing the finest vocal talent in the United States to present performances of the highest professional quality. In doing so, *Vox Humana* seeks to preserve choral masterpieces, encourage new composition, foster the advancement of the choral art, and nurture the development of musical interest and talent. The organization was founded in 2010 by New Zealand-born Artistic Director and President, David N. Childs.

Sopranos: Rachel Carlson, Lesley Childs, Julie Kay Johnson, Gitanjali Mathur, Meredith Ruduski, Mary Scheib
Altos: Katrina Burgraff-Kledas, Dianna Grabowski, Cecilia Kittley, Liz Knight, Keely Rhodes, Jennifer Whatley
Tenors: Michael Boswell, Brandon Brack, Paul D'Arcy, Paul Hondorp, Jeff Manns, Gene Olvera
Basses: Jason Awbrey, Cameron Beauchamp, Steve Olivares, Shreyas Patel, Michael Peters, Paul Tipton, Gil Zilkha

Photograph: Philip Nagy

Kara Kirkendoll Welch

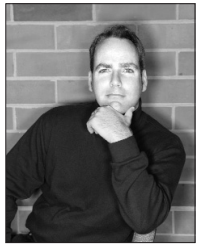
Kara Kirkendoll Welch is a flutist in the Dallas Symphony and Adjunct Asssitant Professor of Flute at Southern Methodist University. She has played Guest Principal Flute in the Saint Louis Symphony Orchestra and has also played as a soloist with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra. She earned her Bachelor of Music in Flute Performance from the University of Cincinnati, College-Conservatory of Music and her Master of Music from Southern Methodist University. Her first recording, *Ballade*, has been critically acclaimed in *Fanfare* magazine, *American Record Guide,* and *BBC Music* magazine.

Photograph: Mike Itashiki

Bradley Hunter Welch

Bradley Hunter Welch is in demand as a recitalist, concerto soloist, and collaborative artist. A native of Knoxville, TN, he holds the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Organ Performance from Yale University. He is the 2003 First Place winner of the Dallas International Organ Competition and was also awarded the Audience Prize for the second time, having previously won it in 2000. He currently serves as Director of Music & Arts/Organist at Highland Park United Methodist Church in Dallas, TX, and he performs approximately twenty concerts annually under the exclusive artistic management of Phillip Truckenbrod Concert Artists, Hartford, CT. His first recording was the first solo organ recording on the 1996 Casavant at Broadway Baptist Church in Fort Worth, TX.

David N. Childs



Photograph: Blair School of Music

David N. Childs is the Founder, President and Artistic Director of *Vox Humana*, a Dallas-based professional chamber choir. Currently also the Director of Choral Music at Highland Park United Methodist Church in Dallas, TX, Childs previously held for ten years the position of tenured Associate Professor of Choral Studies at Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN, where he led three choirs, taught Choral Conducting and Techniques, Choral Education, and was Music Director for the Vanderbilt Opera Theater program. He enjoys an international reputation for his conducting and his compositions, having led numerous choirs, workshops, seminars and clinics in the United States, Japan, Germany, the Czech Republic, and New Zealand. In 2009 and 2011 Childs conducted world premières of his two major works in Carnegie Hall. A composer of over eighty published choral works, his music is performed all over the globe.

The richness of contemporary choral music is explored on this recording of works by some of today's leading composers from across three continents. Eric Whitacre's dramatic setting of Lorca's poetry is contrasted with Frank Ticheli's serene setting of *There Will Be Rest*, in which he attempts, in his own words, to "capture [the poem's] purity of spirit and delicate lyricism." Arvo Pärt has crafted an atmospheric setting of John Henry Newman's 1843 sermon *Wisdom and Innocence*. David N. Childs' *Do Not Go Gentle*, a setting of Dylan Thomas' famous poem, embodies a foreboding and ominous undercurrent of desperation in the face of impending death. Vox Humana is a new 24-voice chamber choir based in Dallas, Texas.

INTO THE NIGHT

1	**Eric WHITACRE (b. 1970): 3 Flower Songs: No. 2 – With a Lily in Your Hand (1991)**	**2:38**
2	**Stephen PAULUS (b. 1949): The Day is Done (2006)**	**5:26**
3	**David N. CHILDS (b. 1969): The New Moon[2] (2007)**	**5:28**
4	**Arvo PART (b. 1935): Littlemore Tractus[3] (2001)**	**4:42**
5	**WHITACRE: Nox Aurumque (2009)**	**6:34**
6	**CHILDS: Do Not Go Gentle (2011) (World Première Recording)**	**5:16**
7	**John TAVENER (b. 1944): The Veil of the Temple: You mantle yourself in Light[3] (2004)**	**6:41**
8	**Abbie BETINIS (b. 1980): To the Evening Star[1] (2005)**	**7:50**
9	**Morten LAURIDSEN (b. 1943): Nocturnes: No. 3 – Sure On This Shining Night[2] (2005)**	**4:54**
10	**Frank TICHELI (b. 1958): There Will Be Rest (2000)**	**6:09**

Vox Humana • David N. Childs

Kara Kirkendoll Welch, Flute[1] • Bradley Hunter Welch, Piano[2] / Organ[3]

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