

## Quire Cleveland in “Hear My Voice” at St. John’s Cathedral (October 6)

by Daniel Hathaway



Quire Cleveland began its tenth anniversary season with concerts in Painesville and Cleveland devoted to liturgical music by the 17th-century British composer Henry Purcell. On Friday, October 6 at St. John’s Cathedral in downtown Cleveland, Quire was in fine “voice” as its 21 singers under the

direction of founder Ross W. Duffin sang repertoire Purcell composed for the choir of the Chapel Royal between his appointment in 1682 and his untimely death at the age of 35 in 1695.

In curating this program, Duffin limited his selections to unaccompanied works or pieces with organ continuo. It’s a tribute to Purcell’s wonderful imagination in setting texts to music — and to Quire’s exquisite singing — that a chain of seventeen such pieces could hold the audience’s attention throughout the evening. (Purcell’s more elaborate verse anthems involving instruments were intended for Westminster Abbey, the composer’s other venue, and could fill several more concerts.)

Friday evening’s program included “full” and “verse” anthems, the latter including expressive sections for soloists, as well as short pieces that were sung during funeral rites for members of the royal family.

Standouts among the anthems that set English texts included *Blow up the trumpet in Sion*, verses in the *Book of Common Prayer* associated with Ash Wednesday, the affecting *O Lord God of hosts* with its supplication to “turn us again,” and the festive

Psalms 100 and 122 — the latter only recently attributed to Purcell. Two striking Latin anthems included the darkly dramatic *Jehova quam multi sunt hostes mei*, and the ebullient wedding anthem, *Beati omnes qui timent Domini*, which breaks out at one point into resounding Alleluias.

The funeral sentences *Man that is born of a woman, In the midst of life we are in death*, and *Thou knowest, Lord, the secrets of our hearts* inspired Purcell to astringent harmonies and arresting ascending lines. Quire sang two settings of the last of the three — one that came later in the program was meant to be sung at the graveside.

Probably the best-known work on the program, *Hear my prayer*, set for eight voice parts, is full of cross relations (clashes of notes between voices) and other choral angst. Quire sang it with extraordinary transparency and expressiveness.

Quire boasts a great depth of vocal talent, and there were too many fine soloists to call out individually, but their cameo appearances contributed greatly to the variety of textures that propelled the program along. Peter Bennett provided stylish continuo on a chamber organ.

Having held its applause until the end of each half, the large audience was strongly enthusiastic at the end of the program. With a nod to the concurrent activity on Progressive Field, Duffin announced an encore: the resurrection of [Come, all ye baseball fans](#), a piece he cribbed from one Henry Purcell and retexted some years ago when the Cleveland Indians previously found themselves on the brink of greatness. Soprano Elena Mullins and countertenor John McElliott were the featured soloists in this clever ending to a remarkable evening.

*Photo by Beth Segal.*

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