

Quire Cleveland at St. John's Cathedral (Nov. 2)

by Daniel Hathaway



Quire Cleveland began its eleventh season on November 2 with new artistic leadership. Under the direction of Jay White, the professional chorus marked the dual celebrations of All Saints Day and All Souls Day with a cleverly devised, masterfully sung program at the Cathedral of St.

John the Evangelist in downtown Cleveland.

“In Lux Perpetuum: Journey into Eternal Life” began with late Medieval and Renaissance music arranged within the framework of a Requiem Mass. Plainchant (Introitus, Tractus, Agnus Dei) alternated with polyphonic Mass movements by Machaut (Kyrie Eleison), Ockeghem (Graduale), Richafort (Offertorium), and Tallis (Sanctus).

Forming another layer in the program were elegies or *Déplorations* written by one composer in honor of another. François Andrieu’s *Armes, Amours / O flour des flours* memorialized Machaut. Josquin des Prez’ *Nymphes des bois* honored Ockeghem, and Jean Richafort’s *Offertorium* was drawn from his Requiem Mass *in memoriam Josquin*. And following Tallis’ *Agnus Dei*, Quire sang William Byrd’s *Ye Sacred Muses*, an elegy for Tallis.

Those pieces populated the m“In Memory Of” section of the concert, to be followed by “Crossing Over,” comprising later works by British composers Charles H. H. Parry and Sir William Henry Harris that celebrate — in ecstatic Anglican fashion — the glories that lie beyond this life.

Jay White, who serves as Professor of Voice at Kent State University, comes to his new position with Quire Cleveland with the experience of three and a half decades as a professional singer, including eight seasons touring with Chanticleer. It's not by coincidence that Quire's program on Friday evening was both cleverly put together and moved along physically like a well-oiled machine.



White grew the chorus as the music became more complex, beginning with chamber-sized groups of singers and culminating in Harris' double-choir motets that involved all 24 performers. Transitions were smooth as singers entered and exited the performing area and adopted different configurations.

Since most of the vocalists were holdovers from the Ross Duffin - Beverly Simmons era, musical values — tuning, blend, and ensemble — remained historically high. The hyper-live acoustic of St. John's Cathedral favored the more fully scored liturgical pieces in this program, while some of the elegies designed for chamber performance, like the double-texted Andrieu motet, got hopelessly garbled. Happily, full texts and translations were provided in the program.

The more modern works that closed the program were among the high points of the evening. The rich textures and harmonies that Parry and Harris applied to wonderful texts by Spenser, Donne, and Vaughan have raised many goosebumps at Evensong in Anglican cathedrals, and so they did ecumenically at St. John's on Friday. After cataloguing the glories of cherubim, seraphim, angels, and archangels, at the end of his *Hymn to Heavenly Beauty*, Edmund Spenser asks,

How then can mortall tongue hope to express
The image of such endlesse perfectnesse?

Harris' setting of those words in *Faire is the heaven* comes pretty close, and Quire gave both that motet and his *Bring us, O Lord God* stunning performances on Friday evening, their tricky enharmonic modulations neatly clicking into place. Parry's more partsong-like settings received warm, supple performances.

A thoughtful addition to the program was Venetian Renaissance composer Salamone Rossi's *Kaddish*, sung in memory of the victims of the Tree of Life Synagogue shooting in Pittsburgh the week before.

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