

# Tubilee

SAT **MARCH 28** 7:30

GRANT HARVILLE, MUSIC DIRECTOR & CONDUCTOR

**“Let their celestial concerts all unite”**

from **Samson** ..... George Frideric Handel

**Petite messe solennelle** ..... Gioachino Rossini

*Kyrie*

*Preludio religioso*

*Ritornello - Sanctus*

*Gloria in excelsis - Et in terra pax - Cum sancto spiritu*

INTERMISSION

**Cantique de Jean Racine** Opus 11 ..... Gabriel Fauré

**Three German Folk Songs** WoO 34 ..... Johannes Brahms

*Von edler Art*

*Bei nächtlicher Weil*

*In stiller Nacht*

**“Dirait-on”** from **Les chansons des roses** ..... Morten Lauridsen

**You are the new day** ..... John David

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# PROGRAM NOTES

## “Let their celestial concerts all unite”

from **Samson** 1743

George Frideric Handel | 1685 - 1759

**DURING THE 18TH AND 19TH CENTURIES**, the British famously had significant difficulty producing a great homegrown composer: Few can name a great homegrown British composer between Purcell (who died in 1695) and Elgar (born in 1857). Instead, they brought in composers from German-speaking lands to produce music for them. Handel was the first of these immigrants to find great success, producing no fewer than 36 operas for London audiences, along with the ubiquitous *Messiah* and various commissions for the royal family.

The church forbade staged production of operas based on Biblical plots, so for these Handel employed the similarly-structured but unstaged form of oratorio. **Samson**, one of 25 Handel oratorios, came the year after *Messiah* and was an immediate success. Unlike *Messiah* (whose narrative concerns a progression of theological ideas), **Samson** has an action-driven plot, telling the story of the Israelite strongman whose strength is in his hair. The work ends when Samson, captive of the Philistines, pulls their temple down on himself and his captors. In the final chorus, “**Let their celestial concerts all unite,**” the Israelites celebrate Samson’s victory in death.

The GFSA has performed “**Let their celestial concerts all unite**” several times, first in 1963.



George Frideric Handel

Balthasar Denner

National Portrait Gallery, London

## **Petite messe solennelle** 1863

Gioachino Rossini | 1792 - 1868

**THE SON OF A HORN PLAYER** and a professional opera singer, Gioachino Rossini was the hit machine of his day, making enough money from his fantastically popular operas that he was able to retire in 1829 at the age of 37. (Political and medical factors, and perhaps even changing artistic tastes, likely also played a role in his decision.) His early retirement seems more reasonable, if no less impressive, when one considers that his first widespread success, *L'inganno felice*, premiered when he was 19; later that year, *La pietra del paragone*, would be admired enough to exempt him from military service. Of course, sheer volume helped as well, with 39 operas written in his under 20-year opera career.

Though he had stopped writing operas, he continued to produce a small number of works in other genres, which he called his “sins of old age.” The ironically named **Petite messe solennelle** (Little solemn mass) is the largest of these, clocking in somewhere close to an hour and a half. The “petite,” if it isn’t just winking self-deprecation, refers to the orchestra or lack thereof: The accompaniment consists of only piano and harmonium, an organ-like keyboard. At the end of the score, Rossini wrote, “Dear God. Here it is, finished, this poor little Mass. Have I written sacred music [musique sacrée] or damned music [sacrée musique]?”

The excerpts chosen for this performance emphasize the choral portions of the work, which hearken back to the influential religious works of the Baroque and Renaissance. While the *Kyrie* opens with typical Rossini lightness, the unaccompanied contrapuntal vocal writing of its central section (the “Christe eleison”) is pure Palestrina. A *Ritornello* (a Baroque term for an instrumental interlude) precedes the *Sanctus* (known as “Holy, Holy, Holy” in English), which employs the *a capella* texture of the “Christe” in a more homophonic, romantic style. Like the famous Vivaldi *Gloria*, the *Gloria* from **Petite messe solennelle** opens with a celebratory “Gloria in excelsis,” continues with a solemn “Et in terra pax,” and culminates with a joyful fugue on “Cum sancto spiritu.”

This is the first GFSA performance of the work.

### ***Cantique de Jean Racine* 1865**

Gabriel Fauré | 1883 - 1924

**IN THE SECOND HALF OF HIS LIFE**, Gabriel Fauré would become a composer of renown throughout Europe and perhaps an even more significant figure in education, teaching at and eventually directing the Paris Conservatory. His early career, however, consisted primarily of various positions as church organist and choirmaster, with his dedication to composition being largely self-directed.

This career in sacred music reflects his upbringing: first playing the organ in the chapel of the school where his father was director, and then attending for 11 years the School of Classical and Religious Music in Paris, winning many of that institution's prizes. The work which would win him the composition prize, the ***Cantique de Jean Racine***, would prove to be one of his most popular early works. The text is an adaptation by playwright Jean Racine of a Latin hymn intended to be sung at matins, the morning canonical hour. In the hymn, the faithful pray upon waking to be protected from hell and to have the "slumber" of sin dispelled.

Originally for chorus and keyboard, Fauré orchestrated the piece a year later.

The GFSA has performed the work twice before, in 2000 and 2005.

### **Three German Folk Songs 1857-1864**

Johannes Brahms | 1833 - 1897

#### **THEORETICALLY, JOHANNES BRAHMS'S CAREER**

goal was to be a traveling pianist-composer, following in the footsteps of virtuosos like Liszt and Paganini. He discovered, however, that he preferred composing to practicing, and his efforts as a soloist seemingly became more half-hearted as he aged. He did, however, achieve sufficient fame that his performances and compositions earned him enough money to realize his true professional dream: avoiding a permanent position.

As Brahms was a pianist who had apparently ruined his singing voice by trying to sing too low, it is perhaps unlikely that three of the rare short-lived jobs he would take would be as choral conductor: at the court in Detmold, for a women's chorus in Hamburg, and later (for all of a year) with the Vienna Singakademie. The happy result of these brief engagements is huge amounts of music written and arranged by Brahms for the choruses he conducted.

Much of this music, particularly the arrangements, falls into the "WoO" classification, that is, *Werke ohne Opus* ("works without opus"), indicating their origin as functional music for Brahms's choirs. But they are no less beautiful for the practical motivation of their creation.

**"Von edler Art,"** the first of the WoO 34 **German Folk Songs**, is a desperate love song to a particularly noble beloved. Number 3, **"Bei nächtlicher Weil,"** tells the tale of a huntsman who falls in love with a mermaid and casts himself into the water to be with her. Number 8, **"In stiller Nacht,"** in which the flowers, animals, moon, and stars grieve to hear the nighttime lament of a single voice, is the most famous of the set.

The GFSA last performed Brahms folk song arrangements in 1963.

**“Dirait-on”** from *Les chansons des roses* 1993  
Morten Lauridsen | b. 1943

**DEPENDING ON THE METRIC USED**, Morten Lauridsen may be the most popular choral composer of all time; he is certainly one of the best-selling and most performed of living American composers. A Washington native, he has been on the music faculty at the University of Southern California for more than 50 years, while returning frequently to his retreat on Waldren Island off the Washington coast to do much of his composing.

About **“Dirait-on,”** one of his most popular songs, Lauridsen says that it “was designed as a piece that had never been composed, had always been there;” and was written “in the style of a French folk song” with an accompaniment “that would sound like a guitar.” As a pseudo-folk song, the melody “must be easily sung, able to be passed down from generation to generation.” The text, a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke, concerns a rose without ever explicitly mentioning the word “rose.” Like much poetry, it supports multiple interpretations but suggests that the rose, through its wildness and tenderness, possesses the ability to redeem.

The GFSA has performed the song once before, in 2005.

**You Are the New Day** 1978  
John David | b. 1946

**MADE FAMOUS BY THE BRITISH VOCAL SEXTET** The King’s Singers, *You Are the New Day* was written by Welsh rock musician and songwriter John David. About the song, he says:

“The inspiration for *New Day* was quite simple; I had just had a major blow in my personal life, and was sitting alone late at night on the settee feeling very low, and watching an ominous story on the news about the very real possibility of nuclear war. I started singing to the (hopefully) soon-to arrive New Day like it was an entity, that would rescue me from the depths. If the sun came up and the birds started singing as usual then I could believe that it really was the new day in which life would go on, and in which hope would survive.”

—PROGRAM NOTES BY GRANT HARVILLE



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