

Doug McConnell Works for Organ

For years, my Christmas traditions involve writing a new piece for my wife, Joan. As you can see, the pieces are hymn-based; this reflects my interest in not only the tune itself, but also the hymn-text that I associate with it. I love hymn texts; they are like mini-sermons. The best ones have a lot to tell us about our relationship with God.

Some of these works were designed for use as service music; others are appropriate for recital use. My wife has used some of these settings for both purposes, but organists can decide for themselves.

A Selected List of Hymn-based Compositions

Adoro Te Devote: Based on the well-known plainsong melody; dedicated to the memory of Leonard and Jean Lilyers. The piece works well as a recital choice, but can also be used on a Sunday morning.

Beach Spring: three explorations of the tune in a single setting, varied styles

Bradbury: a gentle, nostalgic setting of this sentimental hymn, appropriate for Good Shepherd Sundays and a variety of other occasions.

Chereponi: A gentle setting of a folk tune from Ghana; congregations often recognize it through the hymn text, *Jesu, Jesu, Fill Us With Your Love*.

Christ the Savior is Born: A simple, straightforward setting of the beloved Silent Night tune, featuring two complete settings of the melody.

Coronation: a very energetic and at times Ives-inspired setting of this early American hymn. This works well as the final selection for a set of hymn-based pieces, or as the final piece at the end of a recital program.

Easter Hymn is based on the well-known hymn known to many as “Jesus Christ is Risen Today.” It uses some striking dissonances and driving rhythms to capture the excitement of Easter morning and Christ’s victory over death.

Fantasia on How Brightly Shines the Morning Star: a free-flowing presentation of the famous Christmas/Epiphany hymn tune that makes considerable use of prominent motives from the tune.

Good Christian Friends Rejoice: a festive setting of the popular Christmas hymn tune, presented in three main sections. Two outer sections are of similar construction and are celebratory in nature; a middle, more lyric section in a slower tempo offers significant contrast. The piece can be played in its entirety or use individual sections to meet your needs.

Go Tell it On the Mountain: This is a spirited rendition of the traditional Christmas/Epiphany hymn tune, one that uses 10/8 meter and various other metric challenges for a light-hearted effect. The music also expresses the joy of the birth of Christ.

Houston: A simple, direct setting, suitable for service playing, of an Epiphany hymn.

I Wonder as I Wander: a classic folk tune, adapted by J. Nacob Niles is the basis for this short setting that uses mild dissonances at crucial moments to underline the questions posed by the hymn's text. Suitable for Advent, Christmas or Lent.

Jerusalem: Based on the choral song composed by C. Hubert H. Parry (1848-1918), the setting features an extended introduction before the first presentation of the tune. A spirited development section follows, before a triumphant return to the original material.

Joseph Dearest, Joseph Mine: An extended presentation of the Christmas hymn tune that uses elements of exposition and development at the same time.

Joy to the World: a joyous, fantasia-like setting of the famous Christmas carol, suitable as a prelude or postlude.

Kingsfold: a brief and straightforward setting of the folk tune dating back to the Middle Ages. Modal scale flavorings are used throughout.

Meditation on Divinium Mysterium. A quiet reflection on the ancient chant tune (Of the Father's Love Begotten). The setting is also distinguished by its use of the Alleluia motive taken from Lasst uns Erfreuen.

Ride on King Jesus: a celebratory setting of the famous African-American spiritual, full of jazz and blues inflections, along with striking harmonies

Simple Gifts: a simple yet free setting of the famous Shaker tune. An opening presentation of the entire tune gives way to a second, more contrapuntal setting, in a trio style. (2' 10")

Sojourner: the hymn tune appears in three settings. A quiet more reflective introduction leads to a second presentation that uses a steady, walking rhythm. An interlude eventually leads to a final, more triumphant setting of the tune. Overall, the setting makes use of various jazz and blues inflections. (3' 10")

Twas in the Moon of Wintertime: a sixteenth-century French folk tune is the basis for this presentation, that alternates between homophonic and contrapuntal writing.

Multi-Movement Works for Organ

The Light of Light Descending

Introduction

1. Let all mortal flesh keep silence...
2. Lord of all, in human vesture...
3. The Host of Angels spreads its vanguard on the way...
4. Christ our God to earth descending...

Finale: Alleluia, God most High!

Picardy, the hymn tune that is the basis for this theme and variations set, is a French folk melody dating back to the seventeenth century. Twentieth-century English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams combined this tune with a Greek hymn text from the Liturgy of St. James of Jerusalem. This pairing of melody and text still exists today in many modern hymnals under the title of *Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence*.

Introduction: A short opening established the D Aeolian mode that is so prominent throughout the composition. The texture is contrapuntal and rather thick at times; two of the voices appear in the pedals. Brief appearances of motives from the tune are discreetly employed.

1. ***Let all mortal flesh keep silence:*** a straightforward presentation of the *Picardy* tune, shared by the manuals and the pedals. This movement is an outgrowth of the material presented in the Introduction.
2. ***Lord of all, in human vesture:*** a lighter, more dance-like variation. The Great manual presents a freely composed countermelody that runs throughout the movement. After a few measures, the borrowed tune makes its appearance in the pedals.
3. ***The Host of Angels spreads its vanguard on the way:*** a more dramatic presentation of *Picardy* eventually gives way to a quieter reflection, based on the second half of this melody.
4. ***Christ our God to earth descending:*** a toccata-like setting of the *Picardy* tune with a repeating ostinato figure in the upper voice. The hymn tune appears in the pedals once again, with imitative responses from one of the manuals. This movement flows directly into the *Finale*...

Finale: Alleluia, God most High! The final movement feeds on the energy provided by the fourth variation to present one last triumphant presentation of the tune. The manuals present a lush harmonization of *Picardy* while the pedals echo the tune in imitation. After progressing to a loud, climactic chord, the piece returns to its quiet beginnings, bringing closure (if not quite harmonic resolution) to the music.

Partita on “Wittenberg New”

Introduction
Theme: *Wittenberg New*
Variation I: Bicinium
Variation II: Trio
Variation III: Fantasia/Interlude
Variation IV: Finale

Written in 1981-82, and revised in 2008, this piece is based on a hymn tune written by Jan Bender, (1909 – 1994,) one of my first composition teachers. The tune is based in F minor, but the treatment of the source material allows for a strong, dissonant harmonic language. This is strictly recital music and is a challenging work.

Works for Instruments and Organ

The Trinity Suite, for C Trumpet/Flugelhorn and Organ (Additional forces are required for the middle movement)

Children of Creative Purpose (5’)
Great Spirit, Come (7’ 30’)
Their High Communion Find (7’)

Written for Thaddeus Archer and Joan McConnell, The Trinity Suite is an exploration of the Holy Trinity. While the three movements are to be presented as a set, performers can select individual movements for recitals.

Children of Creative Purpose: based on the *Holy Manna* hymn tune, which originally appeared in the Columbian Harmony collection of 1829. Some people associate the tune with the text, *God, Who Stretched the Spangled Heaven*, as written by Catherine Cameron. The title of the movement is a phrase borrowed from this text (“Children of creative purpose, serving others, honoring you.”) This fantasia-like movement is a re-working of an earlier organ setting of this tune.

Great Spirit Come..... This movement features the use of flugelhorn with one brief passage for C trumpet. The music also features the use of choral voices; they are asked to perform in various groupings within the audience. The size of the choir may vary, from 20 voices (recommended minimum) to a larger group of singers, depending on local availability. Two vocal soloists are used in the middle section of the movement, and are placed in appropriate places in the nave. Light percussion (2 – 4 triangle players) are also used. The music should surround the audience as much as possible. The movement uses prominent motives from the traditional Southern hymn tune *Prospect*, with choral text taken from the traditional hymn, *The Lone Wild Bird*.

Their High Communion Find: The tune is a traditional African-American melody, which some congregations use for the text, *In Christ There is No East or West*. The piece is a uses a theme and variations approach to feature the tune in several contrasting styles.

Your Morning Rises as a Song, for Alto Saxophone and Organ

Leanne Fazio (1944-2013) was a keyboard performer with multiple interests; she performed regularly on the organ, piano, and harpsichord throughout her career as a soloist and as a collaborative musician. For more than three decades, she served as a member of the music faculty at Mississippi State University, in Starkville, Mississippi. She was also an active church musician throughout her career. Leanne used her love of music to build community; those of us who were privileged to work with her will always remember her enthusiasm, her generous spirit, and her sincere interest in everyone who came in contact with her.

Your Morning Rises as a Song, written in memory of Leanne, is a fantasia based on the *Lasst uns erfreuen*, a hymn tune that dates back to the seventeenth century. This is a tune that would have been well known to Leanne from numerous church services. The title of the piece is a fragment taken from a hymn text, as adapted by Miriam Therese Winter, one that is sometimes associated with this tune.

*“Your morning rises as a song,
And lights of evening sing along.....”*

The music is cast in two large sections, as various motives from the well-known hymn tune are gradually introduced and developed. The opening section is slow and meditative; the alto saxophone sings out freely over a more sustained organ accompaniment. A second, faster section, marked “With Joy” in the score works more directly with the hymn tune fragments, using various compositional devices, from imitation to inversion, before building to a final triumphant section.