

Musical Treasure Chest #3

As we shivered through this past week, even seeing a thin blanket of snow on the ground, I remembered a spring of about 20 years ago, when we had a very late substantial snowfall. This memory is vivid for two reasons, the first is waking up on that Sunday morning to the white covering and realizing that its weight had made the roof of our garage collapse, and the other is of being on a musical “high” from a performance the night before of Bach’s St. Matthew Passion with conductor **David Janower** and Albany Pro Musica. David loved Bach: he loved the music, preparing the music, studying other performances, collaborating with the artists and sharing Bach with other musicians and audiences.

David had a wonderful choral pedigree, especially with Bach, he worked with some of the great chorus masters and conductors alive at the time, including Margaret Hillis, Fiona Contino and Helmut Rilling. As his longtime concertmaster I got to see that incredible depth of knowledge and respect, as well as to receive the gift of the passing on of musical traditions. David and I would typically meet a few months before a big performance to discuss the bowings (for non-orchestra players that is the agreement between the string sections of which way the bow travels) and articulations. David would arrive at these meetings with stacks of music and scores, some from Margaret Hillis and the Chicago Symphony Chorus, some from the Oregon Bach Festival with Helmut Rilling (where David had been an assistant for several summers). These parts brimmed with markings and David’s notes and questions; he invested so much energy and passion into them. He was curious about what worked and did not work, what served the musical line and the delivery of the text best. I always looked forward to these meetings. In my early years I was fascinated to see what the long time traditions were with the music and why certain decisions were made. Later, as we revisited repertory sometimes for a third or fourth time over our 30 years of collaboration, I would have strong opinions about what I thought worked. Those meetings through the years still influence my musical decisions today, and I cherish all that I learned from him.

My first performances of several of the great Bach choral masterpieces, including the B-minor Mass and the St. Matthew Passion, were with David, and I have very special memories of each of them. I thought for this Musical Treasure, I would give you some of my favorite moments within these pieces, as well as two other works that I had a chance to perform with him. I still miss David, I always will, but I treasure the musical experiences he gave to me and the great repertory we shared.

The first excerpt is from the **Bach B-minor Mass**. David was particularly devoted to this piece and had a strong concept of exactly how it should flow. The opening *Kyrie* and David’s shaping of it remains one of my great memories of performances. A model for David’s interpretation was the John Eliot Gardner version, which I share with you here. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RKypt3TSkq4> Bach b minor mass, Kyrie, Gardiner, Monteverdi choir, English baroque soloists. The performance is truly magnificent.

Bach’s St. Matthew’s Passion is one of western music’s master artistic achievements, its quality defies words. Within almost continually magical moments during this three hour plus piece, there are a few that are simply sublime. One is the aria *Erbarme dich*. So unutterably beautiful and profoundly sad and deeply moving....a human soul pouring out its anguish. This performance is simply exquisite with Julia Hamari, mezzo-soprano and Otto Büchner,

violin. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aPAiH9XhTHc&list=RDaPAiH9XhTHc&start_radio=1&t=0

Another incredible work that I played for the first time with David is the **Mozart Requiem**. We performed this several times over the years, in a variety of versions (as Mozart did not finish it and there are several options for musical realization). For one of the performances David opted to end the Requiem with the *Lacrimosa*, which proceeds the Offertory (the last section Mozart fully composed). I love this movement, it gives me chills every time I hear or play it. It is so achingly grief-stricken, the musical depiction of tears streaming down a face. My favorite recording (I think because of where it was recorded, which was in St Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna, where Mozart's funeral was held in 1791) is with Sir Georg Solti and the Vienna Philharmonic and Chorus.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f_DMbVpwpQ0 Mozart Requiem, Solti, Vienna Philharmonic, opera chorus

And finally, perhaps on a more happy note, David, my husband and I collaborated on several musical projects. One of them was the oratorio **Esther of Handel**. This is a fantastic piece, almost operatic in scope, which is truly under-performed. We featured a quintet of Young Artists from Glimmerglass Opera, including tenor Michael Slattery and bass Craig Phillips (now of the Grammy winning male vocal quartet NY Polyphony). Esther tells the Purim story, and for me, one of the absolute highlights is the thrilling chorus (which is quite virtuosic) *He Comes, He Comes to end our Woes*. The soaring horn lines, the contrapuntal writing for the chorus, the brilliant string writing, the contrast of the middle section, the word painting on "trembles;" it is all wonderful. Enjoy this fine performance with Harry Christophers and his virtuoso choir The Sixteen.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AiJMHg8o-6Y>