

Ave Maria

Edited by
WINFRED DOUGLAS

S. RACHMANINOFF

Op. 37, No. 6

Smoothly, not quick

SOPRANO

Hail, O Vir - gin Moth-er, Bear - er of God, ho-ly

ALTO

Hail, O Vir - gin Moth-er, Bear - er of God ho-ly

TENOR

Hail, O Vir - gin Moth-er, Bear - er of God, ho-ly

BASS

Smoothly, not quick

PIANO
for
practice
only

Ma - ry, full of grace; the Lord is

Ma - ry, full of grace; the Lord is

Ma - ry, full of grace; the Lord is

with thee: Hail, O

with thee: bless-ed art thou a -

with thee: Hail, O

Vir - gin Moth-er of God, ho - ly Ma - ry, full of

mong wo - men, and bless-ed is the fruit of thy womb; for

Vir - gin Moth-er of God, ho - ly Ma - ry, full of

for

ff grace, for thou hast brought forth the
 thou hast brought forth the Sav - iour, who re-deem'd our
ff grace, for thou hast brought forth the
 thou hast brought forth the Sav - iour who re -
ff
mf
pp
ppp
 Sav - iour, who re - deemed our souls.
 souls, who re - deemed our souls.
 Sav - iour, who re - deemed our souls, who re - deemed our souls.
 deemed our souls, who re - deemed our souls.
p
pp
p
pp
ppp

PROGRAM NOTE

These fifteen numbers form what is called in Russian the "Combined Prayer Service", or "All Night Vigil", consisting of the vesper and matin service linked together for the nights of vigil preceding the great holidays. It must not therefore be confused with the liturgy or the communion service, for which Rachmaninoff has also written a musical setting. This work of his written in 1916, had only a few performances in Moscow before the composer left for America. The first performance of any of the numbers was given by the Schola Cantorum of New York, which sang two pieces in Russian at its concert in April, 1919. The New York Oratorio Society sang one number in English at its Spring Festival in 1920, and the Schola Cantorum presented six more of the anthems at a later concert. The entire work has now been translated into English by Canon Winfred Douglas and has been issued in this English form with revisions by the composer.

In the opinion of Kurt Schindler conductor of the Schola Cantorum, "Rachmaninoff's 'All Night Vigil' represents beyond all doubt one of the important landmarks in modern church music by its sublime craftsmanship, its skill in vocal orchestration, its new and unheard-of effects. Each group of the eight-times divided chorus is used and stands out to the limit of its possibilities and all this with the utmost simplicity, with the greatest reserve, according to a careful architectural plan. The rhythm is free, and untrammelled by the usual pattern of equal measures; like harmonized Gregorian song it surges and ebbs according to the meaning of the text and the cadence of the words. But there is one remarkable aspect of this music not easily understood by an audience unfamiliar with the Russian Orthodox Church, namely the poetic vision and masterful plasticity with which the obligatory repetitions of text-phrases are treated and enhanced by an architectural plan, which always evolves, raises, illuminates the words, by ever new harmonies, ever surprising modulations, ever changing sonorities. To explain all the beauties of the score in its relation to the Church service, would mean to write a book and yet the master composed the entire work in less than two months. Suffice it to say that compared to the full-grown maturity of this work the older settings of Tchaikowsky and Rimsky seem like children's work, beautiful though they be, and that confronted with such austere grandeur and simplicity all other modern Russian church music must needs take second place."

High praise this, and yet it cannot be said that it is undeserved. This music is obviously the work of a great master, a craftsman of the utmost skill, a poet of the highest inspiration and a seer of the profoundest significance. There are many passages of the most ineffable beauty to which it would be impossible to listen unmoved. There is a rare spiritual atmosphere pervading the whole work, which could have been born only from profound emotion and which will kindle in the hearer some varying degree of the same feeling.

Some of the numbers have an exotic quality which would perhaps make them somewhat out of place in the average American church, although there is no reason why congregations should not be trained up by a gradual process to a proper appreciation of this music, whose message is as universal as Art itself. Others again of the anthems are of a quality that requires no politic introduction to western auditors, notably the "Ave Maria", the "Nunc Dimittis" and the "Glory be to God".

For the director of secular choruses there need be no such limitations. Though written for religious services, music of such profound significance as this belongs to the whole world. Its subtle intricacies, its imposing climaxes, and dramatic contrasts will call out the best of which conductor and chorus are capable. Such a number, for instance as the "Gloria in Excelsis", or as it is sometimes called "The Great Doxology" runs almost the whole gamut of musical expression, from the most elusive pianissimo to the most sonorous fortissimo, with the utmost freedom of rhythm and plasticity of phrase, with every shade and color, with varying mood and sudden change. To render properly such a monumental composition as this argues a perfect command of tonal resources. It is a veritable touchstone of taste and ability. Seldom have the hearts and minds of both performers and listeners been simultaneously so moved and invigorated.

It is quite impossible to give but the merest suggestion of the power and beauty of this music. Like all the masterpieces of really great art, it stands aloof from analysis and untouched by criticism.

A word of praise should be spoken for the English text provided by Canon Winfred Douglas. This indefatigable champion of the Russian school has labored lovingly over these translations and adaptations and has achieved a truly notable result.

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