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THE CHORAL MUSIC OF AAM MEMBER DAN LOCKLAIR

The First in a Series of Articles on His Music

by Marilyn Keiser, S.M.D.

I first met Dan Locklair when he was a senior organ major at Mars Hill College in Mars Hill, North Carolina. Dan was serving as the Organist and Choir Director at St. John's in the Wilderness Episcopal Church in Flat Rock, and he called on me for some advice. I was then living in Asheville and serving as Music Director at All Souls Parish and Music Consultant for the Diocese of Western North Carolina. From the first time I met Dan, I was impressed with his personal warmth, his intense energy, his superb talent, and his deep interest in the music of the Church. Dan now serves as Composer-in-Residence and Professor of Music at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem. He is a prolific composer, and his music is widely performed throughout the world.

Most of us know Dan's organ works—the rollicking final movement of *Rubrics*, the serenity of *The Peace may be Exchanged*, and the grandeur of *Phoenix Processional*. But Dan's choral music is equally wonderful, and much of it is based on sacred texts. It is always fresh, inventive, meticulously written, and filled with exquisite harmonies. Dan is a master at setting texts; the words of each anthem are treated with the utmost care.

For All Saints Day: **Remembrance** (Subito Music, 91480445)

Described by a critic for the *Washington Post* as “a vibrant anthem,” this setting of the Beatitudes from Matthew 5 has a serene and timeless quality. It was written in memory of Dan's parents, and is scored for SATB, organ, and optional trumpet. A short simple antiphon for a single solo voice contrasts with exquisite choral sections set for SATB, TTBB, and SSAA. The text unfolds quietly with a dramatic musical climax on “Rejoice and be exceeding glad,” and the organ blasts forth a thrilling fortissimo. The work ends quietly on one word, “Remember.”

Shepherds, Rejoice! Lift Up Your Eyes (Subito Music, 492-00057)

This work is a delightful anthem for Christmas Eve or the Christmas season. Marked “brisk and exuberant,” the eight verses of text are a perfect fit for the charming and energetic nature of the music. Dan uses varied voicings for the stanzas (TB, AT, SA). The music

is repetitive and not difficult, but appealing and very joyful.

Christ was Born in Bethlehem (Subito Music, 492-00056)

This Christmas anthem, quiet and sustained, is harmonized with great beauty. It would be well within the reach of smaller choirs. The text is set with great care and sensitivity.

It may be helpful to know that *Shepherds, Rejoice! Lift Up Your Eyes* and *Christ Was Born in Bethlehem* were conceived of and written as a set of two anthems entitled *Shepherds, Rejoice!*. Dan's publisher thought they would best be published separately with the cover of each piece showing both titles. That is why they are two individual publications, working effectively as a pair or, of course, separately as well.

Love Came Down at Christmas (Subito Music, 91480550)

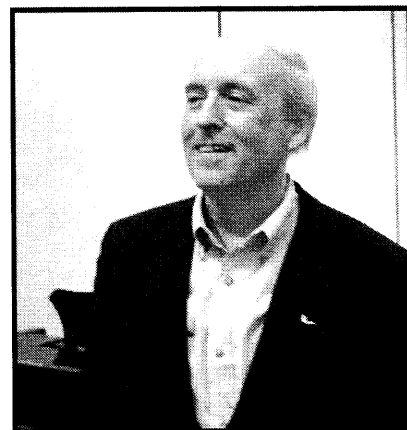
This slow, simple, and reflective anthem for Christmas is scored for SATB a cappella, or with keyboard accompaniment. Composed in 2009, this work provides a fresh and beautiful musical setting for Christina Rossetti's text. Dedicated to me and to the choir at Trinity Church, Bloomington, Indiana, it is very accessible, with musical repetition. A lovely high point in the music occurs as the choir sings “love to God and neighbor, love for plea and gift and sign.” You will love it!

Lord Jesus, Think on Me (Subito Music, 91480446)

This is a beautifully expressive setting of a familiar hymn text by a 5th-century Greek monk named Synesius of Cyrene. Dan sets the text to an original tune, reminiscent of the hymn tune *Southwell*, to which the text is set in *The Hymnal 1982*. Dan uses thoughtful and effective contrasts in voicings in this piece. The work begins with sopranos and altos singing alone; the tenors and basses enter on the final phrase of the verse. The music gains in energy and momentum and, at verse three, the SATB voices, singing in close harmony, open out into a dramatic musical climax on the words “and share thy joy at last.” This is a work of great subtlety and is a magnificent anthem for Lent. My choir loves it.

Create in Me a Clean Heart (Paraetele Press, PPM00006)

Like a number of Dan's choral works, this piece is set in ABA form. The care Dan has given to setting this text is clear from the first notes. The opening must surely be modeled after the opening measures of Britten's *Rejoice in the Lamb*. The middle section, marked “buoyant and graceful” and set to the text “Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation,” takes a bit of work. Soprano and



Photograph by Bill Saviers

Dan Locklair

tenor voices begin this section, singing in octaves, the alto and bass voices follow with an answering phrase, and then imitative entries lead to an exciting and brilliant climax on the text “and uphold me with thy free spirit.” Alto and tenor voices sing the text “Then will I teach transgressors thy ways” on a unison G, while the alto and bass voices create a 6-4 inversion of the G Major chord. Over the top, a solo soprano voice enters on the same text outlining a descending G major triad (hints of Britten’s *Te Deum* in C major). The ending is absolutely exquisite and the overall effect is deeply moving. Every time the choir in my parish has sung it, there is total quiet in the congregation—no one moves. There is a beautiful recording of *Create in Me a Clean Heart* on an Arsis CD as recorded by the Vocal Arts Ensemble of Durham, North Carolina, that also includes the motet, *Pater Noster*.

Several years ago, a parishioner wrote to the composer:

Dear Professor Locklair:

On Sunday, Marilyn Keiser introduced the congregation to your anthem, *Create in me a Clean Heart*. I was transfixed. This was truly a find! I was compelled to contact you, not because of my own response to this wonderful piece, but because of the response I observed in the pew in front of me. The younger child, a boy, of a young couple in our parish, a boy of not more than three years (probably two-and-a-half) stopped dead in his casual fidgeting. This child climbed up on the kneeler to get a better view and smiled broadly and listened with total

involvement for the length of the piece. It is a measure of the strength of the work that it could shake a small and uninvolved child out of his attention to whatever and bring him to a level of delight and involvement that adults can only wonder at and envy.

Three Christmas Motets (E.C. Kerby, Ltd. [Ricordi], Hal Leonard, dist., HL50482744)

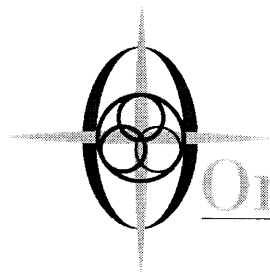
Quem Vidistis Pastores?
O Magnum Mysterium
Hodie Christus Natus Est

These motets, dating from 1993, are fabulous! Written for SATB Choir, divisi, a cappella, they are works of some difficulty. This music is vintage Dan—changing meters galore, wonderful rhythmic energy, and magnificent harmonies. The first time I heard Dan’s setting of *Hodie Christus*, I played it six times without stopping. This music would need a well-trained and highly-skilled choir, but it is fabulous. Unlike *Shepherds, Rejoice!*, it is one publication that includes all three pieces. If you want to enjoy it in on your CD player, order *Cantez Noel: Atlanta Singers* from Albany Records.

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