

Recording Reviews

MARJORIE JOHNSTON

Dan Locklair: Gloria. Sospiri, Christopher Watson, Conductor; Winchester College Chapel Choir & The Portsmouth Grammar School Chamber Choir, Malcolm Archer, Conductor; Jeremy Cole and Sam Gladstone, Organists; Andrew King and Dan Locklair, Producers (Convivium Records, MCPS. CR033), Amazon \$16.38, iTunes \$9.99; also see audio streaming options.

The very first recording I reviewed for *The Journal* in 2014 was a compilation of Dan Locklair pieces titled *Tapestries*. I was increasingly a fan, and that CD piqued my interest to follow Locklair's career more closely. Now I return to his work with a CD that picks up chronologically where the other one left off, with works from the 1990s moving forward. His *Gloria* serves as the centerpiece for this collection of the composer's sacred choral works that spans different points in the liturgical year.

The disc's opening track is Locklair's take on *Lord Jesus, Think on Me*, the ancient text by Synesius of Cyrene (ca. 375-430), with the same translation by Allen W. Chatfield used in *The Hymnal* 1982. At first hearing, one expects the familiar tune, *SOUTHWELL*, but this is a strikingly original setting. One may not immediately associate the hymn tune or text with "brightness and joy," but the composer makes a point of conveying these key words in the final verse very effectively.

The *Isaiah Canticles* was a significant 2005 commission for The South Bend Chamber Singers. The three movements are settings of well-loved canticle texts: *Surely, it is God Who Saves Me*, *Seek the Lord*, and *Arise, Shine, for Your Light Has Come*. The set was conceived as a

suite with a center pitch of "D" and the use of modal polychords, but each movement could certainly stand on its own. Set for a *cappella divisi* chorus, this would provide a fulfilling challenge for an advanced choir.

Two distinctive pieces in this collection represent the Christmas season. One of these is *Angel Song*, making use of a unique text written by the Rev'd Moncure Daniel Conway—a strong proponent of the abolitionist cause during the presidency of Abraham Lincoln. It is clearly centered on the birth of Christ, but the author's passion for justice is evident in the third verse:

I saw the warrior on the plain
Pause in that light to sheathe his sword;
I saw the slave look up in pain,
Chains melted in the fires it poured.

Angel Song is an exciting and fresh Christmas text, rooted in tradition, with an organ accompaniment requiring polished technique and expression. This observation made perfect sense when I saw that the anthem was commissioned by the gifted Organist/Choirmaster of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Winston-Salem, N.C., John Cummins.

In a telephone interview, Dan Locklair pointed out that it's important to work closely with people on commissions. In the case of *Angel Song*, he already knew Dr. Cummins and the 1928 Skinner for which the piece was written. "Of course, John Cummins can do anything, and I wanted to utilize the organ because it's a big part of the music program there," Locklair explained. "You know, when you do a piece like that, it may limit performances but at the same time it demonstrates different compositional styles for the instrument as well as for voices. The power of the organ was required for that piece. That's what fuels me with commissions: you know at the other end of the creative process, there is an excited group waiting for that piece! I keep in mind that there is a 'universal' choir that might also find it useful."

The fourteen-and-a-half minute *Gloria* is set for SATB *divisi* chorus, brass octet, and percussion. It strikes me as an accessible and gratifying piece

that would work well for a solid choir that has the numbers to handle the *divisi* comfortably, and the children's voices from the Portsmouth Grammar School Chamber Choir make a terrific contribution on this recording. I also think it would be appealing to play in the accompanying ensemble, as the writing is so rhythmically interesting. Even with the varying timbres that match the text, there is a cohesiveness to this substantial work, written in 1998.

Gloria was recorded at Romsey Abbey in Hampshire, England—a coveted recording venue. A live offering of the piece involves a small group of singers beginning at the back of the performance space and moving forward. Executive Producer Adrian Green and the recording engineers for this disc worked hard and successfully to capture that effect, building a silently rolling device for the microphones that followed the choristers in procession. Locklair also pointed out the downside of a wonderful, old, reverberant space—random building noises! That was also handled beautifully by the production staff for this disc.

Devotees of this composer may know some of the pieces that complete the disc: *O Sacrum Convivium* and *Ave Verum Corpus* are the kinds of anthems that can create a following. A piece I did not know and was happy to discover on this recording is *St. Peter's Rock*. It is set for SATB chorus and organ, with optional trumpet (beautifully played by Ellie Lovegrove.) There is a chant-like antiphon, *Tu es Petrus*, and a nice mix of English and Latin employed on other pertinent scripture passages from Matthew, Genesis, and Psalm 122.

Adrian Green was also essential in getting the performing forces together, and for signing on Malcolm Archer and Christopher Watson with their respective groups and vast experience. Locklair expressed great appreciation for them, and for his co-producer, Andrew King—"lovely man, extraordinary ears."

I recommend this disc to my AAM colleagues because it offers something for choirs of all levels, and I appreciated the variety of voicings and accompaniments. I had some rather nebulous questions about composing for Dan Locklair during our interview,

and he handled them with aplomb; I'll close with his words:

I love writing and I really sweat over every detail of every piece... every chord and every nuance. One thing that I value is craft... being able to take the least and make the most out of it. Beyond the technical, I search for beauty and a setting of a text that seems inevitable. With choral or vocal music, that needs to be the overall mantra. It's hard to judge your own style, but I hope there are some fingerprints. I never cease to marvel at what has been done and can be done with only 12 notes!

News of Members



Eugene Lavery has been appointed Director of Music at St. Alban's Episcopal Church in Waco, Tex., as of January 2017. Serving as the first full-

time musician at St. Alban's, a parish enjoying rapid growth, Lavery will develop a comprehensive Anglican choral program with a particular focus on building an RSCM-based chorister school.

Born in New Zealand, and a graduate of the Juilliard School, Lavery is highly sought after as a solo recitalist, accompanist, conductor, and teacher. Notable recital venues include St. Paul's Cathedral, London; the Cathedral of St. John the Divine, New York City; Harvard University, Cambridge; St. Andrew's Cathedral, Sydney, Australia; and the Cathedral of the Holy Cross, Lagos, Nigeria. Lavery has also served as conductor and organist of RSCM courses and conferences in the United States, New Zealand, and Nigeria.

Previous church appointments include Director of Sacred Music and Organist at St. Martin of Tours Catholic Church, Louisville, Ky.; Artistic Director of the Cathedral Choir School, Wilmington, Del.; and Assistant Organist at Holy Trinity Cathedral, Auckland, New Zealand.

Do You Need to Find a Conference Roommate for the 2017 Winchester, England Conference?

AAM offers a Roommate Search Service through which those wishing to share a room at the AAM Annual Conference can make contact with each other. Alan Reed compiles lists of conferees searching for a roommate and circulates them as names are added. If you wish to be on the Roommate Search List, please send your name along with your e-mail and/or mailing address to:

Alan Reed
8808 Darcy Hopkins Road
Charlotte, NC 28277
(704) 408-7489
ACTARreed@aol.com

The 2017 Association of Anglican Musicians Conference

Winchester

In Quires & Places Where They Sing

Tuesday
11th July
through
Sunday
16th July
2017

(arrive Monday
10th July
depart Monday
17th July)

<http://conference.anglicanmusicians.org/the-winchester-conference/>