haunting, setting is moderately easy and well worth adding to any choral library.


Psalm 116 from the BCP Psalter elicits a simple, tuneful response from Stopford in this moderately easy anthem. The musical language is a familiar style of church music flavored with popular-music influences. Much of the anthem is unison or soprano-tenor and alto-bass pairings, and even the four-part harmony is quite predictable. This is warm, emotive music that moves through the text of the Psalm with sensitivity and direction.


A murmuring, minimalist accompaniment undergirds a contemplative choral recitative. The piece is mostly unison, either with all voices singing the melody or treble and bass voices alternating. When harmony does appear, it is two part soprano-tenor and alto-bass. While not sight-readable, this moderately easy piece would complement various Lenten services with minimal work.


A strong, striking introductory phrase sets the tone of this exciting setting of the Magnificat, and the music never relents. Quasi-minimalist gestures and an irregular mixture of simple and compound meters, further enriched by effective hemiolas, propel the music, while the harmonic activity that moves between F-sharp minor and major contributes its own energy. The Gloria Patri introduces 5/8 measures, enhancing the forward drive into the final, subito piano cadence. The Nunc dimittis is a languid counterbalance to the excitement of its companion. In something akin to Tallis’ Short Service, the sopranos spin out an expansive melody while the lower voices accompany with interlocking homophonic phrases. For most of the piece, the lower voices sing only the word “Lord,” reinforcing their accompanmental role. The Gloria Patri is a mesmerizing and simply-homophonic setting. Although the piece is diatonic throughout and contains no part divisions, these canticles are moderately difficult yet very worth the effort.


Gerald Near has newly edited these familiar works by Thomas Attwood, affording the opportunity to replace tattered old copies that linger in choral libraries. Both pieces are available in free versions at www.cpdl.org, yet reading from a piece of professionally published music has real merit. Syllable breaks, text underlays, and general layout are more consistent and correct in the MorningStar editions. On the other hand, the scores available online are generally free of dynamic markings, whereas Near supplies them freely and without comment. Michael Burkardt is cited as editor and arranger of the Billings piece, yet it is unclear how he altered the original. The text of the Lord’s Prayer is a paraphrase by Nahum Tate and Nicolas Brady, thus it varies considerably from the version in the BCP. This perhaps opens its use as an anthem without risking tautology within the liturgy. Burkhardt provides a keyboard reduction as well as performance indications (dynamics, phrasing, etc.). With repeats, the work is longer than many Billings pieces, approaching the scale of the Easter Anthem.


AAM member David P. Dahl has composed four sets of variations based on early American hymn tunes from the shape-note tradition. A stanza of the hymn heads each variation and also inspires its musical content. The chosen tunes are New Britain, Consolation (known as Morning Song in The Hymnal 1982), Dove of Peace, and Wondrous Love. Dove of Peace was not familiar to me, but it is a lovely lilting tune in the manner of Land of Rest. The variations are varied and contrasting, mostly in a Neo-Baroque style. Dahl’s familiarity with mechanical action organs (having played the Brombaugh organ at Christ Church, Tacoma, Washington, for many years) and Baroque repertoire shines through these compositions. Forms include the bicinium, the trio, and the aria. Each set of variations is introduced by an intonation and a complete original harmonization of the tune, both of which could be used independently for congregational singing. The variations on Consolation (Morning Song) and the more adventurous expressive harmonies of Wondrous Love are particularly successful. Canon is employed in several variations, including canon by augmentation and inversion in Variation V of Consolation. These attractive sets of pieces based on well-loved hymns would be useful as a prelude or to demonstrate different combinations of stops in an organ recital.