

Bach Beat

The Newsletter of the Bach Cantata Choir



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Newsletter

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Charles Villiers Stanford 1852~1924

By Lorin Wilkerson—Bass

Charles Villiers Stanford was the son of a well-to-do Dublin lawyer and received a musical education from an early age. His parents were extremely accomplished amateurs; his father sang the bass solos in the Irish premier of Mendelssohn's *Elijah* in 1847 and his mother played piano concertos with orchestras in Dublin.

His musical precocity was noticed early on, and nurtured by his family. By the time he was seven, he played Beethoven, Mozart and Mendelssohn on the piano, and he started composing at age eight. Much like Handel's father, Stanford's father fervently hoped that his son would follow him in a career in law, but did not force it upon him. Stanford had the opportunity to study at the famous Leipzig conservatory in his 20s; he felt that the atmosphere of advanced musical studies in England was stuffy and reactionary, and wanted to expand his horizons. His talent enabled him to gain entrance to this prestigious German academy, though in his Classical studies at Cam-

bridge he came in 65th out of 66 students in his graduating class!

He was a controversial figure, and by no means universally loved in his lifetime. He and his colleagues, including Hubert Parry and Alexander Mackenzie, gained artistic control over many of the major music festivals in Britain around the turn of the century, and no less than George Bernard Shaw, perhaps their most vociferous critic, lampooned them as a "mutual admiration society," and others criticized what they saw as a stranglehold by these men and others over most of the musical education institutions in England.

While his musical style was conservative, and indeed he was contentious and quarrelsome as both a professor and colleague, at the Royal College of Music he taught composition to a number of the most important English composers of the generation after him, such as Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Gustav Holst,

Ralph Vaughan Williams and John Ireland. Stanford's star began to wane in the first decade of the 20th century as he was eclipsed by the more popular younger composer Richard Elgar. Once friends, they turned to bitter rivals in Stanford's later years, thanks largely to Stanford's acrimony.



Caricature of Charles Villiers Stanford
originally published in *Vanity Fair*

Although he composed in many genres, much of Stanford's fame would come to rest upon his Anglican church compositions, such as his settings of the Anglican church services and Stabat Mater and his Magnificats, of which he set one in every major key! ¹

Though his influence had waned in his later years, there can be no doubt as to the importance of his legacy. Said Vaughan Williams: "In Stanford's music the sense of style, the sense of beauty, the feeling of a great tradition is never absent. His music is in the best sense of the word Victorian, that is to say it is the musical counterpart of the art of Tennyson, Watts and Matthew Arnold." ²

¹ The BCC will perform two motets by Stanford at the Lenten concert: *Justorum Animae* and *Beati Quorum*.

² Davies, Walford et al. "Charles Villiers Stanford, by some of his pupils," *Music & Letters*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (July 1924), pp. 193–207.

Biographical info on Stanford adapted from Wikipedia.

BCC at Mt. Angel in July

We'd like to remind our dedicated followers that the Bach Cantata Choir has been extended the great honor of being asked to sing for the 42nd Annual Abbey Bach Festival at Mt. Angel. This incredible festival, set in a beautiful monastic environment about an hour south of Portland, will take place over three evenings; July 24th through the 26th. The choir will be performing on Thursday and Friday evenings at 6:00 p.m.

A variety of ticket options are now available online at www.mountangelabbey.org/bach-home.htm. This is a sell-out event, so don't delay if you'd like to join us for this special event.



BACH CANTATA CHOIR
3570 NE MATHISON PLACE
PORTLAND OR 97212

Lenten Concert

Join us for *An Irish Blessing* by Bob Chilcott, works by Tallis and Stanford and J.S. Bach's famous *Concerto for Violin and Oboe in C Minor* featuring Mary Rowell and Paul Pitkin

Sunday, March 17, 2012 at 2:00 p.m.
Rose City Park Presbyterian Church
Free concert (free-will offering accepted)

The Roman Soldiers

By Ralph Nelson

When I was growing up in Pennsylvania, Good Friday was always a school holiday, and we always went to services on Maundy Thursday and also Good Friday. Nowadays, most public schools are open on Good Friday and people simply go through the day as if it were just another day. In 1997, while working as organist at Rose City Park Presbyterian Church, I wrote this anthem in part as a reaction to this kind of "oh well, just another day" attitude that most people now have about Good Friday. The anthem is dedicated to Rose City's long-time choir director Glenda McKibben, who also, like me was saddened that Good Friday had very little meaning in our present society.

In the piece, the men play the Roman Soldiers -- a rather uncaring, brutal group -- and the women narrate the story. In college, while working on a report for a New Testament Greek class, I learned that Pontius Pilate had crucified thousands of Jews in the same year that Christ was crucified. The Romans used Crucifixion as a way to humiliate and control a population -- it was a hideous, very public death that kept local populations in utter fear, and hence controlled by Rome. The soldiers were very good at it (in the piece it says, "The Roman soldiers knew their craft") -- and Christ was just simply one more crazy man to be crucified. Frankly, for these soldiers it was probably "just another day."

In the anthem, the rhythm of the work always marches us to the cross until Christ dies with the words "he bowed his head, and died." Then the women stop being the story-tellers and dramatically become the wailing women at the cross with the words, "Oh, My Jesus." At this point, I took a cue from J.S. Bach and wrote an original chorale on this text:

What would I have done if I were there?
If I were a soldier, would I have cared?
If I were his friend, would I fall away?
Or would I simply say, "It's just another day"?

Hence, the question comes back to us and how we live our lives. Does Good Friday matter to us, or like the Roman Soldiers, is it simply "just another day"? Finally, the work ends with a quieter reprise of "Oh, My Jesus."