

Denmark

A Fair and Lovely Land

Sunday, March 2, 2025
2:00 PM

*Ballard First Lutheran Church
Seattle*

Presented by
Nordic Chamber Music



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ENSEMBLE

Dr. Gary D. Cannon
Artistic Director

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The Emerald Ensemble enlightens the mind, uplifts the heart, and enriches the soul through great choral music presented with passion and skill. We envision a world made better through great choral music.

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The Emerald Ensemble recognizes that we gather on the traditional lands of the Duwamish people.

We are grateful to the land and its people, past and present.

Denmark – A Fair and Lovely Land

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PROGRAM

Danmark, du kornblonde datter (1909)	Carl Nielsen (1865–1931)
Tre Madrigali di Torquato Tasso (1955) 1. A Virgilio — 2. All’Aurora — 3. Non è questo un morire	Bernhard Lewkovitch (1927–2024)
Fünf Gesänge, op.13 (1846) 1. Ritter Frühling — 2. Die Wasserrose — 3. Morgenwanderung — 4. Im Herbst — 5. Im Wald	Niels Gade (1817–1890)
The Wee Wee Man (1972)	Vagn Holmboe (1909–1996)
Motet (2012)	Mette Nielsen (b.1985)
Sidskensang (1906)	Carl Nielsen

INTERMISSION

Eksempler (1970) 1. Ikke blot hende — 2. Morgen — 3. Børn kender overmagt — 4. Barn rødkindet — 5. Gammel mand i meditation — 6. På træet sidder der et blad	Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen (1932–2016)
Der er et yndigt land (1924)	Carl Nielsen
Vandet risler med sagte lyd (1935?)	Nancy Dalberg (1881–1949)
Tre Motetter (1929) 1. Afflictus sum — 2. Dominus regit me — 3. Benedictus Dominus	Carl Nielsen

PROGRAM NOTES, TEXTS, AND TRANSLATIONS

Danmark, du kornblonde datter [Denmark, you corn-blonde daughter] (1909)

Carl Nielsen (1865–1931)

For a concert celebrating the rich history of Danish choral music, it seems appropriate to go into some detail about Denmark's most celebrated and influential composer, Carl Nielsen. The son of a peasant house-painter on the largely pastoral island of Funen, Nielsen wrote in his autobiography of his mother singing "as if she were longing for something far away beyond the farthest trees of the land," and of his father playing violin and cornet at community festivities. Those twin influences of song and folk dance remained with him throughout his life. Young Carl learned the violin himself and played horn and trombone in a military orchestra. Soon his talent became noted by the wealthier residents of the nearby city of Odense, who arranged for his admission to the conservatory at Copenhagen at age eighteen. Its director at the time was Niels Gade, and though he and Nielsen were on friendly terms, the student resolved quickly not to imitate the Germanic sound espoused by his teacher. He did not excel in his studies, and composed little during that time.

After graduation, Nielsen made a meagre living as a freelance violin teacher and performer. He first came to note as a composer with his *Suite for Strings* (1888). He then gained a post as a violinist in the orchestra of the Royal Theatre. But promptly he secured a scholarship that allowed him to travel for nine months in Germany, France, and Italy. He thus encountered the compositional trends and performance standards elsewhere in Europe and, incidentally, fell in love with and (much to the shock of their families) married the Danish sculptor Anne Marie Broderson. During the 1890s, he gained a reputation for composing incidental music for theatrical productions and cantatas for civic occasions. When the Royal Theatre orchestra premiered his *First Symphony* (1892), he stepped out from the second violin section to receive applause. That symphony already demonstrated his skill with motivic economy and rhythmic energy, but composition didn't pay the bills. He continued playing with the orchestra for sixteen years.

Nielsen later described 1897–1904 as his "psychological period." His marriage was strained: he largely raised their three children himself while Anne Marie traveled for months at a time developing her career, and he maintained his violinist career while trying to compose on the side. The *Third String Quartet* (1898) was perhaps the first hint of his compositional maturity, with his idiosyncratic harmonies, thick textures, and what has come to be called progressive tonality. As he put it: "We should once and for all see about getting away from keys, but still remain diatonically convincing;" in other words, he used mostly traditional chord structures, but not in the standard key-focused manner which requires a home pitch. His groundbreaking new compositions, such as the Biblical opera *Saul og David* (1901) and the *Second Symphony* (*The Four Temperaments*, 1902), received mixed notices. But the opera *Maskarade* (1906) was an immediate hit; it remains among the greatest comic operas of the twentieth century. He also stopped playing violin for the Royal Theatre in 1905 and began conducting them occasionally from the following year.

This was a period of self-conscious nationalism in classical music, especially elsewhere in the Nordic region. But Nielsen avoided that trend, writing, much later in 1925: “Nothing destroys music more than nationalism does.” In fact, as he wrote in 1908, his view was perhaps anti-nationalistic: “I wanted to protest against the typical Danish soft smoothing over. I wanted stronger rhythms and more advanced harmony.” And he put his views into practice: see the Third Symphony (*Sinfonia espansiva*, 1911), with its simultaneous two keys, and also the Violin Concerto (1911) and Second Violin Sonata (1912). In 1914, he resigned from the Royal Theatre in disappointment at not being appointed its musical director, thus returning to life as a freelancer.

While you can read more about Nielsen’s life and output in the note on the *Three Motets* below, let’s pause for a moment. Even in this middle period of his creative output, he responded to commissions for music for public celebrations, such as the laboriously titled *Cantata for the Opening Ceremony of the National Exhibition in Aarhus 1909*. Usually such works were performed once, at the intended event, and then completely forgotten. But in this case, four years later the publishing house Wilhelm Hansen compiled *Danske Korsange*, a collection of choral songs by various Danish composers. The volume’s editor had his sights on two excerpts from the *Aarhus Cantata*, writing to Nielsen: “We would very much like to include your two songs, since they would significantly enhance the quality of the volume, and for the sake of the enterprise we really cannot do without your name.” One of those songs was *Danmark, du kornblonde datter*. Nielsen knew what was required of him for that cantata: something traditional, approachable, non-threatening. And he delivered perfectly. The tune and harmonies bear the influence of German choral trends from the nineteenth century, most particularly Mendelssohn.

Danmark, du kornblonde datter
af den mandlige muld og det moderlige hav,
avlet under himle så høje,
at de blånende blev i dit øje:
Vi hilser dig fra havets og muldens rige favn,
vi bringer vore sejre, vor gernings fulde gavn,
moder, til ære for dit navn!

Denmark, you corn-blonde daughter
of the male soil and the maternal sea,
born under the heavens so high
that blue remained your eyes:
We greet you from the realm of sea and soil,
we bring our successes, our deeds’ benefits,
mother, in honor of your name!

Danmark, du sangmilde søster
til det solrige syd og det vinterlige nord,
vokset her, hvor isbjærge smælted,
da de mødtes med våren og vælted:
Vi lægger dig fra norden og syden i vort blod
det bedste, vi har evnet, det største, vi forstod,
moder, som hyldest for din fod!

Denmark, you song-mild sister
of the sunny south and the wintry north,
grown here, where icebergs have melted,
where they met with spring and collapsed:
We lay before you, from north and south, in our blood,
the best we are able, the greatest we understand,
mother, as homage at your feet!

Danmark, du frugtbare datter
af den favnende blæst og den føjelige blomst,
modnet under storme så stride,
at du ved, hvad af smerte man kan lide:
Vi fæster dig af blomster, som dufter veldt af vår,
af aks fra vore agre, af løv fra lund og gård,
moder, en majkrans om dit hår!

Denmark, you fertile daughter
of the embracing wind and the docile flower,
ripened under storms so fierce
that you know what pain man can suffer:
We bind flowers for you, which smell sweetly of spring,
of corn from our fields, of leaves from groves and farms,
mother, a May-wreath around your hair!

Tre Madrigali di Torquato Tasso [Three Madrigals of Torquato Tasso], opus 13 (1955)

Bernhard Lewkovitch (1927–2024)

The central figure in Danish church music is surely Bernhard Lewkovitch. Born to impoverished Ukrainian immigrants, his music education began as a choirboy at St. Angar's Cathedral, the seat of Danish Catholicism. Thence he proceeded to the Royal Danish Conservatory, but by age twenty he was back at St. Angar's, now as organist, a post he retained until 1963. He founded two prominent choirs there: the Schola Cantorum for mixed voices, and the men's choir Schola Gregoriana. Through recordings and performances he did much to popularize medieval and Renaissance music in Denmark. Initially his music—the vast majority of which is liturgical in nature—employed modal harmonies of those ancients, but in the mid-1950s he increasingly shifted to bitonality, polytonality, and even twelve-tone techniques and pitchless experimentalism. By the 1970s, however, he returned to his compositional roots of modality and liturgy.

The Three Madrigals, on texts by Tasso, the greatest Italian poet of the high Renaissance, marked Lewkovitch's first foray into a more modernist compositional language. In one sense, Lewkovitch adopts Nielsen's progressive tonality. All three movements cadence onto a series of major chords, but they don't obey any traditional rules of harmonic progression, and the lines are filled with parallel tritones and harmonic whole-steps. The first song is a paean to Tasso's model in epic poetry, the Roman writer Virgil from the first century BCE. The second lilt a graceful description of the dawn. The final funereal madrigal hints to Gesualdo's anguishing harmonies.

1. *A Virgilio*

Qual'è questa, ch'io sento,
dolcissima armonia di verdi fronde,
d'aure, d'augelli, d'onde?
Qual suono, o quale spirto,
fa così mormorar il lauro, e 'l mirto?
Forse è quel di Virgilio: e 'n questi rami,
per ch'egli spiri, e canti e viva ed ami,
ch'i suoi pensieri han l'alme
pur vaghe di cantar vittorie e palme.

2. *All'Aurora*

Ecco mormorar l'onde,
e tremolar le fronde
a l'aura mattutina, e gli arboscelli;
e sovra i verdi rami, i vaghi augelli
cantar soavemente
e rider l'Oriente:
ecco già l'Alba appare
e si specchia nel mare,
e rasserena il cielo:
e le campagne imperla, e 'l dolce gelo;

To Virgil

What is this, that which I hear,
sweetest harmony of green leaves,
of breezes, of birds, of waves?
What sound, or what spirit,
makes thus to murmur the laurel and the myrtle?
Perhaps it is that of Virgil: and in these branches,
it seems that he breathes and sings and lives and loves,
that his thoughts have souls
still yearning to sing of victories and palms.

To the Dawn

Behold, the murmuring of the waves,
and the trembling of the leaves
in the morning breeze, and the shrubs;
and on the green branches, the lovely birds
sing sweetly
and the East laughs:
behold, already Dawn appears
and is reflected in the sea,
and calms the sky:
and the countryside it adorns with pearls, and the sweet frost;

e gli alti monti indora.
Oh bella, e vaga Aurora!
L'aura è tua messagera, e tu de l'aura,
ch'ogni arso cor ristaura.

and the high mountains it covers in gold.
O beautiful and lovely Dawn!
The breeze is your messenger, and you the breeze
that restores every burning heart.

3. *Non è questo un morire*

Non è questo un morire,
immortal Margherita,
ma un passar anzi tempo a l'altra vita:
né de l'ignota via
duol ti scolora o tema;
ma la pietà per la partenza estrema.
Di noi pensosa e pia,
di te lieta e sicura,
t'accomiati dal mondo, anima pura.

This is not a death,
immortal Margherita,
but a passing before its time into the other life:
nor does the unknown path
of sorrow discolor or frighten you;
but mercy for the ultimate departure.
Of us, thoughtful and pious,
of you, happy and comforting,
take your leave of the world, pure soul.

— Torquato Tasso (1544–1595)

Fünf Gesänge [Five Songs], opus 13 (1846)
Niels Gade (1817–1890)

In the nineteenth century, Danish music was dominated by two figures: J.P.E. Hartmann (1805–1900) and his son-in-law, Niels Gade. But the latter was the first Danish composer to gain a following outside of his home country. (We'll set aside the notion that the mid-Baroque giant Dieterich Buxtehude may have been Danish by birth, as he was definitely German by parentage.) Gade's father was a carpenter and instrument-maker by trade, and as a teenager Niels began playing violin with the Royal Orchestra. His first break as a composer was the orchestral overture *Efterklange af Ossian* ("Echoes of Ossian," 1840). When the Danish establishment declined to premiere his First Symphony (1842), Gade sent the score to Felix Mendelssohn in Leipzig. Not only did the great man perform the new work with Europe's most acclaimed orchestra, he invited Gade to conduct and teach at the conservatory there. Mendelssohn and Robert Schumann became his exemplars moving forward. Gade even conducted the premieres of Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto and Schumann's Piano Concerto.

It was during this stint in Leipzig that Gade wrote and published his *Fünf Gesänge* (Five Songs), opus 13, to German texts. (They were later published in Danish translations, but we will sing the originals.) They were clearly written for an ensemble rather expert by the day's standards, as they are as contrapuntally complex as Mendelssohn's unaccompanied secular choral writing at its best. They tell the journey of a year: two songs for spring, one each for summer and autumn, then a triumphant return to springtime. Gade is precise in his occasional demands of *staccato* articulation, and his handling of the voices is at times of orchestrational caliber. Note, for example, the start of the second song, with a would-be clarinet solo in the altos, with *staccato* thirds in the bassoon-line tenor and bass, while a soprano flute flows gently above all. See also the motivic interplay between voices in the fifth song. In the fourth number, special attention is given to a soprano soloist as the voice of a fleeing songbird. The cycle's overall effect—as was common in German choral music at the time—is a gleeful rejoicing in the variety and beauty of nature.

War broke out between Denmark and Prussia in 1848, and thus Gade returned home. There he promptly established Copenhagen's first permanent orchestra, the Musikforeningen (Musical Society), which he conducted until his death. In 1866 he was appointed co-director, with Hartmann, of the new Copenhagen Conservatory. He was also active as the organist at the prestigious Holmen Church. He stood aside from nationalistic trends—Grieg quoted him as saying “one becomes tired of patriotism”—and thus remained a cosmopolitan figure, recognized as conductor and composer throughout northern Europe. His chamber music was broadly published and performed, most notably the Octet (1849). The choral cantata *Elverskud* (1854) is still beloved in Denmark. Of his eight symphonies, the most noteworthy are perhaps the Fourth (1850) and the dark Sixth (1857), which demonstrate aptly his inventive orchestrational and development techniques. His Violin Concerto (1880), premiered by the great Joseph Joachim, also gets an occasional outing. Though a musically conservative figure, Gade was the central figure in Danish music for half a century, and his focus on craft over nationalism helped to lay the groundwork for Carl Nielsen's innovations.

1. *Ritter Frühling*

Der Frühling ist ein starker Held,
ein Ritter sondergleichen,
die rote Ros' im grünen Feld,
das ist sein Wappen und Zeichen.

Sein Schwert von Sonnenglanze schwang
er kühn und unermüdet,
bis hell der silberne Panzer sprang,
den sich der Winter geschmiedet.

Und nun mit triumphierendem Schall
durchzieht er Land und Wogen,
als Herold kommt die Nachtigall
vor ihm dahergeflogen.

Und rings erschallt an jedes Herz
sein Aufruf allerorten,
und hüllt' es sich in dreifach Erz,
es muß ihm öffnen die Pforten;

es muß ihm öffnen die Pforten dicht,
und darf sich nimmer entschuld'gen,
und muß der Königin, die er verflucht,
der Königin Minne huld'gen.

Sir Spring

Spring is a strong hero,
a knight without equal;
the red rose in a green field,
that is his coat of arms and symbol.

His sword with the sun's brilliance he wields;
he is bold and tireless,
until brightly the silver armor gleams,
that which winter has forged.

And now, with triumphant clangor
he wanders over land and waves;
his herald is the nightingale
that flies before him.

And all around there sounds to every heart
his call everywhere,
and when accompanied he is by threefold soundings,
to him the gates must open;

to him the heavy gates must open,
and may never excuse themselves,
and he must to the queen, whom he has betrothed,
the queenly love he obeys.

— Emmanuel Geibel (1815–1884)

2. Die Wasserrose

Die stille Wasserrose
steigt aus dem blauen See,
die Blätter flimmern und blitzen,
der Kelch ist weiß wie Schnee.

Da gießt der Mond vom Himmel
all' seinen gold'nen Schein,
gießt alle seine Strahlen
in ihren Schoß hinein.

Im Wasser um die Blume
kreiset ein weißer Schwan,
er singt so süß, so leise,
und schaut die Blume an.

Er singt so süß, so leise,
und will im Singen vergehn—
O Blume, weiße Blume,
kannst du das Lied verstehn?

— Emmanuel Geibel (1815–1884)

3. Morgenwanderung

Wer recht in Freuden wandern will,
der geh' der Sonn' entgegen;
da ist der Wald so kirchenstill,
kein Lüftchen mag sich regen.
Noch sind nicht die Lerchen wach,
nur im hohen Gras der Bach
singt leise den Morgensegen.

Da zieht die Andacht wie ein Hauch,
durch alle Sinnen leise,
da pocht an's Herz die Liebe auch
in ihrer stillen Weise.
Pocht und pocht, bis sich's erschließt,
und die Lippe überfließt
von lautem, jubelndem Preise.

Und plötzlich läßt die Nachtigall
im Busch ihr Lied er klingen,
in Berg und Tal erwacht der Schall,
und will sich aufwärts schwingen,
und der Morgenröte Schein

The Water-Rose

The quiet water-rose
rises from the blue sea,
its petals shimmer and flash,
its bud is white as snow.

As casts the moon from heaven
all his golden shine,
so he casts all his beams
into its [the rose's] womb.

In the water around the flower
circles a white swan;
he sings so sweetly, so softly,
and gazes upon the flower.

He sings so sweetly, so softly,
and wishes in singing to perish—
O flower, white flower,
can you understand the song?

Morning Stroll

Whoever justly in joy wishes to wander,
may he go toward the sun;
there the forest is quiet as a church,
not even a mild breeze is astir.
Not yet are the larks awake;
only the high grass by the stream
sings softly its morning blessing.

Then prayers pass like a breath,
through all the senses softly;
then throbs the heart with love
in its quiet manner—
throbs and throbs, until it opens up,
and the lips overflow
with loud, jubilant praise.

And suddenly the nightingale lets,
from the bush, its song resound,
in mountain and valley awakens the sound,
and it wishes upward to soar,
and the morning's redness shines,

stimmt in lichter Gluth mit ein:
laßt uns dem Herrn lobsingen.

— Emmanuel Geibel (1815–1884)

4. *Im Herbste*

Feldeinwärts flog ein Vögelein,
und sang im muntern Sonnenschein
mit süßem wunderbarem Ton:
Ade! ich fliege nun davon,
 Weit! Weit!
Reis' ich noch heut!

Doch als ich Blätter fallen sah,
da dacht ich: Ach, der Herbst ist da!
Der Sommergast, die Schwalbe zieht,
vielleicht so Lieb' und Sehnsucht flieht,
 Weit! Weit!
Rasch mit der Zeit!

Doch rückwärts kam der Sonnenschein,
dicht zu mir drauf das Vögelein,
es sah mein tränend Angesicht,
und sang: Die Liebe wintert nicht,
 Nein! Nein.
Ist und bleibt Frühlingschein!

— Ludwig Tieck (1773–1853)

5. *Im Wald*

Im Wald, im hellen Sonnenschein,
wenn alle Knospen springen,
da mag ich gerne mittendrein
eins singen.

Wie mir zu Muth in Leid und Lust,
im Wachen und im Träumen,
das stimm' ich an aus voller Brust
den Bäumen.

Und sie verstehen mich gar fein,
die Blätter alle lauschen,
und fall'n am rechten Orte ein,
mit Rauschen.

Und weiter wandelt Schall und Hall,
in Wipfeln, Fels und Büschen.

voicing in the light's glow with it:
let us to the Lord sing praise.

In Autumn

Into the field flew a little bird,
and sang in the cheerful sunshine
with a sweet and wonderful sound:
“Farewell! I fly simply away,
 far! far!
I travel even today!”

Yet when I watched the leaves fall,
as I thought: Ah, autumn is here!
That summer guest, the swallow, departs,
perhaps thus love and longing flee,
 far! far!
quickly with the season!

Yet the sunshine returned;
close beside me was the little bird,
it saw my tearful face,
and sang: “Love does not winter,
 no! no.
It is and remains spring's glow!”

In the forest, in the bright sunshine,
when all the buds are springing,
there I am likely, in the middle of it,
to sing.

As with courage, in pain and joy,
when awake and when in dreams,
I voice, with full breast,
to the trees.

And they understand me quite well,
the leaves all listen,
and fall in at their right place,
with rustling.

And further wander the sound and echo,
in treetops, rocks, and bushes.

Hell schmettert auch Frau Nachtigall
dazwischen.

Brightly blares Lady Nightingale
among it all.

Da fühlt die Brust am eignen Klang,
sie darf sich was erkühnen—
O frische Lust: Gesang, Gesang
im Grünen!

Then feels the breast its own sound,
it may itself do something boldly—
O fresh joy: a song, a song
in the green!

— Emmanuel Geibel (1815–1884)

The Wee Wee Man, opus 110, no.2 (1972)

Vagn Holmboe (1909–1996)

With his tall, high forehead and long, jutting chin, the visage of composer Vagn Holmboe is that of a tree made human: strong, striking, severe, somber. In fact, he personally planted over three thousand trees in the area around his rural home in the last forty years of his life. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Holmboe's parents were amateur musicians, and he studied at the Royal Danish Conservatory. Early on he developed an interest in Balkan folk music (his wife was Romanian) and conducted extensive ethnomusicological field work in Greenland, the Faroe Islands, and throughout Denmark. In fact, he wrote the definitive volume on *Danish Street Cries* (1988). Holmboe came to public attention with his prize-winning Second Symphony (1939), and the next year began teaching at the Royal Danish Institute for the Blind. The decade of the 1940s—dominated initially by German occupation—brought his first compositional maturity. In 1950–65 he taught at the Royal Conservatory in Copenhagen, after which the Danish government granted him a stipend allowing him to compose full-time. His forested home in Denmark's rural northeast, near the Arresø lake, hosted many a visiting musician over the decades, and Holmboe was renowned for his kindness of spirit.

Holmboe wrote that his compositional ideal was a kind of motivic metamorphosis, “a process of development that transforms one matter into another, without it losing its identity, its basic characteristics.” These transformations were based on “submotivic” elements—say, specific intervals, or a brief turn of phrase, or a fragment of a scale, or even a certain instrumental timbre—rather than whole melodies. The effect is thoroughly tonal, but also steadily evolving, like a living organism.

Few composers have been as prolific as Vagn Holmboe. He composed some four hundred works, including thirteen symphonies and twenty-one string quartets, two of history's greatest cycles in those genres. Of the symphonies, the best-known is perhaps the Eighth (*Sinfonia boreale*, 1952). The Second String Quartet (1949) is a good starting place as well. He composed concertos or sonatas for every orchestral instrument except bassoon, horn, and percussion. And there are vast quantities of other orchestral works, chamber music, and, yes, choral music. In 1951 he undertook a series of thirty-four dramatic and often austere Old Testament settings in Latin, collectively called the *Liber canticorum*. His large-scale *Requiem for Nietzsche* (1964) was his only significant foray into non-tonal composition.

And what of *The Wee Wee Man*? Its melody and harmonic figures are constantly transformed in the metamorphic manner Holmboe loved, and indeed the high voices' gliding “O” that starts the whole piece functions as a bookend for each major section. Holmboe loved folk music of all sorts, including the “border ballads” from the region that bridges England and Scotland. Here is a fantastical tale. The basses

bumble about as the tenors tell of walking along the coast and meeting a tiny, grotesquely shaped man (his legs are six inches long, but his eyebrows are nine inches apart). With strong chords in the lower voices, he kicks a massive stone a great distance, and so we ask where he comes from. In the voices of the sopranos and altos, he invites us to see for himself. After a quick horse ride (with bumbling again in the basses), we are met with the wee man's entourage of twenty-four ladies-in-waiting, any of whom are—as confirmed by bagpipe chords—beautiful enough to be the queen of Scotland. The odd fellow's hall has a golden roof and crystal floor. A mighty dance ensues (“bombada, bombada”), but then, in a moment, the wee man and his company disappear—with a modified reverse form of the “O” glides that started the whole encounter.

As I was walking all alone,
Between a water and a wa,*
And there I spy'd a wee wee man,
And he was the least* that ere I saw.

* wall

* shortest

His legs were scarce a shathmont's* lenght,
And thick and thimber* was his thighs,
Between his brows there was a span,*
And between his shoulders there was three.

* distance between tips of thumb and first finger

* heavy, cumbersome

* distance between tips of thumb and little finger

He took up a meikle stane*
And he flang't* as far as I could see
Though I had been a Wallace wight*
I coudna liften't to my knee.

* great stone

* kicked

* as mighty as William Wallace

O wee wee man, but thou be stong
O tell me where thy dwelling be?
My dwelling's down at yon' bonny bower
And will you go with me and see?

On we lap* and awa we rade**
Till we came to yon bonny green
We 'lighted down for to bait our horse
And out there came a lady fine.

* leapt (onto horses), ** rode

Four-and-twenty at her back
And they were a'clad out in green.
Though the king of Scotland had been there
The warst o' them might ha' been his queen.

On we lap and awa we rade
Till we came to yon bonny ha*
Where the roof was o' the beaten gould
And the floor was o' the crystal a.*

* hall

* all

When we came to the stair foot
Ladies were dancing jimp* and sma'**
But in the twinkling of an eye,
My wee wee man was clean awa.

* slender, ** small

Motet (2012)

Mette Nielsen (born 1985)

“A unison is never just a unison.” This is a fundamental tenet of composer Mette Nielsen. Also: “In the unison there is really the possibility of opening up some very small spaces.” And: “I have a great predilection for the friction in small dissonances.”

When Mette Nielsen (no relation to Carl, as far as I know) finished her studies at the Danish Royal Academy of Music, she took a year off. The conservatory had inculcated in her some rather advanced compositional techniques, but she felt the need to go back to basics. So she wrote the String Quartet in One Movement (2011)—and not just one movement, but one pitch: D. It is an open string on all four instruments, and that is all they play for five minutes. The effect is oddly gripping: one hears the subtle interplay that comes simply from rhythm, timbre, dynamics, pizzicato, octaves, articulation, attack, even hearing the harmonies implied by the wooden bodies of the instruments.

The next year she applied this idea of the “imperfect unison” to a brief choral work, written for the choir of Trinitatis Kirke in Copenhagen, where she lives. Now her focus is on G. The word “larme” (“roar”) is granted a half-step dissonance, a dramatic, even “roaring” gesture in context. When mention turns to the sea, E’s are added, and “klappe i hænderne” (“clap their hands”) is likewise emphasized by half-steps. For the mountains, the extremities expand lower to C and higher to B—a slight but, again, contextually dramatic alteration. “Rejoicing” (“jubel”) expands even farther, to A and C-sharp. Finally, all returns to G for “Herren” (“the Lord”).

Since then, Mette Nielsen has grown steadily in reputation, mostly through her instrumental works, which have even been performed by the illustrious modernist Ensemble Intercontemporain in Paris. She also often works with children, teaching them workshops in composition, integrating them among professional musicians, and incorporating children’s songs into her chamber music. She has also written several works for Usmifka, a Bulgarian women’s choir with whom she sings. In April 2023, the Odense Symphony Orchestra premiered her first orchestral work, *Bevægelser* (“Movements”).

She has written insightfully about, essentially, imposter syndrome as a composer: “When the idea is in your head, it’s still amazing, but as written down notes, it suddenly looks like everything else. [...] Sometimes I manage to bite the discomfort in me and keep going, other times I throw it all out and start all over again. It is not always to know [...] if it is just too early in the process to assess it.” Also: “Last year I finished writing a piece, handed it to the string quartet that was to play it, and afterwards went and wondered how bad it might be and whether the musicians would refuse to perform it because of its poor quality. [...] I liked the piece again as soon as I heard it being played.”

Havet med alt, hvad det rummer, skal larme,
jorden og de, der bor på den.
Strømmene skal klappe i hænderne,
alle bjerge skal juble for Herren.

The sea, and all it contains, shall roar,
and the earth, and those who live in it.
The streams shall clap their hands,
all mountains shall rejoice before the Lord.

Sidskensang [Siskin Song] (1906)

Carl Nielsen (1865–1931)

In Europe, choral singing had been almost the sole domain of churches for centuries. But in the nineteenth century—as industrialization led to cities, a middle class, and leisure time—individuals began to bind together into secular choral societies. In Germany and its satellite realms, this largely meant men’s choruses. And so, in 1915, Nielsen wrote in an essay for the Kristiania Arbeidersamfunds Sangforening (Oslo Workers’ Union Singing Association): “In Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, there are good male-voice choirs. All the same I should like to propose: include women and establish many more mixed choirs, because this is where I believe the future lies. [...] We are past the time where men drank in one room and women did their knitting in another. In Norway and Denmark women now have the vote, which we should be proud about, and now we men and women should sing together, so loudly and beautifully that people in other countries should ‘wonder at it.’ So: male-voice singing, excellent; but mixed choirs, even better!” He has since, of course, been proven correct.

Much of Nielsen’s output for unaccompanied chorus is along the lines of *Danmark, du kornblonde datter* (see above): Germanic, folksongish, with predictable melodic phrasing and harmonic pacing. But, on occasion, Nielsen allowed himself to stretch. Such was the case when Frederick Rung, conductor of the Cæciliaforeningens Madrigalkor (St. Cecilia Society’s Madrigal Choir), commissioned a new work. Rung was famous for performing music from the Italian Renaissance, and invited composers to incorporate elements of that style into modern composition. Nielsen responded with a virtuosic showpiece in the form of *Sidskensang*, or “Siskin Song.”

A siskin is a small, yellow-and-black finch, very common throughout Europe. More importantly, during Nielsen’s time it was a metaphor for an impertinent person. Hence Emil Årestrup’s poem, in which the nosy bird encourages a refined but shy young man to pursue the maiden he desires. Nielsen doubles-down on trends from the Renaissance that were also common to his own style: prevailing lyricism, driving rhythms, unexpected harmonic shifts, and complex interplay between the voices. He adds a particularly Monteverdian touch of frequent changes in tempo. Each little element is closely linked to Årestrup’s text. *Sidskensang* is scored unusually—for two sopranos, one alto, and one tenor—perhaps to reinforce the light-hearted, flippant nature of the bird. Though it survives in seven different manuscript sources, it was never published in Nielsen’s lifetime. It’s time for this miniature masterpiece to make a comeback.

Du er, min tro, en underlig pøg,
så fiin og klog,
du læser såmangen lærdmands bog,
og dog —

You are, in faith, a strange boy;
so fine and clever,
you read a learned man’s book,
and yet —

Og dog har du hverken mod eller list;
hvad bli’r det tilsidst?
At sukke og se på en rosenkvist —
Jo vist!

And yet you have neither courage nor cunning;
what comes of it in the end?
To sigh when seeing a rose-branch —
Yes, probably!

Dertil må nok høre en dygtig forstand.
Ej, ej! hvor kan

Therein one shall hear enough of a skilled mind.
No, no! how can

en pige få lyst til så underlig mand,
som han?

At skrive et vers og citharen slå —
Nå, nå! Lad gå! —
Er godt, men ej nok! det må vi forstå,
vi små.

Vel klæder det smukt, at herren er bly;
men ræddes og flye,
når glutton er ene, og skoven har ly:
O fy!

Så har vi fugle en anden maneer;
man seer, man leer,
forfølger hinanden, og kyskes og be'er
om meer.

Højst ærede! Gjør du ligeså;
det lykkes må!
Der seer jeg din søde pige jo ståe:
Nu gå!

— Emil Årestrup (1800–1856)

a girl get a taste for such a strange man
as him?

To write a verse and play the zither —
Well, well! Let it go! —
It is good, but not enough! We must understand it,
we small ones.

In his beautiful clothes, he is mere lead;
but afraid, he flees;
from where the maiden is, the forest has shelter:
Oh fie!

But we birds have a different manner;
one sees, one laughs,
some pursue each other, and kiss and beg
for more.

Most honorable sir! Follow your desire;
it must succeed!
There I see the sweet girl standing:
Now go!

INTERMISSION

Eksempler [Examples] (1970)

Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen (1932–2016)

Pelle Gudmundsen-Holmgreen studied at Royal Danish Conservatory in Copenhagen, and afterward taught composition at the Jutland Conservatory in Århus. While his early works were influenced by Nielsen and Holmboe, he shifted to hyper-modernism in the early 1960s (think Stockhausen, Boulez, and Ligeti), but by 1965 had begun to embrace a trend called “the New Simplicity,” a forerunner to minimalism. He wrote: “Only SIMPLICITY endures.” It is from this period that his choral *Eksempler* dates. Its texts are from three young poets who later made quite a name for themselves in Denmark. Gudmundsen-Holmgreen called the cycle “examples of how a generation expresses itself and examples of the exploitation of a highly limited body of tonal material. Three different poets in the same small space.”

Take, for example, the first movement. The text is an uninterrupted depiction of two lovers. The tenors and basses sing the description of “her,” then the sopranos and altos of “him.” At the moment of that shift, there is likewise a transition from minor to major mode. Throughout all is a pedal D. The symmetry is palpable. In “Morgen,” Gudmundsen-Holmgreen channels Charlotte Strandgaard’s depiction of a tired

woman taking a rare day off by isolating each phrase, each new variable in her cherished moment of relaxation. The third and sixth movements are very brief; the choir divides into three parts, each proclaiming the text at different tempos, some sung, some spoken, some whispered. “Barn rødkindet” paints an infant and young mother in symmetric pairs. The fifth movement is the most extensive. In it, the poet Henrik Nordbrandt reflects on an old man alone in a forest, his shadow, and the moment when a wind blows out his lantern (or, symbolically, his moment of death). As the wind rises, Gudmundsen-Holmgreen divides the text, syllable by syllable, among the different voices, such that the final line—when the poet reflects on his own mortality—is a shock of homogeneity.

Gudmundsen-Holmgreen’s later works incorporate collage techniques, unorthodox scales, polyrhythm, the Fibonacci sequence, pop art, and block construction—in essence, and perhaps counterintuitively, a return to basic musical elements. It’s a sound-world and craft not too dissimilar from Messiaen’s. A great starting place for those interested in exploring him further is the orchestral *Symfoni, Antifoni* (1977). The four Strings Quartets (Nos. 5–8) from the mid-1980s have also garnered much attention. He called his Concerto Grosso (1990), written for the Kronos Quartet with orchestra, “Vivaldi on safari.”

1. *Ikke blot hende*

Ikke blot hende men også den måde hun smiler på og ikke blot dem måde hun smiler på men også den måde hun er nærværende på og ikke blot den måde hun er nærværende på men også hendes hånd og ikke blot hendes hånd men også hendes hånd i hans hånd og ikke blot hendes hånd i hans hånd men også hans hånd i hendes hånd og ikke blot hans hånd i hendes hånd men også hans hånd alene og ikke blot hans hånd alene men også den måde han er nærværende på og ikke blot den måde han er nærværende på men også den måde han smiler på og ikke blot den måde han smiler på men også ham	Not just her but also the way she smiles and not just the way she smiles but also the way she is currently and not just the way she is currently but also her hand and not just her hand but also her hand in his hand and not just her hand in his hand but also his hand in her hand and not just his hand in her hand but also his hand alone and not just his hand alone but also the way his hand is currently and not just the way his hand is currently but also the way he smiles and not just the way he smiles but also him
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— Hans-Jørgen Nielsen (1941–1991)

2. *Morgen*

Hun er glad hun er alene	<i>Morning</i> She is happy she is alone
hun nulrer dynen det er sjældent hun står sent op	she nuzzles the quilt it is rare that she gets up late
hun nyder det	she enjoys it

luften er gennemsigtig og grå	the air is transparent and grey
hun har bestilt morgenbrød i forvejen også wienerbrød	she has ordered morning bread already also pastries
hun tager det hele på en bakke hun bringer det ind i sengen	she takes it all on a tray she brings it into bed
hun gider ikke læse aviser hun har husket et ugeblad	she does not bother to read the newspapers she has remembered a magazine
det blæser op cigaretrøgen hænger	she exhales cigarette smoke hangs
hun prøver at se lyset gennem et af sine hår det er listegråt	she tries to see the light through her hair it is slate grey
hun tænker på sig selv	she thinks about herself
et nul der sidder i et nul	a nobody sitting in a nowhere
det er dejligt	it is delight.

— Charlotte Strandgaard (1943–2021)

3. *Børn kender overmagt*

Børn kender overmagt børn møder overbærenhed børn er mindre	Children know domineering children meet tolerance children are smaller
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— Charlotte Strandgaard (1943–2021)

4. *Barn rødkindet*

Barn rødkindet mor stærk barn hjælpeløs mor omsorgsfuld	Child red-cheeked mother strong child helpless mother caring
barn dunet mor lykkelig barn uskyldig mor kærlig	child soft mother happy child innocent mother loving
barn lille mor ung	child small mother young

barn spæd
mor mild

child infant
mother gentle

barn rent
mor øm
barn duftende
mor god

child clean
mother tender
child fragrant
mother good

— Charlotte Strandgaard (1943–2021)

5. Gammel mand i meditation

Old man in meditation

Jeg tænker på en mand i en skov
en gammel mand med en stormlygte helt
alene i en vældig skov

I think about a man in a forest
an old man with a storm-lantern
alone in an immense forest

så tænker jeg på det han stirrer på
og som optager ham så meget
at han end ikke blinker når et insekt
rammer hans pupil

then I think about what he is staring at
and which occupies him so much
that he doesn't even blink when an insect
hits him in the eye

i den kreds som oplyses af lygten
ser man det han stirrer på det
som ingen anden end han kan få øje på

in the circle of light from the lantern
one looks for what he is staring at
which no one but himself can see

så tænker jeg i stedet for på hans skygge
skyggen af en gammel mand
som kastes ind mellem træstammerne

then I think instead of his shadow
the shadow of an old man
which is cast among tree trunks

vinden blæser gennem hans skæg
og gennem hans vide ærmegab
skyggen af hans skikkelse
svajer i vinden

the wind blows through his beard
and through the wide armhole of his garment
the shadow of his figure
sways in the wind

vinden som nu høres overalt
tiltagende
ind til lygten blæser ud

the wind that now is heard everywhere
increasing
until the lantern blows out

så tænker jeg i stedet for på mørket
så tænker jeg i mandens sted
på blæsten på mørket
og på den tomme plads i skoven

then I think instead about the darkness
then I think about the man's place
about the blowing wind about the darkness
and about the empty place in the forest

så tænker jeg på mig selv

then I think about myself

— Henrik Nordbrandt (1945–2023)

6. På træet sidder der et blad

på træet
sidder der
et blad

on the tree
there is
a leaf

— Charlotte Strandgaard (1943–2021)

Der er et yndigt land [A fair and lovely land] (1924)

Carl Nielsen (1865–1931)

At the height of his fame, in 1924, Nielsen decided to challenge Denmark's most cherished music: the national anthem. The text, written in 1819 by Adam Oehlenschläger, the playwright who introduced Denmark to literary Romanticism, was linked to a melody from 1835 by Hans Ernst Krøyer, who was mildly noted as a composer of songs and music for men's choirs. Like many national anthems, Krøyer's tune is, well..., non-descript, overblown, predictable, and let's face it, not particularly inspired. (It is also, much to its credit, easy to sing, confined to a small range, and memorable, as all national anthems should be.) Nielsen decided, of his own accord, that Denmark deserved better.

In early 1924 he made seven different versions of his own tune to *Der er et yndigt land*. When he sent the orchestrated score to the Dansk Korforenings (Danish Choral Society) in Copenhagen, he declined payment, suggesting merely "a duck or a hen from the countryside." The gala performance included over nine hundred singers from throughout Denmark. When asked whether it was musical sacrilege to defy Krøyer's beloved tune, Nielsen replied: "It's a difficult question, because force of habit is strong, and it is probably true that it is not actually a musical question but something quite different. The nation takes up a song and makes it a national anthem. No power on earth can prevent that, and when that happens it reflects the mood of the times much more than literary or musical taste. I consider that such a melody is more a symbol—like the flag, the cross, or what have you—and therefore it doesn't have to be 'good' in and of itself, but... well, now I'm trying myself; so much for human logic!"

For better or worse, Nielsen's tune failed to catch on. His reply: "Well, with respect to *that* I can certainly beat my breast with pride. For one thing I can truthfully say is that it was not written in vain. [...] It has made people love the old tune more than ever. Like nothing else I have written, I know that my melody for *Der er et yndigt land* has given me access to the people!" Kudos to Nielsen for his bravery, and for acknowledging the silver lining to his defeat.

Der er et yndigt land,
det står med brede bøge,
nær salten Østerstrand;
det bugter sig i bakke, dal,
det hedder gamle Danmark,
og det er Frejas sal.

There is a lovely land,
it stands with broad beech trees,
near the salty East Sea [Baltic Sea] beaches;
it wanders itself in hill and valley,
it is called old Denmark,
and it is Freyja's* hall.

Der sad i fordums tid
de harniskklædte kæmper,

There sat, in ancient times,
the armor-clad giants,

udhvilede fra strid;
så drog de frem til fjenders mén,
nu hvile deres bene
bag højens bavgasten.

Det land endnu er skønt,
thi blå sig søen bælder,
og løvet står så grønt;
og ædle kvinder, skønne møer
og mænd og raske svende
bebo de danskes øer.

— Adam Oehlenschläger (1779–1850)

resting from battle;
then they went up to the enemy's injury,
now they rest their legs
below burial mounds.

This land still is beautiful,
for blue is the encircling sea,
and leaves stand so green;
and noble women, beautiful maidens,
and men, and strong workers
occupy the Danish isles.

* Freyja = Norse goddess of love, fertility, and war

Vandet risler med sagte lyd [The waters murmur with a sweet sound] (1935?)

Nancy Dalberg (1881–1949)

Nancy Dalberg's father was an exceedingly wealthy industrialist, the founder of a factory of food chemicals on the island of Funen. At a young age she befriended the composer Hilda Sehested (1858–1936), who lived in a nearby estate. Thus Nancy was introduced to fine classical music early in life, but her father declined her request to study piano at the conservatory in Copenhagen. Instead, at age twenty, she married a military engineer, Erik Dalberg. When in 1909 an ailment with her arm forced her to abandon her lingering dream to become a concert pianist, she began to study composition, first with an ageing Johan Svendsen, and, from 1913, with Carl Nielsen. Quickly Nielsen spotted and vigorously encouraged her talent. He played in the premiere of her First String Quartet (1914) and conducted three of her orchestral works: the Scherzo for strings (1914), the Symphony in C-sharp minor (1917), and the Capriccio (1918). Sometimes the printed program would include only her surname, and critics were then astonished to discover that music of such quality could be written by a woman. Nielsen even engaged her to orchestrate parts of his massive score for the play *Aladdin* (1918).

Dalberg's husband had been deeply involved in expanding the fortress in Copenhagen. When the First World War revealed that such defense plans were obsolete to modern warfare, he left the military and his mental health declined precipitously. Dalberg continued to compose, but the demands of caring for her invalid husband proved exhaustive. Tragically, she largely gave up music in the 1930s. Only now is Dalberg's music benefiting from a re-evaluation. Some of her orchestral works (though, regrettably, not yet her symphony) have been recorded, as have her three masterful string quartets. The Second Quartet (1922) has even become standard repertory to Scandinavian ensembles.

Though no stranger to vocal music—she composed about fifty solo songs—Dalberg wrote only one work for chorus, the brief *Vandet risler med sagte lyd*. While it may have been performed in November 1935, it survives to us only in an undated manuscript. It is written in the Germanic vein of choral miniatures, just sixteen bars long and comfortably in A minor. But this is not to denigrate its extremely high quality. The lyrical melody is perfectly balanced, the voice-leading is top-notch, the dissonances are handled expertly, and she brilliantly captures the somber, nostalgic mood of the text. Nancy Dalberg deserves to be one of the great what-ifs of classical music: had her talent been encouraged in her youth, and had she not been

burdened with the social responsibility of caring for her husband, surely she could have been one of the major voices in Danish music.

Vandet risler med sagte lyd,
til dans langt borte de spille.
Bag sorte grene står nymånens spyd.
Natten er klar og stille.

Aldébaran skælver i månegrå luft,
og trækfuglestemmer klage.
Mit hjerte beruses af minders duft
og drømme om henfarne dage.

O drømmende hjerte! O liv, der foer hen!
O stjerner, der opad mig vinker!
End har jeg mit hjem og min sjæl igen,
og endnu Aldébaran blinker.

— Johannes Jørgensen (1866–1956)

The waters murmur with a sweet sound,
to dance far away they play.
Behind black branches stands the new moon's spear.
The night is clear and quiet.

Aldebaran* trembles in the moon-grey air,
and migratory birds' voices lament.
My heart is intoxicated by remembered scents
and dreams of bygone days.

O dreaming heart! O life that goes forward!
O stars that wave up to me!
Then have I my home and my soul again,
and still Aldebaran twinkles.

* Aldebaran = a bright star in the constellation Taurus

Tre Motetter [Three Motets], opus 55 (1929)

Carl Nielsen (1865–1931)

Everything changed for Carl Nielsen in 1914, not because of the outbreak of the First World War (in which Denmark was neutral), but because word leaked out of his various love affairs, and he and his wife formally separated. This initiated a period of artistic re-appraisal. He renewed his interest in composing art-songs and hymn-tunes, blending traditional with modern in an attempt to embrace, as he called it, the “semblance of the known.” (Many of his 290+ songs are still very popular in Denmark.) In 1915, he began a twelve-year stint as the regular conductor of the Musikforening (Music Society) orchestra, and he started frequently guest-conducting in Sweden. That same year, he joined the faculty at the conservatory in Copenhagen. He thus threw himself into his work vigorously.

Soon emerged what are perhaps his three most popular works. In 1916 came his Fourth Symphony (*The Inextinguishable*), with its finale's dueling timpanists. The Wind Quintet from 1922 is justly beloved by woodwind players across the world. And the Fifth Symphony (also 1922) presented new ideas about sonata form and orchestration, featuring a prominently disruptive side drum. He embraced new, exotic harmonic and timbral choices, as in his incidental music for *Aladdin* (1918) for the Royal Theatre. (Nancy Dalberg helped him with the orchestration.) He gained greater and greater acclaim within Denmark; his sixtieth birthday in 1925 was a national occasion. Though he and his wife reconciled, his health had deteriorated. But rather than reduce his workload, major works continued to flow from his pen: the Sixth Symphony (*Sinfonia semplice*, 1925), which he had planned to be “simple” but is tonally even more explorative than its predecessors, and the sparse and modernist Flute Concerto (1925) and Clarinet Concerto (1928). He turned his attentions somewhat to church music, including the Three Motets (1929) and the virtuosic, twenty-minute organ toccata, *Commotio* (1931). This was his final major work. Not until the 1950s, however, did Nielsen's music begin to develop an international following, thanks largely

to the efforts of Leonard Bernstein and the English author Robert Simpson. Nowadays, especially in England and the United States, Nielsen's symphonies are part of the standard repertoire, and he is regarded as one of the most innovative figures in the crucial bridge from Romanticism to modernism.

Nielsen's Three Motets demonstrate several aspects of his late compositional style. Most evident is his unique take on progressive tonality. "Afflictus sum," for example, begins in a world of D minor, but soon flirts with D major, and within just ten bars, harmonically confusing D-flats already appear. Later, the dissonant cries of "rugiebam" ("I roared") defy analysis in any context of traditional tonality. Clearly Nielsen had studied Renaissance polyphony, for despite their adventuresome harmonies, the motets' structure, being built on imitative counterpoint, is ancient. Each motet is its own psychological journey, of the sort that could only have existed after the climax of Romanticism: the introspective anguish of the first, the pastoral peace of the second, the confident jubilation of the third. He has chosen forces to fit the texts as well: sopranos are absent for the dark, hopeless first motet, but divided for the bright, optimistic third. These works are among the greatest glories of twentieth-century choral writing.

1. *Afflictus sum*

Afflictus sum, et humiliatus sum nimis:
rugiebam a gemitu cordis mei.

I am afflicted, and I am deeply humbled:
I roared with groaning in my heart.

— Psalm 38: 9

2. *Dominus regit me*

Dominus regit me,
in loco pasquæ ibi me collocavit.
Super aquam refectionis educavit me.

The Lord rules me;
in the place of pasture, there he placed me.
Beside refreshing waters he teaches me.

— Psalm 23: 1-2

3. *Benedictus Dominus*

Benedictus Dominus,
quoniam mirificavit
misericordium suam mihi.

Blessed be the Lord,
for he has magnified
his mercy to me.

— Psalm 31: 23



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soprano



Dustin Kaspar
tenor



Jonathan Silvia
bass-baritone



Kathryn Weld
mezzo-soprano



Kathea Yarnell
mezzo-soprano

Dr. Gary D. Cannon is one of Seattle's most versatile choral personalities, active as conductor, musicologist, singer, and composer. In addition to Emerald Ensemble, he conducts two community choirs—Cascadian Chorale in Bellevue and the Vashon Island Chorale—in repertoire spanning from the medieval to frequent premieres. He has also appeared as guest conductor of Choral Arts Northwest, Kirkland Choral Society, Northwest Mahler Festival, and Vashon Opera. Dr. Cannon gives pre-concert lectures for Seattle Symphony and has provided program notes for choirs across the country. He teaches voice at Edmonds College, and received the Faculty Excellent Award while teaching music history and theory at Whatcom College. He holds degrees from the University of California at Davis and the University of Washington.



Gary D. Cannon
conductor
