

Choral Discoveries: Off the Beaten Track

Creator of the Stars of Night • Daniel Nelson • Paraclete Press, 1029 • SATB, piano.

<http://www.paracletepress.com/creator-of-the-stars-of-night.html>

After discovering Mr. Nelson's singular, modern/modal compositional style a few years ago, I find his pieces difficult to resist. Simply put, there's not a lot on the liturgical market that sounds so fresh. This is another of his ethereal choral pieces bringing new dimensions to the ancient Advent chant text *Conditor alme siderum*.

(An) Advent Processional • Donald Pearson • Aureole Editions 63 • U/2 pt. unacc., bells and percussion.

http://www.morningstarmusic.com/viewitem.cfm/item_id/AE063

Advent Processional has been around for a while but may not be widely known. Pearson, formerly at the Episcopal cathedral of St. John in Denver, wrote this compelling and stamina-testing unison/2 pt. piece, which moves along breathlessly especially when sung while processing. Another example of new wine in old wineskins, the text is a combination of "O, Come, O Come, Emmanuel" (refrain) and *Veni, redemptor gentium*, the Ambrosian predecessor to "Savior of the Nations, Come" (verses). Riveting.

Keep Your Lamps Trimmed and Burning • Alan Hommerding • World Library Publications 05739 • Unaccompanied. <http://www.wlp.jspaluch.com/2676.htm>

Most church musicians are familiar with the essential version of this spiritual by Andre Thomas. If, for some reason, you want to try something a bit different, Mr. Hommerding's setting is a wholly satisfying alternative.

Gabriel's Message • Craig Phillips • Paraclete Press • SATB, Organ

<http://www.paracletepress.com/gabriels-message.html>.

In 2012, the AGO presented Dr. Phillips with their distinguished composer award inducting him into an elite circle of some of the finest sacred choral composers in American history (including Carl Schalk and Richard Proulx). If you don't have a setting of the Basque Carol in your library, I recommend giving this one a close look and hearing. One caveat: at first listen, two minor rhythmic alterations to the tune may be slightly off-putting. Still, the writing is of highest caliber. The final stanza adds a fifth voice descant.

If you're considering something from the Hispanic tradition these next two recommendations are absolutely deserving of your attention.

A la ru • J. D. Robb & Richard Proulx • GIA 6466 • SATB, Flute, oboe, cello.

http://www.giamusic.com/search_details.cfm?title_id=5544

Here's an achingly beautiful Christmas lullaby with a deft arrangement from the late, great Richard Proulx (pronounced PROO; I still hear people say PROO-lex). "A la ru" has appeared in a few denomination hymnals, but not yet in any Lutheran collections, to my knowledge. Flute, oboe and cello parts add to the sublime experience of presenting this on Christmas Eve. Five stars!

A La Nanita Nana • William Ferris • World Library Publications 5738 • SATB, harp, opt. guitar
• <http://www.wlp.jspaluch.com/download/005738>

The late, eminent, Chicago choral conductor/composer William Ferris (died 2000) crafted this splendid setting of a (probably) South American or Spanish lullaby. The strength of this piece is the sound rather than the message perhaps making it more appropriate for concert than liturgy.

Lute-Book Lullaby • John Butler • Paraclete Press 01334 • Trebles, piano.

<http://www.paracletepress.com/lute-book-lullaby.html>

The text "Sweet was the song the virgin sang" originated in *William Ballet's Lute Book*, a composite tablature manuscript of dance pieces for lute and viol of popular Elizabethan dance and broadside ballads that also gave us GREENSLEEVES. Mr. Butler's setting is immediately ingratiating and is my choice setting of this text with the exception of Stephen Paulus' "A Savior from on High" which employs a variation of this text.

Snow Had Fallen, Christ Was Born • Stephen Paulus • SATB, harp or keyboard.

<http://stephenpaulus.com/products/snow-had-fallen-christ-was-born>

The composing voice of a magnificent talent fell silent on 19 October 2014 at the age of 65 due to complications from a 2013 stroke. For someone known chiefly for his operatic output, it's somewhat surprising that Mr. Paulus could write gems for the average parish choir as well (think "Hallelu"). The several Dale Warland albums/CDs that included a wondrous selection of his Christmas compositions were as formative for me as the Robert Shaw/Alice Parker Christmas recordings of my parent's generation.

Several years ago a British poll named Harold Darke's setting of "In the Bleak Midwinter" the favorite all-time Christmas carol. But this luminous version with a reworking of the Rossetti text

and new music is a particular favorite of mine and I always alternated its usage with the Darke setting.

The Wexford Carol • Robert Lehman • Paraclete Press 1439 • A cappella.

<http://www.paracletepress.com/the-wexford-carol.html>

“Good people all this Christmas time”, the alternate title for this old and most beautiful of Irish carols, deserves to be better known. This version has no peer that I know except for Frank Ferko’s version. I urge you to seek this out and discern whether it is appropriate for your choir’s capability.

Jesu, Son, Most Sweet and Dear • Colin Brumby/arr. Jackson Berkey • GIA/Walton WW1160
• Soloist, SATB, Harp or electronic keyboard.

http://www.giamusic.com/search_details.cfm?title_id=26229

Berkey, who co-founded Mannheim Steamroller in 1974, has fashioned a mesmerizing setting of this carol by Australian Colin Brumby to an anonymous text. It was the hands-down concert and Christmas Eve favorite when my choir presented it a few years back. You will need a soulfully strong soprano soloist to make this successful. Choir parts are quickly learned.

Carol of the Star • T. Tertius Noble, arr. June Nixon • Paraclete Press 0729 • SATB, organ.

<http://www.paracletepress.com/carol-of-the-star.html>

I’m not familiar with Noble’s original (he founded the St. Thomas Boy Choir in NYC and composed two volumes of enduring hymn harmonizations). But much-honored Melbourne, Australia organist June Nixon has created a piece of sheer delight about the Bethlehem or “luminous wandering” star named Earendel in Anglo-Saxon lore from about A.D. 750. Sopranos need to reach a high A, but otherwise this is a straightforward Epiphany piece with several charming nuances. This one is in my “definitely purchase” pile.

Joyous listening and delight in discovering and presenting some of these in your own circumstances!

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