The Cloud of Unknowing

Erik Westberg Vocal Ensemble
Markus Wargh, Organ
Conductor Erik Westberg

Riga Cathedral – 8th November 2019
Tukum Church – 9th November 2019
PROGRAMME

Choir, Organ

Brett Dean (b. 1961) – Was it a Voice? (2014)
Choir a cappella

Choir a cappella

I Min Ynglingsdal
II Natteregn
III Den Kedsom Vinter
Choir a cappella

* * *

Improvisation
Markus Wargh, Organ

Jan Sandström (b. 1954) based on a yoik by Johan Märak (b. 1928) – Jiegnáffo (2019)*
Choir a cappella

* * *

Carl Unander-Scharin (b. 1964) – The Cloud of Unknowing (2019)*
I Cloud and Light
IV Darkness
V Nowhere Bodily
Choir and Organ

*World premiere
**LYRICISTS AND COMMENTS**

**Te Deum Op.2**
Lyricist: Anonymous

Te Deum laudamus,  
Te Deum confitemur.  
Tibi omnes Angeli,  
tibi coeli et universae potestates,  
Tibi Chérubim et Seraphim incessabili  
voce proclamant:  
Helig den store Herren Sebaot.  
O Gud vi lova dig.  
Vem gör att allt i detta nu ej blir till intet?  
Endast du Helig Herren Gud.

You are God: we praise you;  
You are the Lord: we acclaim you;  
You are the eternal Father:  
All creation worships you.  
To you all angels, all the powers of heaven,  
Cherubim and Seraphim, sing in endless praise:  
Holy, the great Lord Zabaoth!  
O God, we praise thee.  
Who prevents everything from turning into nothingness at this moment?  
Only Thou, Holy Lord God

Sandström’s “Te Deum” is written for Thanksgiving Sunday (celebrated in Sweden on the second Sunday in October). Being intended for the Sunday Mass, Sandström’s composition is relatively short and does not use the entire text; it also mixes the original Latin with the Swedish translation of Luther’s German paraphrase of Te Deum. In the solemn and powerful opening section, the organ is given a prominent role; by contrast, the following “Te Deum confitemur” is sung almost entirely a cappella, mostly in soft dynamics. For the angel’s cries, “Holy, Holy, Holy” (beginning, surprisingly, in pianissimo), the language switches to Swedish; here the choir is divided between women and men, representing the seraphs crying to each other, according to the prophet’s celestial vision in Chapter 6 of Isaiah.

**Was it a Voice?**
Lyricist: Graeme William Ellis (b. 1944)

Was it a voice  
Just before dawn that  
Whispered in dreams  
“Awaken”?

Was it a voice  
First made us aware  
When despair shed her leaves  
On the third day of thorns?

Why seek ye  
The living among the dead?

Solace  
Of a rock  
Rolled away

Solace  
In the cry  
Of our dying world

By the grace  
Of one voice

In the harmony  
Of each voiced suffering

Lost  
In the dark wood’s origin

Solace  
In the unheard Final  
Rising
"Was it a voice?" was commissioned by the Choir of Clare College, Cambridge for their Ascensiontide Service, 2014 and is my third work in a ongoing series of sacred settings for a-cappella mixed choir. It follows the Christmas Carol “Now comes the dawn” (for the Choir of King’s College, Cambridge – 2007) and a grace setting, “Concedas Domine” (for the Choir of Repton School – 2010).

The text was especially written for the occasion by the Melbourne-based poet, Graeme William Ellis. Though Ascension Day is one of the great feasts in the Christian liturgical calendar and traditionally celebrated with a sense of splendor, majesty and radiance, Graeme and I wished to express something of humility and restraint in this observation of the last day of Christ’s physical presence on Earth.

My setting, with its layered, dual C-D pedal point of interweaved male voices posing the title’s opening question, strives, even as the female voices join and the work builds in density, to honour the sense of the hushed mystery and reflective gratitude that Ellis’s text expresses, placed as it is against the tragic background of the Easter passion story.

_Brett Dean_

**Entflieht auf leichten Kähnen, Op.2**
*Lyricist: Stefan George (1868-1933)*

Entflieht auf leichten Kähnen
berauschten Sonnenwelten
daß immer milde Tränen
euch eure Flucht entgelten.

Seht diesen Taumel blonder
lichtblauer Traumgewalten
und trunkner Wonnen sonder
Verzückung sich entfalten.

Daß nicht der süße Schauer
in neues Leid euch hülle –
es sei die stille Trauer
die diesen Frühling fülle.

Take flight in light barks
from tipsy, sunny worlds,
that ever milder tears
reward you for your flight.

Watch without ecstasy
how the intoxication of blond
light-blue dream powers
and drunken passions unfolds.

So that the sweet trembling
will not envelop you with new sorrow -
Let silent sadness
fill this spring.

Anton Webern met his mentor Arnold Schoenberg for the first time in the fall of 1904. Webern had only started composing about five years before that and, impressed by *Verklärte Nacht* and other Schönberg works, he sought the older musician out and became Schönberg's first private pupil in Vienna. Webern worked on several compositions under Schoenberg's supervision, the last of which was the short work for unaccompanied chorus *Entflieht auf leichten Kähnen*, completed 1908. The poem is by Stefan George, who was one of Webern’s favourite poets. As George’s poem falls into three four-line verses, Webern’s setting is in three connected sections. The quiet ascending melodic line that opens the work mirrors George’s invitation to “take flight in light barks.” Gradually the polyphony becomes more chromatic and dense, in four parts with canonical interaction between the men’s and women’s voices. A moving hush descends at the mention of the "new sorrow" that ensues once one leaves these "tipsy, sunny worlds." Then, after a pause, the setting of the final two lines acts as a sort of reprise of the first section as the chorus sings of the "stille Trauer" (silent sadness) of spring. Despite that the work was published in 1921, it wasn’t given its first performance until April 10, 1927, and was performed seldom if ever during the remainder of Webern's lifetime.
Tre Romantiske Korsanger

I Min Ynglingsdal
Lyricist: Steen Steensen Blicher (1782-1848)

Hvor est du, elskte plet, hvad er dit navn?
Når skal jeg dig engang i verden finde?
Når vil du til din yndefulde favn
for stedse mig og mine ønsker binde?

Min barndoms skønne drøm, ukendte dal!
Hvor jeg en hytte mellem roser bygger.
Når skal jeg høre dine kilders fald?
Når vil du favne mig i dine skygger?

Nu har jeg ledt om dalen fjern og nær
men ingensteds endnu jeg har den fundet.
Derfor jeg sorgen i mit hjerte bær
og derfor have mine tårer rundet.

Farvel da du min barndoms skønne drøm.
Den strenge skæbnens røst mig grusomt vækker!
Jeg hvirves bort i mine dages strøm,
og armene forgæves mod dig strækker.

II Nattereregn
Lyricist: Nis Petersen (1897–1943)

Fall mild rain, fall softly
- Give power to the soil and to the air of the hill
the pure, summer-baked
and either-clear fragrance.
fall rain in muted murmur,
whisper rain in humming and sighing
to all my trees that thrive in my coppice,
that all these midnight drops are heart-pleasing tears,
kissed to dizziness and fall of sun and choose
the laughing dizziness of the Danish summer night.

Blæs blæst - blæs blidt - i blinde,
bræs friskhed til min hyttes bænk
med myge, vege vinde
og regn i sagte stænk.
Blæs blæst - blæs op -fanfarer,
til natten åbenbarer
for alle mine træer, der trives i mit krat,
at alle disse lyde i alt det grå og grønne
og alle disse dufte, der tumler om min rønne,
er den svinmellyse latter i den danske sommernat.

Three Romantic Pieces for Choir

I My favourite valley

Where are you, beloved spot, what is your name?
Where in the world shall I find you?
When will you in your delicate embrace bind me and my wishes forever?

Lovely dream of my childhood, unknown valley!
Where shall I build a cottage among roses.
When shall I hear the splash of your fountains?
When will you embrace me in your shadows?

Far and near I have sought for the valley
But nowhere found it as yet.
Therefore my heart is heavy with sorrow
And therefore tears I have shed.

Goodbye lovely dream of my childhood.
The voice of a harsh fate cruelly calls!
I am carried away by the streams of time
And for you my arms reach in vain.

Blow, wind – blow softly, blindly,
blow freshness to the bench of my hut
with plant, yielding winds
and rain in soft drops
Blow, wind – sound out flourishes,
till the night reveals
to all my trees that thrive in my coppice,
that all these sounds in all the grey and green
and all these fragrances tumbling on my hovel are
the dizzy-light laughter of the Danish summer.
III Den Kedsom Vinter
Lyricist: Ambrosius Stub (1705-1758)

Den kedsom vinter gik sin gang
den dag så kort, den nat så lang
forandrer sig
så lempelig;
Den barske vind, den mørke sky - må fly;
Vor kakkelovn så ene står,
og hver dags koldesyge får;
Den tykke vams, den foret dragt
er alt hængt hen, og rent foragt;
og muffen er tillige gemt og glemt;
Man frygter ej, at sne og slud
skal møde dem, som vil gå ud,
Thi lad os gå
at skue på,
Hvor smukt naturen sig beter – og ler.

Ak se, hvor pyntet solen går
Med lange stråler i sit hår!
Den varme krans er rette kands,
For alle ting, som nu må gry - på ny.
Den klare lyse himmelblå
Er værd at kaste øjet på;
Se fuglene i flokkelal,
i luftens vide sommersal,
de holder snart hvert øjeblik musik;
De kappes daglig to og to
at bygge hvor de bedst kan bo,
er flyver en
jo med sin gren,
En anden sanker hår og strå - så små.

Ak se, hvor spejeklar og glat
den sø dog er ilave sat!
Det er jo, som at solen kom,
Kun for at se sit skilderi deri.
Bekymret Sjæl, så ser du dog
at alting står i Herrens Bog!
I hvor det går, så ved jeg grant
mit Navn står tegnet deriblandt;
Gud kommer vist min tarv ihu
endnu;
han rammer nok den rette tid,
da himlen den skal blive blid;
jeg tør måske
vel få at se
min vinter blive til en vår - i år.

III The tedious winter went its way

The tedious winter went its way,
The day so short the night so long
Clanging
So gently;
The harsh wind and the dark clouds
Must flee.
Our stove so lonely stands
And the daily ills receives;
The thick doublet, the padded clothes
Are all hung away quite disdained,
The muff too is packed
And forgotten.
There is no fear that snow and sleet
Will meet those who walk abroad:
So let us go – And behold
How beautifully laughing nature behaves.

Oh! See how lovely the sun moves
With long beams in his hair;
The warm garland
Gives good chance
For all that now must dawn
Anew.
The clear blue sky
Is worth a glance
See, the birds in numerous flock
In spacious summer air,
Making music
All the time
They struggle daily two and two
To build where best it is to live.
Here flies one
With a twig,
Another gathers hair and straws
So small.

Oh see, how mirror-like and smooth
the lake lies in its place
It is as if
The sun came
Just to see its image there.
Uneasy spirit, see how all
Is written in the book of the lord!
Come what may, I clearly know,
My name, too, is written there;
God will still remember
My need;
He will find the proper time
When heaven is kind:
I still might see
My winter turn to spring
This year.
At the request of the conductor Mogens Dahl, Jörgen Jersild wrote music in 1994 for Ambrosius Stub's sensual poem: *The tedious winter went its way*. This rate replaces the original 'Evening Red’ as a new piece in the work: Three Romantic Choral Songs. In a detailed and distinctive style that is so characteristic of Jörgen Jersild choral music, these three beautiful texts are expressed with a fine chiselled clarity, where the individual parts weave together into an effective and amazing whole.

**Jiegnáffo**  
Based on a yoik by Johan Märak

De jon Jiegnanáfo nalte
guokta suohkana jon
ealusa juo bálggadedje lo lo...
De jon beaiven máhtá oaidnit
goste cáhpadedje lo lo...
De jon guokta suohkana jon
ealusa juo bálggadedje lo lo...

On Jiegnáffo

two parishes’
reindeer herds are cooling off
Already on the day, one can see
how it blackens (by reindeer)
Two parishes’
Rein deer herds are cooling off

The mountain Jiegnáffo located southwest of Staloluokta has a glacier where reindeer love to cool off during sunny summer days. A yoik is a traditional Sami piece of lyrics and music, here merged together/accompanied with choir in an arrangement by Jan Sandström.

**The Cloud of Unknowing**  
Lyrics: Anonymous

**I Cloud & Light**

Be thou sure that clear sight shall never man have here in this life: but the feeling may men have through grace when God vouchsafeth. And therefore lift up thy love to that cloud: let God draw thy love up to that cloud and strive thou through help of His grace to forget all other thing.

He will sometimes peradventure send out a beam of ghostly light, piercing this cloud of unknowing that is betwixt thee and Him. Then shalt thou feel thine affection inflamed with the fire of His love, far more than I can tell thee, or may or will at this time.

Beat upon this high cloud of unknowing, and rest afterward. Use it to beat upon the cloud of darkness above you. And to subdue all distractions, consign them to the cloud of beneath you. It is truly and perfectly comprehended in this little blind love pressed, when it is beating upon this dark cloud of unknowing. Then all other things are put down and forgotten.

Be thou sure that clear sight shall never man have here in this life

**IV Darkness**

When I say darkness, I mean a lacking of knowing: as all that things that thou knowest not, or else that thou hast forgotten, it is dark to thee; for thou seest it not with thy ghostly eye. And for this reason it is not called a cloud of the air, but a cloud of unknowing. Let that quiet darkness be your whole mind and like a mirror to you.
V Nowhere Bodily is everywhere ghostly

Nowhere bodily, is everywhere ghostly. Look then busily that thy ghostly work be nowhere bodily. And then wheresoever that that thing is, on the which thou wilfully workest in thy mind in substance. Surely there art thou in spirit, as verily as thy body is in that place that thou art bodily.

And therefore be wary that thou conceive not bodily that which is meant ghostly. Although that a thing be never so ghostly in itself, nevertheless yet if it shall be spoken of, since it so is that speech is a bodily work wrought with the tongue, the which is an instrument of the body, it behoveth always be spoken in bodily words. Nowhere bodily, is everywhere ghostly

This work for choir and organ in six movements is a commission from the Erik Westberg Vocal Ensemble with support from the School of Music in Piteå at Luleå University of Technology, Sweden. The composition builds on an astonishing text from the English medieval period with the name “The Cloud of Unknowing”. The text was written by an anonymous monk in the 14th century and revolves around the timeless question of how to understand and to know God. The only way to do that, according to “The Cloud” is to “abandon consideration of God’s particular activities and attributes, and to surrender one’s mind and ego to the realm of “unknowing”, at which point one may begin to glimpse the nature of God”.

For the textual compilation for the compositional work, I also included some sentences from “The Book of Privy Counseling” – another formidable work attributed to the same anonymous 14th c. author. The two books form a rich texture of complicated theological considerations, out of which I compiled six themes, which later formed the basis for the six movements in the choral suite.

Carl Unander-Scharin
ABOUT THE PERFORMERS

Markus Wargh (b. 1969, Jakobstad, Finland) is a renowned concert organist with Bach, the great romantic works and the improvisation close to his heart. He graduated with diploma from the Sibelius Academy in 1991 – being the third in the history of the academy to achieve the highest possible grades. The following years he continued his studies at the Academy of music in Piteå, Sweden, where he graduated as concert organist 1995.

The artistry of Markus Wargh relies on a great ability of expression, energy and virtuosity – as well when he improvises as when he interprets Bach and the masters of the Romantic Age.

Markus Wargh has toured across Europe and the USA, and he has made numerous appearances in radio and television. Except for being an international solo organist, Markus Wargh is organist in Luleå Cathedral.


He has been the leader of numerous choirs, including the YMCA choir in Stockholm and the Oslo Philharmonic Choir, and he has also been guest conductor of the Swedish Radio Choir. Internationally Erik Westberg has been engaged as guest conductor for Pro Coro Canada, Coro Nacional de España, Coro Sinfónica do Estado de São Paulo, and Jauna Muzika, Lithuania. He has also been Artist-In-Residence at Wollongong University, Australia.

With the Erik Westberg Vocal Ensemble he has premiered over 40 works by, among others: B Tommy Andersson, Gunnar Eriksson, Mats Larsson Gothe, Paula af Malmborg Ward, Jan Sandström, Sven-David Sandström and Arvo Pärt. With The University Chamber Choir in Piteå and the Erik Westberg Vocal Ensemble, he has performed over 50 tours to Europe, North- and South America and Asia.

His audio catalog includes more than twenty recordings from the record labels Studio Acusticum Records, Opus3, Naxos, and Caprice, several of which has received excellent reviews. Among his many collaborations are musicians such as former ABBA-member Benny Andersson, the jazz singer Alice Babs and the trombone virtuoso Christian Lindberg.

He has been a member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Music since 2008 and Professor of Choral Conducting and Choral Singing at the School of Music in Piteå, Luleå University of Technology since 2003.

The Erik Westberg Vocal Ensemble was formed in 1993 and consists of 16-20 singers. The members of the Ensemble work as soloists, church musicians and music teachers and come from Northern Sweden and Finland. The Ensemble has commissioned and premiered about 40 works by composers such as Gunnar Eriksson, Paula af Malmborg Ward, Tebogo Monnakgotla, Jan Sandström, Sven-David Sandström and Arvo Pärt.

The Swedish Broadcasting Corporation has, in close collaboration with the Ensemble, sent several live performances, both in Sweden and throughout Europe.

The Ensemble has undertaken over 40 tours to North and South America, Europe and Asia. A particularly notable engagement was the project Choral Singing for Peace and Justice with a tour to Tonga and Samoa by the turn of the millennium, seen by the largest television audience ever.
Sopranos
Virve Karén
Christina Fridolfsson
Alva Stern
Linnea Pettersson
Cecilia Grönfelt

Altos
Katarina Karlsson
Anu Arvola
Anna Risberg
Anna-Karin Lindström

Tenors
Erik Stillesjö
Stefan Millgård
Örjan Larsson
Alexander Olsson

Basses
Martin Eriksson
Anders Steinwall
Jonatan Brundin
Anders Bek
Janne Posti

The Erik Westberg Vocal Ensemble is supported by Curt Boström foundation at the School of Music in Piteå, Luleå University of Technology, Kempeföfar, Swedish Arts Council and Region Norrbotten.

A close cooperation is pursued together with Studio Acusticum when it comes to concert-productions and releasing CD’s.

Kempeföfar
**CD’s are sold at the cost of 10 Euro. They may also be ordered at our website:**  
www.vokalensemblen.se