



Karen P. Thomas | Artistic Director and Conductor

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PRESS RELEASE

ANNOUNCING
SEATTLE PRO MUSICA'S NEW CD

MUSIC OF THE SPIRIT

Seattle Pro Musica is pleased to announce the January 2006 release of its new CD. *Music of the Spirit*, Seattle Pro Musica's fifth CD, will be released in January, 2006. ***Music of the Spirit*** features some of the greatest a cappella choral masterworks of all time, from the austere beauty of Allegri's *Miserere*, with its stratospheric soprano solo, to the sumptuous splendor of Frank Martin's *Mass for Double Choir*, an astonishing tour-de-force for singers. The CD also includes CV Stanford's *Beati quorum via*, Hugo Wolf's *Sechs geistliche Lieder*, and the premiere recording of Karen P. Thomas' *Lux Lucis*.

Seattle Pro Musica is widely considered to be one of the finest ensembles in the Pacific Northwest – American Record Guide ranks it “among America’s very best choirs.” Seattle Pro Musica has received international recognition and acclaim for its CD recordings and live performances. Choir and Organ magazine (Great Britain) writes: “...there is great depth and purity in this performance... Seattle Pro Musica presents a cappella singing at its best...” Fanfare Record Magazine writes: “Seattle Pro Musica’s intonation is razor sharp...” and “the tone and blend are exquisite.” Seattle Pro Musica is a winner of the national Margaret Hillis Achievement Award for Choral Excellence.

Music of the Spirit and Seattle Pro Musica’s other CDs – *Peace in Our Time*, *Weihnachten! A German Christmas*, *Alnight by the Rose*, and *Rachmaninov’s Vespers*, are available directly from Seattle Pro Musica, www.seattlepromusica.com/order, through Clarion Records and Distribution <http://www.clarionrecords.com>, and national outlets such as amazon.com, Arkiv, and Tower Records.

<<<MORE>>>

Digital images and an electronic copy of this press release and relevant promotional materials are on the enclosed CD for your convenience. Please contact laura@seattlepromusica.org for further information.

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Music of the Spirit

Seattle Pro Musica CD Release – January, 2006

Frank Martin, a Swiss composer of French descent, created a personal compositional style which incorporated elements of French Impressionism, serialism, the Italian Renaissance, German Romanticism, and Bach. Martin worked on his *Mass for Double Choir* for four years while in his thirties, composing the first four movements in 1922, then adding the *Agnus Dei* in 1926. He then put it away without seeking publication, not intending for it to be performed. At the time of its premiere he wrote: "I did not want it to be performed since I was afraid that it would be judged from a purely aesthetic viewpoint. I considered it at the time as being a matter between God and myself. I felt then that an expression of religious feelings should remain secret and removed from public opinion." Almost forty years after its completion, the *Mass* was finally premiered in 1963. Today it is regarded as one of the greatest a cappella choral masterpieces of the 20th century.

Sir Charles Villiers Stanford was born in Dublin in 1852, and brought up in a cultured professional circle – his childhood home was a meeting-place for amateur and professional musicians. By the age of nineteen he had become organist of Trinity College and conductor of the Cambridge University Musical Society (later he was also conductor of the London Bach Choir, the Leeds Philharmonic Society and the Leeds Festival). He was appointed professor of composition and orchestral playing at the Royal College of Music from its opening in 1883 and professor of music at Cambridge in 1887. In addition to his prodigious compositional output, Stanford's great influence on several generations of British composers is one of his most important legacies – among his many students were Vaughan Williams, Holst, Howells, and John Ireland. Along with Elgar and Parry, he was responsible for the late-19th-century "renaissance" in British music, achieving special stature as a composer of sacred choral music. *Beati quorum via* was published in 1905 in a set of three motets, but was likely written a decade earlier.

Lux Lucis is a collection of three motets for women's voices by **Karen P. Thomas**, composed on texts by Hildegard von Bingen. The title translates as "light," and especially refers to the light of life or the light of day – it can also translate as "hope" or "elucidation" in certain contexts. The texts by Hildegard for these three motets contain numerous references to light, the sun, flame, life and radiance. Compositional devices such as shimmering harmonies, cascading polyphonic lines and the polarity of rich and simple textures are used to illuminate the textual themes found in the poetry – themes of light, hope and purity. Musically, the motets pay homage to Hildegard's compositional style – particularly in the use of the interval of the ascending fifth, which is found in many of Hildegard's songs, and also in the extended chant which opens the third motet. However, there are no direct quotes of Hildegard's melodies in these pieces.

Hugo Wolf is celebrated as a composer of art songs, having composed approximately 300, often in bursts of intense creativity. His choral compositions are fewer in number, but like his art songs, are characterized by the careful unity of music and text. As Wolf himself remarked, he sought to create an art "written in blood," in which the music he composed was a recreation of the poetry itself. The *Sechs geistliche Lieder* (*Six Sacred Songs*) are set to poems by Joseph von Eichendorff, and are marked by their deep religious feeling. They were written in 1881 when Wolf was only twenty-one, but not published until after his death. The fifth song, *Ergebung*, was sung at his funeral service in Vienna.

Gregorio Allegri was a tenor in the papal choir of the Vatican and a respected composer of music for the choir. Numerous composers wrote settings of the *Miserere* for the papal choir to perform in the Sistine Chapel, among them Palestrina, Alessandro Scarlatti and Hasse. But it was Allegri's famous 1638 setting which became the favorite and enjoyed exalted status, eventually attracting hordes of tourists who came to Tenebrae services in the Sistine Chapel during Holy Week to hear its stratospheric high notes and improvised embellishments, performed in complete darkness. For decades Allegri's *Miserere* was a mysterious and carefully-guarded secret, the exclusive property of the papal choir, and no copies of the score were allowed to leave the Sistine Chapel or to be published. The fourteen-year-old Mozart is reputed to have broken this barrier of secrecy by writing down the music from memory after hearing it performed.