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Vocal Music for a Renaissance Military Ceremony

by TIMOTHY J. MCGEE

A battlefield death, an ephemeral victory, a general's glorious installation; these are links in a chain of events in fifteenth-century Florence that provide us with an extraordinary opportunity to see how ceremonial demands worked to produce a musical composition and its performance. We would be grateful for such an extremely rare opportunity in any case, but especially so in light of the principals: the setting is Florence in 1485, the patronage issued from Lorenzo de' Medici, the composer was Heinrich Isaac, and the performers were the first-class civic ensemble of Florence.

Isaac's *Alla Battaglia* has been a favorite composition since its first modern edition in 1907,[1] but it has always been known as an instrumental composition. The recent rediscovery of a manuscript part-book with a partial text and an early printed book with the full text has provided evidence that the work was actually a vocal piece and has led to an unusually vivid picture of one of the most splendid ceremonial occasions to have taken place in Florence during the Renaissance.

There has been a bit of confusion about *Alla Battaglia* in this century owing to the way in which the work was preserved — or, more correctly, not preserved. The music for *Alla Battaglia* survives in two manuscripts in the Florence National library: in one the music is complete but totally without text;[2] the other is a bass part-book with most of the text of the first stanza,[3] (the soprano, alto, tenor books for this set have been lost). Only the textless source was known to most of the modern editors, and when the partial text was discovered in 1953 it made little sense and was judged to be a later attempt to add text to

[1]Johannes Wolf, ed. *Denkmäler der Tonkunst in Österreich,* Vienna, 1894-. Vol. XXXII, 221-24.

[2]Florence, Biblioteca Nationale, MS Panciatichiana 27, fol. 9v-12r.

[3]Florence, BN, MS Banco Rari, 337, fol. 78-80.

an instrumental composition.[4] The full text, found without music in a book printed *ca.* 1500,[5] however, makes it clear that *Alla Battaglia* was originally intended for four-part vocal performance. A comparison of the text in the bass part-book and the music of the four-part version reveals the reasons for the partial text in the part book: only one stanza of the poem was set. Phrases are missing when the bass part rests while the other parts continue to sing.

The text of *Alla Battaglia* is a poem of eighty-three lines in three stanzas with a refrain.[6] The text is so specific that we are able to pinpoint with certainty the occasion for which it was written as well as to fill in a number of specific details surrounding its performance. The subject matter is a charge to the Florentine army to persevere in their attempt to take the castle of Sarzanello, as can be seen in the opening lines:

> To the battle, quickly to the battle.
> Everyone must arm himself with armor and chain mail.
> To help the excellent captain
> Everyone must quickly be armed and go forth.
> Forward valiant men, one by one,
> Signor Julio, Organtino, and Paulo Orsino.
> Sarzanello must be cleaned away.

Throughout the length of the poem a number of proper names are used — obviously those of soldiers — urging them forward into battle; sometimes the reference suggests they are already engaged in the battle:

> They have found their weapons.
> Let us take them away from them.
> Wait! Wait! Wait!
> O Scaramuccia, come on Zaccagnin Corso,
> Riccio Vecchietti. Forward Borgo Rinaldi.

It is because of these names that the specific occasion can be identified. A search through the military pay records in the Archives of Florence shows that these men were military leaders who were all serving in the Florentine army between 1484 and 1487. The only name conspicuously missing from the poem is that of the captain-general, and that provides the final clue: the song was written in his

[4]See Bianca Becherini, "La canzone 'Alla Battaglia' di Henricus Isac," *Revue Belge de Musicologie* VII (1953), 5-25 and Wolfgang Osthoff, *Theatergesang and Darstellende Musik in der Italienischen Renaissance,* 2 vols., Tutzing, 1969, 73-109.

[5]Seville, Bibl. Colombina, 6-3-29, opusc. 25.

[6]According to the Seville print, the author was Gentile Aretino. He has been identified as Gentile Becchi, friend of the Medici family, Bishop of Arezzo, and teacher of Lorenzo. See Frencesco Novati, "Contributi alla storia della lirica musicale neo-latina," *Studi Medioevali* II (1907), 303-6.

honor. He is referred to — but not named — in the opening lines: the "excellent captain" (line 3 above) was Niccolò Orsini, Duke of Pitigliano, the newly installed captain-general of the Florentine army.

Throughout the 1470's and 1480's Florence was at war with Genoa over the territory that lay on the coast (the Italian Riviera). Situated half-way between the two cities, it was a tract that included the town of Sarzana and its castle, Sarzanello. In the late spring of 1485, the Florentine Army was preparing to attack Sarzanello when an opportunity presented itself to attack Pietrasanta, another town on the coast. Genoa sent forces to help defend Pietrasanta but Florence prevailed. The Genoese army did prevent the Florentines from proceeding to Sarzanello, however, by killing their captain-general, Roberto Sansoverino.

The civic leaders of Florence immediately summoned Niccolò Orsini, who had been serving in the army, and swore him in as the new captain-general. The details of the promotion show that the date and time for this installation was chosen carefully by the Florentine astrologer in order to insure the best possible fortune. It was to be at 6:30 p.m. on June 24, the feast of San Giovanni, patron saint of Florence. Since the new appointment had been made in haste and in secret, Orsini was sent back to the troops in the field and a time was set for a proper and public formal installation ceremony to take place three weeks later.

The Florentine army actually did not pursue its quest of Sarzanello immediately. Problems with neighbors to the East occupied the city's attention during the remainder of 1485 and 1486, and it was not until June of 1487 that they actually attacked Sarzanello again and won; but it proved to be an ephemeral victory. The castle was given to Charles VII of France in 1494. At the time of Orsini's public installation, on July 17, 1485, there was still hope for an immediate victory at Sarzanello, and the text of *Alla Battaglia* reflects that expectant triumphal mood:

> Come on, good leader, quickly advance
> With captain marchese Gabriello.
> Place yourselves in battle array.
> Clear them away from around Sarzanello.
> Who are the Genovese?
> They do not appear to be prepared,
> The cursed people.

It is fortunate that we have the Florentine *Ceremoniale* from the last half of the fifteenth century, the official account of ceremonies for the city, recorded in detail by the civic herald Francesco Filarete.[7]

[7]F. Filarete, *Ceremonie,* Carte di correde, 61, Archivio di Stato, Firenze. Modern edition by Richard Trexler, *The Liber Ceremoniale of the Florentine Republic,* Geneva, 1978.

The *Ceremoniale* contains a record of honors bestowed upon a number of distinguished people, especially the ceremony accorded a new captain-general of the army. The amount of space devoted to accounts of military installations is more than that given to any other ceremony, indicating the relative importance of the event.

There was a standard set of formalities that were observed for the welcome of all distinguished guests to Florence. All were usually met at one of the city gates by the civic leaders, hundreds or even thousands of the citizens, including youths in festive dress, and the civic ensemble of musicians. There followed a procession through the streets and an official welcome ceremony with speeches by various civic officials.

From the *Ceremoniale* account and various other pieces of evidence we can piece together many of the details of the ceremony for Orsini's investiture. The position of captain-generalship was usually awarded to a nobleman, and thus the ceremony was suitably grand both in light of the importance of the occasion and as befitted the high social position of the recipient. According to the *Ceremoniale,* Orsini was met at a city gate with a welcome ceremony and procession — even the route of the procession is given in detail. He was greeted by the officials at the platform erected in front of the Signoria (city building), and there followed the ceremony for installation, beginning with a number of orations that included a speech by the first minister of the city, Bartolomeo Scala. We know from other accounts that the "usual" orations also involved a poem, and it is at that point in the ceremony that *Alla Battaglia* was most likely recited and then sung. After the orations Orsini was given a banner and a helmet, both emblazoned with "Gilio," the fleur-de-lis symbol of Florence. It was customary for the bestowing of gifts to be accompanied "with much pomp by the trumpets."[8] At the end of the ceremony Orsini was accompanied by the citizens on a long procession that wound through the streets of Florence and across the bridges that span the Arno river.

The details of the investiture make it clear that music played an important part. The civic musicians — shawm and trumpet players — were present for the welcome at the gate; they played during the processions before and after the ceremony, and the trumpets also played during the presentation of gifts. We know from the music of *Alla Battaglia* that a quartet of singers must have appeared during the oration part of the ceremony to sing a poem written specifically for the honored guest. (Another poem from an investiture ceremony has

[8]Filarete, *Ceremonie,* fol. 13v, R. Trexler, *The Liber,* p. 89.

also been preserved: "The Sack of Volterra," written for the installation of Federigo di Montefeltro in 1472, but no music has been found for this text.)

Exactly what music the civic instrumental ensemble played is not yet known. It is thought that the instrumentalists improvised fanfares and other festive sounds. (They are never pictured with music, and it is believed that until the end of the fifteenth century most civic musicians could not read music.) There were between four and six shawm and trumpet players in the Florentine ensemble during the fifteenth century — a common group for major cities at that time [9] — and we can imagine that they could have performed polyphony, but no music has been identified as part of the repertory of any civic ensemble from that period and no descriptions have been found in which any particular composition has been named or described. We also do not know who would have sung *Alla Battaglia* during the ceremony; there is no record of singers in the employ of the civic government. The composer, Heinrich Isaac, was connected with the church choirs of San Giovanni and Santissima Annuziata at that time and therefore it is possible that he enlisted the help of four singers for the performance (or three and himself).[10] Another possibility is that some of the instrumentalists in the civic ensemble could read music and doubled as singers. The bass part-book — with some portions containing text and some not — suggests that this could have been the case. Whatever the performing ensemble, Isaac provided the musical world with a fine composition for this occasion and he provided it in a hurry. Between the initial secret investiture and the public ceremony there were only twenty-three days in which the civic officials organized the entire public ceremony. It would have been only after the private investiture on June 24 that they could have scheduled the ceremony, requested the poem and its musical setting, and ordered the preparation of the various gifts. There would have been very little time for Isaac to spend on the music in that case; the musical phrases are obviously written to set the first stanza of the poem, and Isaac would have had to wait for the poet to finish the stanza before he could begin the music.

Isaac's music for *Alla Battaglia* is quite stirring. It is full of the triumphal sounds of fanfare-like passages to match the expectant and military tone of the poem. In writing the composition Isaac combined the two major styles of the period: the more sophisticated interna-

[9]See Giuseppe Zippel, *I Suonatori della Signoria di Firenze*, Trent, 1892, and Keith Polk, "Ensemble Instrumental Music in Flanders — 1450-1550," *Journal of Band Research* II (1975).

[10]See Frank A. D'Accone, "Heinrich Isaac in Florence: New and Unpublished Documents," *Musical Quarterly* IL (1963), 464-83.

tional style of imitation used by the Flemish masters (example 1), and the more homophonic Italian national style found in the *frottole* of the period (see example 2).

EXAMPLE 1

EXAMPLE 2

As Isaac changes from one style to the other, the music changes its mood. In the imitative parts the mood is serious and somewhat learned, caused by the complexity of the imitation. Sections in homophony are more simple sounding and those in triple time take on a very light tone. Triple time usually suggests the lightness of dance music, and Isaac takes advantage of the technique to create

variety. When he uses triple time along with homophonic writing, the music suggests the mood of a light-hearted carnival song typical for this kind of writing. When Isaac combines triple time with imitation, he achieves a mood somewhere between the two extremes of style. At other times he chooses a sustained chordal effect to pronounce the name of one of the soldiers with solemnity (example 3, bars 124-27).

EXAMPLE 3

There does not seem to be any design for setting certain phrases in one particular style: Isaac does not choose, say, the imitative style for narrative lines, or triple time for action. As a matter of fact, it would seem that he did not consider that kind of representation at all. The homophonic setting in triple time in example 2 surely was *not* chosen because the words "forward valiant and bold men" suggested a light-hearted treatment, nor is there any apparent reason for the use of the fanfare-like setting of the names "Annibale" and "Guidone" in example 3, bars 128-33, as distinct from that of the soldier from Piombino in the passage that precedes it.

It would seem that Isaac varied the musical mood for musical reasons alone rather than to closely express any given phrase of text. He was certainly concerned with providing music to set each of the phrases so that in each case declamation and phrase lengths accommodated a complete line of text, but his method of representing the spirit of the text was a more general one. The music for *Alla Battaglia* reflects the overall attitude of the text; it is bright and optimistic with a general suggestion of the military. There is no close association of music with the meaning of individual words — this became a device of the next century. The early Renaissance dealt with the meaning of the text on a more general level. The composer was concerned only with text accentuation and flow from line to line, not with the portrayal of individual words.

Alla Battaglia is Isaac's earliest known composition. He had been in Florence little more than six months when he was called upon to set the text for the investiture ceremony. There can be little doubt that his patron, Lorenzo de' Medici, was happy with this new musician who could furnish such a fine composition on such short notice. We can sense in *Alla Battaglia* the genius to be found in Isaac's later Masses, motets, secular songs, and the monumental Choralis Constantinus.

The discovery of a text for *Alla Battaglia* presents us with a fine new Renaissance vocal composition, an interesting glimpse of an important ceremony in fifteenth-century Florence, and new information about one of its greatest composers.

The music and text of this work will be released shortly by Musica Sacra et Profana, Berkeley, California, in an edition by this author under the title *Alla Battaglia by Heinrich Isaac.*

Choral Conductors Forum

MINIMALISM

A battle has been raging in the press for some time – a battle of obvious interest to the choral conductor because it questions the very concept of chorus. Its argument is that the normal connotation of "chorus" in Bach's works was not a group made up of various sections but only the sum total of soloists. This startling theory, in short, declares any vocal group of more than one-to-a-part a mere figment of imagination so far as "authentic" Bach performance is concerned.

One cannot quite suppress the comment "What next?" and in a New York Times *editorial entitled "How Far Shall We Go With Minimalism?" Donal Henahan has addressed himself to this question. As we reprint his polemic masterpiece, we must necessarily leave the question itself open – but here lies the crux of the argument: the last word may never be spoken. Amusingly enough, some of Henahan's fastidious readers missed the point and thus prompted a second editorial under the heading "The Trouble With Irony, Frivolity And Such."*

Consequently, the larger question has arisen: are we dealing with something ridiculous or something serious? We tend towards the latter interpretation, for what has involved the issue of minimalism in the first place is a streak of twentieth-century megalomania. It is the idea that, with the means of modern source study, today's scholar can provide a definitive answer to everything. Sources can be explained in different ways; hence the argument. And involving, as it did, scholars of exemplary training and ability, it has become extensive and complex. While the argument has reminded us that in the practice of Bach's time the term "chorus" was, in fact, understood in different ways, what seems immediately convincing is, in the end, a bit of common sense added to the minutiae of research – we quote here just a single point of the discussions carried over from articles in High Fidelity *and* The New York Times *into an exchange of statements in* The Musical Times *(London). It refers to the eight-part* Osanna *of the predominantly five-part score of the* Mass in B Minor:

> . . . for the first two hours or so of a live performance of the Mass those three extra voices are apparently expected to loiter about, idle and silent.

* * *

The ruling spirit of our age is Minimalism. Or, if you object to sweeping generalizations in opening paragraphs, maybe we could narrow it down and say that it certainly is one of the ruling spirits. A Zeitgeist, if not *the* Zeitgeist. Regardless of what cosmologists may contend, we seem to live in a shriveling universe, one in which heroes easily fit onto 12-inch television screens and $30,000 autos are the size of kiddie cars. A 50-cent candy bar fits neatly into a tooth cavity. Doctors who treat the century's most characteristic illnesses are known as shrinks. Whole libraries are condensed onto a couple of microchips. Dieting has replaced gourmandizing as the mark of the leisure class. *The Reader's Digest* has given the Bible a slim, new look.

Small wonder, then, that music also has been deeply affected by this austere revolution, which broke out in earnest shortly after World War II. It was then that the avant-garde made an idol of Anton Webern and his wispy, aphoristic composing style. Renunciation, economy and parsimony became tenets of the true faith. Large symphony orchestras were declared dead and small chamber groups proliferated, particularly at the universities. The peak of the wave was reached in 1954 with John Cage's "4 Minutes and 33 Seconds," a three-movement piece that required a pianist to sit at the keyboard without playing. Later came less inspired works such as one that made use of one major chord, endlessly repeated, and even a whole opera made up of little but a few simple scales.

Musical scholarship, not surprisingly, followed a course parallel to music in general, with results that at first were stimulating and refreshing. In choral music, for instance, we saw the downgrading of the grandiose performing groups that we inherited from the nineteenth century and their replacement by smaller, more historically plausible choruses. Harpsichordists, with the help of musicologists, shamed pianists out of playing anything before middle Mozart on the modern grand. Even among pianists, the leaner, more epicene sound of the harpsichord became the ideal in advanced circles and was sought with monkish fervor by artists such as Glenn Gould. In recent years, the grand pianists have been further tyrannized by the fortepiano specialists, who have claimed or reclaimed for their small-voiced instrument much of the standard nineteenth-century piano repertory.

Where, you may ask, will it all end? You probably have been following with intense interest, as I have, the dispute that is simmering in musicological circles over Joshua Rifkin's radical shrinkage of Bach's B Minor Mass. Mr. Rifkin presented his case last November in Boston before the American Musicological Society and illustrated it with a live performance. In brief, what he believes is that

some of Bach's famous choral works were not originally meant for chorus at all but were sung with just one or two voices to a part. That is, by at most eight singers. Nonesuch has released a Rifkin-directed performance of just such a B Minor Mass, which you are invited to hear and judge for yourself, bearing in mind that a recording is a far different matter from a live performance. In the current issue of *High Fidelity,* the Bach scholar Robert L. Marshall pokes some holes in the Rifkin thesis, which is based in part on the fact that only one score per voice exists for these works.

For many reasons, not all of them spelled out by Mr. Marshall, I am afraid it is impossible to endorse the extreme Minimalist side in this debate. Has Mr. Rifkin never seen those old prints and paintings of choral singers crowding around a single piece of music manuscript, bawling away happily? Obviously, such cosy sharing was common performing practice in the dark days before the advent of the copying machine. Still, Mr. Rifkin's theory is fascinating, however eccentric. He stands in an honorable line of Twentieth-Century Minimalists who have carried the principle of "less is more" into every corner of our culture. Up to a point, they were performing a genuine service, too, stripping away the barnacles of performance tradition and outworn stylistic conventions. You may be old enough to remember how exciting it was, a little over twenty years ago, to hear the B Minor Mass performed by the Robert Shaw Chorale with only thirty-odd singers and an equal complement of orchestra musicians. These would seem horribly bloated numbers on the Rifkin Scale.

However, Mr. Marshall argues, there is no question but that Bach had at least three singers to a part available to him at Leipzig's St. Thomas Church in 1730 and that he clearly thought that an inadequate number. He wanted a minimum of four. These figures occur in the detailed memorandum Bach sent to his ecclesiastical employers setting out his plans and requirements for giving them "A Well-Appointed Church Music." Unless generations of scholars have misread this famous document, we must believe that at this late date in his career Bach could sometimes muster only twelve singers for his choral music. Only a year earlier, the evidence indicates, he was able to command thirty or more voices for the first performance of the *St. Matthew Passion.* That decline probably was the reason for his memo.

But let all that be argued out by the Bach specialists. For the moment I am more interested in the historical thrust of Mr. Rifkin's argument than in its scholarly validity or lack of validity. I wonder if he knows that, extreme though his insistence on one singer to a Bach part seems, it is by no means the last word on the subject. Is he familiar, by any chance, with the work of the Silesian musicologist and

composer Heinrich Stumm? Herr Stumm, an artist well in advance of his time, lived between the Baroque and the Rococo eras, in what is known as the Lococo period. He believed so strongly in what we now know as Minimalism that he composed a vocal piece that employed not two hundred or sixteen, or even one voice to a part, but none. This pioneering and all but forgotten work, his two-hour *Cantata Silentium,* was based on a chapter from Tacitus. It has been recorded by Nada Records and makes easy listening. There is, in fact, not one performer whose work can be said to offend the ear. Furthermore, the recording itself is exemplary.There is absolutely no hiss, no swish, no static cling, no ring around the collar. And think of it: no voices per part. None. Eat your heart out, Joshua Rifkin.

— Donal Henahan

Choral Performances

Chicago — A brilliant performance by the Chicago Symphony Chorus and Orchestra added to this city's symphonic season a choral work that stands unparalleled — Handel's *Israel in Egypt* — and once again the monumental achievement of the aging composer electrified and awed its audience.

"Handel's great days are over, his inspiration is exhausted and his taste behind the fashion," wrote Frederick the Great, himself a well-versed musician, in the fall of 1737 — one year before the composition of *Israel* and four years before *Messiah.* Handel's third opera enterprise had ended in bankruptcy, and the composer had suffered a stroke and mental collapse. At his remarkable recovery, he took on a double challenge: Italian opera and English oratorio, the former in irrevocable decline and the latter in a state of searching experimentation. The personal and physical crisis was followed by an artistic one; *Israel in Egypt* marked its culmination.

In an extraordinary document of English musical history, Aaron Hill, Handel's long-time business associate in opera, had attempted to show the master the way. His moving letter admonished Handel that the time was ripe for "delivery" from "Italian bondage": for opera in English. Handel ignored the plea. He had been captivated by the vision of choral drama, by the return to polyphonic writing; he held to a "taste behind the fashion" and stubbornly pursued the road dictated by the instinct of his genius.

The role of the chorus in the newly fashioned oratorio had fascinated Handel because it touched upon the essence of classical tragedy. In the musical design of *Israel in Egypt* he was carried away and explored the possibilities of choral interpretation to the extreme. The creative history of *Israel in Egypt* presents us with the picture of an artist driven by an ideal.

In the typical impetuous pace of his invention Handel had postponed the conception of the total work by writing its last part first. Inspired by the text from Exodus XV:1, "Moses and the children of Israel sang this song unto the Lord, and spake, saying: I will sing unto the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously," he wrote a vast anthem of praise which he entitled "Moses' Song." It opens with an alternation of chorus and duet, but as he continued, Handel

composed five choruses in a row. And although he tried to restore the balance in the course of the work, the share of the chorus grew; in the monumental double chorus on the text "The people shall hear" — the institution of the Passover — the choral writing seems to defy structural bounds. Twice Handel writes choral episodes that suggest the pattern of prelude and fugue; but in each case the fugal portion develops into new preludes for a vast choral fantasy based on the text "Till Thy people pass over, O Lord." The last theme moves from seventh to ninth chords over chromatically ascending pedal points until its exchanges in double counterpoint are exhausted in the completion of an immense cadence.

Handel then decided that the paean of Israel's victory must be preceded by the drama of Exodus itself, and he composed, within a few days, what is now considered the first part of the work, "Exodus." As before, he began with an alternation of solo and chorus, but after the first four numbers the form of the work is swept into a series of eight consecutive choruses. In the end, the composer gave the oratorio an imposing prologue, adapted from an earlier anthem, which is entirely choral.

This concentration upon the choral element found Handel's audience unprepared. The first performance was a failure. "Handel has had a concerto this winter. No opera, no nothing," wrote an observer after the end of the season, and one of Handel's close friends, Mrs. Delany, remarked later: "*Israel in Egypt* did not take, it is too solemn for common ears." In other performances the work was drastically altered and eventually broken up into its components. The form preserved for posterity shows only one of the possibilities Handel adopted in trying to save this unique drama; it remains a gigantic torso.

The Handelian images of Exodus have become legendary. His epic description of the plagues, the verminous swarms, the hailstorms and cries of fire, the groping in thick darkness, the drowning of the defeated enemy, the fear and belief of the survivors — these are ultimate expressions of Baroque choral art. The variety of choral styles is greater than in Bach's *B Minor Mass.* But it is an array of choral styles that, as in Bach's writing, is illuminated by the virtuosity of the orchestra.

It takes a twin team such as the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Chorus to do justice to the work's grandeur. Margaret Hillis conducted an inexorably paced performance with her proven leadership of both. The excellent soloists were Phyllis Bryn-Julson, Barbara Pearson, Alfreda Hodgson, David Britton, Leslie Guinn, and Kurt Link.

—A.M.

Princeton — One of the more significant events that took place in Princeton this season was the three-day 28th International Heinrich Schütz Festival that was held on the campus of Westminster Choir College. Sponsored by the College, and scheduled in cooperation with the *Internationale Heinrich Schütz-Gesellschaft* in Kassel, West Germany, this event brought to an American audience an interesting cross-section of the music of this monumental seventeenth-century composer as well as the works of a number of other composers.

Three of the major works of Heinrich Schütz were performed during the festival: the *Passion nach dem Evangelisten Johannes* (1666) by the Westminster Chapel Choir under Frauke Haasemann; the *Historia von der Geburt unseres Herren Jesu Christi* (printed in Dresden, 1664) by the Westminster Singers and their conductor Allen Crowell; the *Musikalische Exequien* (1636) by the Westminster Choir under Wilhelm Ehmann as guest conductor. The Westminster Symphonic Choir, under its regular conductor, Joseph Flummerfelt, performed at the final concert of the festival a program that included *Warum toben die Heiden* and *Danket dem Herren, denn er ist freundlich,* both from the *Psalmen Davids* (1619). These polychoral pieces, clearly influenced by the composer's study with Giovanni Gabrieli in Venice, were a fitting and brilliant conclusion to the weekend.

Of special significance was the American premiere of *Jauchzet dem Herrn, alle Welt,* Psalm 100, a little-known work of Schütz, which was performed for the first time between 1662 and 1671 and probably not again for over three hundred years. It was one of the composer's late works — his "swan song," as he and his contemporaries called it. Although the title page appeared in print in 1671, together with *Psalm 119* and a *Magnificat,* the music for *Psalm 100* existed only in manuscript copies from which two voices and the basso continuo part were missing. The East German musicologist Wolfram Steude found the work in the Saxon State Library in Dresden, scored it and supplied the missing parts — cantus and tenor of the second choir. It was he who edited it for this Princeton performance by the choirs of Trinity Church under John Bertalot. It was sung as part of the regular Sunday morning liturgy.

As a means of bringing the music of Heinrich Schütz to the broadest possible audience in Princeton, the choirs of Nassau Presbyterian Church, the United Methodist Church, the Lutheran Church of the Messiah, and Trinity Church all performed the music of Schütz in their Sunday services. In addition, Professor Karlfried Fröhlich, from the faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary, led a service in Westminster's Bristol Chapel which recreated major elements of the regular Sunday service ("Messe") in the Court chapel at Dresden in the time of Schütz.

Four major lectures were given during the Festival. Kurt Gudewill, President of the International Heinrich Schütz Society and Professor Emeritus at the University of Kiel, West Germany, prepared a lecture on the topic "Some Aspects of the Revival of the Music of Heinrich Schütz." Because an illness prohibited a trip to America for the Festival, the paper was read by the Princeton University musicologist J. Merrill Knapp. Wilhelm Ehmann, Director Emeritus of the *Westfälische Landeskirchenmusikschule* in Herford, West Germany, presented a lecture-demonstration "Performance Practice in the Music of Heinrich Schütz," in which he used soloists, instrumentalists and members of the Westminster Choir.

Joshua Rifkin, one of the authors of the Schütz article in the new edition of *Grove's Dictionary,* selected the topic "Toward a New Image of Heinrich Schütz" for his lecture which presented important new biographical information on the composer. The final lecture of the Festival was given by Christiane Bernsdorff-Engelbrecht, musicologist at the *Westfälische Landeskirchenmusikschule:* it was an illustrated lecture (with slides) "On the life way of Heinrich Schütz."

While the music of Heinrich Schütz formed the focus of the Festival, works of other seventeenth-century composers were also included. Joan Lippincott, head of the organ department of Westminster Choir College, and Mark Brombaugh, a member of the faculty, presented an organ and harpsichord recital at Trinity Church which offered works of Michael Praetorius (1571-1621), Samuel Scheidt (1587-1654), Franz Tunder (1614-1667), Matthias Weckmann (1619-1674), and Johann Jakob Froberger (1616-1667).

Twentieth-century composers whose works were scheduled during the weekend included Hugo Distler (1908-1942), Daniel Pinkham (b. 1923), Randall Thompson (b. 1899), and William Walton (1902-1983).

Despite the revival of early music in recent times, the works of Heinrich Schütz remain relatively unknown in the United States. This Princeton festival was the second International Heinrich Schütz Festival to be held in this country, following one in Eugene, Oregon ten years earlier (1973). (The first American Schütz Festival was held in Philadelphia in 1954; Columbia University presented a special program honoring Schütz in 1935.) If the comments of the participants are any indication, the 28th Festival made some important strides toward a better understanding of the music of Schütz among American choral musicians.

— Ray Robinson

Los Angeles — Giulini conducting the Brahms *Requiem.* The very thought conjures up the specter of scaling musically Olympian heights. A conductor noted for revelatory readings of the standard repertoire surveys a choral monument of the nineteenth century, assisted by *his* orchestra, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the Los Angeles Master Chorale; one's expectations soar. The four later October performances before Music Center Audiences did not disappoint.

The Maestro remained, more or less, at arm's length from both performers and composition, seeming at times almost aloof though not disinterested in the proceedings before him. He did what any sensible conductor in those circumstances should do, namely, simply let the work unfold with all deliberation, sympathy, and unhurried finesse. The result was thrilling Brahms styling from first to last. As audiences have come to expect from Giulini, there were no artificially pumped up and thundering climaxes. His reading was characterized by moments of controlled passion and inexorable tension and release.

Beginning "Denn alles Fleisch" with a surprisingly brisk tempo, Giulini convincingly stressed the optimistic side of life's transitory nature instead of the doom and grim foreboding so often witnessed at this point. Upon arriving at the fugato on "Die Erlöseten des Herrn" of the second movement, the Master Chorale provided musical textures of perfectly transparent cast. Counterpoint!

As Giulini raised his arms to provide the downbeat for the third movement, the bridge on a viola collapsed with a rather startling smack, whereupon the conductor paused long enough for another instrument to be passed forward to the unfortunate player and things proceeded without mishap. (One player, of course, in the last viola desk sat out the remaining four movements listening from one of the best seats in the house.)

Baritone Siegmund Nimsgern contributed a bitingly focussed tone to his opening "Herr, lehre doch mich." His is an instrument of ample size and soaring baritone resonance. He projected the German text with exemplary clarity. His counterpart, soprano Kathleen Battle, made expressive use of what appeared to be rather limited vocal resources, limited except when soaring to the B-flat on "Traurigkeit" when she made it clear she had been holding back. Whether by design or vocal difficulty, this rather reticent production caused some balance problems between soloist and orchestra. But this was minor indeed when weighed against Miss Battle's assured sense of phrasing and floatingly expressive vocal line.

Between these two sections featuring soloists, the chorus lovingly intoned the fourth movement "Wie lieblich sind deine Wohnungen" almost in the style of choral lieder.

The entire evening displayed the pristine choral diction of the Master Chorale impeccably prepared by Roger Wagner. Seldom does one hear uniform vowels, diphthongs, consonants crisp or refined, depending upon the context, as produced by this chorus. The waltz-like "Hölle, wo ist dein Sieg!" never deteriorated, as is so often the case, to a pseudo-liebeslieder character; again, restraint, conviction, and assuredly controlled expression.

In sum, this performance provided Los Angeles listeners with the long awaited moment of choral truth that had been anticipated since the arrival of Mr. Giulini before the Los Angeles Philharmonic. As chronicled in these pages in the past, the previous encounters between Giulini and works such as the Verdi *Requiem* or Haydn's "Nelson" Mass have inevitably left something wanting. However, this combination of Brahms, Giulini, and superb orchestra, chorus and soloists provided a dimension of musical meaning rarely encountered under even the best of circumstances.

* * *

Young British conductor Simon Rattle felicitously paired the *Stabat Mater* of Karol Szymanowski with Gustav Mahler's Symphony No. 2 ("Resurrection") in one of the most satisfying programs of the Los Angeles Philharmonic 1982-83 season. Assisted by Roger Wagner's Los Angeles Master Chorale, the orchestra's principal guest conductor ventured into the realm of choral-orchestral literature for the first time in this city. The lyrical musical style comes easily to him, although he has yet to learn that a choral *fortissimo* is not the equal of an orchestral one.

By turns reverent, fervent, and dramatic, the *Stabat Mater* remains an unjustifiably neglected work. The technical demands upon orchestra, chorus, and soloists are moderate; one wonders why it is not performed more often. The first of the six movements, for soprano solo and women's voices, opens with orchestral underpinning of harmonically vague polyphony alternating with parallelisms containing judiciously placed dissonances. Phrases for women's voices ("O quam tristis et afflicta") are strongly reminiscent of Ravel. Alison Hargan unsteadily intoned the simple soloistic incantations (her vocal indisposition the previous evening had caused the cancellation on that concert of the *Stabat Mater*). The more dramatic second movement ("Quis est homo") resulted in balance problems between soloists, chorus, and orchestra. One suspects that had Rattle placed the soloists in front of the choir to the rear of the orchestra, as he did later for the Mahler, he would have had a clearer sense of balances in this piece. Douglas Lawrence poured out a considerable amount of

resonant baritone only to be overwhelmed by orchestra and chorus at climactic points.

The third movement ("Eja Mater, fons amoris!") recalls the relatively sparse musical texture of the opening. Choral homophony resembling that of the late Renaissance marks the fourth section ("Fac me vere tecum flere"). After a shaky *a cappella* start, this movement provided the most affecting moment in the work, with its alto solo beautifully spun out by the consistently excellent Florence Quivar. The performance was finally ignited by Rattle in the fifth movement. Opening with the choral *parlando* ("Virgo, virginum praeclara"), clarity of words no longer seemed essential, nor was it probably intended. The effect of verbal agitation led to the incendiary "Flammis ne urar succensus," whereupon choral, solo, and orchestral forces combined in forceful summons of the Virgin. The final section, a supplication to Christ ("Christe, cum sit hinc exire"), provided a breathless finish in which nearly ten seconds elapsed before anyone in the audience dared break the silence with applause. While not without its flaws, this was a performance that penetrated to the core of a choral work one hopes to encounter with greater frequency in the future.

The Los Angeles Philharmonic is clearly at a crisis point with respect to its guest conductors. When Music Director Carlo Maria Giulini is on the podium, this ensemble rises to heights that are matched by few orchestras today. When led by the procession of guest conductors that make up the bulk of the symphony season, lackluster presentations seem to be the rule rather than the exception. Simon Rattle frequently faces an orchestra that seems distracted, or plays dutifully but halfheartedly. Such was the case on this program with the Mahler symphony. Rattle worked energetically to arouse the ensemble from its lethargy, but seldom succeeded.

Fortunately, soloists and chorus did not need extra coaxing. Miss Quivar provided a ravishing tone and sense of vocal line in her "O Röschen rot." The chorus, after sitting for nearly an hour into the piece, began its "Aufersteh'n wirst du" with hushed, almost inaudible tone and built a musical line of handsome dimensions. Rattle seemed to be deliberately sacrificing intelligibility of text to matters of sonorous effect, but nothing was lost in the exchange.

With soloists stationed in front of the chorus, balance problems encountered earlier were alleviated. The Master Chorale, singing, as always, with the enthusiasm of amateurs and the finish of professionals, made Rattle's job simpler and yet dramatically effective. This is a case where an orchestra stands to learn something from a chorus.

—Jerome S. Kleinsasser

Report from Hungary

Budapest — There is, I must confess, something slightly unnerving in discovering that a treasured part of one's personal life has passed into the domain of public history. Twenty years ago I was in regular communication with Zoltán Kodály — in person in Budapest and London, or by correspondence — and thereby learning to appreciate the subtleties of a simple man and the simplicities of a subtle mind that were the constituents of a particular form of genius. And now, in December, 1982, the vibrant past — for me a continuing present — is pinned down to the musicological clip-board — borne into the daily conference promptly at 9 o'clock for five days — or elegantly exhibited in some of the showcases collecting the career of the subject of celebration. The moment of unease is when among the objects exhibited one notices fragments of one's self — a facsimile of a letter once received and replied to; even a reproduction of the title page of one's own study of the master. Do we not, I am bound to ask, become too severe in our centenary, bicentenary, tercentenary celebrations, so that the composer of the year becomes an adult's replacement for the child's "Superman"?

The headquarters of the Budapest International Kodály Conference were in the Academy of Sciences with which Kodály himself had been so intimately connected, and where the most significant scholarly work in respect of folk music has been accomplished across the years of this troubled century.

Kodály, I remember, had a powerful and penetrating sense of logic. But it was balanced by a persistent and critical sense of humor. Between these virtues lay the belief that what mattered most of all was the preservation of the integrity of those values of civilized living that once or twice in history seemed to be held in common by those who stood where art and science meet. Among those values was the sanctity of the free spirit.

There were at the Budapest Conference a number of those who had known Kodály intimately, and in the margins of the occasion, shared confidences and reminiscences revived the realities that are so vital to understanding the work of an artist — and so elusive. I wonder, do musicological courses include compulsory sessions of "creative conversation"?

More than any other composer of modern times, Kodály believed in the power of the word. Thought is shaped in language, and language, being *ab initio* one part of music, can be raised to higher levels of meaning through extension of its own inner musicality. Kodály's works — whether vocal or instrumental makes no essential

difference — begin in the folk music he did so much to redeem, and, simultaneously, in the whole broad tradition of western European art music. On the one hand are the early chamber music and the miraculously evocative *Summer Evening* and "Peacock" Variations; on the other, the spread of choral masterpieces from the *Psalmus Hungaricus* to the *Missa brevis,* and *Háry János.* The *Psalmus,* in particular, is a prophetic work; *Háry János* is a true *Singspiel* comedy — the wit and wisdom of the *Simplicissimus* from Transdanubia.

In Hungary virtually the whole of Kodály's *oeuvre* was exposed across the centennial year, so that the celebrated version of the Puppet Theatre interpretation of *Háry János* (which we saw in an earlier version ten years ago in Budapest) escaped our sojourn. The *Psalmus* was the culmination of the Conference, concluding a gala concert given in the Academy of Music (where Kodály also had roots) by the Hungarian Radio Choir and the State Symphony Orchestra, conducted by János Ferencsik. This program included the "Peacock Variations," and a group of *a cappella* works of which *Jesus and the Traders* was the most prominent. It is, one might observe, unusual for virtuoso conductors to direct unaccompanied choral works — from which fact one many draw such conclusions as seem appropriate. Among them, however, reposes the certitude that Kodály did not think too highly of those who were unskilled in vocal music.

This is where we arrive at musical education, to which, properly, a great deal of attention was paid at the Conference. One of the outstanding events was an evening of choral works performed by the choirs of two Primary Music Schools and a chamber choir of somewhat more senior students. The recipe for success, as is well known but (in the world at large) too seldom used, is a daily dose of sight-reading based on sol-fa. As well, there is needed that kind of spiritual faith in the music and the choir director that so distinguishes the world of Kodály. The performances of those young singers in the Congress Hall of the Academy of Sciences was ravishing. Together with pieces by Kodály there were three specially commissioned works from Akira Miyoshi, of Tokyo, Sándor Szokolay (President of the Hungarian Kodály Society), and Peter Maxwell Davies.

On another day there was an excursion to Kecskemét, Kodály's birthplace, where now is his principal memorial: the Kodály Institute. Housed in a restored Franciscan monastery, this is part museum, part conservatory. Here we heard folk song in the raw, brought down from the Matra mountains and from across the Great Plain by village musicians. One very old lady had been among those who had provided traditional songs to Kodály's collection many years ago. All this was a distinctly rude shock: for the musician of the present, living in a western land, it is practically impossible to relate the fundamentals of musical experience to the apparatus with which he is encumbered.

We also heard a music lesson in the Kodály Primary Music School which adjoins the Institute. Here one feels a little too much of perfection. There are two points to be remembered in connection with teaching: first, that it is a bad lesson if the class makes no mistakes; second, there is something seriously amiss when there are no opportunities for pupils to ask questions. The children of Kecskemét were all perfection, but for that there is too high a price to be paid. The Kodály Method — of which numerous devotees from various parts of the English-speaking world were present — tends, perhaps, to be a thing apart — even a cult. And the ideal end-product is taken to be a *girls'* choir.

Justly praised in his lifetime as educationist, Kodály conceived of education as a whole of which music is an essential and undetachable part. A splendidly chosen exhibition concerning his life was on view in the National Museum at one end of the Castle complex in Buda. In the Europe Park at the other end of this historic part of the city (the jubilee of whose federation with Pest in 1923 was the occasion for the commissioning of the *Psalmus Hungaricus)* a new statue of Kodály was unveiled. It is symbolic that this sculpture, showing the composer in old age, seated, with closed eyes, should stand here. It was almost exactly on this spot that the last Turkish ruler of Hungary was defeated in 1686. In celebration of this liberation, the *Budavari Te Deum* was composed by Kodály in 1936. There is a particular kind of actuality in Kodály's choral music, the performance of which is greatly assisted by a knowledge of the historic circumstances that turned him into the composer he became.

—Percy M. Young

Recent Records

J.S. BACH: *Mass in B Minor.* Nelson, Baird, Dooley, Hoffmeister, Opalach; The Bach Ensemble, Joshua Rifkin. Nonesuch digital 79036 (2 discs).

This is the all-solo-voice (no chorus) performance of the Mass that for a time turned the musicological world upside down, from which position it has hopefully since righted itself. This was a large tempest in a pretty shallow teapot, if you ask me.

I toss in here only a few non-musicological remarks that may make some common sense. Recorded performances, as documents of music, are indeed fixed for a given disc release (though astonishing alterations may be made in a later reissue that goes back to the master tapes and may include adjusted acoustic surround). But live music is necessarily flexible, to conform to the moment, and never more so than in Baroque practice. The exigencies — good or bad — are *always* with us, in the performers, in their instruments, in the acoustics, the weather, even the audience. We adapt, and the show goes on. I suspect that Handel would have produced a (live) *Messiah* with no chorus at all at the proverbial drop of a hat, if the situation required it! Moreover, he would have done his usual ingenious adaptations to make the most of it, we can be sure.

Sorry, but this is a very dull performance to have caused so much furor. OK — so we use solo voices throughout; would it not seem logical to match them up in vocal quality — for a recording, at least — so that the ensemble might blend? It doesn't. These vocal instruments are so different that with the best intentions they do not produce the combined sound of the familiar music as Bach wrote it. But more important than the un-blend, which we could take, given a really musical performance, is the callous un-rhythm. This verges on what I once called "freight-car Bach," the jangling, bang-bang effect of freight cars going over a rail crossing. The singers try hard but they are dragged along piecemeal with scarcely time for a breath; the instruments, all authentic, fare the same. And, incidentally, they are drowned out by the loud solo voices in almost every chorus — though this is perhaps a technical problem in the recording itself.

In short, this recording is out to hammer down a musicological point, and that is exactly what it does.

If there are those who agree with Mr. Rifkin, perhaps someone will come forward with a performance featuring the same "mix" but a more satisfactory approach to a work that remains one of the most profound of any in the Western musical tradition, whatever the manner of presentation.

PALESTRINA: *Missa Papae Marcelli;* Motets: *Dominus Jesus in qua nocte, Alma Redemptoris Mater, Pecantem me quotidie; Stabat Mater.* Pro Cantione Antiqua, Bruno Turner. Nonesuch 71407.

The trend towards the use of solo voices for the great choral works of the past (and the wealth of the less great too!) would seem to be primarily a style of our time — an opposing reaction to the enormous choral forces that were the thing from Mendelssohn's day and straight on, indeed, until World War II. Musicology, of course, is invoked, often quite correctly, just as it is to reinforce the trendy use of old instruments along with the older choral music, as though our former *a cappella* sounds were quite out of any present question. Trendiness will always be with us. Yet the consequences are often enough good.

Here is, unquestionably, trendiness — and also beautiful singing. This is a group of eight mature men, two countertenors, four tenors, and two basses, and the sound is not unlike that of such now highly popular groups as the King's Singers. Not "authentic" for Palestrina, unless for some occasional *ad hoc* works without trebles, if I am right — but does it matter? The blend is very beautiful, the phrasing and sustaining of tone is splendid, and the words are faultlessly shaped, as they must be in Palestrina; the result, of course, is unlike any Palestrina you may have heard before, and particularly unlike the usual sound of a modern mixed chorus. Not even very much like the classic all-male British choir, with boys (and now occasionally girls). This extraordinary variety, at least in performances as musical as this one, stimulates the choral imagination.

The Mass is the high point here. The motets and *Stabat Mater* are curiously less interesting in the listening. Not easy to say why.

N.B. One musicological argument is absent — one does NOT use instruments with Palestrina. There are none here.

HANDEL: *Ode for St. Cecilia's Day.* Jill Gomez, Robert Tear; Choir of King's College, Cambridge, English Chamber Orchestra, Phillip Ledger. Vanguard 25010.

No intimations here of solo voices for the choral parts (though there are Handel works for ensemble of solo voices). The two undoubted soloists are backed, at the beginning and the end, by a massive choir and orchestra sound in the best British manner. And the contrast, in this work of the period just before *Messiah,* is obviously a major part of the musical drama, notably in the final number where the soprano sings each noble phrase entirely alone, followed by the entire forces, choral and orchestral.

The English are very, very slowly getting rid of their old-style oratorio solo manner — that heavyweight, loud, almost spitting delivery, so lugubrious and sluggish that the well known "runs" in many older works are either hopelessly smeared, or coughed out for lack of any other articulation. True, this applies mainly to the men and in particular to the old-fashioned oratorio basso. Sopranos in England have their own lovely style — the pure little-girl high voice, superbly accurate in pitch, only marred by the British Trill, which sounds like a nanny goat. The contraltos, too, are excellent, with a marvelously noble style. Yes, it is the men who have been at fault.

The indefatigable Robert Tear is of the old school. He simply does not belong in this sort of performance, with its excellent small orchestra, so easily excelling in the now-required ornamentation. And yet wherever there is Handel, there seems to be Tear as well. Jill Gomez, despite the name, has the classic English soprano voice — tight, true, soaring on high. Are there no new tenors to match?

The King's College Choir has a better blend now between its adult males and the boy trebles than in past years, when the adults were full of soloistic vibrato. It remains a great choir, now improved.

—Edward Tatnall Canby

Recent Scores

The scores listed below were selected from material received by the editor of this column. Single copies are available for perusal from THE AMERICAN CHORAL FOUNDATION'S *reference library at 130 West 56th Street, New York, New York 10019.*

BURT, ALFRED. *Star of Love*; a service of meditations and carols for narrator, choir and incidental soloists with organ accompaniment. TRO (Shawnee Press, Delaware Water Gap, Pa.) (40 p., 2.00)

COATES, JOHN, JR., arr. *Singin' in His Sunshine.* Eleven choral arrangements for mixed voices (youth's or adult's), keyboard. Companion recordings are available: complete performance of all arrangements in this collection by singers and orchestra on LP or cassette; instrumental accompaniment track tape in 7½ i.p.s. reel-to-reel (mono) and cassette (stereo). GlorySound (Shawnee Press, Delaware Water Gap, Pa.) (84 p., 2.95)

COCKSHOTT, GERALD, arr. *My Billy Boy.* English folksong. SSContralto. Roberton Publications, Bucks, England. (7 p., 18 pence)

COHEN, DUDLEY, arr. *Yom Seh Le-Israel.* Traditional sabbath table hymn. SATB. Boosey & Hawkes, N.Y. (8 p., .45)

GEISLER, JOHANN CHRISTIAN. *Glory to Him.* Edited and arranged by Karl Kroeger. SATB, organ. Carl Fischer, N.Y. (15 p., .50)

HAAN, RAYMOND H. *Carol of the Risen Lord.* SATB, organ. Concordia, St. Louis, Mo. (8 p., .55)

HANDL, JACOB. *Repleti sunt omnes.* Transcribed and edited by Cyril F. Simkins. Double choir or SATB, brass. Choir score and instrumental parts are available. Concordia, St. Louis, Mo. (full score 12 p., .80)

HALLOCK, PETER. *Trisagion.* 2 voices, organ, with trumpet and handbells ad lib. G.I.A. Publications, Chicago, Ill. (7 p., .50)

MELBY, JAMES, arr. *Come, Your Hearts and Voices Raising. (Quem pastores;* 14th-century melody; setting by Melby) SATB, 3 wind or string instruments, organ, and optional treble solo or children's voices. Concordia, St. Louis, Mo. (7 p., .65)

MORLEY, THOMAS. *I Am the Resurrection.* Edited by Cyril F. Simkins. SATB. Concordia, St. Louis, Mo. (7 p., .60)

NELHYBEL, VACLAV. *Clap Your Hands.* From the cantata *Blessed Nation* commissioned by the citizens of Ponca City, Oklahoma. Double SATB, piano (original accompaniment for percussion ensemble and organ available from publisher). European American, Clifton, N.J. (16 p., .70)

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SMALLS, CHARLIE. *If You Believe.* From the musical *The Wiz.* Arranged by Roy Ringwald. SSA, piano and optional string bass. Shawnee Press, Delaware Water Gap, Pa. (8 p., .50)

WEILL, KURT. *Kiddush.* (Text in Hebrew only) SATB, cantor (Bar), organ. European American, Clifton, N.J. (9 p., .55)

WILLIAMSON, MALCOLM. *The World At The Manger.* A Christmas cantata for soloists, SATB, organ. Boosey & Hawkes, N.Y. (score $8.00; chorus part .50)

— Richard Jackson

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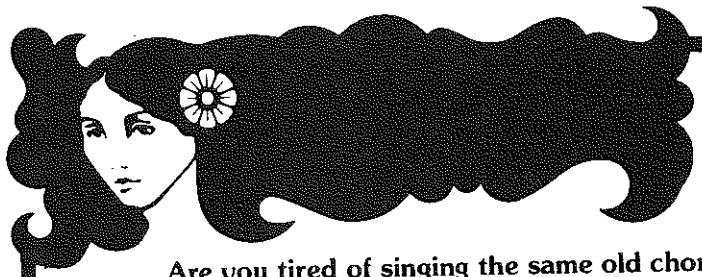

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