



Renaissance Voices

on the plains...

Sonora Borealis suggests the special qualities of light, energy, and serenity inherent in the prairie landscape. Our program centers around pieces which evoke those same qualities. We begin with two Renaissance madrigals; the rest of our program comes from the first half of the 20th century.

Although **Thomas Weelkes** was dismissed from his post as organist of Chichester Cathedral because he was a habitual drunkard and a notorious swearer and blasphemer, he nevertheless composed some magnificent sacred and secular music. Nowhere are Weelkes' outstanding musical abilities more evident than in his four sets of madrigals, which appeared between 1597 and 1608. "**On the plains, Fairy trains**" is a lively, whimsical piece with an almost bell-like gaiety.

Orlando Gibbons, like Weelkes, was part of the astonishingly rich vein of English composers who spanned the late 16th and early 17th centuries. He died at the age of 42 in 1625, having been immersed in the English College and Cathedral scene for virtually his entire life. Known particularly for his music for the Church, he nevertheless composed some fine madrigals, "The Silver Swan" being the most famous. In "**What is our life?**" Gibbons offers an extraordinary setting of the poem by Sir Walter Raleigh, the English courtier, adventurer and poet—a true Renaissance man. Gibbons elicits with such skill the poignancy and irony in Raleigh's profound survey of each stage of our mortal existence.

Charles Hubert H. Parry is probably best known for his anthem "I was glad," sung at several coronations, and for his

stirring song “Jerusalem.” However, he also composed forty-five partsongs, which, along with those of C.V. Stanford and Edward Elgar, restored the reputation of English composers to the lustre of Purcell’s time. “**Music, when soft voices die**” is laden with heavy Romantic colour and symbolism, and Parry provides a suitably luscious treatment of the Shelley poem, but demands a challengingly slow tempo for 21st-century ears. The second partsong on our program is a setting of the Robert Bridges’ poem “**My delight and thy delight**,” a celebration of the wonder and sweetness of life and love.

Few Swedish composers have achieved such widespread popularity, both in his homeland and abroad, as **Hugo Alfvén**, who died in 1960 at the age of 88. His compositions have come to represent the national romanticism in Swedish music. His choral composition, “**Aftonen (Evening)**,” was composed in 1942 and is very much in the Romantic vein. A setting of a poem by Herman Sätherberg, the piece reflects the calm beauty of a sunset.

We conclude with a setting of a 1920 poem, “Everyone Sang,” by the English poet, Siegfried Sassoon, an officer in World War I who was wounded and lauded twice with medals for bravery. His poetry, at times violent, always honest, expressed his conviction of the brutality and waste of war in grim, forceful, realistic verse. In this poem, “**Everyone suddenly burst out singing**,” which generated such feelings of ecstatic freedom that “horror drifted away.” English composer, **C. S. Lang**, best known for his compositions for organ and the Anglican service, has brilliantly captured the mood and spirit of the text in this 1936 setting.

Derek Morphy, conductor

Derek Morphy, a dynamic choral musician, conductor, and adjudicator, sang as a Choral Scholar in the chapel at St John's College, Cambridge, before coming to Canada in 1967. He has conducted many choirs, including award-winning high school chamber choirs in Brandon and Winnipeg, the Manitoba Youth Choir, all four regional Youth Choirs in Manitoba, the Brandon University Chorale, and Renaissance Voices. He is the co-chair of *Podium 2004*.