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Deutschlandradio Kultur

Stille Nacht...

Christmas Choir Music



RIAS Kammerchor | Uwe Gronostay

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 Jesus-Christus-Kirche, Berlin-Dahlem (H. v. Herzogenberg + J. N. David)
 recording producer: Klaus Bischke | Wolfgang Gottschalk | Helge Jörns | Walter Schales
 recording engineer: Klaus Krüger | Geert Puhmann | Hansjörg Saladin | Alfred Steinke

Deutschlandradio Kultur

Eine Aufnahme von RIAS Berlin
 (lizenziert durch Deutschlandradio)

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Stille Nacht... Christmas Choir Music



RIAS Kammerchor
 Uwe Gronostay, Dirigent

Regina Jacobi, Mezzosopran
 Klaus Stoll, Kontrabass

ADRIAN WILLAERT (ca. 1490-1562)

Mirabile mysterium declaratur hodie (Anonymus) 3:45

recording: 22-10-1981

THOMAS STOLTZER (ca. 1475-1526)

Dies sanctificatus illuxit nobis (Anonymus) 2:05

Grates nunc omnes reddamus Domino Deo
(Anonymus) 1:52

recording: 22-10-1981

LUDWIG SENFL (ca. 1490-1543)

Et filius datus est nobis (Anonymus) 1:55

recording: 22-10-1981

MICHAEL PRAETORIUS (1571-1621)

Enatus est Emanuel /

Geborn ist uns Immanuel (Anonymus) 1:29

Musae Sioniae, Teil VI (1609)

recording: 20-06-1974

ANONYMUS (16. Jhdt.), auch Michael Praetorius zugeschrieben

Psallite unigenito / Singt und klingt (Thomas Popel) 1:40

recording: 20-06-1974

LEONHART SCHRÖTER (1532-1601)

Lobt Gott, ihr Christen alle gleich (Nikolaus Hermann) 1:46

recording: 21-06-1974

LEONHART SCHRÖTER

Freut euch, ihr lieben Christen 1:24

Neue Weihnacht Liedlein (1586/87)

recording: 21-06-1974

SETHUS CALVISIUS (1556-1615)

Freut euch und jubiliert (Anonymus) 1:28

Florilegium Portense (1618)

Gloria in excelsis Deo (Bibel, Lukas 2:14) 1:20

Joseph, lieber Joseph mein (Anonymus) 1:38

Florilegium Portense (1618)

recording: 17-12-1980

JOHANN CRÜGER (1598-1662)

Wie soll ich dich empfangen (Paul Gerhardt) 2:19

recording: 27-11-1984

JOHANNES ECCARD (1553-1611)

Übers Gebirg Maria geht (Ludwig Helmbold) 2:43

Preussische Festlieder, I. Teil (1642)

recording: 27-11-1984

MARTIN GRABERT (1868-1951)

Das Reis (Trotz Schnee und Eis blüht wo ein Reis) 3:18

(Käthe Kamossa)

recording: 24-11-1977

HEINRICH VON HERZOGENBERG (1843-1900)

Meine Seele erhebt den Herrn

3:12

(Bibel, Lukas 1:46-47 u. 49) *Zur Adentszeit op. 81, I*

recording: 30-11-1978

CARL LOEWE (1796-1869)

In dulci jubilo (Anonymus)

2:56

recording: 14-10-1975

ANONYMUS / WOLFGANG JEHN (*1937)

Er ist da, Hallelujah (Frankreich, Margarete Rollny)

1:59

Hier liegt das Kindlein auf Heu und auf Stroh

(Holland, M. Rollny)

1:42

Auf dem Heu das Kindlein (Polen, M. Rollny)

1:11

recording: 17-12-1980

Nacht überm Judaland (Schweden, M. Rollny)

1:38

Mit lieblichen Flöten (Jugoslawien, M. Rollny)

1:36

Kommt, ihr Brüder (Spanien, M. Rollny)

1:21

Geboren im Stalle (Schweiz, M. Rollny)

1:18

Macht euch auf, ihr Hirten alle (Jugoslawien, M. Rollny)

1:40

recording: 30-11-1972

HANS FRIEDRICH MICHEELSEN (1902-1973)

Der du die Welt geschaffen hast (Rudolf Alexander Schröder) 1:23

Trittst du wieder vor die Nacht (R. A. Schröder) 1:24

Steht auf und wacht, der Morgen lacht (R. A. Schröder) 1:50

recording: 20-06-1974

JOHANN NEPOMUK DAVID (1895-1977)

O oriens splendor lucis aeternae

8:04

(Ambrosius / Martin Luther)

recording: 10-03-1986

HEINZ WERNER ZIMMERMANN (*1930)

Lobet, ihr Knechte des Herrn (Bibel, Psalm 113)

1:56

Uns ist ein Kind geboren (Bibel, Jesaja 9:6)

2:16

recording: 27-01-1977

ANONYMUS / HELMUT BARBE (*1927)

O Tannenbaum, o Tannenbaum

1:24

(Anonymus, aus dem Westfälischen)

Maria durch ein Dornwald ging

2:15

(Anonymus, aus dem Eichsfeld)

recording: 15-02-1977

JOHANNES PETZOLD (1912-1985) /

UWE GRONOSTAY (1939-2008)

Die Nacht ist vorgedrungen (Jochen Klepper)

2:51

recording: 18-12-1972

FRANZ XAVER GRUBER (1787-1863)

Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht (Eusebius Mandyczewski)

3:36

recording: 07-12-1976

All lyrics available on www.audite.de



RIAS Kammerchor and Uwe Gronostay / Deutschlandradio-Archiv

The Night of Light

The Christmas carols on this CD were recorded by the RIAS (Radio in the American Sector) Berlin¹ between 1972 and 1986. The recordings are distributed over the entire era during which Uwe Gronostay was artistic director of the RIAS Kammerchor. Gronostay, born in Hildesheim in 1939 and trained as a church musician, was active in this capacity already during his school years on a part-time basis in Braunschweig, and on a full-time basis in Bremen following his studies. He proved his suitability for the position at the West Berlin station through his work with the North German „Figuralchor“². With the founding and direction of this ensemble, he emerged as an exponent of a new choral culture. A number of madrigal choirs

¹ Founded in February 1946 by the American Armed Forces, initially as wired radio in the American Sector of Berlin (DIAS), it was absorbed into Deutschlandradio in 1994.

² Not to be confused with the ensemble of the same name founded in 1981 by Jörg Straube in Hannover.

and „Figuralchöre“ (choirs specialising in the polyphonic music of the 14th to 16th centuries) were established during the 1960s. It was often church musicians who provided the impetus for them; they directed good choirs, but they wanted to develop their work artistically, going beyond the technical limitations of the community. They brought together the best singers from their churches to form achievement-orientated choirs engaged in projects. Concurrently with the student movement, the amateur choir scene underwent a forward thrust towards almost professional quality. The sound was orientated towards pure intonation, clear articulation, unified character and flexibility; the highest art and touchstone was considered to be a-capella singing. After the singing movement of the 1920s, which had been partially discredited for having adapted to Nazi doctrines, this was the most important renewal in the culture of choral singing; historically, it took place concurrently with the spread of historically informed performance

practice. In 1973, Nikolaus Harnoncourt realised his first production of Handel's *Messiah* with Gronostay's North German Figuralchor.



The pioneers in high achievement amongst amateur choirs transferred new challenges to professional choirs, especially through the a-capella ideal. With the takeover of the RIAS Kammerchor, Uwe Gronostay involved himself in both areas. Under his direction, the West Berlin Radio Ensemble regained the sound character that fit its name and a strong personnel that could bear international comparison, perfecting

it through exchanging experiences. The recordings on this CD give an idea of the development that the RIAS Kammerchor underwent during the brief decade and a half under Gronostay's direction. This remained a subordinate aspect, however, in the selection and arrangement of the pieces on this Christmas CD. In terms of content, the compilation by Rüdiger Albrecht ranges from the mysterious night in which God's light falls, to songs of praise, narrative and contemplative songs about the birth of Christ and then back to the night – which, in the religious-symbolic sense, also contains daybreak within it. In terms of the history of their composition, the works extend from the Renaissance to the 1960s; mainstays of the Christmas-carol literature alternate with rarely performed songs.

I. From the Renaissance and Early Baroque

The 34 pieces are arranged in three groups corresponding to the various epochs. The large first section consist-

ing of music of the Renaissance and early Baroque periods (tracks 1-13) is followed by a Romantic intermezzo (tracks 14-16); the substantial final group sketches a spectrum of Christmas choral music from the mid-twentieth century. The first part begins and closes with a homage to the city that, in its day, set the standards for Western musical culture: Venice. Under Adrian Wil-laert (approx. 1490-1562), a Belgian, music at St. Mark's Cathedral achieved new heights, serving as a model for his contemporaries and successors. The Thuringian Johannes Eccard (1553-1611), who was primarily active in Prussia after having served in Munich and Augsburg, received important stimuli in Venice – "La Serenissima". He strove towards a simplification of his musical language without compromising the compositional refinements of his time. The Silesian Thomas Stoltzer (ca. 1475-1526) who, after a long period in Breslau, was ultimately appointed to serve at the Hun-garian court in Ofen (Buda), organised

a flourishing musical life there by order of Queen Maria until the invasion of the Turks. Like the Swiss Ludwig Senfl (approx. 1490-1543), he sympathised with the Reformation but avoided any public commitment to Luther's teachings. Senfl corresponded with the reformer, abandoned the priesthood in favour of marriage but remained open to all options for the sake of his art.

The situation of music and musicians after 1520 can be symbolised by an unresolved contradiction. Religious denomination remained of secondary importance for them, despite different emphases in the veneration of the Virgin Mary and in the use of the Latin or German language. Seven out of the first thirteen pieces are sung in Latin; some of their texts are taken from the Bible (track 10 from the Christmas story, track 4 from Isaiah 9:6), some from the liturgy (tracks 1 to 3; 1 is based on an antiphon that was sung in the liturgy of the hours at dawn; 2 and 3 are an Alleluia verse and a sequence belonging to the Christ-

mas Midnight Mass), and others are free verses. *Enatus est* and *Psallite* – both contained in the sixth volume of Michael Praetorius's (1571-1621) *Musae Sioniae* (Zion's Muses) – were disseminated in Latin and German versions, and *Psallite* is even written bilingually, modelled on the *Quempas*. Both pieces use traditional popular forms – the round and the refrain song – thus creating a link between the loftiness of the Christian Annunciation and the popular aspect of the mid-winter celebration.

Michael Praetorius, like Schröter, Calvisius, Eccard and Crüger, was a Protestant; they all belonged to a generation that had already grown up with the new denomination. Leonhart Schröter (approx. 1532-1601) stands for the heyday of musical cultivation at Magdeburg Cathedral; he primarily dedicated himself to adaptations of church hymns in all conceivable forms. Sethus Calvisius (1556-1615), as the Cantor of St. Thomas's Church in Leipzig, had to provide music ranging from simple songs to large motets. Johann Crüger (1598-1662) was principally active

in Berlin, like Eccard; he was known for his chorales to poems of Paul Gerhardt (1607-1676). The selections heard on this CD include examples of the most important genres in which composers wrote sacred music during this period – small vocal forms ranging from simple four-part writing to highly ornate textures of melodically independent voices.

2. Romantic Intermezzo

For Uwe Gronostay, vocal music of this kind formed the basis of all choral work. Unlike other conductors, he did not primarily differentiate between a repertoire for amateurs and one for professional choirs; he was a musician of open boundaries. To be sure, there were different performance requirements for both groups; there are certainly works that amateurs are incapable of performing. Nonetheless, Gronostay laid the foundation for a clear and flexible choral sound – also with the professional singers of the RIAS – by working on the shorter forms of unaccompanied singing. He

expanded the repertoire from that point on; time and again, he used these works for the purposes of artistic examination and inspection.

His interpretations lent greater plasticity and transparency to Romantic choral music. This was just as true of Carl Loewe's (1796-1869) "Stück im Volkston" (Piece in Folk-Style) as of the elaborate, eight-part motets composed by Heinrich von Herzogenberg (1843-1900) to the Song of Praise of the Virgin Mary. The way in which this Graz-born composer assimilated historical compositional methods was largely thanks to Johannes Brahms – as was true of nearly all the composers who formed, with him, Professor of Composition at the Academy in Berlin, the circle of the Berlin Academicians. In their wake was also Martin Grabert (1868-1951), a pupil at the Berlin Academy during Herzogenberg's time. Alongside his appointments as an organist, he developed a rich compositional oeuvre of which nothing is known today. His women's chorus to

verses of the actress and poet Käthe Kamossa (1911-1989) makes use of the antiphonal form which was very popular with Christmas carols.

3. Twentieth-Century Tendencies

The largest group within the compilation consists of choruses composed during the 20th century. Some of these originated in the legacy of the German "Singbewegung" (Singing Movement), which strove towards a musical reform out of the spirit of the old vocal style from the Renaissance and early Baroque periods; others are representative of the experimental approaches of the 1960s and 1970s. Wolfgang Jehn, two years Uwe Gronostay's senior, knew the latter from the Bremen Conservatory. Both studied Protestant church music there during the early 1960s. When Gronostay received his first important position, Jehn sent him his choral arrangements of European Christmas carols, newly composed at that time. Gronostay liked them, performing some of them with the Bremen Kan-

torei and the RIAS Kammerchor as well. As extensions of the repertoire, they accommodated a number of trends and fulfilled certain needs. They expanded the horizon beyond exclusively German songs, thus following a general tendency towards internationalisation that was taking place – not only in entertainment music and music for practical use. Jehn liked to differentiate his choral movements into a main vocal part carrying the melody and singing the text, together with a texture of accompanying voices singing vowels, consonants or syllables. He thus distanced himself from the homophonic regularity of traditional writing without creating otherwise difficult vocal constellations; all his pieces are conceived on the basis of a moderately modern harmonic language. The differentiation between sung and hummed parts corresponded to the relationship between lead singer and background choir in popular music, without Jehn ever stooping down to these styles. In line with the pedagogical reform in music teaching tak-

ing place in schools at that time – part of an attempt to update school music instruction – he attempted to win over the young generation for choral singing with his pieces.

Works by Hans Friedrich Micheelsen (1902-1973) and Johann Nepomuk David (1895-1977) were mainstays in the music heard at church services and concerts during the post-war period. Micheelsen, who directed the education of Protestant church musicians in Hamburg from 1938 until 1961, applied the ideal of "Gebrauchsmusik" (music for use) of his teacher Paul Hindemith to church practice. Of the melodies that he wrote to poems of Rudolf Alexander Schröder, amongst others, three were included in the Evangelisches Kirchengesangbuch (Protestant Hymnal) of 1953. Schröder was a man of the confessing church; this was not changed by the honours that he accepted in 1938 on his 60th birthday from the official functionaries. His poems speak an early Christian, confessional language: God is the highest, no worldly power can

claim His omnipotence. His collection *Die Kirche im Lied* (The Church in Song) was published in 1937. Micheelsen set poems from it to melodies and polyphonic movements in 1938. The three Christmas choral pieces were composed during this time, as was *Die Nacht ist vorgedrungen* (Night has Advanced); the Advent chorale by Jochen Klepper, to which Johannes Petzold contributed a popular melody, is an absolutely indispensable part of today's inventory of church hymns. Uwe Gronostay wrote a demanding four-part setting to it, with the melody in the bass; the vocalises of the other parts sharpen the diction of the text.

Johann Nepomuk David's pre-Christmas motets are the most demanding of all the works of this CD. This master of counterpoint, who grew up in the monasteries of St. Florian and Kremsmünster, taught in Leipzig (1934–1945) as Professor and Academy Director (from 1939); after an intermezzo in Salzburg, he became Professor of Composition in Stuttgart (1948–1963). Herbert Hübner

characterised this Hindemith contemporary as follows: "Whereas [Hindemith and Stravinsky] renew past stylistic worlds out of the spirit of our time, David lives more in the past, in that he brings in the problems of post-romantic means."³ The choral work that he wrote in response to a commission from the RIAS in 1960 underlines this attitude in all sonic modernity. David composed it in potentialization of old procedures, for he interweaves four textual and melodic levels: the early church antiphon for 21 December (*O oriens, splendor*), the Ambrosian hymn *Veni, redemptor gentium* (Come Redeemer of All Peoples / 4th century), its German version by Martin Luther (*Nun komm der Heiden Heiland* / 1524) and a setting of the seventh verse of the first chapter of the Revelation of St. John.

With Heinz Werner Zimmermann (born 1930) and Helmut Barbe (born 1927), Gronostay accepted two representa-

³ Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart, Vol. 3, Kassel 1954, column 55.

tives of church-music life in the political enclave of West Berlin into his choral repertoire. Zimmermann directed the Spandau Church Music School on the northwest edge of the city from 1963 until 1976, when West Berlin was acclimating itself to its insular existence. In jazz and spirituals, he recognised an opportunity to find new forms of musical expression through rhythm, without entangling himself in the contradiction between comprehensibility and modernism. "Thus my motets for mixed choir and pizzicato double bass were written first. As in the rhythm section in jazz music, the double bass was to provide an unswervingly regular walking bass as a rhythmic foundation. I gained a syncopated, free melodic language [...] from the syllabic setting of Biblical prose"⁴ and the accentuation structure of its language. Helmut Barbe, Provincial Director of Church Music in West Berlin from 1972 until 1985, also

regarded his compositional work in connection with his position as cantor at the Nikolaikirche in Spandau. Thus he wrote settings of folksongs and hymns in which the melody was left alone but with its surroundings organised according to his experiences with sound composition, forming a more-or-less sonic sculpture around the main vocal line. For him, as for the old masters, the hymn was an art that was always intrinsically capable of renewing itself, time and again.

Habakuk Traber

Translation: David Babcock

⁴ Lecture given on 25 October 2008 at the Academy of Music in Würzburg.



RIAS Kammerchor and Uwe Gronostay, 1972 (photo: D. Schulze)