

AN AMERICAN MASTER:

The Choral Music of *RANDALL THOMPSON*

First Presbyterian Church of Kirkwood

September 13, 20, and 27, 2020

9 a.m.

George Durnel

CLASS 1

RANDALL THOMPSON

- 1899 April 21. Born, New York City
- c. 1910 Attended the Lawrenceville School, Lawrenceville, New Jersey
- 1920 BA in Music, Harvard University
- 1922 MA in Music, Harvard University
- 1922-25 Fellow of the American Academy, Rome
- 1927-29 Assistant Professor of Music, Wellesley College, Wellesley, Massachusetts. Also 1936-37.
- 1929-30 Awarded Guggenheim Fellowships
- 1936 March 3. "The Peaceable Kingdom" premiere at Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
- 1937-39 Professor of Music at University of California, Berkeley
- 1939-41 Director of the Curtis Institute of Music, Philadelphia
- 1940 July 8. "Alleluia" premiere at the Berkshire Music Center, Tanglewood, Massachusetts.
- 1941-46 Head of Music Division, School of Fine Arts, University of Virginia, Charlottesville
- 1943 "The Testament of Freedom" premiere at the University of Virginia, Charlottesville.
- 1946-48 Professor of Music, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey
- 1948 Named Walter Bigelow Rosen Professor of Music at Harvard
- 1949 August 12. "The Last Words of David" premiere at the Berkshire Music Center.
- 1959 October 18. "Frosteriana – Seven Country Songs" premiere performance in Amherst, Massachusetts.
- 1963 April "The Best of Rooms" premiere at Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois.
- 1968 Retired from Harvard, was given the title of Professor Emeritus
- 1984 July 9. Died, aged 85, in Boston, Massachusetts
He is buried in the Mount Auburn Cemetery, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Alleluia

Alleluia, Amen

The Last Words of David

He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.
And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth,
even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass
springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain.
Alleluia. Amen.

—2 Samuel 23: 3,4 (King James Version)

The Best of Rooms

Christ, He requires still, wheresoe'er He comes
To feed or lodge, to have the best of rooms:
Give Him the choice; grant Him the nobler part
Of all the house: the best of all's the heart.

— "Christ's Part," Robert Herrick (1591-1674)

The Testament of Freedom

- I. The God who gave us life gave us liberty at the same time; the hand of force may destroy but cannot disjoin them.
— Thomas Jefferson, "A Summary View of the Rights of British America" (1774)

- IV. I shall not die without a hope that light and liberty are on steady advance... And even should the cloud of barbarism and despotism again obscure the science and liberties of Europe, this country remains to preserve and restore light and liberty to them... The flames kindled on the 4th of July, 1776, have spread over too much of the globe to be extinguished by the feeble engines of despotism; on the contrary, they will consume these engines and all who work them.
— Thomas Jefferson, Letter to John Adams, Monticello (September 12, 1821)

The God who gave us life gave us liberty at the same time; the hand of force may destroy but cannot disjoin them.

CLASS 2

THE PEACEABLE KINGDOM

I. Say Ye to the Righteous

Say ye to the righteous, it shall be well with him:
for they shall eat the fruit of their doings.
Woe unto the wicked, it shall be ill with him:
for the reward of his hands shall be given him.
Behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart,
but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart and shall howl for vexation of spirit.

— *Isaiah 3: 10,11; 65: 14*

II. Woe Unto Them

Woe unto them that draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as it were with a cart rope!
Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness;
that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!
Woe unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!
Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink!
Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that continue till
night, till the wine inflame them! And the harp, and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine, are in
their feasts: but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operations of his
hands.
Woe to the multitude of many people, which make a noise like the noise of the seas! Woe unto them
that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed
alone in the midst of the earth.

— *Isaiah 5:8, 11, 12, 18, 20, 22; 17:12*

III. The Noise of a Multitude

The noise of a multitude in the mountains, like as a great people; a tumultuous noise of the kingdoms
of nations gathered together; the Lord of hosts mustereth the host of the battle. They come from a
far country, from the end of heaven, even the Lord, and the weapons of his indignation, to destroy
the whole land. Their bows also shall dash the young men to pieces; and they shall have no pity on
the fruit of the womb; their eye shall not spare children. Every one that is found shall be thrust
through; and every one that is joined unto them shall fall by the sword. Their children also shall be
dashed to pieces before their eyes; their houses shall be spoiled, and their wives ravished. Therefore

shall all hands be faint, and every man's heart shall melt. They shall be afraid: pangs and sorrow shall take hold of them; they shall be in pain as a woman that travaileth; they shall be amazed at one another; their faces shall be as flames.

— *Isaiah 13:4, 5, 7, 8, 15, 16, 18*

IV. Howl Ye!

Howl ye; for the day of the Lord is at hand.
Howl, O gate; cry, O city; thou art dissolved.

— *Isaiah 13:6, 14:31*

V. The Paper Reeds by the Brooks

The paper reeds by the brooks, by the mouth of the brooks, and everything sown by the brooks, shall wither, be driven away, and be no more.

— *Isaiah 19:7*

VI. But These Are They That Forsake the Lord For Ye Shall Go out with Joy

But these are they that forsake the Lord, that forget my holy mountain.
For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace:
the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing,
and all the trees of the fields shall clap their hands.

— *Isaiah 65:11; 55:12*

VII. Have Ye Not Known?

Have ye not known? Have ye not heard? Hath it not been told you from the beginning? Have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth?

— *Isaiah 40:21*

VIII. Ye Shall Have a Song

Ye shall have a song, as in the night when a holy solemnity is kept, and gladness of heart, as when one goeth with a pipe to come into the mountain of the Lord.

— *Isaiah 30:29*

CLASS

FROSTIANA

1. The Road Not Taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I —
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

— *Mountain Interval*, 1916

2. The Pasture

I'm going out to clean the pasture spring;
I'll only stop to rake the leaves away
(And wait to watch the water clear, I may):
I sha'n't be gone long. — You come too.

I'm going out to fetch the little calf
That's standing by the mother. It's so young
It totters when she licks it with her tongue.
I sha'n't be gone long. — You come too.

— *North of Boston*, 1914

3. Come In

As I came to the edge of the woods,
Thrush music — hark!
Now if it was dusk outside
Inside it was dark.

Too dark in the woods for a bird
By sleight of wing
To better its perch for the night,
Though it still could sing.

The last of the light of the sun
That had died in the west
Still lived for one song more
In a thrush's breast

Far in the pillared dark
Thrush music went —
Almost like a call to come in
To the dark and lament.

But no, I was out for stars;
I would not come in.
I meant not even if asked;
And I hadn't been.

— *A Witness Tree*, 1941

4. The Telephone

"When I was just as far as I could walk
From here today,
There was an hour
All still
When leaning with my head against a flower
I heard you talk.
Don't say I didn't, for I heard you say —
You spoke from that flower on the window sill —
Do you remember what it was you said?"

"First tell me what it was you thought you heard."

"Having found the flower and driven a bee away,
I leaned my head,
And holding by the stalk,
I listened and I thought I caught the word —
What was it? Did you call me by my name?
Or did you say —
Someone said 'Come' — I heard it as I bowed."

"I may have thought as much, but not aloud."

"Well, so I came."

— *Mountain Interval*, 1916

5. A Girl's Garden

A neighbor of mine in the village
Likes to tell how one spring
When she was a girl on the farm, she did
A childlike thing.

One day she asked her father
To give her a garden plot
To plant and tend and reap herself,
And he said, "Why not?"

In casting about for a corner
He thought of an idle bit
Of walled-off ground where a shop had stood
And he said, "Just it."

And he said, "That ought to make you
An ideal one-girl farm
And give you a chance to put some strength
On your slim-jim arm."

It was not enough of a garden
Her father said, to plough;
So she had to work it all by hand
But she don't mind now.

She wheeled the dung in the wheelbarrow
Along a stretch of road;
But she always ran away and left
Her not-nice load,

And hid from anyone passing,
And then she begged the seed.
She says she thinks she planted one
Of all things but weed.

A hill each of potatoes,
Radishes, lettuce, peas
Tomatoes, beets, beans, pumpkins, corn
And even fruit trees.

And yes, she has long mistrusted
That a cider apple tree
In bearing there today is hers
Or at least may be.

Her crop was a miscellany
When all was said and done,
A little bit of everything,
A great deal of none.

Now when she sees in the village
How village things go,
Just when it seems to come in right,
She says, "I know!"

It's as when I was a farmer —"
Oh, never by way of advice!
And she never sins by telling the tale
To the same person twice.

— *Mountain Interval*, 1916

6. Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farm-house near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sounds the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

— *New Hampshire*, 1923

7. Choose Something Like a Star

O Star (the fairest one in sight),
We grant your loftiness the right
To some obscurity of cloud —
It will not do to say of night,
Since dark is what brings out your light.
Some mystery becomes the proud.
But to be wholly taciturn
In your reserve is not allowed.
Say something to us we can learn
By heart and when alone repeat.
Say something! And it says "I burn."
But say with what degree of heat.
Talk Fahrenheit, talk Centigrade.
Use language we can comprehend.
Tell us what elements you blend.
It Eives us strangely little aid,
But does tell something in the end.

And steadfast as Keats' Eremite,
Not even stooping from its sphere,
It asks a little of us here.
It asks of us a certain height,
So when at times the mob is swayed
To carry praise or blame too far,
We may choose something like a star
To stay our minds on and be staid.

— *Come In*, 1943

Bright Star

Bright star, would I were stedfast as thou art –
Not in lone splendour hung aloft the night
And watching, with eternal lids apart,
Like nature's patient, sleepless Eremite,
The moving waters at their priestlike task
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores,
Or gazing on the new soft-fallen mask
Of snow upon the mountains and the moors-
No – yet still stedfast, still unchangeable,
Pillow'd upon my fair love's ripening breast,
To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,
Awake for ever in a sweet unrest,
Still, still to hear her tender-taken breath,
And so live ever – or else swoon to death.

— *John Keats*

RECORDINGS USED:

Alleluia! Sacred Choral Music of New England.

The Harvard University Choir; Murray Forbes Somerville, Director; 1992. Northeastern Records NR-247-CD

"Alleluia"

"The Best of Rooms"

An American Voice: Music of Randall Thompson.

The Roberts Wesleyan College Chorale; Robert Sherwan, Conductor; 1999. Albany Records TROY 362

"The Last Words of David"

Alleluia: A Randall Thompson Tribute

The Michael O'Neal Singers; Michael O'Neal, Music/Artistic Director; 1998. ACA Digital Recording, Inc. CM20065

"The Testament of Freedom"

Ye Shall Have a Song: Choral Music by Randall Thompson

American Repertory Singers; Leo Nestor, Director; 1996. ARSIS Audio CD 103

"The Peaceable Kingdom"

Frostiana

Exultate Chamber Choir and Orchestra; Thomas D. Rossin, Conductor; n.d. Exultate Masterworks Recordings EX-105

"Frostiana"