

Laughing



The Choir of Ormond College directed by Douglas Lawrence

As every good day should begin with an espresso, so every good recording should begin with something perky. *Java Jive* by Milton Drake and Ben Oakland was originally popularised by The Inkspots, and made even more popular by The Manhattan Transfer. Since then its cool stylings and cryptic lyrics have become a favorite of a cappella groups around the world.

Chili Con Carne is an a cappella song first sung by the Swedish jazz quintet The Real Group. It was written by their countertenor Anders Edenroth. Though superficially it is a prosaic set of cooking instructions, the music is a fun bossa nova.

Goodnight Sweetheart was a big 1954 hit from the doo wop group The Spaniels. Despite its title, it is not a lullaby, rather a panicked “Oh is that the time?” song. Like many modern arrangements, this arrangement features female voices, unlike the all-male Spaniels.

Soul Bossa Nova was composed by Quincy Jones in 1962 and performed by his big band on the record Big Band Bossa Nova. Its upbeat sound has appealed to producers and to the public, with its most famous outing being in Mike Myers’ Austen Powers movies.

Next are Three Elizabethan Part Songs by Ralph Vaughan Williams (1875-1958). One of the songs is by the mystical religious poet George Herbert, and the other two are songs from Shakespeare’s plays. *Sweet Day*, the Herbert song, says that while outward beauty is engaging; inner beauty is lasting and shines brightest in the darkest moments. *The Willow Song* existed in a number of versions before Shakespeare incorporated it into *Othello*. The subject matter of a woman made unhappy by the man she greatly loves fits Desdemona very well, having been falsely accused of adultery by her husband *Othello*. *O Mistress Mine*, from *Twelfth Night*, is in a much lighter vein, and is a good natured attempt to get a lover to live for the present—

*In delay there lies no plenty,
Then come kiss me,
Sweet-and-twenty*

Vaughan Williams’ musical settings match their lyrics closely. A *Sweet Day* evokes the calmness of a beautiful spring day. *The Willow Song* captures the melancholy mood of a dejected lover sitting by a river and *O Mistress Mine*, is whimsical and engaging.

The next piece was written five hundred years earlier in France at the height of the courtly love period. *Dame vailans de prijs et de valour* is an anonymous ballade for three voices; each voice singing a different verse of the text. It appears only once in a manuscript of northern-Italian and French music known as the Reina Codex.

Josquin Desprez (c. 1450-1521) was the most famous composer from the Franco-Flemish school of the high renaissance. *Allegez moi* is similar to the following *Charm me Asleep* of four hundred years later in that it is a smooth, sonorous setting of rather risqué words (“Ease me, sweet, darling little brunette, just below the belly-button”), which all goes to show there is nothing new under the sun!

Next come two madrigal settings from the Victorian era. *Charm me Asleep* by Henry David Leslie (1822-1896) sets the opening lines of a poem by Robert Herrick (1591-1674). The words, perhaps a little bawdy coming from a bachelor-vicar, are smoothly set by Leslie.

*Charm me asleep,
and melt me so
With thy delicious numbers,
That, being ravish’d, hence I go
Away in easy slumbers.*

The music to *Lay a Garland* is by Robert Pearsall (1795-1856), who is credited with reviving the English madrigal with lovely compositions such

as this one. The text is taken (slightly altered) from the *The Maid's Tragedy*, a play from 1610 of Frances Beaumont and John Fletcher, and the music is a rich eight-part tapestry.

Sweet and Low is a setting by Joseph Barnby (1830-1896) of a poem by Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809-1892). This simple, beautiful lullaby has been popular in choral circles ever since it was written.

The German folk tune *In einem kühlen Grunde* is an example of a folk tune where poet and composer are both known. The poet was Karl Eichendorff (1788-1857) and this most famous melody is by Friedrich Glück (1793-1840). As folk singers took up the song it received many small changes. The German singing group The Comedian Harmonists were the best known singers of the song in the twentieth century. This version was transcribed by Jonathan Wallis from one of their recordings. The sad story tells of a broken engagement, and ends with these gloomy sentiments:

I hear the mill wheel going,

I don't know what to do.

I would like to die from love

To once again get some peace.

More cheery is Laughing (Lachen)

by the nineteenth century German composer Franz Abt (1819-1885). Abt knew Mendelssohn, Schumann and Wagner, and had most success with his songs. While the words of this song may not stand up to modern scrutiny

(if "Only men like drinking wine" were true, there would be devastating consequences for the wine industry), it is a fun song for a group of men to sing with their tongues firmly in their cheeks.

Lastly come five Afro-American spirituals. The original spirituals were composed by illiterate slaves, and this oral tradition produced a great diversity in style, even from one singer to the next. Lyrics often contained references to life in slavery, either offering comfort or in some cases references to the "Underground Railroad", a secret network dedicated to helping escaped slaves reach freedom north of the Ohio river. Gradually the songs became more formalised, with more official meetings of the Protestant City-Revival Movement in the 1850s, professional singing groups like the Fisk Jubilee Singers in the last nineteenth century, "boys quartets" such as the Mills Brothers in the 1920s, and solo singers like Paul Robeson. Moses Hogan (1957-2003) was the latest in a distinguished series of arrangers of spirituals, and arranged four of the spirituals on this recording.

Didn't my Lord Deliver Daniel is a lively spiritual that describes how the Lord delivers various Old Testament figures from trouble. The lines

*I set my foot on the gospel ship
and the ship began to sail.*

*It landed me over on Canaan's shore
and I'll never come back no more*

refer to the Underground Railroad and freedom in the northern states.

I Want Jesus to Walk With Me, featuring a solo by Kate McBride, is a cry for comfort during trials, sorrow and troubles.

Calvary is a small group arrangement by former choir member Vaughan McAlley, arranged for an Easter concert in 2001. The arrangement was inspired by the sound of the black American a cappella group The Persuasions, and this performance features tenor Sam Qualtrough.

Abide With Me is not a spiritual but a hymn by the Scotsman Henry F. Lyte. Its tune (the best-known of several) is by William H Monk who composed it while compiling *Hymns, Ancient and Modern*. Whether Lyte wrote it as we are told: three weeks before his death from tuberculosis, or whether he wrote it earlier after visiting a dying friend, the words are a powerful glimpse into the face of death. The music is given the Moses Hogan 'treatment', much as earlier hymns by the English Dr Isaac Watts were sung in a unique style by negroes in the early nineteenth century.

Finally, *My Soul's Been Anchored in the Lord* is a positive spiritual about religion in everyday life. Moses Hogan's arrangement is joyful and exuberant.

Singing can be a serious business. Indeed a great deal of effort goes into striving for perfection in the performance of all classical music. There is however a lighter side to all this. We trust that you laughed with us on *I Can Tell the World*, and now we want you to laugh with us again; well, at least smile a lot. If you don't laugh with the comrades on track 14 you surely need to lighten up.

Many of these pieces have been sung in concert or at parties after concerts. Especially in Germany where we have been hosted many times; choirs love to get together to sing and to laugh. So laugh away, smile at the madrigals and perhaps even feel a little sad with Vaughan Williams and William Shakespeare.

— Douglas Lawrence

LAUGHING | The Choir of Ormond College

move

Jazz, doo wop and bossa nova

- 1 **Java Jive** – words and music: Milton Drake and Ben Oakland, arr. Manhattan Transfer & Kirby Shaw 2'28"
- 2 **Chili Con Carne** – words and music: Anders Edenroth 4'16"
- 3 **Goodnight Sweetheart** – words and music: Calvin Carter, James Hudson, arr. Lachlan Mackenzie-Spencer 2'23"
- 4 **Soul Bossa Nova** (theme from 'Austin Powers') – music: Quincy Jones, arr. Alexander L'Estrange 2'41"

Three Elizabethan Part Songs - music Ralph Vaughan-Williams

- 5 **A Sweet Day or Virtue** – George Herbert 2'24"
- 6 **The Willow Song** – William Shakespeare from 'Othello' 2'10"
- 7 **O Mistress Mine** – William Shakespeare from 'Twelfth Night' 1'15"

Madrigals and older songs

- 8 **Dame Vailans** – anon 14th century French 1'54"
- 9 **Allegez moi** – music: Josquin Desprez 1'51"
- 10 **Charm Me Asleep** – words: Robert Herrick, music: Henry Leslie, arr. the King's Singers 2'41"
- 11 **Lay a Garland** – words: Francis Beaumont, music: Robert L. Pearsall 2'23"
- 12 **Sweet and Low** – words: Alfred, Lord Tennyson, music: Joseph Barnby 2'45"
- 13 **In einem kühlen Grunde** – words: Karl Eichendorff, music: Friedrich Glück, arr. Harry Frommermann 2'38"
- 14 **Laughing (Lachen)** – words: G. Hesezial music: Franz Abt 1'30"

Afro-American spirituals

- 15 **Didn't my Lord Deliver Daniel?** – arr. Moses Hogan 3'02"
- 16 **I Want Jesus To Walk With Me** – arr. Moses Hogan 3'29"
- 17 **Calvary** – arr. Vaughan McAlley 2'46"
- 18 **Abide With Me** – words: Henry F. Lyte, music: William H Monk, arr. Moses Hogan 3'34"
- 19 **My Soul's been Anchored in the Lord** – arr. Moses Hogan 3'29"

Recorded 1999–2005

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