



MAGNIFICAT
My Spirit Rejoices!

ragazzi
Boys Chorus

The music we have chosen to perform on this CD serves to set the scene for the United States premiere of *Magnificat*, by Canadian composer Rupert Lang, which was originally commissioned in 1998 for Canadian Chorus Chor Leoni. Lang explores the text of this traditional canticle to Mary from the viewpoint of Mary herself, a young girl who has been thrust into the role of carrying a child who she has been told is the son of God. Mary, in contrast to the traditional Latin Magnificat settings, sings in English about her very human doubts and fears regarding this awesome responsibility. The men's chorus responds with the traditional Latin text, and at the end of the work, as Mary becomes resigned to her fate, she celebrates together with the men's chorus as they join in a Gloria, now all in English.

The texts of the other works we sing on this recording also mix traditional Marian and Nativity music with music celebrating life through various human experiences. The opening chant, a Gregorian "Kyrie" from Medieval times, is part of the daily recitation of the Latin mass and leads to a setting of "Ave Maria," a traditional veneration of the Virgin Mary by Renaissance composer Tomás Luis de Victoria. "Bist du bei mir" and "Der Herr segne euch" by Johann Sebastian Bach express our trust in God even to death and the very human aspects of love and blessings to family and friends. An extended "Ave Maria" by contemporary German composer Franz Biebl again immerses itself in the veneration of Mary, with an emphasis on the sacredness of her role. As Dr. Wilbur Skeels, friend of Biebl, writes,

"Herr Biebl told me that when he was organist/choirmaster and teacher in the Fürstenfeldbruck parish near Munich he had in his church choir a fireman. It was common for companies, factories, police and fire departments, etc., to sponsor an employees' choir, which often would participate in choral competitions and festivals with other similar choirs. This fireman asked Biebl to please compose something for his fireman's choir for such an occasion..."

For the text, Biebl has chosen to present the familiar Latin prayer "Ave Maria" (the same text that Victoria sets in track 2) three times using a double chorus. The first two times he employs only the first half of the text, but in the third time through he completes the prayer, bringing his setting to a majestic climax on the final 'Amen.' In between each repetition, he added three separate texts sung in unison chant. These chants were taken from a separate daily devotional prayer called the 'Angelus.' "Psalm 23" by the Canadian Jewish composer Srul Irving Glick and Z. Randall Stroope's "Inscription of Hope" are songs of faith and hope in the midst of trials and challenges. Stroope based his composition on a Holocaust-era inscription written in French, discovered on the wall of a cave in Cologne, Germany where Jews had been hiding.

I believe in the sun, even when it is not shining, and I believe in love even when there is no one there, and I believe in G-d even when he is silent.

Retaining one's faith in God even in the darkest of times is also central to Glick's setting of "Psalm 23," whose opening phrase is sung in Hebrew. "To The Ploughboy" is a cheerful celebration of life and work before we return to a very different view of the Nativity scene with the rousing Nigerian song "Betelehemu."

Two selections follow from Benjamin Britten's *Ceremony of Carols*: a soothing lullaby to the baby Jesus, "Balulalow," and "This Little Babe," which presents the birth of Christ as a battle between a seemingly helpless babe and the powers of darkness. As a pacifist choosing to travel to the then-neutral United States due to the political unrest in Europe prior to World War II, Britten rediscovered his own sense of his English heritage and returned to England in 1942 after the United States entered the war. It was during this return voyage, crossing an Atlantic riddled with German U-Boats, that Britten composed his *Ceremony of Carols*, using medieval texts as inspiration. Britten later famously expressed his abhorrence of war in his *War Requiem* of 1961, but here in *Ceremony*, there are already hints of his pacifism. The text of the poem "This Little Babe" albeit "violent" on the surface, in fact shows that the little babe conquers evil through his love and seeming weakness: His "battering shot are babish cries."

Translations and Texts

Kyrei

Lord have mercy,
Christ have mercy,
Lord have mercy.

Ave Maria

Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you.
Blessed are you among women and
blessed be the fruit of your womb Jesus.
Holy Mary, pray for us now
and at the hour of our death, Amen.

Bist du bei mir

If you are near me, I go with joy even to my
death and to my rest.
Oh how delightful would my end be if your beautiful hands
tenderly close my faithful eyes.

Der Herr segne euch

The Lord bless you, now and more and more,
bless you and your children

Ave Maria (Angelus Domini)

The Angel of the Lord announced to Mary
And she conceived by the Holy Spirit
[Hail Mary]
Behold the handmaiden of the Lord
Do to me according to your word.
[Hail Mary]
And the Word was made flesh
And dwelt among us
[Hail Mary]

Psalm 23 (from *Psalm Trilogy: A Song of David*)

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.
He leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul;
He guideth me in straight paths
for His name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil,
For Thou art with me:

Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence
of mine enemies;
Thou has anointed my head with oil; my cup
runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the
days of my life;
And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Inscription of Hope

I believe in the sun even when it is not shining,
And I believe in love even when there's no one there.
And I believe in God even when he is silent,
I believe through any trial there is always a way.
But sometimes in this suffering and hopeless despair;
My heart cries for shelter, to know someone's there.
But a voice rises within me saying hold on my child,
I'll give you strength, I'll give you hope, Just stay a little
while.

May there someday be sunshine, May there someday be
happiness,
May there someday be love, May there someday be peace.

To the Ploughboy

Come all you young ploughboys and help me to sing,
I'll sing in the praise of you all,
For if we don't labour how can we get bread?
Let's sing and be merry withal.

Refrain: Let's sing, sing, sing and be merry withal.

Here's April, here's May, here's June and July,
What pleasure to see the corn grow,
In August we moil it we reap, sheath and tie,
And go down with our scythes, for to sow.

Refrain.

And when we have laboured and reaped every sheaf,
And gleaned up every ear,
We'll make no more ado but to plough we will go,
To provide for the very next year.

Refrain.

Betelehemu

We are glad that we have a Father to trust.
We are glad that we have a Father to rely upon.
Where was Jesus born? Where was He born?
Bethlehem, the city of wonder.
That is where the Father was born for sure.
Praise, praise, praise be to Him.
We thank Thee for this day.
Gracious Father, praise be to Thee, merciful Father.

Balulalow (from *Ceremony of Carols*)

O my dear hert, young Jesu sweet, Prepare thy creddil in my spreit,
And I sall rock thee to my hert, And never mair from thee
depart.

But I sall praise thee evermoire With sanges sweet unto thy gloir;
The knees of my hert sall I bow, and sing that richt Balulalow.

This Little Babe (from *Ceremony of Carols*)

This little Babe so few days old, Is come to rifle Satan's fold;
All hell doth at his presence quake, Though he himself for
cold do shake;
For in this weak unarmed wise The gates of hell he will
surprise.

With tears he fights and wins the field, His naked breast
stands for a shield;
His battering shot are babish cries, His arrows looks
of weeping eyes,
His martial ensigns Cold and Need, And feeble Flesh his
warrior's steed.

His camp is pitched in a stall, His bulwark but a broken wall;
The crib his trench, haystalks his stakes; Of shepherds he
his muster makes;
And thus, as sure his foe to wound, The angels' trumps
alarum sound.

My soul, with Christ join thou in fight; Stick to the tents
that he hath pight.
Within his crib is surest ward; This little Babe will
be thy guard.
If thou wilt foil thy foes with joy, then flit not from this
heavenly Boy.

Magnificat

Recitative

Solo: My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour. My soul has been touched by the wings of an angel, messenger of God. Frightening, yet all loving, stirring, yet disturbing!

Gabriel, Gabriel! What wonders have you wrought in me? Is this all a dream?

Is it possible, Gabriel? Answer me! Return and rescue me from this anxiety deep within my breast, deep within my soul.

Gabriel, Oh Gabriel! You answer not. You have planted deep within me cradle and cross; and you planted within me, the whole universe. For this seed of Truth stirring within me causes me now to rejoice! All generations shall call me blessed.

Mary's Song

Solo

My soul doth magnify the Lord

And my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour!

Chorus

Magnificat!

anima mea Dominum

I. Magnificat

And my spirit now rejoices!

And my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour!

For you have regarded the lowliness of your handmaiden.

Magnificat! anima mea Dominum

Et exultavit spiritus meus in Deo salutary meo!

Quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae

For behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed!

Ecce enim ex hoc beatam me dicent, omnes generationes!

II. Quia Fecit

For you are mighty, for you have done great things for me and holy is your name.

And your mercy is on those who fear you from generation to generation.

Quia fecit mihi magna qui potens est.

Sanctam nomen ejus.

Et misericordia ejus a progenie in progenies timentibus eum.

III. Fecit Potentiam

You show us strength, strength with your arm!

You have scattered the proud!

You have put down the mighty from their seat

The humble and meek you now exalt!

You fill the hungry with good things

Fecit potentiam in braccio suo,

Dispersit superbos mente cordis sui

Deposuit potentes de sede

Et divites in anes

(The rich he has sent empty away)

IV. Suscepit Israel

You have come to the help of your people,

For you remembered your people, remembered your promise of mercy.

As spoken to our ancestors, Abraham and Sarah and their children forever.

Recordatus misericordiae suae

Abraham et semini ejus in saecula.

Magnificat anima mea Dominum.

V. Gloria

Solo and Chorus

All glory to thee sacred thee, one ever-loving God. As at the first, still may you be beloved, obeyed, adored. Amen!

Joyce Keil, Artistic Director and co-founder of Ragazzi, has served as panelist, adjudicator and guest conductor for music teachers and choirs throughout the Western United States. An experienced teacher, she has served on the faculties of the College of Holy Names, Notre Dame de Namur University, Crystal Springs Uplands and Lick-Wilmerding High School in San Francisco. The Lick-Wilmerding choruses have won numerous awards including the Heritage Festival Gold Medal, and placed second in the Prague International Choral Festival. Ms. Keil has served as Western Division Chair of the Boychoir Committee for the American Choral Directors' Association and has sat on the College Board for Advanced Placement Music Exams. Ragazzi, under Joyce Keil's leadership, was cited in the November 22, 1998 *San Francisco Chronicle* as one of the four elite youth choruses in the Bay Area.

British-born **Elsbeth Franks**, mezzo-soprano, has been heard by Bay Area audiences as the alto soloist in Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* and Bach's *G Minor Mass* with the San Francisco Bach Choir, in Bach's *Magnificat* with San Francisco Choral Society and in Verdi's *Requiem* with the Berkeley Community Chorus and Orchestra. Ms. Franks has given recitals throughout the United Kingdom and the United States featuring the music of contemporary English, French and American composers and has also appeared with the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra and Chorale, Berkeley Symphony, Carmel Bach Festival (where she was named a Virginia Best Adams Fellow for 2002 & 2003), Sacramento Opera, Bear Valley Music Festival, San Luis Obispo Mozart Festival, West Marin Music Festival, Rogue Opera, Rimrock Opera, West Bay Opera and Pocket Opera. She made her New York debut with the Mark Morris Dance Group in the role of Commère (*Four Saints in Three Acts*) and in 2004 made her European debut in performances of Haydn's *Harmoniemesse* in Munich, Prague, Budapest and Vienna.

Julia Simon, a native Minnesotan, holds degrees from Concordia College, Moorhead, MN and Westminster Choir College, Princeton, NJ. She studied conducting with Paul J. Christiansen and Joseph Flummerfelt. In addition to directing Ragazzi's Festival Group, she conducts the University Church Choir of Stanford University, First Kids Choir of First Lutheran Church in Palo Alto, sings with Soli Deo Gloria and the vocal jazz ensemble, the San Andreas Singers. She also teaches voice and composes choral music. In her "free" time, she continues her studies in French.

Denis Moreen began serving as piano accompanist for Ragazzi in 1992. His educational background includes two music degrees from Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, and a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from Stanford University. In June 2000 Dr. Moreen retired after forty years of full time music teaching, the last 29 years at Notre Dame de Namur University in Belmont. In September 2000 he came out of retirement and became Ragazzi's Program Manager for three years. Dr. Moreen is currently active as a free-lance music teacher, arranger and pianist in both San Francisco and Palm Springs areas.

Choristers

Young Mens Ensemble

Jordan Aragon, Anthony Berk, Wesley Brown, Daniel Crowley, Timothy Duncheon, Thane Graham, Calvin Johnson, Rick Jones, Aaron Kaswen, Collin Lee, Derek Lee, Alexander MacQuitty, Ted McIntosh, Christopher McMillan, Gus Meuschke, Daniel Miner, Carlos Olmos, Jeremy Ragent, Ravi Ravai, Francis Reynolds, Daniel Schonhaut, Anthony Wang, Jared Wells, Jordan Wells, James Williamson, Daniel Wilson

Concert Group

Daniel Brenzel, Ellis Briery, Daniel Clancy, Andrew Cohen‡ (Assistant Conductor), Tommy Economou‡, Mark Fedronic‡, Mark Jordan-Kamholz, Jesse Kim‡, Jordan King‡, Ian Leung‡, Spencer Mahlstedt‡, Ryan McLeod‡, Harrison Nida‡, Ju-Hyun Park‡, Abram St. Amand Poliakoff ‡ (Head Chorister), Carsten Stann, Nathan Tsai, Jeremy Wells‡, Nathan Wilen‡ (Assistant Head Chorister), Michael Wu‡

Festival Group

Trevor Assaf, Andrew Baltay, Maxwell Coleman, Zachary Freier-Harrison, Kiyoshi Okada, Gregory Owen, Bradford Thorne, Thomas Wade

‡ Concert Ensemble

The mission of **Ragazzi Boys Chorus** is to perform traditional and innovative choral literature of the finest quality that is both beautiful and well-crafted. Applying the highest standards of musicianship, Ragazzi offers a distinctive, rigorous curriculum for boys who seek to learn and value music and fosters qualities such as self-confidence, cooperation, leadership, sensitivity and a commitment to excellence. Our work enriches the community and nurtures an appreciation of music.

Hailed by critics as “one of the Peninsula’s finest treasures” Ragazzi Boys Chorus is one of the San Francisco Bay Area’s premiere arts organizations. Founded in 1987, the organization is a regional center for music education and performance for boys and young men, ages 7 to 18. More than 130 singers from 86 schools in 26 Bay Area communities including San Mateo, Santa Clara and Santa Cruz counties perform a full range of traditional and contemporary works sung in their original languages for both the treble and changed voice. Since its founding Ragazzi, which in Italian means “guys” and is the term used in Italian opera to designate children’s voices, has performed regularly with some of the top performing arts organizations in the Bay Area.

Over the years, the Chorus has toured extensively, including prestigious engagements in Canada, Russia, Eastern Europe, Italy, the British Isles, Japan, Spain and Portugal. In 2006, out of 150 choirs considered, Ragazzi has been selected as one of only 17 choirs from Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, Oceania and South America to participate in the 2006 International Choral Festival in Missoula, Montana, the first non-competitive festival of its kind in the United States. In addition, Ragazzi was selected to be the Featured American Choir at the Pacific International Children’s Choir Festival (PICCFEST), which was held in June 2005 in conjunction with the Oregon Bach Festival. The Chorus has also been honored for the fine quality of its recordings. In 2000, Ragazzi Boys Chorus contributed to the San Francisco Symphony’s *Stravinsky: Firebird, The Rite of Spring, Perséphone* CD, which won three Grammy awards, including Best Classical Album. On its own, Ragazzi has recorded four CDs: *Good News! 10 Years of Ragazzi Singing, A Holiday Collection, Canciones de Alabanza* and this new release *Magnificat, My Spirit Rejoices!*

Producer and Digital Editor: Steve Barnett (Barnett Music Productions, Minneapolis, MN)
Recording and Mastering Engineer: Preston Smith (Perfect Record, St. Paul, MN)
Assistant Recording Engineer: Dann Thompson (Skywalker Sound)

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The production of this recording was underwritten by Mical Atz and James R. Brenzel, Marty and Jim Barrow, Lynne and John McIntosh, Jill and Rick Nida and the Pacific Rim International School.

Joyce Keil, *artistic director* Scott Warren, *executive director*

Ragazzi Boys Chorus 20 N. San Mateo Drive, #9 San Mateo, California 94401
888.RAGAZZI • www.ragazzi.org