From the Editor’s Perspective

March/April 2014

Hosanna, Loud Hosanna! — Mark Hayes

As one of the “Big 3” of the Palm Sunday hymns, this tune has the advantage of having at least a couple of other familiar texts associated with it, I Sing the Mighty Power of God probably being the most often sung. But this Mark Hayes setting is full of fanfare and pomp especially befitting Palm Sunday’s celebration of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. In fact, the first ten measures would function nicely as a rousing hymn introduction, adjusting by landing on a G chord at m. 10. Whatever the use, play the descending arpeggios with a flourish and with a pedal sustained over the entire cascade of notes (until the chord changes!). And follow that with m. 7–10 being somewhat detached and accented. By the way, if a few of the stretches are too demanding for your hands, such as in m. 13 and 18, just play the bottom two notes; we won’t tell and no one will notice. Just revel in playing this magnificent setting of a great hymn tune!

Lead Me to Calvary — Larry Shackley

This selection is the musical polar opposite of the previous arrangement, intended to be simple, straightforward, and folk like, so be ever-aware of the Celtic-like feel that Larry Shackley brings to this setting. Never let it feel rushed; in fact, I would probably play it a tad more slowly than indicated, perhaps in a more reflective mode. The tune DUNCANNON is not actually a folk tune but is named after the birth place—Duncannon, PA—of the composer, William James Kirkpatrick. Nevertheless, the simple folk feel certainly captures the reflective entreaty of its chorus:

Lest I forget Gethsemane; Lest I forget Thine agony;
Lest I forget Thy love for me, lead me to Calvary.

Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee — John Purifoy

Although this noble hymn is derived from the Finale to the Ninth Symphony of Beethoven, it is often sung at Easter and, in fact, has had specific Easter texts written for it. But John Purifoy chose to stay with the familiar original hymn title by Henry van Dyke, a noted Presbyterian minister at the turn of the twentieth century. If played at Easter, you may want to use the Brian Wren title, Christ Is Risen! Shout Hosanna! Celebration of life is the obvious message from either hymn, one divine, the other human.

Let John’s setting sparkle with the running sixteenths, while always keeping them unrushed and under control, a particularly challenging task in m. 12 and 32. Those are your tempo-setting measures! And if you can’t resist (as I could not), you may add your own “Bah-dah!” with lower octave B flats at the end! With a flourish, of course!
**Easter Joy!** — Colin Curtis

With a different title, this original work could be programmed at any time. I love the driving energy of the repeated eighths and asymmetric accents leading into the melodically soaring B section. The key: keeping the eighth notes absolutely even throughout. The movement of the RH makes it easier as it follows the accents of the eighths to help you keep on track. I think this is a particularly fun piece to play and exciting for listeners.

**Pie Jesu** — Gabriel Fauré, Arranged by Lani Smith

This is simply one of the most beautiful melodies ever, no matter the musical genre performing it. Originally a solo from Fauré’s *Requiem*, the melody needs to be lifted above the accompaniment as if a voice were indeed singing it. If you have never heard this soprano solo in its original form, listening to it would be particularly helpful, not to mention also being a glorious musical experience. It is particularly appropriate for memorial services when the text is considered.

*Pie Jesu, Domine, Merciful Lord Jesus,*
*Dona eis requiem.* *Grant them rest.*

**At the Lamb’s High Feast** — Terry Osman

This selection is no doubt a lesser-known hymn, but it is found in some hymnals (the Lutheran Hymnal, for example) as a Communion hymn. It’s fairly spritely when compared to most Communion hymns, but that is one of the reasons for its appeal. After all, Holy Communion is supposed to be a celebration of the sacrament. Terry Osman has created an excellent setting that incorporates the style of the late Renaissance/early Baroque period as well as the text of the hymn.

*At the Lamb’s high feast we sing praise to our victorious King,*
*Who has washed us in the tide flowing from his pierced side. Alleluia!*
*Praise we Him, whose love divine gives His sacred blood for wine,*
*Gives his body for the feast —Christ, the victim, Christ the priest. Alleluia!*

**The Risen Lord** — Eugene Butler

Using all of his considerable craftsmanship, Gene Butler offers this Easter celebration incorporating two familiar Resurrection hymns that are intermingled, intertwined, and inexorably linked together! All that, and it’s fun to play, too! There seems to be a surprise at every turn, whether in the appearance of a new unrelated key, a hint of one tune in the midst of the other, or a sudden shift in style or dynamics. This is a great pianistic *alleluia* to any Easter service. It feels like I just wrote a “sales blurb,” but I hope it simply illustrates my personal enjoyment of this piece that I’m excited to share with you!
**Wondrous Love** — Larry Shackley

First massaging the melody into a simple 3/4-meter setting in the style of Satie’s *Gymnopédies*, then restoring the familiar duple feel of the melody for added strength, Larry Shackley’s arrangement amply displays the loving grace of God and the powerful message contained in the text of this beloved American folk hymn from the *Southern Harmony*. This arrangement may be the most difficult piece to play in this issue, at least from a musically standpoint, but it is so worth the effort. Great care must be taken to tenderly caress and subdue the Satie-like chords on the second beats of the A section, as must also happen with the lovely cascading sixteenths under the melody on the second page—not particularly easy in either case, but very rewarding when done well. As with others in this issue, the melody must continually be heard as the utmost component of the piece.

**When Jesus Wept** — William Ringham

The hauntingly simple William Billings melody is treated just as simply—and powerfully—in this William Ringham setting. Each restatement of the melody creates its own musical style, and with it, its own interpretation of the two-phrase text.

*When Jesus wept, the falling tear in mercy flowed beyond all bounds; When Jesus groaned, a trembling fear seized all the guilty world around.*

In m. 34–50, let the repeating D have a subtle pulse and separation; pedal judiciously.

At the end, take lots of time with the penultimate measure, letting the final chord be softly struck, fading to silence before lifting your hands from the keyboard.

**O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go** — R. Kevin Boesiger

I have no idea if composer Kevin Boesiger knows the story behind the writing of this hymn, but this setting, with its mysterious but beautiful discordant interjections, certainly suggests that he might. Let me explain.

The author of this hymn, George Matheson, was blind since he was eighteen years old. In spite of his blindness, he went on to become a great preacher in the Church of Scotland, assisted by his sister, who learned Greek and Hebrew to assist his research. He wrote this hymn when he was forty years old, reflecting on the aloneness he felt on the day of his sister’s wedding. This overwhelming feeling caused him, as he described, “...severe mental suffering. The hymn was the fruit of that suffering.”

Now (dare I say it and reveal my age), the rest of the story.

Some have proffered that the suffering that was consuming Matheson as he wrote the hymn was his remembering the time when his fiancé broke their engagement after learning he would soon become
blind. Perhaps the marriage of his devoted sister represented another desertion. He would once again be left alone.

In any case, Matheson had discovered a love that would not let him go and wrote about that love in this hymn. In much the same way, after some softly discordant chords interrupting this reassuring melody, Kevin resolved this setting with a beautifully sonorous C-Major chord, reassuring us of the same love this hymn describes.