

The Music of Keith Bissell

Handwritten musical score for "Kyrie Eleison" in D major, 4/4 time. The score consists of five staves. The first four staves are vocal parts (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) and the fifth staff is for piano accompaniment. The lyrics are "KY - RI - E E - LE - I - SON, KY - RI - E". Dynamics include *mf* and *mp*. The score is handwritten and includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and bar lines.

(A tribute to the composer to mark his retirement
as Co-ordinator of Music for the Scarborough Board of Education)

The Cathedral Church of Saint James,
Tuesday, June 1st, 1976

Programme

ST. SIMON'S CHOIR

Choirmaster: Edgar Hanson

Christ, Whose Glory Fills the Skies
Missa Brevis: Kyrie, Sanctus, Benedictus, Agnus Dei
From Everlasting to Everlasting (for Choir and Brass Quintet)

Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God.

For all our days are passed away in Thy wrath; we spend our years as a tale that is told.

Even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God.

(from Psalm 90)

THE CHAMBER PLAYERS OF TORONTO

Director: Victor Martin
Divertimento for Strings
Andante and Allegro (for Strings and Oboe Solo)
Soloist: Melvin Berman

ORGAN

Sonata II for Organ
Organist: David Smith

SOPRANO, FLUTE and PIANO

Overheard on a Saltmarsh

Treble: Yves Abel
Flute: Fiona Wilkinson
Piano: David Smith

Nymph, nymph, what are your beads?
Green glass, goblin.

Why do you stare at them?

Give them me.

No.

Give them me, give them me.

No.

Then I will howl all night in the reeds,
Lie in the mud and howl for them.

Goblin, why do you love them so?

They are better than stars or water,
Better than voices of winds that sing,

Better than any man's fair daughter.

Your green glass beads on a silver ring.

Hush, I stole them out of the moon.

Give me your beads, I want them.

No.

I will howl in a deep lagoon
for your green glass beads,

I love them so.

Give them me.

Give them.

No.

Harold Munro

THE TORONTO BOY'S CHOIR

Musical Director: Edgar Hanson

Three Songs in Praise of Spring (for SSAA, piano, percussion)

Spring Goeth All in White (*Robert Bridges*)

Loveliest of Trees (*A.E. Housman*)

Spring, the Sweet Spring (*Thomas Nash*)

The Tribute to Keith Bissell

Charles Peaker, Mus. Doc.

For the past four decades, Dr. Charles Peaker has made outstanding contributions to the Canadian music scene. Organist, teacher, choir-master, public speaker, intellectual — he is truly a man of letters. Dr. Peaker recently retired from his long tenure as organist of Saint Paul's, Bloor Street, Canada's largest Anglican Church. During that time, his close friend, Keith Bissell, contributed frequently to the music at Saint Paul's, both as composer and as conductor.

The Committee could think of no person so able or qualified to express to Mr. Bissell the sentiments and gratitude we all share.

The Presentations

(a) On behalf of the Scarborough Board of Education and of all of Mr. Bissell's friends who supported this concert:
Anson Taylor B.A., M.Ed., Director of Education, Scarborough.

(b) On behalf of the Province of Ontario:
The Honorable Thomas Wells, Minister of Education.

CHOIR, STRINGS, BRASS AND ORGAN

In Praise of Famous Men (first performance)

(Conducted by the Composer)

Treble Soloist: Yves Abel

I

Let us now praise famous men, and
our fathers that begat us.

The Lord hath wrought great glory by
them through his great power from the
beginning.

II

Such as did bear rule in their kingdoms,
men renowned for their power, giving
counsel by their understanding, and
declaring prophecies:

Leaders of the people by their counsels,
and by their knowledge of learning meet
for the people, wise and eloquent in
their instructions:

III

Such as found out musical tunes, and
recited verses in writing:

IV

Rich men furnished with ability, living
peaceably in their habitations:

V

All these were honoured in their
generations, and were the glory of their
times.

VI

And some there be, which have no memorial;
who are perished, as though they had never
been. But these were merciful men, whose
righteousness hath not been forgotten.
Their bodies are buried in peace,
(Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine)
but their name liveth for evermore.

The Artists

St. Simon's Choir

Edgar Hanson, *Organist and Choirmaster*
David Smith, *Organist*

The Toronto Brass Quintet

Musical Director: Lawrence House

The Chamber Players of Toronto

Violins:

<i>Director:</i> Victor Martin	Clara Schranz
Noriko Martin	Elaine Sargous
Rosalie Zelonka	Patricia Shand
William Biddell	Yuriko Takano

Violas:

Donald Wasilenko
Baird Knechtel
Leonard Odynski

Cellos:

Nelson Dempster
Carol Gibson

Bass:

Joel Quarrington

Oboe:

Melvin Berman

Flute:

Fiona Wilkinson

Percussion Players:

Jerry Ronson
David Kent

The Toronto Boy's Choir:

Musical Director: Edgar Hanson
Accompanist: David Smith

Programme Notes

'Christ, Whose Glory fills the Skies', a short motet written about twelve years ago, has gained favour with many church choirs.

The **'Missa Brevis'** was written for Frank Daley and his St. Andrew's Choir of Scarborough. It follows, in Latin, the common abbreviated form of the Mass.

'From Everlasting to Everlasting' was commissioned by Edgar Hanson and first performed by the St. Simon's Choir at the annual conference of the RCCO in Toronto, 1975. It is a free treatment, for Choir and Brass, of selected words from Psalm 90.

'Divertimento for Strings' was written for the Hart House Orchestra conducted by Boyd Neel, and first performed by that orchestra in 1965. The three movements are purely subjective impressions of three cities, Budapest, Salzburg and London, visited by the composer during the previous summer.

'Andante and Allegro for Strings and Oboe' was written especially for this occasion.

'Sonata II for Organ' is one of three such works inscribed to different Canadian organ recitalists. Number I was dedicated to Dr. Charles Peaker, Number III to Mr. Barry Cabena, and this one was dedicated to, and first performed by Mr. Douglas Bodle. It follows the traditional three-movement sonata form.

'Overheard on a Saltmarsh' was the result of a commission for the Toronto soprano, Esther McKay. This setting underlines the strange, improvisatory quality of Harold Munro's poem.

'Three Songs in Praise of Spring'. Robert Bridges, A.E. Housman, and Thomas Nash each celebrates a particular aspect of the piano, with percussion instruments introduced in the first and third pieces to give added colour and rhythmic vitality to the exuberant texts.

'In Praise of Famous Men'. Rulers, leaders of the people, poets and musicians and rich men are all praised in appropriate terms. They were honoured in their generations, and were the glory of their times. But the highest praise is reserved for those who have no memorial — merciful men, whose righteousness hath not been forgotten. Written for this occasion, 'In Praise of Famous Men' employs the combined forces of choir, soloist, organ, brass and strings. The text used is from Ecclesiasticus, Chapter 44 of The Apocrypha.

Keith Warren Bissell

Keith Bissell was born in Meaford, Ontario, in 1912. The family moved to Toronto in 1920, and he was educated at primary and secondary schools in Toronto, most notably at Runnymede Collegiate Institute where he first demonstrated his talent as a composer and, peripherally, his skill *con agilità* on the football field.

He began his teaching career in 1934, rapidly becoming a specialist in music. In the late 'thirties he began his studies in composition with Leo Smith, which continued throughout the 'forties; and in 1942 he took the degree of *Mus. Bac.* at the University of Toronto. For the last twenty-five years he has played a leading role in music education in Canada, first at Edmonton, where he was Supervisor of Music for the schools from 1948 to 1955, and since then at Scarborough, where he has been Chief Supervisor and Co-ordinator of Music for the Board of Education. His great interest in the teaching of music to children and young people has permeated many of his activities: his study of the methods of Carl Orff, whom he visited in the early 'sixties; his presidency, from 1970 to 1972, of the National Youth Orchestra. It has also influenced his work as a composer. He has described his music, in Hindemith's term, as *Gebrauchsmusik*, that is, as music designed to meet the particular needs of groups in Church and School. His designation of his music in this way is a modest means of declaring his distaste for doctrinaire coteries and precious professionalism. For him, music and literature are closely interrelated; the poet and the composer work together to create a single world of meaning and emotion. Such a world emerges, for instance in his setting of poetic passages in Ernest Buckler's *Oxbells and Fireflies*, and in his *St. Luke's Passion*, where a contemporary idiom interpenetrates a traditional approach.

His compositions cover a wide spectrum. Besides the numerous settings of texts, he has written work for chamber groups and orchestras, and three sonatas for organ. His work as educator and as composer is of a piece, each dominated by a belief that music is a great humanizing force; and that delight and discipline, the old and the new, sound and meaning, are indissolubly linked.



Keith Bissell

Composers of Keith Bissell's stature are magicians. The notes of music, before they're struck, exist only in the blind realm of the unrealized. How then can the composer voyage there and bring back with him precisely those notes — and only those — which can be linked together to make a triumphant sound? It's by the gift of something more mysterious even than the instinctual, and Keith Bissell possesses that gift consummately. It's what makes his work seem inevitable.

Now I know little about music, but I think I know something about men. And I know that Keith Bissell is not only a man of partitas but a man of parts. Each of them is as valid and without dilution as the other. And (though I risk his wrath to say this, because he abhors anything that smacks of the stuffingly fulsome, as if it were a species of taxidermy) each feature of his variform "persona" is built upon a bedrock integrity, like the armature of a sculpture.

In her one intelligible sentence, Gertrude Stein once said of someone she knew: "There is no there there." By which she meant, I suppose: He has no inner defining landscape, no inner *signature* of who he is. No one could ever say that of Keith's unique individuality. No one could ever mistake him for anyone else. In Keith, there certainly is a wealth of "thereness" *there*. And I'm prepared to swear to that on a stack of fortissimos!

Ernest Buckler