

Lupine Music

The Urth list — 2 messages, 2 voices, 26 Feb 2002

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James Jordan — 26 Feb 2002, 02:59

While we're briefly on the subject of music, church and otherwise:

1. My claim that the Lutheran tradition has produced the most good hymns was not a comment on current hymnals, which are all smorgasbords. The modern Anglican and Methodist are quite good, as is the Christian Reformed Psalter/Hymnal (which has the added advantage of the French/Genevan and Dutch traditions) -- but many of the hymns in these books that people consider the richest are in fact Lutheran in origin -- and there's a reason for this. There's good stuff in all traditions, from Sarum Chant to Black Gospel. There was, however, a certain "peak" of hymnody, both musically and textually, in the late Renaissance and early Baroque in the Lutheran areas of Yerp -- not in the Catholic areas, because they were stuck with earlier plainsong, and not in Calvinism, because they sang only psalms. And I mean pre-Bach. Bach is too rich for true congregational hymnody, and he straightens out the original jazzy rhythms. I'll get to Wolfe, but for the interest of the few: Luther was a musician himself, and an excellent poet. He set in motion a church tradition that prized musicians more than any other tradition had done before or since. The results were predictable over the next century and a half. These were educated and trained musicians and poets, who had a sensitivity to what congregations of ordinary people could sing -- even if they also wrote for courts and professional choirs. They took folk traditions and Catholic plainsong traditions and moved them up a few notches. If you play the piano, you owe it to yourself to get a copy of the old Missouri Synod "Lutheran Hymnal" (1940) and just play through it. You will be astounded: at the texts, at the melodies and their rapid harmonic motion, and especially at the jazzy rhythms.

But let me remove my "minor in music history" and "Professor of Liturgical Theology" hat, and add for everyone's interest:

2. I wrote Wolfe a decade ago a list of questions, including what kinds of music he likes best. (Jack Vance, for instance, is a fan of authentic improvised jazz.) I wondered if Ockeghem, or Bach, or Mozart, or Shostakovich, or Messiaen, or bluegrass, or Gregorian chant, or what? (I didn't bother to ask about rock; I'd read enough Wolfe already). He replied that he favors filk, and that was his hobby music. So, SF all the way when it comes to old Gene!

3. Hey! Did anybody see "Futurama" two weeks ago? Leela's first name turns out to be Turanga. Turangalila (pronounced Turanga Leela) is the name of a 10-movement symphony by Olivier Messiaen (an absolutely WILD piece of music, but hardly standard repertoire; a cult classic, so to speak). I was astounded at this allusion. It can't be a coincidence. I wonder if "turangalila" appears in any context other than as the title of Messiaen's "hindu symphony." I've never heard of it, if so. Messiaen on Futurama? Amazing. (No musical quotes on the show, however. Still, my jaw dropt!)

Nutria the Almost-Nutricious

Dan'l Danehy-Oakes — 26 Feb 2002, 18:28 · follows James Jordan

PatNutWrit ...

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Luther was a musician himself, and an excellent poet.

Need I point out: So was Wesley? Probably why Methodist churches to this day have such a strong musical tradition. And, btw, my point about how good the music in Methodist services is (at least in my somewhat limited experience) shouldn't be taken as a comment on the selection so much as on the performance standards of choir, accompanist, random soloists, etc.

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Now, that may be the single scariest thing about GW I have ever heard. Is he also a Sherman-Yankovic fan, we must wonder?

-- Blattid