

Raymond Schroyens

FOREWORDS

1953 **PEACE OF CHRISTMAS** (soprano solo, SATB, piano duet/or organ)

This work was started sometime early in 1953. This song bears all the hallmarks of what would become known as the *Mechelen Cathedral Style*, which in the days when Jules Van Nuffel held the office of Principal of the Institute (1916-1952) came in full swing. This well-known Belgian choir conductor and composer of overwhelmingly ecclesiastical compositions, had himself written similar exemplary choral Songs which I knew and venerated. The accompaniment I added was originally set for piano, but I re-arranged the score for piano-duet.

1961/65 **ADAGIO TRIPTYCH** (SATB a cappella)

In 1959, my wife, Alleine, became mother for the first time. I presented her with a choir composition, based on Timmermans' delightful Adagio-poem "*Maria zingt*" (Mary sings). The somewhat mystical, highly colorful yet unsophisticated tone of the text woke in me the same yearning I had drawn from German composer Hugo Distler which he must have experienced while composing his *Mörike Chor Buch*.

The personal blow following the self-provoked, premature death of one of my favorite teachers drove me to Timmermans' "*Door de neev'len van den avond*" (Through the haze of the evening), a transcendental mood of an imagined journey toward Emmaüs on a moonlit night. This is a song of wondering and waiting.

That same year saw one more unexpected drama when another of my ex-music teachers, Staf Nees, died on the street. This time I found solace in Timmermans' well-liked elegy "*De kern van alle dingen*" (The core of all things). The famous Luther hymn tune "*Mit Fried' und Freud' fahr ich dahin*" (In peace and joy I travel yonder) concludes the cycle.

1962 **I WENT THROUGH THE SNOW** (Gemini 2) (SATB a cappella)

In 1962, the first serious attempts were made in Belgium to create contemporary ethnic folk songs. Examples from our late Gothic and high Renaissance periods were very highly valued and were set as topics for inspiration. *I went through the snow* tells about a man bringing roses to his beloved, but he discovers strange footprints in the snow, leading to her door, "... *and snow lasts only a short while...*" is the conclusion.

In 2012, I made a different arrangement of this song - 'new' being the extension of choral intersections and a complete new melody setting to the second stanza.

1963/69 **THREE CANTICLES** (SATB a cappella)

1963 **The Lord's Prayer**

In 1963 during a visit to my parents-in-law in Birmingham, Ala./USA, I was considering writing a choral work in gratitude for their generous hospitality. At the same time it would offer me the opportunity to illustrate the influence of the (then) New Young German choir esthetics, as they were spreading over Western-Europe, including Flanders (Belg.). At random I chose the text of *The Lord's Prayer*.

From the start the music unfolds on an ostinato bass formula in recitation tone, using the first four lines of the Prayer text. The three other voice parts evolve in chordal style. The same procedure is repeated at the end of the piece, using the concluding words of the Hymn.

In the middle section, a tone language is engaged suggesting a soft kind of contemporary Schütz or Buxtehude or one of their Germans contemporaries .

The Lord's Prayer is dedicated to the memory of Mr. and Mrs. E. Lurton-Selby.

1969 **A voice in Rama was heard** (SS(soprano solo) ATB a cappella)

A terrorist attack on an Israelite school, making many mortal victims among the youngsters, brought to mind the Bible story of the Bethlehem massacre of the Innocents, as well as Rachel 's deep mourning .

The initial short rising motive (with its lowered fifth) joins the doleful sound of the desert wind, keeping its influence going in the complete first section. Follows next Rachel's complaint (vocalized on the Ah-sound), which circles above a subdued, meditative line from the Bible Story and finally leading to complete submission to fatality.

While the last slow tamping of a bell dies away, the wailing desert wind systematically covers up the painful images of repugnance_ and cruel violence.

I dedicated this lamentation to all the murdered children in the world.

1968 **Memorial Hymn** (SATB a Cappella, with several voice part divisions)

The year 1968 was marked by revolutionary and political turmoil. The French president Ch. De Gaulle was forced to leave his post at the Paris Elysée, and in Los Angeles/USA the presidential candidate Robert Kennedy was assassinated exactly five years after an identical attack on his brother, president John F. The hidden complot behind it shook me deeply and painfully. In those days I found spiritual rescue and solace in Ps. 26, and transposed my bitterness into vocal sounds. The dissonances in the first part delivered their earliest liberating results.

The second part (*Glory be*) gave access to a growing positive influence, in which Enlightenment won temporarily from obscurity. For a short moment, the old jubilant Cathedral style in full glory took over from defeat and depression until the sense of reality returned, pushing the original sadness back to the foreground.

This transition is recognizable at the beginning of the third part, being the repeat of the initial opening panel (*Remember, O Lord*).

This music is in A-B-A-form and is written to the memory of Bobby Kennedy.

1980/83 **SIX DICKINSON MINIATURES** (SATB a cappella)

Nobody in Belgium, except maybe a happy few, knew of Emily Dickinson; certainly no one was informed about her poetry. Her manner of expressing ideas and sentences was so precise and carefully combed out that the result was a remarkable verbal tension. My discovery of Dickinson's mastery, plus an earlier promise of mine to bring an industrious small mixed choir - in Alabama (USA)- in contact with the European Choir Sound, lead me to this composition.

The last three poems were written first; some time later I finished the first three and put them before the others. It may well be that I have been one of the very first choir composers in my country to have set Emily Dickinson to music.

1983 **THREE NOCTURNES** (SATB-divided, a cappella)

In 1983 we commemorated the demi-centennial of the poetess Alice Nahon (1896-1933). Nine weeks prior to her death, I was born in Mechelen. In this my native town, Alice Nahon had been Head Librarian of the Public Library and had become very good friends with the Flor Peeters' family, also living in Mechelen..

My venerated teacher and friend, Dr. Flor baron Peeters (1903-1986), world-renowned concert organist and composer celebrated his 80th birthday in 1983.

Another close friend, Denys Dille (1904-2005*) "the Belgian Bartok-specialist", was also approaching his 80th birthday. The two friends, Peeters and Dille, had been mutual acquaintances of Miss Nahon.

For these three elements, I found exactly what I needed: three poems which she had called "Three evening songs", but which instead I preferred to title "Three nocturnes". These could be typified as 'heartfelt sentiments, music of the soul'. They are set in a free-gliding prosody, which I tried to preserve by implying a measureless notation. For that matter the whole cycle is well-soaked in the modal tone system. By means of a dominant homophonic writing, I have tried to fixate the transparency of the picture-like wording.

(* Mr. Dille died at 101 years of age)

1984 **MY LOVE IS LIKE A RED, RED ROSE** (SATB a cappella)

This song on the well-known poem by Robert Burns resulted from a discussion challenging me to succeed in writing a romantic song setting in the style of Brahms' *Liebeslieder* Waltzes. Whether or not I achieved this goal depends on the judgment of the listeners and of the performance of the singers.

In Flanders, *My love* has become very popular among the mixed choirs, but several later arrangements of the piece exist, vocal as well instrumental.

1993 **CRÉPUSCULE [Dusk]** (SATB-divided a cappella)

The poem "Crépuscule" took me through a psychological-emotional period, which due to the ultra subtle poetry by Charles Van Lerberghe (1861-1907), brought healing after my mother's death.

To me, Charles Van Lerberghe created a metaphor of crystal, using a language of mother-of-pearl. The beauty of the three poems selected from la **Chanson d'Ève**'s last chapter – named *Crépuscule*- struck me particularly.

Synopsis :

Eve, personification of evolution and time, experiences all the initiations in life, and is like the mayfly- for a last time amazed and surprised by a most striking event, which is: the ending of things.

The angel fulfills a last ritual:

*" Il souffle la flame, éteint le bruit
Met le silence de sa bouche
Sur la bouche qui sourit..."*

(He blows out the flame, turns off the noise,
Puts the silence of his mouth
On the mouth that smiles...)

1993 **IN VIGILIAM** [At Vigil]- (SATB-divided, soprano solo, treble recorder, violoncello and organ)

A fitting subtitle here would be "Three Broader Biblical Views for the Winter Night", personified by St. John the Evangelist, the Apostle of Illumination. The ruling idea in this cantata is the omni-present symbol of the Light of Wisdom culminating in the glittering "brilliant Morning Star", literally the summit and finale of this composition. Furthermore the well-known hymn tune "How lovely shines the morning star" is almost permanently present in one or other form, and can be heard complete, in fragments, or hidden in the overall harmony.

The cantata is constructed in three parts. The first part depicts David, the shepherd. The second part follows his son Salomon, the king. The third part focuses on the heavenly Jerusalem, the future and completion of times.

These three parts are set in different languages. The first, in Latin, symbolizes the strength and the solidity of the Roman Empire then dominating the world. The second is in the Old Lower Frankish language, one of the many transitory cultures then in existence. The third, the era of hope and fulfillment, is represented by the futuristic but artificial Esperanto language.

1994/95 **GEMINI** (SATB a cappella)

The intention to compose for this sort of co-operative singing came to me while two choirs were involved in a joint performance of one of my more popular S.A.T.B-works. At that moment the idea sprang to mind to compose a "twin"-entity to it, and to similar small vocal works of mine as well. The plan resulted in five double-scored songs, four to Flemish words (1,2,3,5), one (4) to alternating English-German texts. Each pair of songs is based on their contrasting nature. They are independent of each other but can – if so wished – be sung simultaneously.

1994 **THE SINGING SUMMER** (Gemini 2b) (SATB a cappella)

Summer stands for love and playfulness, vine branches and roses; autumn for bygone pleasures and remembrances. However, the very thought that spring and summer will return stirs the heart and makes it beat faster again, notwithstanding the knowledge that nothing will be the same as it once has been.

This song is coupled with *I went to my love through the snow*. While its melody evokes a tone of dismay, the tune of *The singing summer*, to the contrary, produces a positive sound and a hopeful prospective.

1994 **SAD CHRISTMAS LAYS** (Gemini 3) (SATB a cappella)

The cozy, fairylike, joyful atmosphere of a traditional romantic Christmas setting notwithstanding, this day is said to be a day of commiseration with the wretched and the poor, the forgotten ones: a day of compassion, peace and mutual love. The text in this song evokes a picture of what Christmas in many places really mirrors: indifference, incomprehension, lovelessness, fanaticism, greed. The outcome is loneliness and the fall into oblivion.

1994 **STARS ABOVE THE FOREST** (Gemini 3b) (SATB a cappella)

This song might very well stand in as a carol for the Christmas season: stars, trees, woods and forests, elves (syn. for angels), gold (syn. for brilliance and gifts). Bundles of light spread out over streets and squares, and in the air lingers a message about the mystical descending of a word which bears the secret of all creation. One of the most appealing aspects of that secret is to be Love, guardian angel of Peace and protector of Children. Christmas is pre-eminently their feast.

1994 **DON'T WRITE MY NAME IN THE STONE** (Gemini 4a) (SSA + TTBB a cappella)

The mystical impact of the text has largely influenced the Aeolian design of the melody. Both these characters have been tuned to the scope of 'eternity' within which *inertia* makes all consciousness of time and space fade away. The structure of the melody is the same as in its twin-song, so that superposition of both songs is possible, leading to a 7-voice double-choir polyphony.

1994 **BEYOND THE SUN AND THE WIND** (Gemini 4b) (SATB a cappella)

The meditative, slightly metaphysical tone of the words inspired an arrangement on two, strongly influential modal characteristics: the floating melody and a mainly Phrygian harmonization. Both choir settings are practically identical. In spite of its obvious subservience, this setting intends to build up a cosmic vision, while calling on the singers' expression of their deep inner feelings.

1994 **KERS -t- ENTIJD** [Cherry-time/Christmas-time] (SSA or TTB a cappella)

In this suite of folksong arrangements - with on the one hand a number of springtime and love songs, and on the other hand some Christmas carols - a double-focused title covering the whole collection needed to be found. This Flemish title is actually a play-on-words, and consequently not exactly translatable. I decided on *Kers(t)entijd*, composed of two consonant words: *Kersen* (cherries) and *Kersten* (Christmas); the first part symbolizing springtime, the second the Nativity, with the ambulant letter "t" thus occasionally playing a decisive role in the title.

To everyone I leave the pleasure of free choice in its pronunciation. The suffix 'tijd' sounds close to the German word Zeit, meaning 'time'.

1994 **AN ALL SCOTTISH RIDE** - (SATBB a cappella)

Sometime in 1994, I was haunted by two Scottish folk melodies*. Both the text plus my imagination leading me, I assembled a huge clan, gave kilts and tartans, pipes, drums and cymbals, and made them proceed in typical march tempo over the Scottish highlands - the duke of Argyll riding at the head of his army. **The Campbells are coming!**

The 'Campbell' melody dates from 1715. For some time revolt had been breeding among the Scots against British supremacy. By far, the greater part of the rebels were Campbell clansmen. Together with their allies, they attacked the Jacobean rulers of James II, a Roman Catholic king. Finally James was driven out, and a Protestant regime took over.

After some thirty years of skirmishing, another usurper of the crown showed up. His name was Charles Edward Stuart, also known as Bonnie Prince Charlie. With his rebel army he fought local battles, won and lost in turn, but was finally beaten at Culloden in 1746. Shortly after this defeat, a second tune -known as **A Hundred Pipers an' a'**- emerged, remembering the better days when the now conquered could command a hundred and more pipers...

These two songs* deliver the basic material to the whole piece. They tell the listener of the gathering of the clans, of the appearance of the duke of Argyll, and of their marching with Full Music into the battle field.

At a particular place in the score, one can clearly hear the vocal imitation of all the band's musical instruments, bagpipes included. Later, both tunes are performed simultaneously by two separate vocal groups.

The story concludes in a tumultuous clash between the opponents, after which the beaten rebel army retreats and disappears.

* "The Campbells are coming" and "A hundred pipers an' a'"

1995 **IN FLANDERS FIELDS** - (SSAATTBB a cappella)

Doctor-Major John Alexander McCrae (°November 30, 1872) was a Canadian volunteer in WWI. For a while he was stationed near Ieper (W-Flanders, Belgium) where he survived the murderous second German offensive (gas)attack (1915). Maj. McCrae served as the Head-Surgeon at the so-called "Essex Farm", an important British field hospital nearby the battered city.

Three years later, on January 28, 1918, still in full military service, John McCrae succumbed in a hospital in Boulogne-Sur-Mer (Fr), partially as the belated result from the gas attack, mainly to a hemorrhage caused by meningitis. He was buried at the nearby cemetery of Wimereux.

John McCrae composed his now-famous poem "**In Flanders Fields**" on May 2, 1915, the day his companion, close friend and ex-pupil, Lt. Alex Helmer, was mortally hit by shrapnel from enemy cannon fire.

However, the author was rather dissatisfied with the poem and threw it away. An observant fellow-officer rescued it from the trash bin, and sent it to the London Press. Shortly after, it was published in Punch magazine, from where it started its triumphant journey around the world.

1996 **SCHIP AAN DE KADE** [Ship at the quay] (TTBB a cappella)

A poignant text by an anonymous lyrical poet. Seldom has the mystery surrounding death been put into words so calmly, simply, yet so approachably as in these few restful lines.

There is no fear, no excitement, no rebellion, no struggle.

The music makes use of similar peaceful submissiveness, as if the journey to the ship were being guided by resignation itself.

1996 **VOCALIZES** (SATB with piano accompaniment)

While moving from one city to another in 1995, I was reminded of an agreement (rather loosely formulated promise) made months before about my “*eventually writing some piece*” (sic) for a mixed choir, then named *Vocalisa*. To make matters worse, the acquaintance-conductor surprised me by announcing that the performance day was already planned and that the programming was in full progress. This while I was deprived of all my poetry books (still packed), and with my piano still wrapped up in its plastic protection. “*If you cannot sing words, vocalize them!*” I thought, and at once I had a plausible solution to my problem. Thinking of the name of the choir (*Vocalisa*) as having four ‘vocals’ in it, I consequently drafted a four part song cycle, one part for each of the consecutive vowels – O, A, I, A (in Flemish pronunciation oh, ah, ee, ah) and provided them with a suitable piano accompaniment. The entire suite should last about 8 minutes.

1997 **UUT MINNEN HERTE** (*üht minnen härtuh*) [From my heart] (SSAA with celesta accompaniment)

The 13th century Flemish Beguine nun, mystic poetess and writer, sister Hadewych (Hahduwig) 1200-1269, is considered one of our earliest remarkable literary personalities.

Her lyric poetry is akin to the courtly lyricism practiced in the Occitan Love Courtesy (Fr. Cours d’Amour). Her idol is Jesus, whom she –contrary to the French Minstrels (Trouvères)-sings praises to as from a woman to a man.

One can very easily transpose the all-religious aspect in her work to a natural flow of secular amorous unburdening, glorifying the beauty of nature and of love.

The inserted Gregorian citations are genuine, borrowed from the Marian rituals.

1997 **THE LEA RIG** (SATB-divided a cappella)

This choir piece was written in 1997 as a part of a greater project on European Folk Song. I chose Scotland for myself as country of preference, and I also selected this song on words by Robbie Burns for its wit and attractiveness. The Scottish highlands conjured up pictures of pipers and drones. To me it displayed Scottish features and rhythms.

They made the March-like counter-melody grow in my mind. It is used throughout the arrangement, now and then escorting the original folk song, or marching all by itself, even in contrapuntal fellowship, concluding the piece. At the end of the work, it is expected that each of the two superposed melodies be performed by an independent choir section (a few soloists). The speed of The Lea Rig is to be derived from a highlanders-band-march, which is a smidgeon faster than one step per second.

1998 **TESTIMONIUM** (TTBB a cappella)

Five music-loving friends who wanted to sing polyphony together, but did not know much about voice technique or note reading, caused a problem of finding good, suitable repertoire. So I started to compose for them. The opening section of St. John’s gospel had a special appeal for some of them. Here and there, I tried a carefully inserted sound effect, e.g. choir-whispering and declamation. All this explains the extreme simplicity throughout this opus. The citation at the very end of the cycle will not be found in St. John, although it works as the acme to his divine message.

1999 **BEOBACHTING** (SATB-divided, a cappella)

The year 2000 saw the 350th commemoration Bach's death. To help realize this specially intended topic, a new composition needed to be created. For me, this was one of the loveliest projects I was ever asked to participate in.

Johann-Sebastian Bach has been my idol since I was 14. My conclusion was :
I want to celebrate the Master from within our Historical United Netherlands, which he surely must have known.'

To preserve the spirit of the time as closely as possible, I plunged into the poetry of the so-called Dutch Golden Age and selected four poets: Gerbrand Adriaanszoon Bredero, Thomas Arendts, Jacob Cats en Constantyn Huyghens. The clue to the choice of these poets lies in the initials of their last names: B.A.C.H. Moreover, a typical Bach-related-Leitmotiv has been elaborated in each song. The somewhat strange title, *Beobachtung* (meaning Observation) 2000, adds to the mysterious atmosphere. Freely translated it means: *Observation from the threshold of the year 2000*. One will notice that in the middle of the title, Bach's name can be recognized. The two inner songs (nrs. 2, 3) talk about frivolous situations like kissing and cuddling; the enveloping parts (nrs.1,4) sing of deeper emotions, like genuine love and death.

2001 **E TERTIUM REGUM TRES** (TTBB a cappella)

A group of male choir amateurs, acquaintances for whom I had composed before, asked for music set in the tradition of the old *Passionsmusk* (Music for the Passion Tide). Thinking of the example of the great masters like Heinrich Schütz (1585-1672) my friends chose this "polyphonic!" cantata which is interlaced with secco-recitatives on Biblical words in connection with the Temple in Jerusalem.

The text presentation in this small cantata is two-fold: the first time it is sung in the common language as an unaccompanied recitative, the second time it is repeated in polyphony by the choir and in Latin translation, as seemed the custom in Schutz's time. The fact that these singing gentlemen were exclusively dependent on their hearing-emotion- and memory abilities, (visual only on the rising or descending of the printed notes) explains the intentional simplicity of this score.

2000 **CONSECRATION OF WINTER** (SATB-divided, soloists, spoken voice, harp, celesta)

The starting point of this cantata was the ultimate period of the annual cycle and its dramatic struggle from darkness to light. This yearly recurrent event strongly reveals both a physical and a metaphysical aspect.

Going back untold centuries, man has attached all sorts of interpretations to it. Even today, darkness creates feelings of fear while light brings forth security, e.g. the darkest moments of wintertime versus the culmination point of high summer. Everything that has to do with 'rebirth' of the light still is celebrated in a special tradition. Christians call it Christmas; other people consider it *the winter solstice*. For almost everybody, this event basically forms one and the same cornerstone. The author, a lifetime friend of the composer, issued a universal ecumenical, a multi-valid, scenario. The ambivalent mingling of reality and illusion, present and past, emerges from the several possible interpretations of the words with a mixture of old Christmas carols, Latin Bible citations and psalmodies. Although interwoven, they are still recognizable as a familiar recitation.

Esoteric summary: At the beginning the "visitor" - the Self - experiences the lonely desolation of a dilapidated hiding place, in which a mysterious transfiguration takes place.

Obscurity recedes to make place for clarity, stars become beacons of light, a comet dominates the heavens. Those crowned with Wisdom understand the allusion to/ and the meaning of a blood offer, burial and resurrection. The light concentration becomes the sun, the sun a mystical rose in the way ancient prophets have spoken of it. The transfigured Self recognizes in it The Principle that brings peace and insight.

2006 **SPES ET DUBITATIO** (SATB-divided, with organ accompaniment)

Composing a R.C. Mass led me back again to the days of my childhood and my adolescence, during which I had been singing for more than ten years in the Mechelen Cathedral choir.

Being by nature a skeptic, already so as a child and still so today, I do not possess the answers on metaphysical or ideological questions, a privilege I envy many others for. I neither admit nor deny anything in the field. I think the best for me to do is eventually hope for the possibility of a good final result.

Missa *Spes et Dubitatio* (Hope and Doubt) testifies to that state of mind. Belief and Hope – while not family - have always seemed close neighbors to me!

2006 **TROIS VERLAINES** (SATB a cappella)

The often-drifting character of the words Verlaine uses, or even the simply 'suggested' ideas in his poetic style typify Verlaine at full length. I sensed a spacious darkness in *La lune blanche luit dans la nuit* (the white moon beams in the night), inclusive the infinite nightly universe high above the mysterious deep; but mainly I was touched by the unspeakable sadness of the motionless surroundings. Nonetheless, the poet's heart keeps groaning; *il pleure dans mon Coeur* (it weeps in my heart). A continuous pushing aside of the peacefulness compares the inner tears in his heart with the outer rain descending on the city. Once again spaciousness sets the main tone: *Le ciel est pardessus le toit* (The sky is above the roof). However, time does not stand still, and vaguely oppressive sentiments of sadness again awaken, questioning the Self about its past.

2007/8 **CHRISTAL [Crystal]** (SATB a cappella)

This title is actually a Flemish play on words, being the result of the combination of two independent words: *Christ* and *Stal* (Eng. Stable). It contains a double allusion: the first one to the Christmas Event, the second one to the place where it happened. The whole title refers to a crystal-transparency of these Christmas carols. The first carol - and even more so the third one – both are still under the influence of the Modal tone system. The second carol dates from much younger times and reflects the intimate-endearing character generally believed typical for simple country souls in the 17th & 18th centuries. The third carol, presumably the oldest, is an extrovert, fast and frolic dance tune in quick 2-beat measure. It represents the odd mixture of spoken language and Latin, not uncommon in earlier centuries. The fourth carol again dates from more recent times. It unfolds the mysterious glow of the Nativity narration, bearing a great inner expressiveness.

2009 **TERRA TREMUIT** [The earth trembles] (SATB, organ ad lib.)

The text deals with the earth's trembling preceding the Lord's rising in majesty to deliver judgment. The succeeding Alleluia's indicate the Easter period, and consequently are to be seen in relation to the Resurrection.

There are three distinct sections. The trembling describes disorder, fragmentation and the shifting of the earth's layers. With the Lord's rising, different aspects of the appearance comprise verbal citations from the first two sections, one of which is musically based on the Te Deum intonation. The two Chant interpolations are of my own invention. They emerge like the colors shooting from a multi-faceted sphere. The Alleluia-part indicating the Easter period points directly at the Resurrection.

2010 **HET BED** [The Bed/No.2 from NACHTLIED – *Night Song*] (SATB-divided, a cappella)

The author, poet and master of verbal Arts, Mr. Jos. Stroobants from Leuven University, divided his text material into four episodes, in this particular part- putting the words in the mouths of an imaginary man and woman, while using the form of contemplative dialogue and full choral intersections. The whole of the layout had been arranged as a classical cantata including recitatives, arias and chorales. I could look forward to rich double-choir sonorities. As to the overall effect, several full-sounding vocal divisions will support my contribution to the project (7 to 8 voices), as well as vivid dialogue passages and solistic interpolations.

2011 **DILIGO DOMINUM** (Ps.116). (TTBB & 4 trombones)

In 2010, I had to undergo a rather common but still quite serious operation, for which I promised to honor the 'hoped-for' success with a composition of gratitude. The result was *Diligo Dominum (ps. 116)* a four-part choral work, entrusted to four male voices with an accompaniment of four trombones. A Renaissance-idea.

By using a boy-soprano soloist, I relived my own time as a soprano singer in the cathedral choir in Mechelen (Belg.), the basic platform of my professional music career. I have purposely striven for an overall picture in which, besides contemporary characteristics, faint echoes of times long past come into being.

2011 **EQUINOX** (SATB a cappella)

This madrigal-like piece has been composed especially for my friend Kurt Bikkembergs on the occasion of his 50th birthday. I chose **Equinox**, poem by another friend, Frans Bleyaert. The title alludes to the equality in length of day and night. This music is descriptive and its performers are asked to pay close attention the realization thereof.

The opening part reminds us that the first half of a century of birthdays has now finished (*Bells extinguish the light of the day*). From within this picture, expectation grows, (*Night loses its force, the Orient starts glowing*). New energy builds, (*Watch the jumping flames, hark the crackling sound*). The closing part connects again to the beginning, though this time weighted with positive aspirations (*on the crossroad (of this 50th birthday) you can still wander in all directions*).

2011 **LITTLE CHRONICLE IN AUGUST** - (SSATTBB a cappella)

In this piece the unity value is the eighth note. Its role is to help picture the vocal painting embedded in the text. Consequently, a spontaneous expressive choir dynamism needs to come forth, wherever or whenever it is required in the poem. When the interpretation depends on it, dynamic indications are intentionally put in place. In all cases, the performers should attempt to attain a perfect balance between the mutual segments, giving full priority to the “creative principle”.

Rhythm and tempo of single words or sentences often speak so clearly for themselves that further indications seem needless. This then is the reason why the familiar mood indications or tempo suggestions are omitted. The first remain far too general or too vague. The second are either ignored all together, or are strictly and rigorously applied, without inner motion or creativity; which in both cases may kill the music.

2013 **HARBALORIFA** (SATB + string quintet)

The word Harba could be the ancient, pre-Latin name of the duchy of Brabant in the 13th c. Southern Netherlands (now Belgium). Lorifa is possibly a corrupted form of Lori Flama, which means “golden flame” or “golden flag”, then the Ducal Standard. Harbalorifa then becomes a battle cry. The governor of the realm, this charismatic duke John I of Brabant, ruled from 1267 till his death in 1296. He enjoyed great popularity, showed himself very social with his subjects, liked holding frequent beer festivals with song and dance. Moreover, the duke was also a Trovador, and composed poems and songs himself. Unfortunately, he also delighted in fierce tournaments and fighting, which in 1296, finally cost him his life.

In order to create the festive style of his solemn entries in towns and cities, each of the four stanza's is preceded by a vocal “fanfare”. The first one is sung on a clear A-sound, the 2nd one on a nasal EU-sound (as in the French word *deux*), the 3rd on a velvety OO-sound, the 4th on a full-sounding clear A-sound).

This fine folk tune was composed in 1947 by Floris van de Putt and Harrie Beecks, and can be considered an example for contemporary folk melody composing.

2013/14 **RONCARD EN AMOUR** (SATB a cappella)

He was a cheerful fellow, this Pléiade poet Pierre de Ronsard (1524-1585). He too, in his sixteenth century, found colorful inspiration with young Mistresses, even more so when they were lovely (mignonne). Ronsard liked to moralize his adventurous relations a little bit, but did so while spreading an epicurean undertone, which always came efficiently to light.

When he composed this Ode, he was about twenty years of age, and his sweetheart (Cassandra Salviati) thirteen. But likewise he dedicated love poetry to other female Beauties, e.g. “Sonnets pour Hélène” (Hélène De Surgères)

These five consecutive love songs form a succession of moods and reflections on the changing faces of love during life, reaching from recklessness to dejection. The continuous reference to roses is a euphemism for the act of love, whence the cycle changes from extrovert to introvert.