

2014-9

Make Music To My God While I Live (Ps 146)

--- Barbara Ziliak

A presentation of musical compositions, hymns and traditions that continue to shape the lives of the Sisters of The Holy Cross

Introduction:

It was a gorgeous warm, sunny morning July 1, 1997, when I parked my car in the employees parking and walked the first of many times behind the guest house and sacristy. I found myself walking through the rows and rows of flowers—all kinds: impatiens, zinnias, petunias, marigolds, geraniums, roses, tiger lilies, even a patch of the most beautiful and fragrant recycled Easter lilies—amid them all was Sister Kathleen Till (Joe Fox's cousin) on her knees in devotion to her flowers, tending each one as if she (Sister Kathleen) were the Little Prince and each one was "her rose". (At that time, our liturgy office was in the convent of Loretto where the Sisters spoiled us and treated us like honored guests.) Sister Kathleen has since died and no one has found the time to continue the gardens, but it's still a beautiful walk because of the Moreau Garden which Sister Jeanette "founded".

Yes, I knew that very first day that I had been lucky to step into a special place where beauty was cherished, the arts were encouraged, and where we could sing with all our hearts:

Ps. 146 Barb begin a capella; choir join immediately; all repeat refrain

Indeed, I found over the years a place where a group of holy women had done just that—made music to their God all their days! So this evening, we'd like to share with you—not the HISTORY of this music nor the history of the Sister composers—but rather the experience of singing and hearing the tunes, the prayer that remains in the minds and hearts of the STHC – I am focusing on the music they still sing when they gather for prayer, liturgy, remembering, burying,

blessing, celebrating at least here on this campus and some have even crossed the oceans!

Actually I have—as I mentioned—no intention of being historically accurate (What am I doing at a history conference?), more right brain and observational.

When I began preparations for this presentation, I found that I had to keep narrowing the resources—there were so many Sister composers over the years. Through the process of research, coupled with my experience, I chose to focus on Sister Marie Cecile.

Let's begin with a sung prayer that is integral to the history and the life of the Sisters even today.

INTRO; Choir sing a capella without handbells Ave Maris Stella vs. 1 and refrain;
Barb invite all on repeat refrain

STOP

Brings us to Sister Marie Cecile—the musician saint to whom I used to raise my eyes to during choir practice when we had quickly mastered a difficult passage or successfully sight-read a new piece: “Thank you, Sister Marie Cecile” I would acclaim.

This song Ave Maris Stella is an old melody that was originally written in 6/8 meter but it was re-arranged to 4/4 by Sister Marie Cecile (Mary Fitzgerald). SMCecile was a remarkable woman and musician. Born in Canada in 1885, first vows in 1913, here at Saint Marys. and never left the campus. She was buried here in December 1977

SMC was already a musician—a published musician--before she entered the community. When in the community she composed and arranged music nearly every day I think until she died in December 1977. S certainly has enough compositions to corroborate that! The Ave Maris Stella has its own history: which I have heard from many of the sisters, most recently told to me by Sr Maureen Rooney.: When anyone left for mission, all would gather at “teardrop” (the area between Bertrand and Holy Cross Hall) to say goodbye to their Sisters,

singing Ave Maris Stella as their Sisters departed (obvious why called teardrop) However, there is a small landscaped area there that is in the shape of a teardrop.

Which came first? Was the landscaping developed after it became a place for tears? Or was the teardrop always there? I don't know. Ave Maris Stella was sung wherever the Sisters were—on the missions, in the schools—at motherhouse for profession processions, and still to this day it is sung as the novices take their leave. But most touching to me is that it is sung during the entire procession from the Church to the cemetery:

As the Sisters (and their lay director) grew older it became more challenging to sing continuously, so it morphed into having handbell interludes, more recently increasing the length of the interludes! But always at the arrival at the gravesite, the doxology was sung.

Intro: handbells now pattern 1, SING AVE vs. 7 and refrain

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX(new topic)

When I think of Sister Marie Cecile's death I call to mind the scenario: Sister Marie Cecile in her casket, leading her Sisters singing Ave Maris Stella.

There is no doubt about the Sisters' love for Mary—one of their favorite songs is still pulled out and sung at every opportunity: As director I didn't ever have to ask who's singing alto...soprano—they just broke out in song—no need to hand out song sheets!

SING IMMACULATE QUEEN OF PEACE

One of the remaining favorites was a collaborative piece: A poem by Sister Mary Eleanore Brosnahan, set to music by Sister Marie Cecile. Apparently this hymn crossed Religious Order lines because in the archives I found an article sad to say for all you archivists: undated, unreferenced, except the name of the magazine (probably): DESiGNS Los Angeles province of Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondolet Newsletter and probably a feature section ARCHIVES. The article sings the praises of the hymn itself and of the writer of the lyrics. Sr. Mary Eleanore Brosnahan entered HCross in 1911. Was much loved and from the little I read entered into a

wide variety of roles and experiences. Described as quote “lovable, charming with a beautiful simplicity. She loved to laugh and sing with all her heart.” At her death, a brief eulogy was written by Father Daniel Lord quote: “She lived high poetry and died a saintly death.” Unquote. You remember Father Daniel Lord and the Catholic Action movement?So now we have the enduring piece in collaboration: Eleanore wrote the prayer for a happy death; Marie Cecile set it to music.

SING SANCTE JOSEPH Vss. 1 & 2

Aside: Sr. Marilyn told me that during the first gathering of Sisters and former members of the congregation, the most frequent request was to sing all the old songs they shared and remembered. Wow the power of music!

One of the favorites is another of Marie Cecile’s which was originally published under the pseudonym “Gerald Rean” because publishers were leary of publishing compositions of women!! Just a few years ago this piece was arranged for handbells by Carrie. Just last Christmas, this song was one of the group of carols sung by the choir before Eucharist. I also heard that the Sisters used to sing it whenever they gathered at the crèche. They tell me that Sister Marie Cecile loved to play the organ chimes, so we add them here:

SING SLEEP HOLY BABE (vs. 1; watch for signal vs. 2) choir only

In the archives, I found evidence that in 1941, Saint Mary’s College celebrated 100 years. In that celebration they held a concert honoring the musician Sisters of the Holy Cross. I was amazed to find a booklet containing musical compositions by more than 33 Sisters of the Holy Cross who taught at Saint Mary’s. Some I had known: Sister Dolorosa, Sister Rita Estelle. Compositions ranged from beginners’ piano books to full score orchestra.

Described as “a master of the organ”, Sister Marie Cecile has a number of organ compositions. Sister Marie Cecile’s eulogist, speaking of Sister’s organ touch, quoted John Dryden who wrote of the instrument itself: “...untunes the sky and

brings the angels down from heaven.” I’ve asked Carrie to play for us Sister’s Ave Maria

ORGAN

Another of the Marian favorites was this wonderful hymn honoring Mary as Cedar of Lebanon:

GLORIA LIBANI

As the director here, I learned little by little, piece by piece, story by story, of the rich legacy that the Sister musicians left and is carried on in the attention still paid to music and the arts.

At times I was taken by surprise: It was toward the end of my 3rd month here when Sr. Julie told me the feast of St Michael was approaching in a day or two. So? She said every year on that day the sisters gathered outside in front of the statue of Michael, and said a prayer and sang a hymn. We looked in our files and found a handwritten piece but didn’t know it, so I told Julie that—didn’t know it, no piano outside, sorry. Later Sr. Campion and said We know it! Just give us the first note!. So it turned out to be a very nice balmy fall evening. I went out wondering who in the world would show up—would anybody show up?—when suddenly I was amazed to see sisters coming from all directions: wheelchairs, walkers, I handed the prayer to Sr. Julie, she read the prayer. I gritted my teeth, closed my eyes and sang the 1st 2 notes—they took it away! It’s a typical song of its time, you’ll discover. Sorry, “younger sisters, if you don’t know this, you’re one of the “younger members”.

HYMN TO ST. MICHAEL

As I was doing research in Archives I found this “Holy Cross Hymn book” Another archivist’s nemesis: no info on it who published?? I found published in 1904. Who put it together?? I found a piece in the accompaniment book: Hymn To Our Lady of Good Counsel and on top of the staff were handwritten in pencil the words of Hymn, obviously a “composition” put to the tune of Our Lady of Good Counsel. I guess Marty Haugen and John Bell are still doing this! Marty to Irish tunes; John to folk tunes; recent composers to Finlandia, Dvorchak,

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX (NEW TOPIC)

Although this is not a Sisters' composition, the story they told me about it always tugged at my heart. **READ FROM VERONIQUE'S BOOK** (Sr. Veronique said even tho it's not really a statue of "OL of Mt. Carmel" Apparently, years ago in closing they sang in honor and memory of all their sisters who, during the Civil War, had served as nurses, caring for the wounded from both armies, burying the dead and working under horrible circumstances. In their honor, they sang this song that was composed and sung by men around the campfires during the war and beyond. You may have sung it at some time in your life: Please join us

SING WE'RE TENTING TONIGHT

We'll never come to the end of this presentation, because it's like The Sisters' "....life rolls on in endless song, making music to our God while we live....", but it was no surprise to me that when their founder, Basil Moreau was beatified, it would be an occasion for a new song to be composed. Michael JOncas was commissioned to do that.

Before we sing our closing song, I'd like to thank all of our presenters this evening. The best part of all of my preparation was to witness the joy of the Sisters at choir rehearsal. They so obviously enjoyed singing the music and re-living some memories. Thanks to Carrie Bowie and to all these Sisters who took the time, for some even amid preparations for travelling to Uganda for General Chapter, who took time out to present at this History Conference!

So I suggest that we all stand and sing in honor of the "founder of this feast?!"

SING HYMN TO BASIL MOREAU (watch for # of verses).

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