The Camerata Season — Marguerite L. Brooks

The Yale Camerata’s eighteenth season is underway, busy and filled with a wealth of gloriously varied music, ranging from works of composers of the Spanish Renaissance to contemporary composers Herb Bielawa, Daniel Kellogg, and Lee Hoiby.

Members of the group have already performed at the installation of Harold Attridge as dean of the Divinity School, as well as at the colloquium session at which the composer Lee Hoiby spoke. As the group had sung Hoiby’s settings of the Magnificat and Nunc Dimittis last spring in St. Paul’s cathedral, they were especially pleased to be able to perform for the composer.

The Camerata hosted a visit by the Körnerscher Sing-Verein Dresden, a 25-member choir specializing in eighteenth-century repertoire. The choir had performed at the University-wide commemoration of that date. The program included works of Bach and Shütz.

The Camerata will join the Yale Symphony Orchestra and its conductor Shinik Hahm in April in performances of the Mozart Mass in c minor. Alumni/ae of the Camerata are invited to return to campus to sing this magnificent work. The all-Mozart program will include a piano concerto with Peter Frankl as soloist.

On Palm Sunday, the Camerata will present a short concert with Yale University Organist Thomas Murray. The program will consist of only two pieces: the St. Mark Passion of Charles Wood for choir, organ, and solo voices, and the Herbert Howells Requiem for unaccompanied voices.

And finally, choral conducting majors from the group who participate in next May’s ISM study tour may enjoy an opportunity to sing some of the masterpieces of Spain in the native country of the composers.
FACULTY & UTS ALUMNI NEWS

FACULTY

Thomas Murray, University Organist and Professor of Organ, has been awarded a Diploma of Fellowship (Honoris causa) in the Royal College of Organists. Look for an article on this in a future issue of Prism!

James White reports that he spent the summer at his 1787 farmhouse in Vermont, now on the National Register of Historic Places. He had articles in Theological Education and in Reformed Worship, and finished a new edition of his book Roman Catholic Worship for Liturgical Press.

ISTS

K. Bernard Schade '65 reports a change of address. PO Box 4858, Clearwater, FL 33758-4858.

Robert A. Schilling '59 retired on July 1, 2002 after 41 years as Minister of Worship and the Arts at North United Methodist Church in Indianapolis. The congregation established a scholarship in his name for outstanding church music students to be administered by the Fellowship of United Methodists in Music and Worship Arts.

John C. Schmidt '63 received certification in August as an American Guild of Organists Fellow. He was awarded the S. Lewis Elmer Prize for the highest overall score on any of the upper level exams as well as the prize for the highest Fellowship score.
Spiritual Visions from Sri Lanka: remarks on the remarkable paintings of Nalini Jayasuriya — John W. Cook

This exhibition of paintings by Nalini Jayasuriya presented by the Institute of Sacred Music contains new and old works representing a rich and varied career. There are three things about this exhibition that make the event remarkable.

First, the fine consistency of style throughout the works should be carefully noted. As you know, many artists working in the medium of painting open themselves to criticism when examples of their early, middle and late work are examined side by side. This exhibition includes paintings from the collections of several of us who have been collecting them over the course of many years: we see clearly a consistency that is greatly to be respected. Nalini has maintained a vision that carries through all these works.

What is the consistency, what is that vision? There is clear evidence in this exhibition. If you compare these works with their recognizable, storytelling content, with those of other artists, you see that there is a realm of reality in these works that demands interpretation. While each painting has recognizable content, the question remains nevertheless: where has she taken us? Immediately we are transported to a realm of the imagination where the story receives her unique interpretation. For instance, if these paintings displayed the kind of realism of presentation that we find in photography, in much art, and in much illustration work, especially biblical illustrations, then the specificity and lifelikeness would lead in one kind of direction. But Nalini’s work is much more imaginative and stimulating than that. These works present figures in settings that take us to another realm than realism. Her works lead us into a spiritual realm where the story is maintained, and the reference lingers as imagery suggestive of meanings deeply rooted in, and beyond, the stories. They also open us up aesthetically to contemplation. Or, to put it another way, there is a mystical dimension that is aesthetically and formally achieved, while the subject matter keeps its integrity, its recognizability.

Second, there is a broad ecumenism to her work. She was born in Sri Lanka (formerly Ceylon) where Buddhism dominates the cultural religious life. She is a devout Christian, and has been all her life, but this exhibition of paintings shows how these two religious cultures (Buddhism and Christianity) remain fully intact in her work. For instance, a leading image in the exhibition is the painting entitled “Christ Mandala.” It is the image she selected for the poster that advertises the exhibition. In the painting, the Christ figure reminds us of one of the Buddha in a sitting posture. However, it is the Christ attended by the apostles and the images of the Evangelists. Although He appears in a field of color, and with a hand holding what appears to be an orb or a sphere of light, he is the reigning Lord referring formally to the medieval Christian sculptural composition of the Christ mandorla that occupies the tympana of so many cathedral portals. There is also in this exhibition an Islamic theme, illustrating the moment that Mohammed rises on horseback into the heavens. In the composition, the face of the prophet is blank, and on the surface of the horse are images of many eyes, as is consistent with the story. These multiple references to other religious traditions appear throughout her works, and show an enriched sense of coordination and integration of themes.

Third, there are surprises in this exhibition beyond the suggestions above. I have in mind, first, the despondent figures that are more monochromatic in presentation and indicate a sense of hiddenness within the composition. I refer especially to the figure of Simon Peter. This dark painting indicates in posture and color that we are looking at remorse in the extreme. The quality of the viewers’ response is dependent upon how much they internalize what is signaled by the work. While there is a lack of facial expression (one does not see the face at all), there is about the figure, in color and form, a message of human regret, deep regret, and contrition.

However, the most demanding, and to my mind the most courageous, of the paintings in this exhibition is “The Gospel.” Here the formal presentation and the subject matter demand that the viewer go somewhere else entirely than what would be expected. This painting shows a female figure with flowers, surrounded by a wide-eyed crowd of observers. That combination places the juxtaposition of the central figure within the context of a stunned, surprised crowd. That is precisely where observers of the painting find themselves. Such a vision is a completely surprising presentation of the tradition, and we are expected to go to another place than the simple realism possible in art, or to an illustration that presents the expected subject matter for such a title. The courage of the piece lies in the fact that it makes the subject into a vision that asks for an aesthetic spirituality, one that sees an attitude about the Gospel, or an understanding of the Gospel that art can achieve, and therefore it takes us to another realm without losing the mooring that the title insists upon. It is not an abstract painting; nor is it a realistic painting. It is a spiritual image about a subject that conveys an attitude and a direction which inspired painting, such as is found in this exhibition, can achieve.

Finally, this exhibition can be seen superficially as a set of naïve, two-dimensional illustrations. However, with careful looking, there is much more at stake. With careful looking and contemplation this exhibit can, and does, lead to deep inspiration.

Dr. John W. Cook was formerly the director of the Yale Institute of Sacred Music. He is currently president of the Henry Luce Foundation. This article is adapted from remarks offered at the opening of the ISM exhibition of the paintings of Nalini Jayasuriya on September 10, 2002.
Daniel Brinson ’02 reports a new address: 817 Thornhill Road, Apartment A, Lexington, VA 24450.

Karen Mulder ’97 continues doctoral studies in architectural history under a Dupont Fellowship at the University of Virginia. She published “Specifying Sacred Space: A Review of the Anno Domini Exhibit/Experience, Edmonton, Canada, 2000” in the Winter 2002 Canadian Journal of Theology and Religion. “Dauntingly Dantoid: A Philippic on the Art of the Last Century,” will be featured in the Winter 2002 e-zine Findings of the Wilberforce Forum in Washington. She also edited the English portion of the trilingual illustrated monograph Janeric Johanssen: Work of Heart. Her chapter on arts education, subtitled “Educating Intentional Christians in the Arts,” was included in Shaping a Christian Worldview: The Foundations of Higher Education. Currently she is assisting in the publication of a website and book on the American Colonial Revival with Dr. Richard Guy Wilson and the National Parks Service. She was also a featured speaker on the contemporary arts last spring at Roberts Wesleyan University, NY, the Center for Graduate Christian Study in Charlottesville, VA, and Southern Theological Seminary, KY.

Glen Segger ’95 and Rachel Manalili Segger ’97 report their new address: 182 Bosrmann Road, East Haven, CT 06512. (203) 468-9992.