



The Sixty-seventh Season of  
The William Nelson Cromwell and F. Lammot Belin  
**Concerts**

National Gallery of Art  
2,725th Concert

**Amor Artis Chamber Choir and Chamber Orchestra**  
Johannes Somary, *conductor*

April 19, 2009  
Sunday Evening, 6:30 pm  
West Building, West Garden Court

*Admission free*



## Program

Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (1525–1594)

Two motets

*Alma Redemptoris Mater*

*Sicut cervus* (Psalm 42)

George Frideric Handel (1685–1759)

*Dixit Dominus* (Psalm 110)

1. *Dixit Dominus*—Chorus
2. *Virgam virtutis*—Alto solo
3. *Tecum principium*—Soprano solo
4. *Juravit Dominus*—Chorus
5. *Tu es sacerdos*—Chorus
6. *Dominus a dextris tuis*—Soloists and chorus
7. *De torrente in via bibet*—Duet and male chorus
8. *Gloria Patri*—Chorus

Soloists: Cynthia Wallace, Megan Friar, Jonathan Goodman,  
and Richard Holmes

Johannes Somary (b. 1935)

The Prodigal Son

Text by Anthony Stein

Part I—Departure

Part II—Discoveries

Part III—Return

Part IV—Reconciliation

Father: John Rose

Younger Son: Michael Streinberger

Elder Son: Richard Holmes

## The Musicians

### **AMOR ARTIS**

Amor Artis is a distinctive chamber chorus and orchestra based in New York City. The ensemble has achieved considerable recognition internationally through its many concerts and extensive discography, encompassing more than fifty recordings. It specializes in balancing well-known favorites with important works rarely heard. One of the first and foremost presenters in New York of lesser-known baroque masterpieces, Amor Artis has distinguished itself in this area and is proud to have stimulated an interest in this repertoire on the part of a number of choirs in the United States.

### **JOHANNES SOMARY**

Beginning his forty-eighth year as music director of Amor Artis, Johannes Somary has conducted the English Chamber Orchestra, the Irish Chamber Orchestra, the New Orleans Symphony, the Polish Television and Radio Orchestra, the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, and XXI Sajandi Orkester in Tallinn, Estonia. He has participated in many international festivals in Croatia, Greece, Israel, Spain, and Switzerland. His discography includes more than sixty recordings, four of which received *Stereo Review's* Record of the Year award and three of which were first recordings of Handel oratorios. As a composer, Somary has received commissions from the Jefferson Music Festival, the Blessed Sacrament Fathers, and the Benedictine Monastery of San Anselmo in Rome. His *Taroko Concerto for Violin and Orchestra* was recorded in Saint Petersburg, Russia, for Albany Records, and his dramatic cantata *The Prodigal Son*, commissioned by the Universal Sacred Music Foundation, was premiered in spring 2008 in New York to great acclaim. Since coming to New York in 1959, Somary has served as choirmaster and music director in several churches, including Saint Patrick's Cathedral. He currently teaches at the College of Mount Saint Vincent, and serves as conductor of The Fairfield County Chorale in Connecticut, which last month recorded *The Seasons* by Haydn for Lyrichord.

## Program Notes

Born Giovanni Pierluigi in the Roman suburb of Palestrina in 1525, the composer Palestrina assumed the place-name of his birth, as was the custom. He worked as resident composer and choir director in a number of churches, including the Sistine Chapel and Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome. He married twice, had children and grandchildren, lost most of them to the epidemics of his time, and for a while ran a fur business. He was a prolific composer—not a trailblazer, but rather the summation of his era in choral music, known as the “late” or “high” Renaissance. His own style purged music of the complexities that had been creeping into general usage at the end of the Renaissance. *Alma Redemptoris Mater* is a masterpiece that paraphrases the Gregorian chant to which this text was usually sung in his day, and it does so with true peace, serenity, and textual clarity. Palestrina's use of expansive melodic lines with well balanced curves—the rising and falling of the lines—is nowhere better illustrated than in the justly celebrated motet *Sicut cervus*.

In the words of musicologist Paul Henry Lang, “*Dixit Dominus* is the diploma of Handel's Italian studies.” Although a work of his youth, composed in Rome in April 1707, it has the power and grandeur that is the hallmark of the English oratorios of later years. The work is a setting of *Psalm 109* (*Psalm 110* in some translations of the Bible). The text is that of the opening psalm sung at Vespers. Occasional appearances of the psalm tone as a *cantus firmus* and a felicitous blend of homophony and polyphony with magnificent use of suspensions illustrate the influence that the music of the Roman Catholic Church (if not its theology) had on Handel during his four years in Italy. Handel's fondness for the work is revealed by the fact that he recycled one of its movements more than three decades later, giving it an English text in his oratorio *Israel in Egypt*. The length of this magnificently festive psalm suggests that it may have been designed for performance in concert, rather than in church. Its eight movements, scored for five-part chorus, soloists (emanating from the choral ensemble), two violins, two violas, and continuo are deliciously diverse and rich in both character and texture.

On my first visit to Saint Petersburg, Russia, in summer 2000, I stood in ecstasy before Rembrandt's extraordinary *The Prodigal Son* in the Hermitage Museum. As I gazed at length, I began to wonder about what went on in the mind of the older brother. Not long after that encounter with the painting, I came up with the burning desire to write a dramatic cantata featuring both brothers and the father with a chorus of onlookers. For a libretto, I went to my friend Anthony Stein, who provided a text that endowed the chorus with a triple role: not only were the choristers observers, but the men singing by themselves became the narrators, and the women singing by themselves became a kind of mystical spirit speaking to each of the three protagonists, who would respond to them in turn with the music of a psalm tone. In the four movements of this cantata — *Departure, Discoveries, Return,* and *Reconciliation* — the music moves gradually from the most pungent dissonance to a relatively serene consonance.

*Program Notes by Johannes Somary*

Next Week at the National Gallery of Art

**Geringas Baryton Trio**

Music by Haydn and German composers

April 26, 2009

Sunday Evening, 6:30 pm

West Building, West Garden Court

The use of cameras or recording equipment during the performance is not allowed. Please be sure that cell phones, pagers, and other electronic devices are turned off.

Please note that late entry or reentry of the West Building after 6:30 pm is not permitted.

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COVER: Rembrandt van Rijn, *Return of the Prodigal Son* (detail), 1636, etching on laid paper, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Gift of Ruth B. Benedict in memory of William S. Benedict and in honor of the 50th anniversary of the National Gallery of Art