

**REDISCOVERING HUGO DISTLER:
ORGAN & CHORAL MUSIC FOR SMALL PERFORMING FORCES**

Dr. Mary Kay Geston, *presenter*

BUILDING BLOCKS

A. Structure

1. Linear
 - a. Contrapuntal polyphony of late Renaissance serves as model
2. Historical influences
 - a. Cantus firmus – primarily chorale tunes
 - b. Canon and fugue
 - c. Melisma

B. Text

1. Set according to speech rhythms (German language)
 - a. Inspired by the music of Heinrich Schütz (1585-1672)
 - b. Spiritual proclamation
2. Rhythmic and melodic expansion of significant words
3. Word-painting

C. Rhythm

1. Free-flowing, mixed meters
2. Mensurstrich vs. barlines
3. Repetition of rhythmic motives

D. Harmony

1. Transparent, open, at times expansive
2. Represents mood/character of text

STUMBLING BLOCKS

A. No bar lines

B. Mixed meters and metrical irregularity

C. Contrapuntal complexity

D. Transparent, open harmonies

HUGO DISTLER'S SACRED VOCAL WORKS

Hugo Distler's music is published by Bärenreiter Verlag: www.baerenreiter.com

- Op. 2 *Herzlich lieb hab ich dich, O Herr* (1930), double 4-voice chorus, unaccomp.
Op. 3 *Deutsche Chormesse* (1931), 6-voice chorus, unaccompanied
Op. 4 *Kleine Adventsmusik* (1931), speaker, children's chorus, flute, oboe, violin, org/harpsichord, cello
Op. 5 *Der Jahreskreis* (1932-3), 52 motets for 2- or 3-voice chorus, some w/instruments
Op. 6/1 *Christ, der du bist der helle Tag* (1933), 3-voice chorus, 2 violins, continuo
Op. 6/2 *3 kleine Chormotetten* (1933), 4-voice chorus, unaccompanied
Op. 7 *Choral-Passion* (1933), 2 solo voices, 5-voice chorus, unaccompanied
Op. 10 *Die Weihnachtsgeschichte* (1933)
Op. 11/1 *Wo Gott zum Haus nit gibt sein Gunst* (1933), 4 solo voices ad lib., 4-voice chorus, 2 oboes, strings, harpsichord/organ/piano
Op. 11/2 *Nun danket all und bringet Her* (1941), Soprano and Tenor solos, 4-voice chorus, strings, organ)
Op. 12 *Geistliche Chormusik* (1934-6, 1941), 4-voice chorus, unaccompanied.
(Singet dem Herrn ein neues Lied, Totentanz, Wach auf, du deutsches Reich, Singet frisch und wohlgemut, Ich wollt, dass ich daheime wär, Wachtet auf, ruft unds die Stimme, In der Welt habt ihr Angst, Das ist je gewisslich wahre, Fürwahr, er trug unsere Krankheit)
Op. 13 *Liturgische Sätze über altevangelische Kyrie- und Gloriaweisen* (1933-5), 2 to 8-voice chorus, unaccompanied
Op. 17 *3 geistliche Konzerte* (1937), Soprano and Tenor solo voices, organ/harpsichord
St. John Passion (incomplete)
Various motets

DISTLER ANTHEMS IN CHANTRY CHOIRBOOK

The *Chantry Choirbook* is published by Augsburg Fortress: www.augsburgfortress.org

- "A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth" ("*Ein Lämmlein geht und trägt die Schuld*"), SATB from *Geistliche Chormusik*, op.12, no. 9
"Come, Holy Ghost, God and Lord" ("*Komm, Heiliger Geist, Herre Gott*"), SATB from *Kleine Chormotetten für vierstimmigen gemischten Chor*, op. 6/2, III
"Creator Spirit, Heavenly Dove" ("*Komm, Heiliger Geist, o Schöpfer du*"), SAB from *Der Jahreskreis*, op. 5
"For God So Loved the World" ("*Also hat Gott die Welt geliebt*"), SAB from *Der Jahreskreis*, op. 5
"Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming" ("*Es ist ein Ros entsprungen*"), SATB from *Die Weinachtsgeschichte*, op. 10
"Maria Walks Amid the Thorn" ("*Maria durch ein' Dornwald ging*"), SAB from *Der Jahreskreis*, op. 5
"Now to Us a Child Is Born" ("*Heut ist uns ein Kindlein geboren*"), SATB
"Now All the Woods Are Sleeping" ("*Nun ruhen all Wälder*"), SATB
"O Savior, Rend the Heavens Wide" ("*O heiland, reiss die Himmel auf*"), SATB
"Praise to the Lord, the Almighty" ("*Lobe den Herren, den mächtigen König der Ehren*"), SATB from *Kleine Chormotetten für vierstimmigen gemischten Chor*, op. 6/2, I
"Salvation unto Us Has Come" ("*Es ist das Heil uns kommen her*"), SATB from *Kleine Chormotetten für vierstimmigen gemischten Chor*, op. 6/2, II

Der Jahreskreis, opus 5 (1932/33)

- a. Fifty-two sacred pieces for the church year
- b. Liturgical *Gebrauchsmusik* for SSA or SAB voices and instruments
 - 1) Written for two- and three-part mixed voices ("small mixed volunteer church choir, as well as children's chorus")
 - 2) Instruments (other than organ) may reinforce or substitute a voice part
 - 3) Missing vocal parts may be sung by alternate voices (transposed up/down one octave)
 - 4) May be performed as a solo (cantus firmus) if accompanied by "suitable instruments"
 - 5) Some equal-voice and mixed-voice settings may be transposed for men's choir
- c. Polyphonic; chorale cantus firma; newly-composed

Kleine Adventsmusik, opus 4 (1931)

- a. Chorale cantata
- b. SAB choir, flute, oboe, violin, organ (or harpsichord or piano), cello and narrator
- c. Seven chorale variations on *Nun komm der Heiden Heiland* with narration between each; framed with an opening and closing instrumental sonata
- d. May be performed without narration; cello optional if using organ

Die Weihnachtsgeschichte, opus 10 (1933)

- a. Christmas story
- b. SATB unaccompanied choir; soloists (S, A, T, T, Bar, B)
 - 1) Choir represents four groups: Choir of Angels, Shepherds and Wisemen, Chief Priests, and Scribes
 - 2) Four solo recitatives (Mary, Angel, Elizabeth, Simeon) originally written with black note heads and no stems; meant to be sung in speech rhythm
- c. Liturgical
- d. Includes an introductory motet and a closing chorus; six chorale variations on *Es ist ein Ros entsprungen*, plus *turba* choruses
- e. Chorale variations may be performed in a group as a chorale partita
- f. Introductory and closing choruses may be performed independently

Geistliche Chormusik, opus 12 (1934-42)

- a. Nine sacred motets for advanced choirs
- b. SATB unaccompanied choir (w/divisi)
- c. Modeled after Heinrich Schütz *Geistliche Chormusik 1648*
- d. Four motets are freely-composed and use the same biblical texts as Schütz (nos. 1, 7, 8, 9); two end with simple chorale settings
- e. Four motets are cantus firmus settings of old German chorales
- f. The remaining motet, *Totentanz* ('Dance of Death'), has 14 short choral settings interspersed w/spoken dialogues between Death and his victims
 - 1) inspired by famous 'Totentanz' (1463) paintings from in the Lübeck Marienkirche
- g. Synthesis of Distler's compositional style