

Welcome to the Winter 2014 Newsletter from Melodious Accord. This print version was adapted from the E-Newsletter.

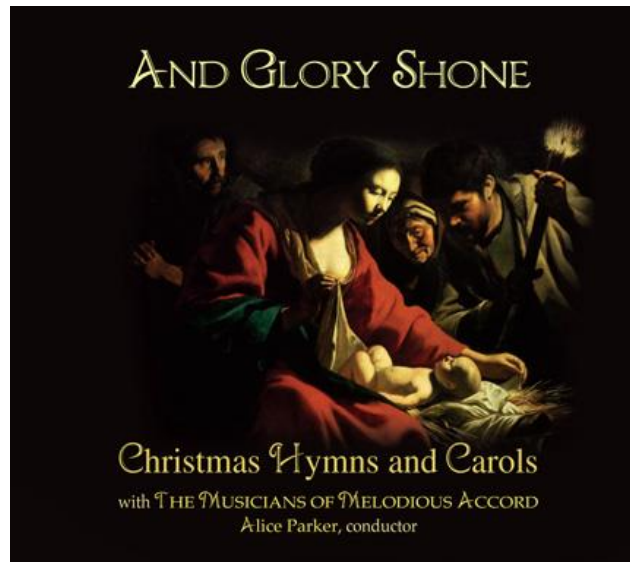
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Statement of Purpose

Melodious Accord believes that melody is an unparalleled means of communication for human beings; that when we use our ears and voices we enrich our lives through creating communities of sound; and that singing together brings immediate benefits - physical, mental and spiritual - to those who join in this most participatory of all the arts.

Shop Window



And Glory Shone

A new collection of 19 of Alice Parker's compositions and arrangements of Christmas music. Long-time favorites include In the Bleak Midwinter, The Friendly Beasts, and My Dancing Day, along with new settings of While Shepherds Watched, Sweet Coming, and The Little Cradle. In this recording, Ms. Parker invites the listener to take a holiday journey through time and tradition: "Moods and rhythms are almost tangible in the singing: the vigor of colonial times, the wistfulness of Advent, the strumming Spanish guitar, the barren stable, chanticleer's rising song. We join in the bagpipes' dance, the children's exuberant touro-louro-ing, the cradle's portentous rocking. If we listen rightly we lose for a time our contemporary sophistication, to re-enter the world of childhood where the story and its many characters are newly minted. We might even shout our own demands for figgy pudding at the end, and join the musicians in more feasting and singing to celebrate the season."

Click on the cover photo above to order your copy now, and visit the [Melodious Accord Store](#) to see all the recordings and publications that are available.

Melodious Accord Fellows Programs

January in New York

Three days of intensive Score Study in Manhattan for conductors, performers, singers and students interested in exploring the sound behind the page. Alice Parker shares her experience with many styles of music from the classics to her own compositions, and discusses the process from the composer's first intention to the finished score. This year (re)discover Mendelssohn's St. Paul oratorio, Arvo Pärt's Nunc dimittis, and the legacy of the Parker/Shaw years through selections from that repertoire.

Editorial

Finding and Sharing the Song

I was asked recently to explain to a choir my compositional process: how do I work? They were rehearsing some of my compositions which they found very difficult, and the question gave them respite for a few minutes to look at their work in a different light.

I found myself using a metaphor that had never occurred to me previously. (Who was it that said we didn't know what we thought until we tried to put it into words?) I could have said simply that I choose the text after lengthy searching, and then live with it for a long period of gestation. I want to hear the melody all the way through in my head before I begin writing anything down: I keep it fluid as long as I can. But here's the picture I drew for them. . .

Picture Emily Dickinson, for example, writing a poem. She's alone, communing with herself, a little circle of one. When I come upon the poem and decide to set it, I enter as much as possible into that circle – but I'm still me. I can't become her, but I can try to work my way into her poem, going from the whole to all the particulars. (She worked the other way, weaving all the particulars into a whole). So there are two little circles now, united in the poem. If we think of her creation as a small plant – a flower or a bush - we see it whole in itself. I don't want to squash it, or trim it, or obliterate it, or harm it in any way. I want to understand it so deeply that when I add music to it, my notes seem to grow from the same roots as the original plant. It's now as if there are two plants side by side, poem and song, each individual in itself, but making a new whole – a double plant - when they are together.

When someone else picks up my score, the humans involved grow from two to three, with the newcomer going through the same process as I had, but in relationship to both poem and music. So there's a third viewpoint added, with the poem and the music subtly changed in being filtered through another mind. And when we move into rehearsal -- think of all those individuals gathered into one room, each with his or her own relationship with both the poem and the song. The circle has expanded radically, with all those different versions floating in the air around the rehearsal space. (I'm convinced that no two of us hear in exactly the same way.)

The final step is to include the audience at the concert – an exponential expansion of the original vision. There's no way that on first hearing, the listeners can comprehend the details of Emily's work, or of my setting. What is the most important thing for us to transmit? Surely it must be Emily's vision: the words themselves lovingly spoken, in song which will help to reveal their unspoken context: the mood, the dance, the tone of voice, the thought that leads us from one line to the next. In short, we want the audience to experience the whole of the poem as we have come to love it through our study.

While we are in the learning process, we are mired in details. How do we get this pitch? How can we untangle this rhythm? What is the dynamic level here, or the precise vowel sound? Can we get the final consonant precisely together? We want to perform the work as faithfully as possible, so we rehearse as meticulously as possible to conquer each detail. The irony is that the more time we spend in this process, the farther we are moving from what we want to project. We are working from the page -- but the heart of the music cannot be notated. I can't bear to hear the music or the poem out of context, even in the learning process. I don't want the poem reduced to a diction exercise; I don't want notes and rhythms sung with technical precision but no understanding. I want it all – we do need the details to recreate the vision – but the eye values must always be subordinate to the ear.

This was probably more of an explanation than my questioner had bargained for. But it did put into perspective that we had to sing a concert in a couple of hours for which we were inadequately rehearsed. (Does anyone, anywhere ever

have enough rehearsal time?) In my understanding, the listeners don't give a hoot about the eighth note or the correctly balanced chord: they want to hear the poem opening up to them through the music. If that is our aim as we sing, we can lift ourselves and them into Emily's world -- and enrich us all in the process. If we do it right, the details are subsumed into the song, and all the individual circles are united in one transcendent experience.

- Alice Parker

New Publications

Magnificat, We Sing composed by Alice Parker. For SATB choir and organ. A brief setting of Alice's own version of the traditional Advent text. Scripture: Luke 1. Published by E.C. Schirmer Publishing (7912).

O Virtus Sapientiae composed by Alice Parker. For women's double choir, SSAA-SSAA, a cappella. A setting of Hildegard von Bingen's chant to Wisdom, with soaring, echoing phrases. Published by E.C. Schirmer Publishing (7913).

Gifts of the Spirit composed by Alice Parker. For SATB choir, a cappella. An anthem setting the familiar text from Isaiah 61. Published by E.C. Schirmer Publishing (7914).

El Ginat Egoz (To the Nut Grove) by Sara Levi-Tanai, arranged by Alice Parker for SATB choir, a cappella. A rhythmic dance; text from the Song of Songs, in Hebrew. Published by Transcontinental Music Publications (993523).

La Rosa Enflorece (The Rose Blossoms) arranged by Alice Parker for SATB choir, a cappella. Traditional Sephardic tune, with text from the Song of Songs, in Ladino and English. A haunting love song. Published by Transcontinental Music Publications (993528).

Cindy arranged by Alice Parker for men's choir, TTBB, a cappella. US Traditional, a lively encore. Published by Santa Barbara Music Publishing (1215).

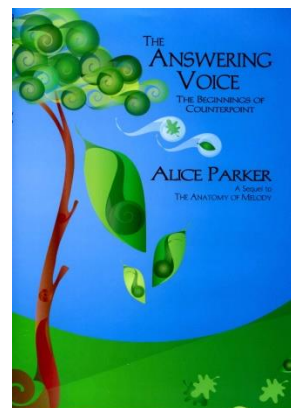
Do, Lord, Remember Me arranged by Alice Parker for SATB, a cappella. A thoughtful, prayerful setting of this spiritual. Published by Santa Barbara Music Publishing (1108).

In This Day composed by Alice Parker, for SATB choir with piano or organ. Anthem setting Alice's own text, with the theme, "Let us rejoice and sing." Published by Neil A. Kjos Music Company (9154).

The Answering Voice: The Beginnings of Counterpoint

by Alice Parker. The GIA catalog entry states: "While essentially a guide to understanding counterpoint, it offers insights for conductors to help them hear individual lines and melodic contour in the choral texture. A master teacher, Parker offers valuable tools for learning the art of choral arranging, beginning with practical group improvisation games and techniques. Anyone who has ever experienced a hymn sing led by Alice Parker will recognize these tried-and-true creative techniques and will be able to begin to put them into practice."

Published by GIA Publications (G-8623)



The View from Here



We're right on the cusp of Fall, in these last days of September. The equinox has passed, and the sun floods in through my eastern windows, creating geometric window-patterns on the floor. The trees, deep green all summer, began to show a yellowish tinge two weeks ago. Now every day is a new kaleidoscope of color, through the spectrum from deep red to gold, from rusty pink to brilliant orange. The hillside looks like a crazy quilt, with leaf patches colliding in every direction.

And the evening comes noticeably earlier each day. It's cool in the morning (in the 30's or 40s), and on sunny days rises to the high 60s or even 70 degrees. But if the wind is blowing, there's an icy twinge even at noon: the winter is waiting in the wings. Should I bring in the house plants that have summered outside? Dare I wait another few days? I generally err on the early side: the petals droop in response, but then seem to adapt and resign themselves to less light.

The summer's growth in the beds around the house is lush and high -- weeds as well as crowded flowers and herbs. The seven foot goldenrod were spectacular this year. I'm learning to accept them on their own terms: a whole field of them is breath-taking! And all the asters with their shy colors decorate the paths and roadsides with washes of pastel. A walk in the woods means abrupt shifts of sun and shade, as well as constant looking down to collect leaves. One has a clear gold on one side, and equally pure green on the other. Most are blotchy, as Gerard Manley Hopkins describes in *Pied Beauty*: "For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim . . . All things counter, original, spare, strange. . ." Wrinkled or flat, whole or torn, supple or dried, each has its own worth. "He fathers-forth whose beauty is past change: Praise him."

- Alice Parker

Correspondence

Beth Neville Evans asked:

My favorite piece we're rehearsing is *O Virtus Sapientiae* (ECS 7913). In m.18 you have a breath marked for everyone at the end of the measure. . . Do you really want that complete break in sound?

Alice responded: "That breath for everyone comes as we swoop from heaven to earth -- lift off that rich, high sound and come down quietly on the unison 'e'. It shouldn't be a long break -- like slowing for a sharp turn off the road. Maximum sonority to almost none: seven voices to one. Imagine letting go of the high chord in a cathedral -- you don't hear the echo till you let go."

Help Support Our Programs

We welcome your interest and your support. Melodious Accord, Inc. is incorporated in the State of New York as a non-profit organization under IRS code 501(c)(3). Contributions are deductible to the full extent of the law.

If you wish to make a contribution you may do so here through PayPal or you may send it by mail to:

Melodious Accord, Inc.
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Park West Station
New York, NY 10025-1516

Calendar

Follow Alice Parker on the Move

2014

December 28 Annual Carol Sing, Federated Church Charlemont, MA

2015

January 9-10 AGO Workshop, Jesuit Church of the Immaculate Conception New Orleans, LA

17 Board Meeting, Melodious Accord New York, NY

18 Annual Spirituals Sing, Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine New York, NY

19-21 Score Study Workshop, St. Ignatius Church New York, NY

February 5-9 Residency, First Presbyterian Church, University of Michigan Ann Arbor, MI

12-15 Residency, East Tennessee University Johnson City, TN

25-28 Presenter, ACDA National Conference Salt Lake City, UT

March 9-10 Residency, University of Northern Iowa Cedar Falls, IA

For information about any of these events, write to kay@aliceparker.com, or call 413-536-1753.

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