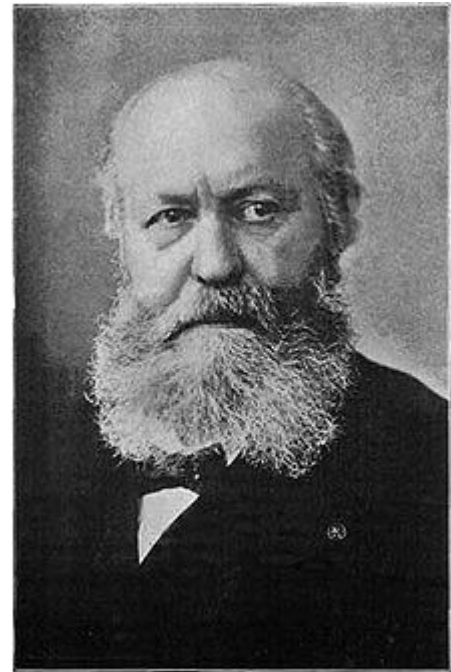


Messe Chorale -- Charles Gounod (1818-1893)

Charles-Francois Gounod was born in Paris to artistic parents who recognized Charles' musical talents early. He was enrolled in the Paris Conservatoire at age 18. In 1839 he won the Prix de Rome for his cantata *Fernand*, and in his 30's he visited Rome, where he became intrigued by the vocal traditions of the Sistine Chapel and the polyphony of the 16th century masters such as Palestrina. His interest in the church also manifested itself in a brief enlistment as a novice at a Carmelite monastery. It was a short stay, and he married Anna Zimmerman in 1852.



CHARLES GOUNOD.

Gounod's musical output includes two symphonies, a sequence of sixteen masses and requiems, over 200 cantatas and motets, several oratorios and thirteen operas. Although he was a major figure in French music in the late 19th century, Gounod's music quickly fell out of favor as being too clichéd and romantically sweet. His opera *Faust* has been his most enduring legacy along with his harmonization of Bach's *C Major Prelude* that includes a melody for "Ave Maria" at one time banned from the church due to overuse. Gounod's *Funeral March for a Marionette* was used as the theme music for the Alfred Hitchcock television program. Of the masses only the *St. Cecilia Mass* has been often performed, and that "Sanctus" for tenor and chorus is frequently heard as a church anthem.

The *Messe Chorale* had been completely neglected until a recent revival in France. The Assabet Valley Mastersingers' performance may be only the second to occur in the United States. This mass is notable for its simplicity and conservatism and adherence to the traditional Gregorian chant "Credo in unum Deum." Also, the contrast of full organ followed by accompanying organ is a reflection of an earlier tradition of antiphonal organ. In spite of these trademarks, this mass written in 1888 characterizes Gounod's late mature compositions and retains much of the 19th century harmonic richness.

Gloria in G—Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)

Francis Poulenc was born in Paris and became a highly cultured man, well versed in poetry, art, literature, and music. Outwardly, he was talented, witty and carefree, moving easily in the high society circles of Paris. Poulenc was also an introspective and intense individual. His interest in religion lapsed with the death of his father, but Francis found a renewal of faith following a visit to Rocamadour, where he was emotionally overcome by the black wooden Virgin. After this experience he expressed his belief openly and frequently, often telling friends, “I have the faith of a country pastor.” He preferred quiet prayer or meditation in a rural setting rather than the structured service of an urban church. He described his thoughts thus: “I want the religious spirit to be expressed clearly, out in the open, with fervor and, especially, of humility, for me the most beautiful quality of prayer... My conception of religious music is essentially direct, and, I dare say, intimate.”



These characteristics of humility, sincerity, and simplicity are pervasive throughout the *Gloria*. Written in 1959 by commission of the Serge Koussevitsky Foundation, it was first performed by the Boston Symphony and Chorus Pro Musica in 1961 under the direction of Charles Munch. It is a work of many contrasts. The second movement is gay and jazzy, considered by some to be irreverent. Poulenc himself likened this movement to the Gozolli frescoes in which the angels are sticking out their tongues, or to some Benedictine monks he once saw playing soccer. The “Qui Sedes” is on the other hand a profoundly beautiful and sincere religious confession.

At first glance much of the *Gloria* appears dissonant, with constant meter changes and chromatics. In much of the work, however, the harmony is quite tonal and functional with rich seventh, ninth, eleventh, and thirteenth chords; the dissonance is caused by the addition of a single non-harmonic tone. Poulenc’s ever-present concern for color is characterized by the extreme vocal registers. His melodies are without peer, and the entire *Gloria* is a mosaic of some of the most beautiful melodies of this past century.