

Smart wanted his poem to be closely parallel to portions of the Order of Morning Prayer and the Psalter and he intended it to function as a responsive reading. Smart was admitted to St. Luke's Hospital for the insane in 1757. "Jubilate Agno" was begun shortly after this time and took four years to complete, the last line being written on January 30, 1763 very near the date of Smart's release from a second asylum.^{iv}

Britten's affection for the beautiful and sometimes cryptic text is abundantly clear, judging by this setting, as well as his request that excerpts be read at his memorial service. Of Britten, Michael Kennedy wrote "the peculiar potency of his vocal music seems often to derive from his ability to convey to his listeners the unexplored area of a text which was always there but which needed revelation through his imaginative vision."^{vi}

Britten came to St. Matthew's and conducted the premiere of *Rejoice in the Lamb* on September 21, 1943. Later he wrote to Rev. Hussey, "I do hope that I have given you something which will be of more lasting value than just for this particular occasion." I think I speak for decades of musicians and audiences when I say that he most certainly had!^{vii}

The piece can be roughly divided into three movements, each containing multiple sections. The opening section, "Rejoice in God, O ye Tongues," starts with a simple bareness with the choir all on a single note—middle C. This continues until a dramatic expansion of sound at the text "magnify his name together," a theme of the piece. This segues immediately into a jaunty processional in which various Biblical figures are paired with members of the animal kingdom to celebrate the majesty of God. Following this is a Hallelujah, but not one in the thundering exultant style of Handel's *Messiah*; rather, we have a slow, quiet hymn in praise of God, here cast as "the artist inimitable."^{viii}

The next movement introduces the soloists. In "For I will consider my Cat Jeoffry," the soprano celebrates the cat's various qualities over a playful, whimsical accompaniment from the organ. The passage concludes with a favorite line of mine: "For I am possessed of a cat, surpassing in beauty, from whom I take occasion to bless Almighty God." When the commissioner, Rev. Hussey, initially expressed reservations about the 'cat' section, Britten replied, "I've used a bit about the cat Jeoffry, but don't see how it could hurt anyone—he is such a nice cat."^{ix}

After lauding the cat's virtues, Britten cleverly merges disparate parts of Smart's poem to make Jeoffry the villain of the next scene, the mezzo soprano's "For the mouse is a creature of great personal valour," celebrating mice, animals often maligned and despised, not so unlike the poet. Following this, the tenor sings a lyric meditation on flowers. My favorite line: "There is a language of flowers. For flowers are peculiarly the poetry of Christ."^x

Now comes perhaps the most arresting moment in the entire work, "For I am under the same accusation as my Saviour," as we finally hear the anguish of the poet. Today, as then, those who suffer from mental illness are often stigmatized and those who are different are often isolated and vilified. In times when violence used by those charged to serve and protect the people is all too common, these words ring powerfully: "For the officers of the peace are at variance with me and the watchman smites me with his staff. For Silly fellow! Silly fellow! is against me." Here Smart identifies heavily with another famous outsider, Jesus.

The next section, for bass soloist, creates the bridge to the final part of the cantata. "For H is a spirit and therefore he is God," is based on alliteration and alphabetical symbolism.^{xi} This leads to a joyful section in which the singers celebrate "all the instruments in Heaven," which are all "a blessed intelligence."

After the celebration follows a time of calm awareness and my favorite lines of the piece are sung:

For at that time malignity ceases and the devils themselves are at peace.
For this time is perceptible to man by a remarkable stillness
and serenity of soul.

The piece closes with a simple and luminous repetition of the Hallelujah, "from the heart of God." Today, we offer this piece in the spirit of awe, gratitude, and celebration.

- Mark David Buckles

ⁱ Brunelle, Philip. Afterward. *Rejoice in the Lamb*. Milwaukee: Boosey & Hawkes, 1943, 41.

ⁱⁱ Talbeck, Carol. "Benjamin Britten. Rejoice in the Lamb." Program Notes. Rejoice in the Lamb. San Francisco Choral Society.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Letters from a Life: Selected Letters and Diaries of Benjamin Britten Volume 2 1939-45*. edited by Donald Mitchell and Philip Reed. London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1991.

^{iv} Brunelle, Philip. Preface. *Rejoice in the Lamb*. Milwaukee: Boosey & Hawkes, 1943.

^v Ismail, Ahmed E. "Three 'Apparent Miracles'" Program Notes. Rejoice in the Lamb. MIT, Fall 2002.

^{vi} Op. Cit. ii

^{vii} Op. Cit. iv

^{viii} Op. Cit. v

^{ix} Op. Cit. iii

^x Op. Cit. v

^{xi} Op. Cit. ii



**ARLINGTON
STREET CHURCH**
Unitarian Universalist

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 23RD, 2014

REJOICE IN THE LAMB

BY
BENJAMIN BRITTEN

LYRICS AND NOTES
ON TODAY'S PERFORMANCE

Arlington Street Church
Boston, Massachusetts
Founded in 1729

Gathered in love and service for justice and peace

Arlington Street Church, *Unitarian Universalist*

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 23RD, 2014

INTROIT

I. Rejoice in God, O ye Tongues

Rejoice in God, O ye Tongues; give the glory to the Lord, and the Lamb.

Nations, and languages, and every Creature, in which is the breath of Life.

Let man and beast appear before him, and magnify his name together.

Let Nimrod, the mighty hunter, bind a leopard to the altar, and consecrate his spear to the Lord.

Let Ishmail dedicate a tyger, and give praise for the liberty in which the Lord has let him at large.

Let Balaam appear with an Ass, and bless the Lord his people and his creatures for a reward eternal.

Let Daniel come forth with a lion, and praise God with all his might through faith in Christ Jesus.

Let Ithamar minister with a Chamois, and bless the name of Him that cloatheth the naked.

Let Jakim with the satyr bless God in the dance,

Let David bless with the Bear - The beginning of victory to the Lord - to the Lord the perfection of excellence.

II. Hallelujah from the heart of God

Hallelujah from the heart of God, and from the hand of the artist inimitable, and from the echo of the heavenly harp in sweetness magnificent and mighty.

INVOCATION

III. For I will consider my Cat Jeffrey

For I will consider my cat Jeffrey.

For he is the servant of the Living God, duly and daily serving him.

For at the first glance of the glory of God in the East he worships in his way.

For this is done by wreathing his body seven times round with elegant quickness.

For he knows that God is his Saviour.

For God has bless'd him in the variety of his movements.

For there is nothing sweeter than his peace when at rest.

For I am possessed of a cat, surpassing in beauty, from whom I take occasion to bless Almighty God.

IV. For the Mouse is a creature of great personal valour

For the Mouse is a creature of great personal valour.

For - this is a true case - Cat takes female mouse - male mouse will not depart, but stands threat'ning and daring.

...If you will let her go, I will engage you, as prodigious a creature as you are.

For the Mouse is a creature of great personal valour.

For the Mouse is of an hospitable disposition.

V. For the flowers are great blessings

For the flowers are great blessings.

For the flowers have their angels even the words of God's creation.

For the flower glorifies God and the root parries the adversary.

For there is a language of flowers.

For flowers are peculiarly the poetry of Christ.

ANTHEM

VI. For I am under the same accusation with my Saviour

For I am under the same accusation with my Saviour—

For they said, he is besides himself.

For the officers of the peace are at variance with me,

And the watchman smites me with his staff.

For Silly fellow! Silly fellow! is against me and belongeth neither to me nor to my family.

For I am in twelve HARSHIPS, but he that was born of a virgin shall deliver me out of all.

VII. For H is a spirit and therefore he is God

For H is a spirit and therefore he is God.

For K is king and therefore he is God.

For L is love and therefore he is God.

For M is musick and therefore he is God.

VIII. For the instruments are by their rhimes

For the instruments are by their rhimes,

For the Shawm rhimes are lawn fawn moon boon and the like.

For the harp rhimes are sing ring string and the like.

For the cymbal rhimes are bell well toll soul and the like.

For the flute rhimes are tooth youth suit mute and the like.

For the Bassoon rhimes are pass class and the like.

For the dulcimer rhimes are grace place beat heat and the like.

For the Clarinet rhimes are clean seen and the like.

For the trumpet rhimes are sound bound soar more and the like.

For the TRUMPET of God is a blessed intelligence and so are all the instruments in HEAVEN.

For GOD the father Almighty plays upon the HARP of stupendous magnitude and melody.

IX. For at that time malignity ceases

For at that time malignity ceases and the devils themselves are at peace.

For this time is perceptible to man by a remarkable stillness and serenity of soul.

X. Hallelujah from the heart of God

Hallelujah from the heart of God, and from the hand of the artist inimitable, and from the echo of the heavenly harp in sweetness magnificent and mighty.

Rejoice in the Lamb

Notes on today's performance

Rejoice in the Lamb is a cantata for organ, choir, and soloists by Benjamin Britten with text by Christopher Smart. Benjamin Britten was one of the most remarkable British classical musicians of the 20th century. Yesterday, November 22, would have been his 101st birthday; he was born on the feast day of St. Cecilia, the patron saint of music. His most notable compositions include the opera *Peter Grimes*, the *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra*, and the *War Requiem*. His career as a composer was matched by his outstanding ability as a performer; he was an excellent pianist as well as a renowned conductor.ⁱ

In 1939, disillusioned by World War II, his country's soaring unemployment, and its opposition to homosexuality, Britten left England for the United States with his lover, tenor Peter Pears, who became his lifelong companion. Britten himself would remain publicly silent about his sexual orientation. Pears said, "The word 'gay' was not in his vocabulary.... He was more interested in the beauty, and therefore the danger, that existed in any relationship between human beings." Britten and Pears stayed in the United States for only three years before returning to England, but during that time, Britten met the Boston Symphony Orchestra's conductor, Serge Koussevitzky, who arranged for his own music foundation to give Britten \$1,000 toward the composition of an opera, which would become *Peter Grimes*, Britten's entrée to worldwide fame.ⁱⁱ

In 1937, Rev. Walter Hussey, then Vicar of St. Matthew's Church in Northampton, England had the idea of bringing artists and the Church back together – something extraordinary at that time. "How sad it was," he said, "that the arts had become largely divorced from the Church: Sad because artists think and meditate a lot and are in the broadest sense of the word 'religious.' They create fine expressions of the human spirit, which can symbolize and express worship, as well as conveying the truth of God to mankind in a vivid and memorable way." A few years later, with this in mind, Hussey wrote to Benjamin Britten about the possibility of commissioning a piece for the 50th anniversary of the consecration of St. Matthew's Church.ⁱⁱⁱ

Britten accepted and chose as his text Christopher Smart's "Jubilate Agno" ("Rejoice in the Lamb" in Latin), a long free-verse poem from which Britten selected certain parts. One of the main themes of the poem, and that of the cantata, is the worship of God by all beings and things, each in its own way.