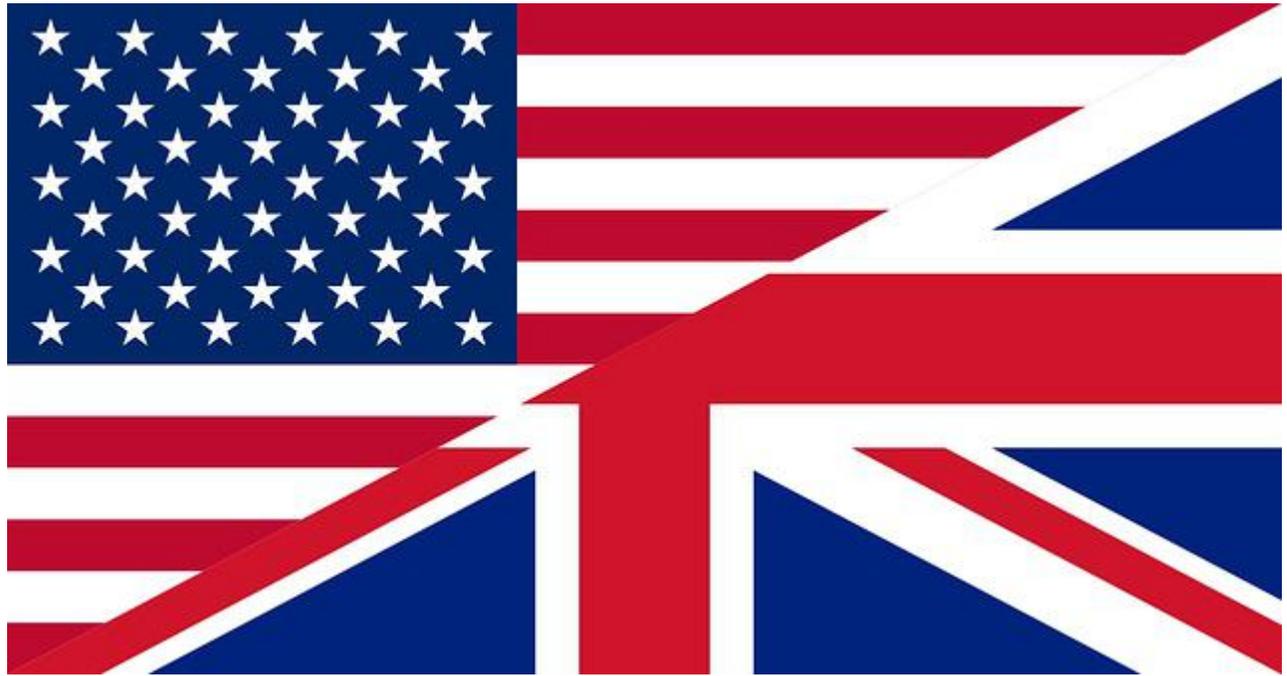


Two entries about the magnificent Rutter *Gloria*:

What's John Rutter's connection to the good ol' USA?



So, last night we had the family over to watch the football game, and I was telling my father-in-law about our upcoming Christmas concert with the Denver Brass, and how they'd be playing with us for the Rutter *Gloria*, among other pieces, and since he's a former brass player himself he was quite interested. He looked through the copy I had sitting on the coffee table, taking note of the instrumentation, and then he read the intro material. "Guess where this was first performed?" he asked. "Somewhere in England," I said. "Nope. Omaha, Nebraska."

Huh. Kind of surprising. Not that Omaha can't be cultured! Hey, Denver's pretty cultured too, and it also has a history as a cow town. Still, you don't usually expect a Cambridge University don, someone whose music has been performed in Westminster Cathedral, a Commander of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire (that's a knighthood, a couple of notches up from a lowly Member—I didn't know there were degrees in these honors until I looked it up on Wikipedia), etc., etc., to show up in the American Midwest. I did a little research (a fancy name for googling), and found that the Omaha connection did not stand alone. Many of Rutter's major choral works have had their premieres in the US, and he was for a number of years (1988-2015) an active conductor at Carnegie Hall where he led over 125 performances. His monumental *Requiem* had its world premiere with the Fox Valley Festival Chorus in Illinois in 1985; his *Gifts of Life: Six Canticles of Creation* premiered in Dallas in 2015. with all sorts of US performances took place in between. But it all started in 1974.

Would Rutter himself be willing to tell me how this whole process came about? Never hurts to ask. I went on his Facebook page and messaged him; this is the answer I got back (which he gave me permission to quote):

Dear Debi Simons,

As it happens the Gloria (written in 1974) was the first work I wrote especially for performance in the USA. It came about simply because I was asked by a very noted choral conductor in the Midwest, Mel Olson, who wrote to me in England offering me a commission to write a 20-minute work for his choir in Omaha, and come over to conduct the first performance. Other commissions from the USA just seemed to follow, to the point where I was able to look upon America as my second home. I visit less often these days, but I still have many friends and colleagues in the US, and am grateful for all the opportunities I was offered and doors that were opened to me all over your vast country – including, as you say, some surprising places – but remember, there are fine performing groups everywhere!

Best wishes, John Rutter

Isn't that cool? So then I thought, 'Who's this Mel Olson?' I couldn't find out any more about him than Rutter mentions above, except that he was the director of the Chancel Choir at the First United Methodist Church in Omaha at one time. That choir has premiered two other compositions by Rutter. So the question is, why did Olson think of asking Rutter to write the Gloria? Rutter was about 30, just at the start of his career, and had never been to the States. But, sadly, I found out that Olson had died just this past September at the age of 89. So I can't ask him, "Why did you write to John Rutter in 1974? He hadn't even started his career as music director at Clare College. How did you hear about him?"

Another American music director, Philip Brunelle, has also had a long relationship with Rutter:

Philip Brunelle's connections frequently pay off for Twin Cities audiences. Brunelle's old buddy John Rutter had written a new Christmas carol for an English audience. In a phone conversation, Brunelle suggested that VocalEssence give the piece its U.S. premiere.

"I got a call from Philip and he said they were devoting much of their Christmas program to me, and I told him about the carol," Rutter said recently. "[VocalEssence] is a choir I've always admired and Philip and I go back 30 years." (from the [VocalEssence website](#))

I guess I could try to contact Brunelle and ask him how *his* friendship with Rutter began, but I have a feeling that this is one of those long and winding roads that leads to no clear answer. What is clear from these little bits and pieces is the importance, and the mystery, of human relationships. So a music director in Omaha decides, we don't know how or why, to commission a work from a young choral composer in Britain. Because of that commission the composer visits the US for the first time, and I guess we can assume that the visit was a success. Way leads on to way, as Robert Frost would say. Rutter meets other Americans; connections are formed, so that, as he says, "other commissions from the USA just seemed to follow." A strong and beautiful friendship is formed. And there it is.

Does the word *tibi* have anything to do with your tibia?



No. Your shinbone is named after an ancient Greek wind instrument, sort of like a flute.

Everybody got that? Maybe it's just me, but I'm very distractible. So it's good for me to get that out of the way. What does "tibi" mean? Basically, "to you." Latin nouns and pronouns have various forms that determine their use in a sentence so that you don't have to use a preposition. And you don't have to worry about word order. You just have to learn all six types (called "cases") of nouns and pronouns. Then you have to learn tense, voice and mood for each verb, and degrees of comparison for each adjective . . . and don't get me started on the adverbs. It's very complicated. How did the Romans have time to conquer the world when they had to learn all this grammar? Beats me.

Since I have such a few weeks to post about this concert I'm going to limit myself to two essays on the *Gloria*, the one last week about Rutter's commission from the US to write it and today's on the meaning of the words. Latin, despite its complications, is kind of a cool language. So, to get back to the text of the *Gloria*, the overall wording is taken directly from the "Ordinary of the Mass," from the *Book of Common Prayer*. Two words here need explanation. "Ordinary" does not mean "boring" but regulated, part of a set *order*. "Common" does not mean "not valuable or low class" but something that is part of a *community*, that is, common or available to all.

Is the *Gloria* a composition specifically for Christmas? Again, the answer is no. The premiere actually took place in May 1974. But we think of it as a Christmas piece, and it is performed mostly at Christmas, largely because of the first section which echoes the song of the angels that the shepherds heard on the night of Jesus' birth: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men."

Let's pick that one apart, shall we? I have always thought that "in the highest" referred to Heaven, so that the phrase meant something like "May God be glorified in Heaven." But the real meaning is more about God and less about a place: "May God be glorified *in the highest degree*." And whose "good will" are we talking about? The most common translation is "good will towards men," with the implication being that God is showing His own good will to men. But the grammatical construction does not support that translation; it is actually "peace to men of good will." So the emphasis shifts to the heart attitude of the people who are receiving God's peace. The Latin for "will" is *voluntatis*. You can see the root of our words "volition" and "volunteer" there. Humankind gets to *choose* how to respond to the offer of God's peace.

I must move in, having used up half my word count already. Let me point out a couple of interesting words in the middle section, the "*Domine Deus*." Here the emphasis moves from God the Father to God the Son. An important word is *unigenite*, which has echoes of "unique"

but specifically means something along the lines of “the only one born.” The old King James Bible says, “only begotten.” Orthodox Christian doctrine does not say that Christ had a heavenly birth or beginning but is eternally co-existent with God the Father.

What about *deprecationem*? Doesn't that sound like “deprecating,” as in “he gave a self-deprecating laugh”? Well, it is the same word, but somehow the meaning we have for it today is quite a bit different from the original. A “deprecation” was originally a prayer, especially a prayer to ward off evil. So the Son, who takes away the sins of the world, is asked to receive our prayers. And one last interesting word before I move on to part III: *dexteram*. Does that sound like “dexterous”? It's indeed the same word, but it means “on the right.” Christ is said to be sitting “on the right” of God the Father. Because the right side, and therefore the place at someone's right hand, was seen as the place of honor, the word eventually came to mean “handy, quick, skillful, especially with the hands.” I could go into a whole rabbit hole here about cultural, Scriptural and political notions of right and left, but I'll restrain myself. (Even in physics certain particles have right and left spin. Did you know that?) The idea of being someone's “right-hand man” is surely derived from this picture of the Heavenly relationship between the Father and the Son. How the right and left got those associations to begin with is another question, one to which I don't have the answer right now.

A key word in the final section is *solus*, obviously meaning “solely” or “alone.” For, or therefore (*quoniam*) God alone is *sanctus* (holy), *Dominus* (Lord) and *altissimus* (most high, referring specifically to Christ—and don't you see the word “altitude” there?). The third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, gets one brief mention, and then we're off to the grand finale. Rutter wraps the end back to the beginning, repeating the great “*Gloria in excelsis Deo*” before moving into the “amen” section, a joy and a challenge to sing with its shifting meter and rhythm. The choir cuts off and the brass ends the piece. Maybe a faint, faint, earthly echo of the real thing?

I couldn't resist closing with a verse from a song we used to sing at a former church whose pastor was seriously in love with old Puritan hymns. This is from “Jerusalem My Happy Home”(with, of course, “Jerusalem” being a reference to Heaven) and dates to 1795:

*There David stands with harp in hand
As master of the choir:
Ten thousand times that man were
blessed That might this music hear.*