



MAGNA MYSTERIA

JOHN FITZ ROGERS

John Fitz Rogers

Magna Mysteria (2010)

for soprano, chorus and (optional) children's chorus,
and chamber orchestra

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------|
| 1. Invocation | 7:05 |
| 2. Quam dilecta | 3:41 |
| 3. Reins of Nature | 6:29 |
| 4. Exaudi orationem meam | 6:25 |
| 5. Truth's Paradox | 6:37 |
| 6. Unam petii | 3:33 |
| 7. Revelation | 11:07 |

Total: 44:57

*Trinity Cathedral Choir, Columbia, South Carolina
Cathedral Choir of Boys & Girls
Trinity Chamber Orchestra
Martha Guth, soprano
Jared Johnson, conductor*



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John Fitz Rogers's *Magna Mysteria* was commissioned by Trinity Cathedral in Columbia, South Carolina to celebrate the restoration of the nineteenth-century Cathedral building. The Cathedral restoration required the landmark building to close for nearly two years, dislocating the congregation from its normal life. The nature of this event led Rogers to examine ideas of home, leaving home, and returning to home; these ideas are something of a recurring theme in Rogers's earlier works, including his chamber piece *Memoria Domi* (2004). The context also established that the orchestra be limited to the number of instruments that could fit within the confines of the Cathedral nave, and that the choral writing include parts for adult singers as well as the boy and girl choristers of the Cathedral.

The resulting seven-movement composition deals with big ideas from its very title: "Great Mysteries." Notice the plural form, "mysteries," enlarging the scope of the thinking and pointing towards the work's broad philosophical sweep. Rogers's text is in itself a great literary accomplishment, weaving together the Neo-Platonic poetry of Boethius with the Vulgate translation of the books of Psalms and Revelation. The text brings to the fore several recurring themes: the idea of home and the seeking of home; the elevation of the idea of home to a metaphorical or spiritual realm; the natures of time and eternity; the image of cycles or circles ("orbem" in Boethius); and the recurring figure of the bird, appearing throughout the text and representing the song of the individual. The Latin text provides a poetic distance for the composer, a certain separation from linguistic home.

From the first sounds of *Magna Mysteria*, we enter another world. The "Invocation" opens with a chorus for children's voices. The opening theme is like a memory of Gregorian chant, a primordial starting place for the journey ahead. Rogers's vocal writing for the trebles is intentionally startling, set extremely low in their vocal register. The timbre embodies a reflection of innocence, and hints at something lost. As the full choir enters, the piece builds to a climax at the words "tu namque serenum (you alone are the bright sky)," but the music seems to contradict the words, with a stormy piling-up of tones at the high point. The peacefulness of the text is revealed by its opposite in the music, and a sense of tranquil rest settles upon the music in the lush E-major sonority that follows.

The second movement, "Quam dilecta," is an outburst of joy, the jubilant dance of being fully at home. The writing for organ amplifies the sound of the orchestra

and creates the illusion of much larger forces. Rogers's skillful orchestration also provides support for the singers, doubling the choir in the manner of *Messiah* and the *Lord Nelson Mass*. The imitative writing in the choral parts hints at the fragmentation of the musical material that will take place in subsequent movements, a pre-echo of the fifth movement. Note the first reference to the bird, happily at home in her nest.

In "Reins of Nature," *Magna Mysteria* develops its core ideas, dealing with cycles of time and the nature of eternity. The nature of time is one of the work's "great mysteries." Rogers composed this music first of the seven movements, and the organ part was written first of all. We hear rolling, perpetual-motion rhythms, the pitches circling and falling back on themselves. It's a quasi-minimalist, almost computer-generated sound world. The harmonies move in broad tectonic shifts and support the patient unfolding of the choral melody, again set low in the vocal register. The soaring oboe lines represent the bird. In the middle of the movement the winds take over the organ's theme, shifting to a dark A-minor: the bird is now caged. As the music returns to the tonic F-minor, the re-entry of the organ and the recapitulation of the opening choral theme (marked "Soaring") brilliantly coincide to illuminate a key phrase in Boethius's text: "Repetunt proprios...(All seek out their own path of returning)." The climactic choral phrase set low in the range against the soaring orchestra is another hallmark of this movement.

The fourth movement is the centerpiece of *Magna Mysteria*. An intensely personal and intimate piece of music, Rogers creates an extraordinary duet for treble choir and solo soprano. The boy and girl choristers open the movement chanting a mournful prayer, "Hear me, Lord." Rogers beautifully dovetails the entrance of the adult soprano with the last note of the treble choir. The juxtaposition of these two vocal timbres is in itself an essay in the nature of time, as we hear the innocence of the unchanged voice next to the yearning cries of the mature voice. The strings enter "pizzicato" and evoke the ticking of a clock, and a haunting pas-sacaglia unfolds. The idea of home has been entirely lost. There is a sense of lying awake at night, alone, tormented by the clock. The soprano pierces the texture with screams of loneliness on high C's. The bird is alone on the housetop. There is a passionate sense of longing in this music. We can hear the universal searching of the lost soul, or the seeking of the agnostic who wants desperately to believe.

In “Truth’s Paradox” the world has splintered, its form reduced to fragments that don’t fit together. “What discordant cause tore into pieces all the world’s concord?” The melodic fragments that were hinted at in “Quam dilecta” are here blown fully apart, leading to an explosion of anxiety and frustration. The music of the central section captures the bitter warfare of the text in its combination insistent, unfeeling repeated notes and the torturously chromatic vocal lines. This cold-sweat inducing music begins to dissolve into a memory of its opening (“sed quam retinens meminit summam”) before erupting into one final, raw, cathartic rage.

In the sixth movement, “Unam petii,” the choir transforms the mood of the work as the music begins to point towards home. As the brutal conclusion of “Truth’s Paradox” hangs in the air, the altos take over the pitch that the violins had just hammered home, but two octaves lower, again at the bottom of the vocal register. As they sing in simple unison the word “unam,” we can begin to see around to the other side of the circle, where the end touches the beginning. This movement of *Magna Mysteria* stands alone as an a cappella choral work (its world premiere was in Canterbury Cathedral in 2009). The expert vocal writing reveals the hand of a composer with a love for the voice and a background in choral singing. The close harmonies of the opening expand and build to a glorious climax at the text, “the fair beauty of the Lord.” Though this high point momentarily feels like home, Rogers seems to emphasize the importance of seeking above all: note the repetition of the text “hanc requiram” at the conclusion, with an extraordinary, shimmering unresolved chord at the last.

The final movement of *Magna Mysteria* is a tour de force unto itself. The music takes the broken fragments of the earlier movements of the work and re-assembles them into a glorious whole. The movement opens with a joyful dance in the orchestra. The flowing sixteenth notes move in small circular motion, the idea of cycles and circles being ever-present in *Magna*. The counterpoint cascades to a low C, revealing a pure C major triad. The soprano soloist emerges, extremely quietly and slowly, “with wonder and rapture.” The clock is no longer ticking. Her melody remembers the themes from earlier movements and begins to knit them back together. As the French horn enters with the melody that the children sang in the first movement, the soprano continues singing the text from

Revelation: “And I saw a new heaven...and I heard a great voice out of heaven saying...”

The soprano repeats three times the word “dicentem (saying),” building suspense and drawing attention to the phrase to come next, wherein the great voice will speak. In the next moment Rogers achieves a profound interlocking of musical and philosophical thought. He brings back the music from “Reins of Nature,” but with the choir singing new text. The music implies the Boethius text, “All seek out their own paths of re-entry,” but the choir now sings, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with people.” These two ideas pile on top of each other, one suggested by the tones, the other by the text, as if to show that the tabernacle of God is our individual seeking. As the soprano soars above this already passionate music, singing “Factum est (“it is finished,” or “it is made”),” the choir shifts to the text that the music has been suggesting from “Reins of Nature.” The soprano sings “I am Alpha and Omega” and the end fully touches the beginning. It is no accident that the last word the choir sings here is “orbem.”

The music finishes with a rollicking “Amen.” The trebles finally sing at the height of their range, and the orchestra joyously plays a variation on the theme that opened this final movement. The vocal counterpoint develops the opening theme from the “Invocation,” yet another way *Magna Mysteria* comes full circle.

At its premiere in 2010, and at the encore performance recorded here in 2014, *Magna Mysteria* was received with rapturous praise by audience, critics, and musicians alike. It is a major accomplishment deserving of a lasting place in the canon of choral and orchestral works. And true to its commission, the music resonates with the high ideals that a great Cathedral strives to embrace: that all people are welcome through their own paths of entry; that mysteries are holy, and that holiness is a mystery; that big questions are worthy of contemplation; and that our souls, at their deepest and most true, deserve great works of art to help them soar.

—Jared Johnson

Magna Mystera

Texts: Latin Vulgate: Psalms 84, 102, and 27 (translation: Episcopal Book of Common Prayer); Book of Revelation: Chapter 21 (translation: Revised Standard Version); and Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae* ("Consolation of Philosophy"). Excerpts from Boethius's "Consolation of Philosophy" translated by Joel C. Relihan are reprinted with permission of Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. Copyright © 2001 by Hackett Publishing Company, Inc. All rights reserved.

I. Invocation (Chorus)

Grant to the mind, Father, that it may rise to your holy foundations;	Da, pater, augustam menti conscendere sedem,
Grant it may ring round the source of the Good, may discover the true light,	da fontem lustrare boni, da luce reperta
And fix the soul's vision firmly on you, vision keen and clear-sighted.	in te conspicuos animi defigere visus.
Scatter these shadows, dissolve the dead weight of this earthly concretion,	Dissice terrenaе nebulas et pondera molis
Shine in the splendor that is yours alone: only you are the bright sky,	atque tuo splendore mica; tu namque serenum,
You are serenity, peace for the holy; their goal is to see you;	tu requies tranquilla piis, te cernere finis,
You are their source, their conveyance, their leader, their path, and their haven.	principium, vector, dux, semita, terminus idem.

II. Quam dilecta (Chorus)

How dear to me is your dwelling, O LORD of hosts!	Quam dilecta tabernacula tua, Domine virtutum!
The sparrow has found her a house and the swallow a nest where she may lay her young; by the side of your altars, O LORD of hosts, my King and my God.	Etenim passer invenit sibi domum, et turtur nidum sibi, ubi ponat pullos suos: altaria tua, Domine virtutum, rex meus, et Deus meus.
Happy are they who dwell in your house! they will always be praising you.	Beati qui habitant in domo tua, Domine; in saecula saeculorum laudabunt te.

III. Reins of Nature (Chorus)

What are the reins of powerful Nature,
Guiding the universe? By what statutes
Does her Providence hold the infinite sphere,
Binding and keeping this world of things
In unbreakable bonds? It is my pleasure
That my song sing out to the soft lyre...

The chattering bird in the high branches
Now is imprisoned in the vault of a cage; ...
And mourning her loss seeks the woods only,
Only coos "The woods!" in her soft singing...

All seek out their own paths of reentry,
Rejoice in their own private returnings.
There is handed down no lasting order,
Except that each join end and beginning
And make for itself one stable circle.

Quantas rerum flectat habenas
natura potens, quibus immensum
legibus orbem provida servet
stringatque ligans inresoluto
singula nexu, placet arguto
fidibus lentis promere cantu...

Quae canit altis garrula ramis
ales caveae clauditur antro;...
silvas tantum maesta requirit,
silvas dulci voce susurrat...

Repetunt proprios quaeque recursus
redituque suo singula gaudent
nec manet ulli traditus ordo
nisi quod fini junxerit ortum
stabilemque sui fecerit orbem.

IV. Exaudi orationem meam (Solo Soprano and Chorus)

LORD, hear my prayer, and let my cry
come before you;
Because of the voice of my groaning,
I am but skin and bones.
I lie awake and groan; I am like a sparrow,
lonely on a house-top.
My days pass away like a shadow,
and I wither like the grass.
But you, O LORD, endure for ever,
and your Name from age to age.

Domine exaudi orationem meam:
et clamor meus ad te veniat.
A voce gemitus mei adhesit
os meum carni meae.
Vigilavi, et factus sum sicut passer
solitarius in tecto.
Dies mei sicut umbra declinaverunt:
et ego sicut faenum arui.
Tu autem Domine in aeternum permanes:
et memoriale tuum in generationem
et generationem.

V. Truth's Paradox (Chorus)

What discordant cause tore into pieces
All the world's concord? What god has decreed
For these two truths such bitter warfare?
Each standing its ground separate and equal,
But drawing the line at joining together.
Or could it be there is no discord—
That definite truths ever cling each to each—
But mind, buried by body's blindness,
Without the fire of light deep-concealed,
Cannot see the world's bonds, microscopic?...

Thus, whoever searches for true things
Has neither condition: for he does not know,
Nor does he *not* know, all things completely.
With an eye on the whole, kept and remembered,
He ponders anew the depths he once gazed on,
That he may add to parts that were kept safe
Parts once forgotten.

Quaenam discors foedera rerum
causa resoluit? Quis tanta deus
veris statuit bella duobus
ut quae carptim singula constant
eadem nolint mixta jugari?
An nulla est discordia veris
semperque sibi certa cohaerent,
sed mens caecis obruta membris
nequit oppressi luminis igne
rerum tenues noscere nexus?...

Igitur quisquis vera requirit
neutro est habitu; nam neque novit
nec penitus tamen omnia nescit,
sed quam retinens meminit summam
consulit alte visa retractans,
ut servatis queat oblitus
addere partes.

VI. Unam petii (Chorus - a cappella)

One thing have I asked of the LORD; one thing I
seek; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life;
To behold the fair beauty of the LORD,
and to seek him in his temple.

Unam petii a Domino, hanc requiram,
ut inhabitem in domo Domini omnes
dies vitae meae:
Ut videam voluntatem Domini,
et visitem templum eius.

**VII. Revelation
(Solo Soprano and Chorus)**

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth;
for the first heaven and the first earth had
passed away, and the sea was no more.

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,
"Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will
dwell with them, and they shall be his people,
and God himself will be with them."

And he said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and
the Omega, the beginning and the end. To the
thirsty I will give from the fountain of the water
of life, [freely]."

Amen.

Et vidi caelum novum, et terram novam.
Primum enim caelum, et prima terra abiit,
et mare jam non est.

Et audivi vocem magnam de throno dicentem:
Ecce tabernaculum Dei cum hominibus,
et habitabit cum eis. Et ipsi populus ejus
erunt, et ipse Deus cum eis erit eorum Deus.

Et dixit mihi: Factum est. Ego sum Alpha et
Omega: initium et finis. Ego sitienti dabo
de fonte aquae vivae, gratis.

Amen.



Composer **John Fitz Rogers**'s music has been performed by ensembles, festivals, and venues such as Carnegie Hall, Bang on a Can Marathon, Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, the Albany, Louisville, Charleston, and Tulsa Symphony Orchestras, New York Youth Symphony, Eastman Wind Ensemble, the MATA, Rockport, Bumbershoot, Bowling Green, and Keys To The Future festivals, the College Band Directors National Association national conference, the World Saxophone Congress, and by individuals and chamber ensembles such as the New Century Saxophone Quartet, Capitol Quartet, Lionheart, Composers, Inc., and the Meehan/Perkins Duo. Recent premieres included *Double Concerto* for two pianos and orchestra, commissioned by the South Carolina Philharmonic, and *Book of Concord*, a string quartet commissioned by and premiered at the Bennington Chamber Music Conference.

Rogers has received commissions, fellowships, and awards from ASCAP, the American Composers Forum, American Music Center, MATA and the Mary Flagler Cary Trust, National Flute Association, MacDowell Colony, South Carolina Arts Commission, and the Massachusetts Cultural Council, as well as the Heckscher Foundation Composition Prize.

A dedicated advocate for contemporary music, Rogers founded and directed the *Southern Exposure New Music Series*, which received the 2005-06 Chamber Music America / ASCAP Award for Adventurous Programming. He holds degrees in music from Cornell University, the Yale School of Music, and Oberlin College, and is Professor of Composition at the University of South Carolina School of Music and visiting faculty at the Vermont College of Fine Arts.



Soprano **Martha Guth** brings consummate musicianship, interpretive intelligence, and a distinctive tonal palette to a wide range of musical styles and periods. In recital, she has performed at the Wigmore Hall and the Leeds Lieder Festival with Graham Johnson at the piano, the Vancouver International Song Institute and the Ottawa International Chamber Music Festival with Erika Switzer, world premieres at Lincoln Center, the Liederkrantz with pianist Dalton Baldwin, and an all Britten recital with pianist Malcolm Martineau in New York City for the Five Boroughs Music Festival. She has performed extensively throughout the United States and Canada in concerts, recitals, and opera, and her performances have been broadcast live on the BBC Radio 2 in England, the CBC and Radio Canada throughout Canada, and the WDR in Germany. She is proud to have worked under the batons of maestros Seiji Ozawa, Robert Spano, Helmut Rilling, John Nelson, Scott Speck, and Richard Bradshaw, among many others.

Her discography includes the Brahms *Liebeslieder* waltzes through Sparks and Wiry Cries, Roberto Sierra's *Beyond the Silence of Slumber* with the Orquesta Sinfonica de Puerto Rico for Naxos, a first solo disc of all Schubert songs with fortepianist Penelope Crawford for Musica Omnia, and *The Five Boroughs Songbook* recorded for GVR records and distributed through Naxos.

Martha curates the Casement Fund Song Series based in New York City, is a founding faculty member and co-director of the Contemporary Performance Studies program at the Vancouver International Song institute (VISI), and is the co-creator and co-editor of "Sparks and Wiry Cries," a website dedicated to scholarship, exploration, and performance in art song (www.sparksandwirycries.com).



Jared Johnson is Canon Organist and Choirmaster of Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in Columbia, South Carolina, and Instructor of Organ at the University of South Carolina. At Trinity he trains the boy and girls choristers and directs the Cathedral Choir in more than 150 services each year, as well as leading regular tours and recordings. As an organ recitalist he has appeared in major venues throughout the United States, Canada, Great Britain and Australia, and his recordings appear on the Pro Organo and JAV labels.

A native of Ohio, he is a graduate of Oberlin College and Yale University, where his principal teachers were Haskell Thomson and Thomas Murray. He has won numerous prizes for musical and academic achievements, including a Watson Fellowship in 1997. Before moving to South Carolina, he worked on the music staffs of Trinity Church, New Haven; Berkeley Divinity School; Memorial Church at Harvard; and Trinity Church, Boston.

The Choirs of Trinity Episcopal Cathedral have a long history of excellence throughout their 200 year history. Their principal mission is to provide music for Cathedral liturgies. In addition they undertake regular tours, recordings, and concerts of major works with orchestra. Trinity Cathedral supports separate choirs of Men and Boys; Men and Girls; and Adults. All of these choirs sing together on this recording.

The Choir of Adults is a mixture of volunteers and professional singers who rehearse weekly and sing for services every Sunday of the year. Boy and girl choristers attend a variety of schools throughout Columbia and the surrounding communities. They practice twice each week and receive special instruction in music theory and sight-reading as well as voice lessons. In recent years they have sung in Canterbury Cathedral; Washington Cathedral; St. Thomas Church, New York; Gloucester Cathedral; the American Cathedral in Paris; the Basilica of St. Francis, Assisi; St. Peter's Basilica; and the Sistine Chapel.

**Cathedral Choir
of Boys & Girls**

Girls

Annie Bauknight
Lucy Grace Burnett
Ruth Dibble
Virginia Dunlap
Kate Evans
Kate Falvey
Mazie Goodlett
Kimberly Green
Hannah Green
Emily Hogue
Elizabeth Hogue
Anne Jackson
Abby Malanuk
Lenora Marterer
Caroline Matthews
Daisy McLeod
Isabelle Mikell
Caroline Moorman
Lucy Owen
Anna Peacock
Harriet Rogers
Helen Rogers
Bailey Rowden
Logan Shainwald
Emma Shealy
Cameron Viperman

Boys

Graydon Davies
Benjamin Eidson
David Shand Estefano
Jack Falvey

William Fritze
Cravens Godbold
Spears Goodlett
Nicholas Hagen
James Kitchens
James Lucas
Daniel Lucas
Walker McKay
Michael Moran
Matthew Pilat
Xander Postic
Myles Roberts
David Shealy
Paul Smith
Jack Taylor
Walker Weaver

Trinity Cathedral Choir

Margaret Bauknight
Witt Bauknight
Janice Boan
Sarah Cameron
Patrick Dover
Amy Duhan
John Duhan
Evan Farr
Stephen Fenner
Jessica Gibbons
Al Glenn
Gordon Goodwin
Stephen Gunter
Mari Hazel
Ryan Headley
Elizabeth Hill
Hannah Lea
Helen Lupo

Susan Lyon
Jeff Maddox
Sarah Moncer
Mark Mooningham
Becki Moore
Xavier Moses
Anne Pearce
Oliver Postic
Joe Rogers
Joan Sallenger
Ken Sallenger
Matthew Samson
Joe Setzer
Christopher Simpson
Haynes Spelvin
Melissa Thigpen
Stephanie Thompson
Emily Thrash
Jonathan Trotter
Blaire Umhau
Don Whittaker
Scott Wild

Jared Johnson,
Canon Organist &
Choirmaster
Christopher Jacobson,
Associate Organist &
Choirmaster
Dido Heath,
Music Administrator
Doak Wolfe, Associate for
Liturgy, Music, &
Administration

Violin 1

Ashley Horvat
Damir Horvat
Pawel Kozak
Erin Althoff
Erika Cutler

Violin 2

Catherine Hazan
Shr-Han Wu
Sarah Land
Andrew Lynn
Emily Wait

Viola

Nathan Schram
Jarrod Haning
Audrey Harris

Cello

James Waldo
Ismail Akbar
Ryan Knott

Double Bass

Craig Butterfield
Jonathan Rouse

Oboe

Rebecca Nagel

Clarinet

Joseph Eller
John Bittle

Bassoon

Michael Harley

Horn

Martha Edwards

Percussion

Scott Herring

Organ

Christopher
Jacobson

CREDITS

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