



'Where the biggies leave off...'

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Compass Rose Brass Ensemble returns to St. Mark's on April 7; 'St. Mark Passion' on March 30

By Michael Wilson

St. Mark's Cathedral will ring once again on Saturday, April 7, to the brilliant sounds of Compass Rose Brass Ensemble as they present a broad range of music for brass choirs ranging from Renaissance Italy to 21st Century Latin America.

Compass Rose performed at St. Mark's in 2015 to great audience acclaim. "To us, St. Mark's is the real deal," says the group's artistic director, Larry Prescott. "Most venues require some sacrifice in dynamic contrast (particularly the louder end), particularly for brass players. Also, most venues don't have the breadth of space to perform antiphonal music. Coming back to St. Mark's is the highlight of our year."

Brass choirs immediately bring to mind that other St. Mark's Cathedral — the one in Venice — where Giovanni Gabrieli astonished the world in the late 1500s by placing his players in separate groups within that great stone space and composing music for them to play antiphonally, sometimes separately and sometimes in unison. It was the late Renaissance version of "surround sound," and it dazzled.

"When we were invited to perform again as part of the St. Mark's Music Series, I immediately began thinking of pieces that would fit the environment," says Prescott. "Antiphonal music was at the top of the list. Second is music that contains huge dynamic variation and color. St. Mark's is a treasure. The space there is as much a part of the presentation as the ensemble."

Compass Rose has programmed three antiphonal pieces, including Allegri's famous, haunting "Miserere mei, Deus," for many people the most magnificent of all choral compositions. The transcription for antiphonal brass has separate choirs calling and answering from the front of the cathedral back to the rear loft.

"We will perform the 'Miserere' in very low-lit conditions with candle lights," Prescott says, "with the intent



Photo by Rachel Adolphson

The musicians of Compass Rose Brass Ensemble, who last delighted listeners at St. Mark's in 2015, return on Saturday, April 7. The Cathedral Choir will sing Charles Wood's "St. Mark's Passion" on Good Friday, March 30.

to recreate the conditions that listeners may have had in the Sistine Chapel circa 1650. There is also an intriguing story about the writing of this piece that we will share with the St. Mark's audience."

Mozart's Queen of the Night pays a visit.

Benjamin Britten's "Fanfare for St. Edmundsbury" is another antiphonal piece that the Compass Rose players are eager to perform for us on April 7. The work is for three solo trumpets in opposing corners of the cathedral, each performing their own diverse call. The finale then has all three calls played over the top of one another. "It is a very cleverly written piece," Prescott says.

A special treat will be the famous "Queen of the Night" soprano aria from Mozart's "Magic Flute," with Prescott on piccolo trumpet. "This piece gives me the opportunity to play very high notes, which I enjoy

doing!" Prescott says. "St. Mark's is a perfect venue for this colorful and dramatic piece."

The previous week, on March 30 (Good Friday), the Cathedral Choir will sing Charles Wood's "St. Mark's Passion," directed by Canon Musician Raymond Johnston. Answering a request from Eric Milner-White, then Dean of King's College, Cambridge, Wood completed his setting in 1920. It is written in a romantic style for choir and soloists, and includes hymns for congregational participation.

Both events begin at 7:30 pm. Tickets for Compass Rose are \$10, available at the door. There is no admission charge for the "St. Mark's Passion," but a goodwill offering will be taken. Visit compassrosebrass.com to learn more about the group and the players. Visit our-cathedral.org/music-series for information on the season's final two concerts.