

Robert Kyr (b. 1952) has composed twelve symphonies, three chamber symphonies, three violin concerti, and numerous works for vocal ensemble of all types, both unaccompanied and accompanied, including many large-scale works for which he wrote or co-wrote the text, including: *A Time for Life* (an environmental oratorio, 2007); *The Passion according to Four Evangelists* (1995); and three choral symphonies—*From Creation Unfolding* (No. 8, 1998), *The Spirit of Time* (No. 9, 2000), and *Ah Nagasaki: Ashes into Light* (No. 10, 2005).

Kyr's music has been performed widely around the world and he has been commissioned by numerous ensembles, including Chanticleer (San Francisco), Cappella Romana (Portland), Cantus (Minneapolis), San Francisco Symphony Chorus, New England Philharmonic, Oregon Symphony, Yale Symphony Orchestra, Cleveland Chamber Symphony, New West Symphony (Los Angeles), Harvard-Radcliffe Collegium Musicum, Harvard Glee Club, Radcliffe Choral Society, Yale Camerata, Oregon Repertory Singers, Cappella Nova (Scotland), Revalia (Estonia), Putni (Latvia), Moscow State Chamber Choir (Russia), Ensemble Project Ars Nova, Back Bay Chorale (Boston), and San Francisco Symphony Youth Orchestra among others.

Several compact discs of Kyr's music are currently available on New Albion Records: *Unseen Rain* (NA 075), a disc of vocal music commissioned and recorded by Ensemble PAN (Project Arts Nova); *The Passion according to Four Evangelists* (NA 098), commissioned and recorded by the Back Bay Chorale (Boston) under the direction of Beverly Taylor; and *Violin Concerto Trilogy* (NA 126) recorded by the Third Angle New Music Ensemble with Ron Blessinger and Denise Huizenga, and the composer conducting. In addition, his music has been featured on several compilation discs recorded by women's vocal ensemble, Tapestry (Laurie Monahan, director): *Celestial Light: Music by Hildegard von Bingen and Robert Kyr* (Telarc CD 80456); *Faces of a Woman* (MDG 344-1468); and *The Fourth River: The Millennium Revealed* (Telarc CD 80534).

In 1974, Kyr graduated *summa cum laude* from Yale University (B. A. with exceptional distinction in Scholar of the House) and continued his education at the Royal College of Music (London), and at Dartington Summer School for the Arts, where he studied with Sir Peter Maxwell Davies. Kyr completed his M. A. at the University of Pennsylvania in 1978, studying with George Rochberg and George Crumb. In 1989, he received his Ph. D. from Harvard University, where he studied with Donald Martino and Earl Kim. He has held teaching positions in composition and theory at Yale University, UCLA, Hartt School of Music, and Justus-Liebig-Universität Giessen, Aspen Music School, and the Longy School of Music in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Currently, Kyr is a professor of composition and theory at the University of Oregon School of Music and Dance, and chair of the composition department, where he has developed new models for teaching composition. The program at Oregon is presently one of the largest in the United States and in addition to teaching, Kyr directs the Oregon Bach Festival Composers Symposium, the Music Today Festival, and the Vanguard Concert and Workshop Series, as well as the Pacific Rim Gamelan.

Many composers have written works related to issues of war and peace: Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem*, Krzysztof Penderecki's *Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima*, and R. Murray Schafer's *Threnody in Honor of Nagasaki*. Kyr's involvement with this topic,

however, differs in terms of the breadth and number of his peace-related works, and his role in creating numerous large-scale projects that focus on peace and reconciliation. For example, he envisioned and implemented 'Waging Peace through Singing' (2000-02), a global initiative that encouraged the creation and dissemination of an international repertoire of choral music composed on peace-related texts.

[In October 2008, Kyr's tenth symphony—*Ah Nagasaki: Ashes into Light*—was premiered by 300 Japanese and American musicians in St. Paul, Minnesota, which has been the sister city of Nagasaki since 1955. The work was created by Kyr and Kazuaki Tanahashi (co-author of the text) as a journey of reconciliation, and the creative partners for the project were: Minnesota Chorale (host chorus and organizer); Gaia Philharmonic Choir (Tokyo); Kai Chamber Choir (Yokohama); Bel Canto Choir of the Allegro Choral Academy; Minneapolis Youth Chorus; Metropolitan Symphony Orchestra; and Mu Daiko (taiko drum ensemble). The work was conducted by Kathy Saltzman Romey (director of the entire project and the Minnesota Chorale), Ko Matsushita (director of the Japanese choruses), and William Schrickel (director of the orchestra).]

From 2000 through 2004, Kyr was the composer-in-residence of the Oregon Repertory Singers (Portland) under the direction of Gil Seeley. As part of the residency, he created an extensive repertoire of music on peace-related themes: *Eight Steps for Peace*; *Into the Hour of New Life*; *The Bell Ringer*; *O Jerusalem*; *A Vision of Peace* (three movements—*United*, *Voices for Peace*, and *Only One World*); *Three Hopes for the Future* (three movements—*May All Living Things Know Peace*, *Hold onto Peace*, and *Peace Is a Song*); *Alleluia (Alleluia for Peace)*; and *Sing Circle*. In addition, he also composed a large-scale motet cycle, *On the Nature of Creation*. For most of these works, he wrote his own text or created a composite text from diverse sources.

In terms of style, the music of Robert Kyr is hard to categorize because he is so prolific, and his output is unusually diverse. He has made it clear that he considers himself to be a 'twenty-first century composer' and that his primary influences are not found in the century of his birth. In his book, *Choral Music in the Twentieth Century*, Nick Strimple traces Kyr's musical lineage: 'His choral music is distinguished by a warmly compelling lyricism, as well as by a contrapuntal mastery that arises from his love of early music, especially the work of Dufay, Josquin Des Prez, and above all, [J. S.] Bach...' Kyr was never a modernist, and even less so, a neo-romantic composer—although his music is intensely melodic and essentially consonant (as opposed to chromatic and/or dissonant). In general, his choral music is characterized by its contrapuntal intricacy, as well as his inspired use of extended tonality and new forms of modality that are highly original. And moreover, since he is also a writer, he creates elegant and beautifully crafted 'texts for music' that are set with great care so that every word is clearly audible."

Adapted from an article by Giselle Wyers: "Waging Peace through Intercultural Art in Kyr's *Ah Nagasaki*" (*Choral Journal*, May 2008, pp 10-11).