Time Marches On!!!!

#1---Song: I Woke Up This Mornin’ Wid Ma Mind Stayed On Jesus!

Some folks equate the turn of the year with a new day, a new morning, beginnings with nature, school, schedules, and the unseen subterranean growth of plants and fauna!!! I tend to think of the new year as a continuation, a deepening!!! Basically everything that I’m doing now I’ve been doing since September, since July and before that in March. The arbitrary beginning of the new year in January is not really how I demarcate my life. Things which I have been doing all year, I continue doing these things. I continue my designing of new clothes to wear, I continue learning music I love, I write to friends and continue to promise to send more relevant emails and not just forwards. I continue to swim in the mornings, I try to eat better for my health, Partnership issues continue to be on my palate and I work on my anger and how I express it. I may do a reappraisal of my discipline in certain areas, but I did that also back in October and August and last May and before that in March. It’s an on-going process for me which has nothing to do with the January beginning of our new year. I spend some time in quiet mediation to continue to nourish my soul. I ask myself the ‘big’ questions about why I was born and who’s my soul mate, will I eventually get married, etc. But I did that every single month of the past 30-plus years and every single week of the past 20-years too. So really, there’s nothing new there either!!!! Sometimes I think that I still don’t know. I never grew up in a home or church with a strong liturgical calendar. I usually celebrate the major national holidays, Halloween, Christmas, New Year’s Eve and New Year’s Day, Kwanza, Dr. King’s Birthday and Presidents’ Day, Valentine’s Day, Memorial Day, Fourth Of July, and Labor Day. For the other significant holidays I usually stay close to my Anglican and Catholic Buddies, and ask questions of them from time to time. These liturgical days seem to be most important to them.

Yet for many people these beginnings are a fine time to look ahead: to take real stock of their lives and businesses, to steal time out from and for the next task, the next commitment, the next breath. That’s an introvert talking. Instead, I tend to get into the car and head up to Burlington to feel like I’m in a city or feel like I’m in Manhattan for a while. I people
watch and get ideas for my next concert. I also go see places of interest around the state or call friends to go shopping. Even the Mall in Rutland is a place to break the monotony of the long winter hours in Vermont. I don’t ski or ice skate, but I do like to do sunsets and take photographs, and watch the winter birds that gather at several strategic places around Lake Champlain.

Well, then what does the new year mean to me and why celebrate it at all????

For me I think it would be safe to say I don’t really consider New Year’s a Celebration at all. If I want an excuse to go to a party ‘okay’ I can do that, but in reality it’s not special in-and-of-itsel at all. Oh, I have things I must organize like my income tax materials for the Internal Revenue Service, or preparing for my January Term class on the American Negro Spiritual, but the truth is I’m preparing for that class all year long. I read, gather, buy and read books, look at articles, visit websites, talk to friends, visit museums, check out symposia on C-span and other PBS networks.....It’s unending and certainly doesn’t start with Advent or January. Through out the year I’m preparing concert programs and couldn’t possibly wait until the last minute or January to start the creative process that leads to a successful concert program. All year long I talk to friends, listen to albums of artist/singers whom I respect and admire for their voices or recital material, or I go to the Flynn or other theaters and observe what my colleagues are doing. I experiment and eliminate things unsuitable for my voice or temperament. I call up Dick Forman or another pianist and we run through materials I’m thinking about. It’s a never ending process and one I enjoy very much....But here again, it has practically nothing to do with New Year’s Day or a celebration.

What I come back to again and again is the need for silence and meditation. I simply crave the Presence of God’!!!! I look forward to quiet time of reflection and experimentation with my voice, the vibrations of a healing sound. I write poetry and recite it out loud; and then I prepare for the upcoming series of performances and traveling that are right around the corner for Dr. Martin Luther King’s Birthday celebrations and Black History Month. When I lived in Manhattan the busiest time of the year for me was December through January until after Easter. I was booked 2 and 3 years in advance. It was exciting but it also meant that things had to be in place. Travel arrangements took a lot
of time. Decisions had to be made about hotels and modes of transportation. I practically lived with my manager and her staff: we talked 20 and/or 30 times a day sometimes on the phone about conditions and situations which must be dealt with before I/we would be able to leave New York City. Repertoire and the change of programs and situations had to be considered. I often performed works like Handel’s Messiah, Mendelssohn’s Elijah, Bach’s St. Mathew and St. John’s Passions, Mozart, Fauré, Verdi, and Benjamin Britten’s War Requiem. Either as a soloist or with the Harlem Spiritual Ensemble it was important to build in seasonal programs and programs that favored different parts of the world. In the midst of all this I must think globally. I imagine world peace and world health. I imagine the arts having a more prominent place in our culture and community like ice hockey and skiing. (Well, maybe that’s asking too much, but it’s very much on my mind!!!) While I’m singing I’d like all of you to think of some way you can meditate or pray to make this world a better place. You may have a personal problem that’s been hard to address this past year. You may know a friend who has health problems, or financial problems or these may be your problems too. Let’s think about those things now. How would you approach the dilemma of Mad Cow Disease?? What would you do about obesity in America, Aids in the world, or the war in Iraq and Afghanistan? Do you think about our youth and the drug culture and the problem of cigarette smoking? There are still civil wars going on in Israel, Rwanda and the Congo!!! Young people are taking up arms all over the world. There have been mud slides and snow slides in our western states and many people have lost their lives while on a casual walk in the mountain moonlight. We have so much to be grateful for in Vermont. I allow myself to be enfolded in a spirit of profound peace and gratitude. I feel blessed to be at this place in God’s kingdom.

#2—Song: I Come To The Garden Alone etc.
I once wrote a poem in which I said: ‘Alone is too much with just myself’

#3—Sweet Little Jesus Boy & Mary Had A Baby
Salisbury Congregational Church
Salisbury, Vermont
Sunday, January 4, 2004  10:00am

Order of The Service

Opening Hymn
Go Tell It On The Mountain  Pg. 154
3 Verses

Announcements---- Perhaps, Irene Barna
Prelude---Instrumental--- Mrs. Dorothy Elmer
Gloria #759 Hymnals
Hymn Pg 164 Arise Your Light Is Come

Thoughts-----Sermon In Song----- Time Marches On
Never Give Up---We Are Survivors!!!!

The Life Of Christ----

I Woke Up This Mornin’ Wid My Mind Stayed On Jesus!!!
I Come To The Garden Alone
Sweet Little Jesus Boy
Mary Had A Baby
God Will Take Care of You

Pastoral Prayer----Spiritual---Amen
Hymn #166   3 verses

Offertory Solo-----Balm In Gilead
Doxology  #780

Hymn  #132 Joy To The World

Benediction