

PROMISES: Worldly and Spiritual

PROGRAM NOTES by Rebecca Scott

Sleepers Wake

We begin our concert with the fourth movement of Bach's cantata 140, originally written for tenor voices. Here we perform it with the entire chorale using the first verse. This movement is a chorale prelude with the chorale melody sung by the unison voices occurring over the unison violin and viola melody, accompanied by the bass continuo (cello and organ). It is based on the Lutheran hymn *Wachet auf, ruft uns die Stimme* ("Awake, the voice is calling") written by Philipp Nicolai in 1598 when the plague had hit the town where Nicolai lived as a preacher. The text, based on the *Parable of the Ten Virgins* from Matthew 25:1-13 and other biblical ideas, refers metaphorically to the end of time: death, judgment, heaven and hell. This was a meaningful choice considering the time. Nicolai's former student, Wilhelm Ernst, Count of Waldeck, had died of the plague at the age of fifteen, and Nicolai used the initials of "Graf zu Waldeck" in reverse order as an acrostic to begin the three stanzas: "Wachet auf", "Zion hört die Wächter singen", "Gloria sei dir gesungen". An unknown author supplied poetry for movements 2 and 3, 5 and 6. The text of the three stanzas 1, 4 and 7 reference the love poetry of the Song of Songs, showing Jesus as the bridegroom of the Soul.

In August of 1598, Nicolai wrote: "Day by day I wrote out my meditations, found myself, thank God, wonderfully well, comforted in heart, joyful in spirit, and truly content; gave to my manuscript the name and title of a Mirror of Joy... to leave behind me (if God should call me from this world) as a token of my peaceful, joyful, Christian departure, or (if God should spare me in health) to comfort other sufferers whom He should also visit with the pestilence."

Sleepers wake, for night is flying. The watchmen on the heights are crying.

Awake, Jerusalem at last.

Midnight hears the welcome voices. And at the wondrous call rejoices.

Come forth ye virgins, night is past.

The bridegroom comes awake. Your lamps with gladness take.

Alleluia.

We follow all the joyful call to join him in the banquet hall.

This Night

David Biedenbender received the Doctor of Musical Arts and Master of Music degrees in composition from the University of Michigan and a Bachelor of Music degree in composition and theory from Central Michigan University, and he has also studied at the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study, the Aspen Music Festival and School, and in Mysore, India where he studied south Indian Carnatic music. He is Assistant Professor of Music Theory and Composition and coordinator of the music theory area at Boise State University. David's music has been described as "simply beautiful". His many outstanding reviews include "Modern, venturesome, and inexorable... The excitement, intensity, and freshness that characterizes Biedenbender's music hung in the [air] long after the last note was played." [examiner.com] . David was in Princeton, New Jersey this summer working with the New Jersey Symphony's Young Composer's Workshop.

The composer explains his use of the text:

"This night is a simple Christmas carol, written for VocalEssence and Philip Brunelle (winner of the 2012 Welcome Christmas Carol Competition. It is a setting of the text *Dies ist die Nacht, da mir erschienen*, ("This Night a Wondrous Revelation"), which was written in 1683 by Caspar Friedrich Nachtenhöfer. I

have used an English translation of the original German poem by Anna B. Hoppe from 1922, which also serves as the text for the Christmas hymn of the same name, commonly set to the tune O Dass Ich Tausen Zungen, written by Johann B. König in 1738. I chose this text because of the beautifully vivid imagery and metaphors for light in the poetry, and because I really enjoy the simple, common rhyme and phrase structure that encouraged me to write simple, clear music.” Isaiah 7:14 PROMISES that a child will be born and called Immanuel (God is with us.)

Dr. Biedenbender has kindly allowed us to transpose the piece 1/2 higher for our voices and to use the violin in place of the original flute part. The flute/violin obbligato sails above the choral line, like the star announcing the birth of the Christ on THIS NIGHT, “shining brighter than a thousand suns.” The use of 9th and 11th chords adds a slight dissonance to the otherwise recurring tonal melody, creating tension at cadence points and driving the motion forward to the climax: “This light through all eternity.” Tension is released into a key which is a tone higher than the starting key: “Thy heav’n and all to thee shall be, this night.” www.davidbiedenbender.com

*This night a wondrous revelation
Makes known to me God’s love and grace;
The Child that merits adoration
Brings light to our benighted race;
And though a thousand suns did shine,
Still brighter were that Light divine.*

*The Sun of Grace for thee is beaming;
Rejoice, my soul, in Jesus’ birth!
The light from yonder manger streaming
Sends forth its rays o’er all the earth.
It drives the night of sin away
And turns our darkness into day.*

Ubi Caritas

Welsh composer Paul Mealor sets the first verse of the original hymn, *Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est* (Where charity and love are, God is there) for eight-part chorus a cappella. The author is unknown, but it was most probably written in France during the 10th century. It is the final antiphon sung during the rite, *Mandatum*, Christ’s final lesson in charity, humility and friendship by washing of the disciple’s feet. (John 13:34) The PROMISE is that where there are two or more gathered in love, God is also there. The ninth and eleventh added to the slow chords create a shimmering vibrato sound, as the minor and major second “rub” against each other. The result sounds as if the music is echoing in a cathedral. The final statement of the original chant is sung by the soloists, our boy sopranos. This piece was commissioned for the Marriage of His Royal Highness Prince William of Wales, K.G. with Miss Catherine Middleton and first performed by the Choirs of Westminster Abbey and Her Majesty’s Chapel Royal, St. James’s Palace, conducted by James O’Donnell, at Westminster Abbey, Friday, 29th April 2011.

*Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est.
Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor.*

*Where charity and love are, God is there
Christ’s love has gathered us into one.*

Exsultemus, et in ipso jucundemur.

Let us rejoice and be pleased in Him.

Timeamus, et amemus Deum vivum.

Let us fear, and let us love the living God.

Et ex corde diligamus nos sincero.

And may we love each other with a sincere heart.

Nunc Dimittis

Arvo Pärt's (b. 1935) music has become some of the most powerful and most performed music in the world. Born in Estonian, he was finally allowed to immigrate to Europe with his family in 1980. He called his later style "Tintinnabuli" from the Latin word for bell. It is a simple style influenced by the composer's mystical experiences with chant music. It has basically two types of lines or "voices", one of which arpeggiates a tonic triad and the second of which moves diatonically in stepwise motion, creating a slow and meditative mood. *Nunc Dimittis*, 2001, is an example of his "holy minimalism". The text is from Luke 2:29-32. The PROMISE begins in Luke 2:25-32 - "There was at that time in Jerusalem a man called Simeon. This man was upright and devout, one who watched and waited for the restoration of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him. It had been disclosed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he had seen the Lord's Messiah. Guided by the Spirit he came into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him was customary under the Law, he took him in his arms, praised God, and said:

'Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people; a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.' "

Nunc dimittis servum tuum, Domine, secundum verbum tuum in pace, quia viderunt oculi mei salutare tuum, quod parasti ante faciem omnium populorum, lumen ad revelationem gentium et gloriam plebis tuae Israel.

Across the Vast Eternal Sky

Ola Gjeilo (pronounced Yay-lo) was born in Norway in 1978. He attended the Royal College of Music in London and received a Master's Degree in composition from The Juilliard School in 2006. As pianist, he enjoys improvisation and much of his inspiration for composition comes from film. He has three CDs devoted entirely to his music and piano playing: *Northern Lights* (2012), *Piano Improvisations* (2012) and *Stone Rose* (2007). The text was developed in a collaborative way with lyricist Charles A. Silvestri. Silvestri states: "It is interesting how a piece of music takes shape especially one which is the product of dynamic collaboration....The legend of the firebird offered creative opportunities to explore the themes of spiritual growth and renewal." The PROMISE of the phoenix is that it will return. It will be born again.

*Sunlight shines on my face; This is my grace, to be Restored, born again, In flame!
When I was young I flew in the velvet night; Shining by day, a firebird bathed in light!
Grey now my feather, which once were red and gold; My destiny to soar up to the
Sunlight shines on my face; This is my grace, to be Restored, born again in flame!
Do not despair that I am gone away; I will appear again When the sunset paints
Flames across the vast eternal sky.*

PROMISES MEDLEY: Program Note by Emily Kaster

["An ounce of performance is worth pounds of promises."](#)

Mae West

“Some people don't understand the promises they're making when they make them,” I said. “Right, of course. But you keep the promise anyway. That's what love is. Love is keeping the promise anyway.”

-John Green, *The Fault in Our Stars*

The second half of our program moves us to worldly promises, from the profound to the downright silly. *The Fault in Our Stars*, a modern love story with a promise that echoes those whispered into lovers' ears time and time again. *Sweethearts* warns us that “all other love is doomed to fade,” compared to the love of a true sweetheart. Written by Tin Pan Alley composer Victor Herbert for the Broadway operetta by the same title, the melodic gymnastics of the soloist mirrors the highs and lows felt by the soul overcome with love. While Herbert cranked out operettas in the early years of the 20th century, his popularity waned as musical comedies rose in favor during the Jazz Age. *I'm Reviewing the Situation* from the British musical *Oliver!* by Lionel Bart, humorously sprinkles some salt into this sweet situation. Conniving character Fagin shows us the often practical side involved in our love decisions as “a misery, she'll make of me...I think I'd better think it out again!”

Tin Pan Alley composers and lyricists, like George and Ira Gershwin and Irving Berlin offer listeners love songs that have been canonized in *The Great American Songbook*, including the medley sung by our ladies in love. George Gershwin has often said that there are only six tunes in the world, and he used all of them. *Someone to Watch Over Me* and *The Man I Love*, with music by George and lyrics by Ira, were both originally conceived in Broadway shows, but have both become standard stand-alone tunes. Jerome Kern brings us the music of *Can't Help Lovin' Dat Man* and *A Fine Romance*. The first tune sports lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein and appeared in *Showboat*, as a supposed traditional African American slave tune. The bluesy tempo underscored lyrics that referenced love that is a force of nature. Dorothy Fields' lyrics in *A Fine Romance* remind us that friendship does not a hot romance make. *I Love You Truly* is a parlor song written by Carrie Jacobs-Bond (1862-1946). It has been used at weddings since its release. It was the first song written by a woman to sell one million copies of sheet music and become a popular wedding song for its serious and romantic lyrics. Our quartette of ladies from *Cantabile* infuse some fun and humor into these familiar tunes, ending with their rewrite of the familiar tune by Burt Bacharach *I'll Never Fall In Love Again* with lyrics by Hall David from the show appropriately titled *Promises, Promises*. Dorothy Fields once again provides the lyrics for the medley closer – *An Old Fashioned Wedding* from *Annie Get Your Gun* by Irving Berlin. We see that differing vision of wedding and marriage between bride and groom did not originate with *Bridezillas* or weddings “like the Vanderbilts have,” and that disagreement has been immortalized in this partner duet. This tune, added to the 1966 revival at Lincoln Center with Ethel Merman and Bruce Yarnell, created a sensation with a half-dozen or more encores required at every performance.

Slow March

According to Stuart Feder in his book *The Life of Charles Ives*, “Composition became a family affair with the first song the fourteen-year old composer wrote. The occasion for it was the death of the family cat, Chin-Chin. The song was a dirge and the tyro composer called it “Slow March”, with the subtitle “Inscribed to the Children's Faithful Friend.” Uncle Layman provided the text. Notes on the early manuscript indicate that George suggested some musical ideas and contributions were made by Mollie (here Mama Ives) and Grandmother Sarah (S.H.Ives.) Thus Ives very first compositions were marches of sorts, each presaging what would become some characteristic features of his mature music, his vocabulary of spirit: in the *Holiday Quickstep*, the lively, ebullient, and indeed quickening essence of march time; and in *Slow March*, solemnity, the themes of death and memorialization, and even a hint of spiritual

transfiguration.” Ives put this piece, his first composition, as the last song in his collection of 114 songs. It begins and ends with musical quotes from George Fredrick Handel, the *Dead March* from *Saul*, a dirge accompanying military burials.

Wherever You Are

Born in 1975 in North Wales, Meador studied composition privately, then at the University of York and at the Royal Danish Academy of Music. He is currently Professor of Composition at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland and has held visiting professorships in composition at institutions in Scandinavia and the United States. A large portion of his compositions are for chorus. His first album for Decca, *A Tender Light* was a great success. After his commission for *Ubi Caritas*, he was commissioned to write music for this song with a text compiled from letters written to British Army military personnel deployed on active service in the Afghanistan War by their wives or partners. The recorded single from the BBC TWO television series *THE CHOIR: Military Wives*, become number one in the UK Singles Chart and raised money for military charities.

War affects us all but not every family experiences it in the same way. Making this song very personal, I would like to dedicate it to my niece and nephews who have made their PROMISE to defend our country and our peace, with their lives:

*Wherever you are, my love will keep you safe;
My heart will build a bridge of light across both time and space.
Wherever you are, our hearts still beat as one,
I hold you in my dreams each night, until your task is done.*

*Light up the darkness, my wondrous star,
Our hopes and dreams, my heart and yours, forever shining far.
Light up the darkness, my prince of peace;
May the stars shine all around you, many your courage never cease.*

*Wherever I am, I will love you day by day,
I will keep you safe, cling on to faith, along the dark, dark way.
Wherever I am, I will hold on through the night;
I will pray each day, a safe return, will look now to the light.*

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.
John 15:13

I Want to Spend My Lifetime Loving You is the main theme from the 1998 film *The Mask of Zorro*, composed by James Horner and lyricist Will Jennings. We have asked our newly wedded couple to reprise this duet from their performance for us as part of our 25th year GALA in June of 2013 and to celebrate their marriage PROMISES this past October.

The Roof

Programming for men’s voice or women’s voices alone utilizes the various colors of a chorus creating sonic beauty, variety and interest for the listener and singer alike. *The Roof* by Andrea Ramsey was composed in 2013 for the Arkansas All State High School Men’s Chorus while she was a student at Michigan State University. She worked with a young poet, Isabel Zacharias, who explains the meaning of her poem in these words:

“.....I loved the image of a roof because it’s sheltering, inclusive, warm, and steady....those are things I really needed...the process of me writing that poem was a process by which I realized how important it is for me to always love, defend, and value myself, regardless of my situation.” For us, the poem and its

musical setting expresses the promises of love: “*for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part.*” The continuous flow of the eighth note beat through changing meters, with the rising violin lines and descending piano lines, creates an image of sustained support and steadiness within the changing environment.

*Be the roof covering all this.
Be the seasons with me.
Our winters will be mild as the front porch.
Our autumns will be easy, springs will bloom.
Our summers will have breezes full of grace.
Be the curve of hands.
Be the time between waking and sleeping.
Be confusing. Be stunning.
Be awkward, imperfect, beautiful you, singular you,
Exhaustingly complex you.
You are still becoming what you will be. You.
Be the roof covering this.*

Advice to a Girl

I first heard the works of Daniel Schreiner while attending a rehearsal of the chorus in which my sister is singing, the Ellensburg Women’s Choir in Ellensburg, Washington. Daniel (B.1990) graduated from Central Washington University with a Bachelor Degree in choral/vocal Music Education where he studied composition with Dr. Elaine Ross and worked on campus as a music theory tutor, accompanist and local organist/choir director. Daniel says that he set the poem *Advice to a Girl* by Sara Teasdale (1884-1933) because he was moved by its simple beauty and honesty and sees this text as comforting encouragement to anyone who has ever had a broken heart and anyone who has ever felt unwanted or lonely. The piece was composed for the Ellensburg choir and he has dedicated it to his mother. www.danielschreiner.com Teasdale seems to be addressing a young woman from the perspective of an older, more experienced woman, giving advice and a lecture on forgiveness.

*No one worth possessing can be quite possessed;
Lay that on your heart, my young angry dear;
This truth, this hard and precious stone,
Lay it on your hot cheek, Let it hide your tear.
Hold it like a crystal when you are alone
And gaze in the depths of the icy stone.
Long, look long and you will be blessed:
No one worth possessing can be quite possessed.*

Amor de mi alma

Amor de mi alma is among the most performed of the 125 published works of Z. Randall Stroope (b. 1953), composer, conductor and lecturer. No doubt this is due to its rich romantic sound expressing the deeply felt emotions of the poem by Garcilaso de la Vega (1503-1536), called Soneto V. Garcilaso de la Vega was a true Renaissance man who was skilled in music, arms, letters and the battles of love. He is a fine example of the poets of the Spanish Renaissance. At the age of 33, he died from wounds he received in military combat. This choral setting uses recurring rich major chords with a descending melody reaching deep into the bass and alto voices and high into the tenor and soprano ranges. Dr.

Stroope knows the human voice well, having received a Masters Degree in voice from the University of Colorado as well as a doctorate in conducting from Arizona State University. Rowan University in Glassboro, NJ is among the many schools in which he has taught.

Amor de mi alma

*Yo no nací sino para quereros;
Mi alma os ha cortado a su medida;
Por hábito del alma misma os quiero*

*Escito está en mi alma vuestro gesto;
Yo lo leo tan solo que aun de vos
Me guardo en esto.*

*Quanto tengo confesso yo deveros:
Por voe naci, por vos tengo la vida
Y po vos é de morir y por vos
muero.*

You are the Love of My Soul

*I was born to love only you;
My soul has formed you to its measure;
I want you as a garment for my soul.*

*Your very image is written on my soul;
Such indescribable intimacy
I hide even from you.*

*All that I have, I owe to you;
For you I was born, for you I live,
For you I must die, and for you
I give my last breath.*