

SPRING EQUINOX: A Time for Balance

PROGRAM NOTES by Rebecca Scott

In springtime, the earth rebalances, renews and seems to start again. This is a time we are given to make new choices, to renew our hopes and dreams, to come alive again and start over. We look forward to new thoughts, sounds and sights to encourage us and give us energy. Our spirits are fed by the beauty popping out around us. Like the earth, we want new clothes and renewed feelings. We try to re-balance our lives. "Winter" has taught us to weigh each decision carefully. We look to the past for guidance and move on. We know that LOVE is the only answer. Love is all around us, showering us with the kisses of spring.

*We look to the arts to give us energy and to restore balance and the enjoyment of life. Music is one of the most easily accessed of all the arts and is participated in by most everyone, whether by performing or listening. Each melody, each poem that we perform today, aims to encourage you, to give you energy and of course, to entertain you. As the program progresses, we hope that each piece helps you retain or regain your balance. We begin with **JOY!***

TAKE JOY:

Beethoven's famous "Hallelujah" chorus which comes from his oratorio *The Mount of Olives*, Op. 85, has brought happiness to singers and listeners for over 200 years. The oratorio, composed quickly in the fall of 1802, portrays the emotional turmoil of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane before his crucifixion. That is not exactly a joyful tale. But the "Hallelujah" is a song of praise and joy: "praise the Lord in holy songs of joy." The strong rhythmic figures with voices in imitation of each other, create a sound that excites the listeners' ears and the singers' voices. The message is clear: BE JOYFUL

TAKE BEAUTY and HOPE:

Barber's *Easter Chorale* presents the resurrected sun: "the fires of dawn refresh our eyes... We listen to the live earth sing." *Easter Chorale* was commissioned in May, 1964, for the dedication of the National Cathedral in Washington D.C. It was originally composed for brass and timpani but later Barber wrote choral parts to a text by Robert Pack (Browning) from Berkley, California. The text uses nature as metaphors for Christian symbols: "We watch the world grow wide and bright and praise our newly risen Light".

"We listen to the live earth sing and praise our loving Source and Spring." Browning is a published poet, a contributing editor of the University of California's edition of the writings of Mark Twain and editor of the Mark Twain Project at the University of California Press. HOPE

HAVE TRUST:

"He watching over Israel, slumbers not nor sleeps." is from Mendelssohn's homage to Bach and Handel, his oratorio *Elijah*. It tells the story of the Biblical prophet Elijah taken from 1Kings and 2Kings of the Old Testament. Since its creation, this chorus has become one most favored by singers. It is composed in the spirit of Bach and Handel whom Mendelssohn emulated. The soprano melody opens over a triplet figure in the accompaniment giving a feeling of birds soaring over water full of waves. The tight imitation of the voices is worthy of Bach, but the harmonic structures show that Mendelssohn was indeed a composer of the early Romantic period. Mendelssohn brought Bach's music back to popularity after almost 100 years of neglect, by conducting a performance of the St. Matthew Passion in 1879. TRUST

RESPECT THE EARTH:

Give us this day was composed by the founder and director of the Swingle Singers, Ward Swingle (1927-2015), an American who spent a lot of his career in France and England where he formed the Swingle Singers. After ten years, Swingle put together the New Swingle Singers and branched out into more adventuresome music such as jazz and even aleatoric music, in other words music with random entrances of voices. The words to *Give us this day* were written for Swingle by Tony Vincent Isaacs. They express the beauty of nature and pray for awareness and gratefulness. The meter is a slow three with the harmony in the soft dissonances of seventh chords. There is an eight measure section which repeats at the end of each verse: "Give us this day that we may see the beauty before our eyes. Give us this day that we may cherish the earth before it dies." HAVE RESPECT.

HAVE KINDNESS:

Samuel Barber used part of "Descriptions of Elysium" from *Permit Me Voyage* by the American poet, author, journalist, screenwriter and film critic, James Agee (1909-1955) to compose the song *Sure On This Shining Night* for a solo voice and piano. Later he arranged it for chorus. The harmony is gently tonal, with light imitation in the voices - as if to say "did you hear that?" "Sure on this shining night of star-made shadows round, kindness must watch for me this side the ground." The melodies soar over the repeated chords in the piano towards the climax: "All——— is healed. All—— is health!"

BE KIND AND COMPASSIONATE.

MAKE WISE CHOICES:

Randall Thompson's (1899-1984) *The Road not Taken* is from his choral cycle *Frostiana*, composed to the poetry of Robert Frost. The first two verses of this well known poem are set for unison chorus over slow seventh chords in the piano at a walking pace, giving the impression of walking down a country road. The third verse expands into harmony as the piano chords cut out, only punctuating the ends of the phrases as the poetry puts forth the decision. But the chords continue as the poetry finishes the story. Thompson was well known and appreciated for his generous output of choral music, especially his influence on men's choral music in America. He taught at both Curtis Institute and Harvard where he had many notable students, including Leonard Bernstein.

MAKE GOOD DECISIONS.

LAUGH:

In 2004, Cantabile commissioned Emma Lou Diemer (b. 1927) to compose *In One of the Stars* in memory of Cantabile alto, Leila Eutermarks (1953-2004), who died of cancer. Ms. Diemer is a well-known and prolific composer and keyboard artist. Born in Missouri, she has performed widely and composed in many forms, instrumental and choral, including many hymns found in hymnbooks. She now resides in California. The text from *The Little Prince* by Antione de Saint-Exupery. was chosen by Leila's husband, as one of their favorites. The commission was completed in August 2005 and Cantabile performed it in Spring 2006. The piano part introduces high sparkling notes which seem to come from the sky. The sopranos begin singing over the guitar and piano chords in the swaying rhythm of compound meter as the other voices join in. "Look at the sky!" The second part is quite melancholy on the words "You, only you, will have stars that can laugh. And when your sorrow is comforted (time soothes all sorrows) ...you will want to laugh with me." The music has half tones that rub against each other, representing pain. Although these make the chords difficult to sing, the song is so beautiful and rewarding to perform.

LAUGH AND HEAL.

UNIFY:

Song of the Open Road by poet Walt Whitman has too many words to sing in a song, so composer Norman Dello Joio (1913-2008) paraphrased it for chorus, piano and trumpet. The trumpet part gives energy and tone color to the piece. The nine-minute piece was composed in 1957, the same year that Dello Joio won a Pulitzer prize. It is built on chords of a fourth (instead of the usual thirds) which give it a strong feeling, but it still is quite tonal. The piano rhythm thrusts the motion forward in a joyous march of unity. "Whoever you are, come travel with me!" "*Take the long path leading wherever I choose, I travel with the wide world before me.*" The composer has caught the enthusiasm and energy of the poetry and instills the music with the joy of discovery and community. Dello Joio was a prolific and award winning composer who came from a family of musicians (his godfather was Pietro Yon) and studied with famous teachers, such as Bernard Wagenaar at Juilliard and later Paul Hindemith. He continued to compose into his nineties.

SHARE WITH THE COMMUNITY.

MENTOR:

Dan Davison, composer of *Ritmo* (b. 1956) can certainly be called a great mentor of youth. He has received numerous awards for his role in education. He has been the Choir Director at Ballou Junior High in Puyallup, Washington since 1979. In addition to conducting the four ensembles at the school, he has numerous teaching and mentoring responsibilities, and most notably, sings professionally with Male Ensemble Northwest. Davison was born in Sacramento, California, but has lived in the greater Seattle area since 1965. Since 1979, he has lived in Puyallup, Washington, with his wife, Cathy, who is also a public school teacher. Walton Music has published 24 of his pieces. He composes and arranges nearly all of the music for his jazz choir, and his published compositions in the vocal jazz genre cover a wide range of difficulties (available through Sound Music Publications). *Ritmo* is a Latin-inspired energetic celebration of love, peace, joy, unity, harmony, freedom and of course, rhythm! It features 4-hands at the piano, hand percussion from the singers and lots of spirit.

GIVE WHAT YOU LOVE TO THE NEXT GENERATION

DANCE:

Aaron Copland (1900-1990) has often been called the "Dean of American composers." He has influenced generations of composers, including tonight's commissioned composer, Eric Ewazen. Copland used the folk-songs of various ethnicities as a basis for many of his instrumental and choral pieces. In 1942, he was commissioned to compose folksong settings by Hugh Ross, as a tribute to Kurt Schindler (1882-1935) who founded the New York Schola Cantorum in 1909. The dance tune that Copland selected, *Las Agachadas* (The Shake-down Song), was brought to the USA by Schindler from the Burgos province of Spain in 1929. Copland used the original Spanish for this a cappella setting featuring a four-voice solo group with an eight-part chorus of mixed voices imitating the strumming of Flamenco guitar. We are happy to have a solo ensemble from New Brunswick High School Concert Choir that speaks Spanish to give the true flavor of the sound. The words make fun of the genuflecting of monks by comparing it to a folk-dance.

DANCE!

LOVE - FEEL - APPRECIATE

Angelic Light: Choral Trilogy by Eric Ewazen

Eric Ewazen writes in a very personal and emotional way: his melodies are beautiful, in turn, lilting or powerful, with extended vocal ranges for expression and reflection. The first song, *How do I love thee?* begins with high piano notes falling like stars down from heaven. Ewazen is a wonderful pianist with a wide hand and the piano part reflects his skill. The lift in the vocal melody "I love you" is a perfect reflection of the inner voice of feeling. This is a love letter. The second song, *Ashes of Life* begins with anger "Love has gone and left me and the days are all alike." The melody in d minor in the piano stabs out the tonic chord like arrows in the heart. The vocal lines explode up an octave expressing the frustration of lack of sleep: "But Ah! to lie awake and hear the slow hours strike!" while the piano pounds out the time in low octaves like the chiming of the clock. A slow waltz expresses the long night of stillness and no hope: "Would that it were day again with twilight near." Many changes of key express the unstable emotional state: "But all the things that I begin I leave before I'm through." The slow waltz returns as the griever is stuck alone, left behind in the past, in the ashes of life: "in this little house, on this little street." With the third song, *She was a Phantom of Delight*, life is flowing again. It begins with the energy of sixteenth notes in the piano and descending arpeggios as he remembers his first sight of her flowing by him like a phantom. It is love at first sight. A change of meter to 6/8 energizes the melodies as he remembers how her eyes twinkled like stars as her hair flowed behind her. She seemed like May and the cheerful Dawn. A dancing figure appears in the piano part as he remembers her image as "a dancing Shape, an image gay." With the return of the opening themes a more mature awareness emerges: "And now I see with eye serene.... a traveler between life and death...a spirit still and bright with something of Angelic Light," and the melodies raise to heavenly height!

LOVE IS THE ANSWER TO EVERYTHING - THE WAY TO BALANCE
