

Program Notes
A Sustainable Earth
April 29, 2023

Tonight, we present songs that changed our country and helped to begin the process of protecting our earth, along with newer songs created in gratefulness for the gift of the earth and in honor of its beauty and strength.

These issues resonate with us all in today's world. We have become even more aware through TV, the internet and social media, that everything is connected. We hear about climate change, we experience weather issues and we argue about what we can do as we strive to protect our planet. We know that each of us has to take a personal step in reducing waste, recycling, continuing to encourage products that can be recycled and of course to reuse as much as we can of what we no longer can use in its present form. People who knit do this all the time - they pull apart old sweaters and reuse the skeins. There is no time to waste. Every step we take to protect and regenerate our planet is a positive step in the right direction.

Heroes of the early environmental movement attracted the attention and enlisted the help of regular people by singing songs of desperation and encouragement to bring attention to the problems that the earth was facing from humans - our personal use, commercial use and government use of the earth for our own purposes. The website below can give you a good look at the history of Earth Day and the Origins of the EPA:

<https://www.epa.gov/history/epa-history-earth-day>

The environmental movement in the U.S.A. began in 1970. Before that, there was no EPA, no Clean Air Act, no Clean Water Act and no legal nor regulatory mechanisms to protect our environment. In the spring of 1970 Senator Gaylord Nelson (1916-2005) of Wisconsin created Earth Day -April 22nd - as a way to force this

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issue onto the national agenda. Millions of Americans demonstrated in various U.S. cities! There was a huge outpouring of songs celebrating the earth and warning of the dangers of ignoring the care for our environment. By December of that year, Congress authorized the creation of a new federal agency to take on environmental issues: the United States Environmental Protection Agency.

We begin our program with paraphrases of the first story of the creation of our world from the book of Genesis in the bible and continue the story through the sixth day. We end our program with a poem which will encourage us to teach our children well about sustaining nature's gifts into our future.

In the Beginning is a 20-minute a cappella work for chorus composed in 1947 by Aaron Copland (1900-1990) for the Harvard Symposium on Music Criticism. We are singing a short excerpt which introduces the King James version of Genesis through the first day of creation, in Copland's vocal recitative style that echoes the prayer style of Rabbinic Judaism.

God's World by Eric Ewazen (b. 1954) was originally written for Rebecca Scott as part of a soprano solo song cycle, *Five Songs by Edna Saint Vincent Millay*, which premiered at The Juilliard School with the composer at the piano. *God's World* is so expressive of the joy of living on this earth that Ms. Scott wished to share it with Cantabile for its 20th anniversary season program in 2008. Mr. Ewazen happily arranged it for four-part chorus in 1992 and you will hear Cantabile sing it again tonight in our 35th performing season!

The song takes its form from the Edna St. Vincent Millay's passionate poem. It has three distinct sections. The melodies rise and fall with the description of the earth's crags and bluffs, winding

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down like waves, at the end of section two, to take a big sigh before moving forward faster into the third section. Here the passion builds to the conclusive thought that this year, the world is too beautiful to bear! A truncated first section returns to repeat with a final sigh, “O World, I cannot hold thee close enough!”

Oi Tam Za Horoiu (Oh, there beyond the rocky hill) is based on a Ukrainian folk carol from the Poltava region in central Ukraine on the Vorskla River. Composer Eric Ewazen, whose father was born in Ukraine, wrote this piece in 1992 for Cantabile and the St. Andrew’s Ukrainian Church choir of South Bound Brook, Taras Pavlofsky, director. We perform it today to honor the courage of the people of Ukraine. Mr. Ewazen has set the carol into a series of short two measure rhythms, with time signatures changing with the length of the textual phrases. It is a joyous carol extolling the beauty of the country with the three “friends” - the bright sun, the glowing moon, and the fine rain, offering a good evening. The sun says, “when I come up, we will rejoice, old and young.” The moon says, “when I come up, all the beasts of the field will rejoice.” The rain says, “when I come down, then the rye and wheat and all manner of growing things, will rejoice.” “Oh there beyond the rocky hill, we will all rejoice and have a plentiful evening.”

Whose Garden was This by Tom Paxton (b.1937) was composed for the first Earth Day in 1970. It is a song written from the perspective of someone living after the environmental destruction of the earth. Mr. Paxton is an American folk singer-songwriter and music educator, an environmental and social advocate, who has had a music career spanning more than fifty years. He is semi-retired but still occasionally performs. He has received multiple awards including best male vocalist in traditional folk and children’s music. His songs have been performed by dozens of well known singers that he also has performed with. He was perhaps the first singer-songwriter of the famous folk culture of the 1960 and 70s in the USA that spawned later singers like Bob Dylan.

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God Bless the Grass by Malvina Reynolds (1900-1974) - The message of this song is the message of Malvina Reynolds' life - never give up working for the earth, for justice and for peace. Her songs have found their way into the repertory of entertainers, protesters, teachers, parents, and children all around the world. By the time the folk protest movements of the 1960s came along, she was ready to take on the issues of the day: civil rights, opposition to the war in Vietnam, and the right of workers to organize. Overall, she wrote hundreds of songs, some of great beauty and many displaying a sense of humor and wit that has endeared her to performers and listeners from Helsinki to Tokyo. She died on March 17, 1978, with gigs on her calendar. See website: malvinareynolds.com

Big Yellow Taxi by Joni Mitchell (b. 1943). This is one of the favorite environmental songs of the '70s. Mitchell says, "I wrote Big Yellow Taxi on my first trip to Hawaii. I took a taxi to the hotel and when I woke up the next morning, I threw back the curtains and saw these beautiful green mountains in the distance. Then, I looked down and there was a parking lot as far as the eye could see, and it broke my heart. . . this blight on paradise. That's when I sat down and wrote the song. Big Yellow Taxi is mostly about environmental concerns. The refrain 'don't it always seem to go that you don't know what you've got 'till it's gone, they paved paradise to put up a parking lot!', can be seen as a clarion call to stop taking the earth for granted by destroying paradise for the sake of progress." (from a 1996 interview with the *Los Angeles Times*.)

Emerald Stream by Seth Houston (b.1974). "This piece draws inspiration from the "shape-note" singing tradition that flourished in New England from 1780-1820. Like a shape-note "fuging" tune, *Emerald Stream* features a hearty, strong sound, an imitative fusing section, melodic ornaments, open intervals and doubling at the octave. It is unusual, however, in that the melody is in the bass

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part. The text draws on the hymn-writing style of Isaac Watts, Charles Wesley, and other great theologians whose dynamic poetry animated the shape-note tradition. While drawing on these traditions, *Emerald Stream* proclaims a more contemporary message of environmental stewardship.” (from composer’s notes.)

Sailin’ Up, Sailin’ Down by Lorre Wyatt & Jimmy Reed. This song was popularized by Pete Seeger and Arlo Guthrie and performed at fundraisers for the Hudson River Sloop *Clearwater*, the mascot for the organization Seeger founded in 1966 to preserve and protect the Hudson River. Seeger believed that all you have to do is get a group of people together on a project and things will change and improve. This proved to be true about the Hudson River water which turned from toxic, to swimmable with their activism.

“Clearwater created the blueprint for many other groups to follow; Clearwater was the first environmental group to focus on an entire river and its ecosystem, the first wooden sailing ship with a mission to preserve and protect the environment, and the first onboard environmental classroom accessible to children of all ages, races, background.” see Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, N.Y. Inc.

We Belong to the Earth by Terry Leonino & Greg Artzner, a.k.a. “Magpie”. These singer-song writers have devoted themselves to environmental causes. Earth Day 1998 found them performing at Harper’s Ferry National Park where their anthem *We Belong to the Earth* was the perfect finale to a speech by President Clinton. They have brought their songs to educational organizations and environmental action activities and have been supported by many notable groups in the wildlife and sustainable earth movement around the country.

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I Feel Tired Sometimes by Judy A. Rose. We all are tired of wearing masks, working isolated, hearing about war, pestilence and famine and being told how we have to save the planet by sacrificing. We wish it would all go away! But when we reach out to others and see how people are working to help each other feed and cloth themselves in a sustainable way, we can have the joy of experiencing a renewal of the earth and our way of living! It gives us hope and energy and honors the grief and joy of this time on the planet. To quote Howard Thurman (1899-1981), author, philosopher, theologian, mystic, educator, and civil rights leader:

“When we have exhausted our store of endurance,
When our strength has failed ere the day is half done,
When we reach the end of our hoarded resources,
Our Father’s full giving is only begun.”

Howard Thurman, *Meditations of the Heart* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2022), 77–78. Note: minor edits made for inclusive language.

Composer Judy A. Rose has written a new spiritual for us all in traditional style and dialect, adding an old Latin phrase: “Cum sancta spiritu in gloria dei patris, amen.” (*With the Holy Spirit in the glory of God the Father, Amen.*) Ms. Rose certainly knows how to write a catchy song after having taught music in the Portland, Oregon Public Schools for 23 years. She is also a Facilitator there with the Center for Courage and Renewal (Courage to Teach). Besides composing, she plays Native American flute and practices photography and birding.

The Peace of Wild Things by Joan Szymko (b.1957)- the song is a musical setting of Wendell Berry’s poem of the same title. This setting often brings singers to tears because of its connection to

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our animal nature - it stills our minds, slows our breath and invites respite from despair. Szymko say:

"My goal is to compose music that invites the audience in while challenging the notion that accessibility and musical integrity are incompatible concepts.... I am drawn to texts that invoke divine grace, speak to the universal yearning for good and that nurture a compassionate heart."

Wendell Berry (b.1934) is still active as an American novelist, poet, essayist, environmental activist, cultural critic and farmer. He is closely identified with rural Kentucky where his themes of agrarianism have been expressed in books, articles, poems and personal activism.

Now is the Cool of the Day by Jean Richie (1922-2015). The beauty and imagery of Jean Richie's words echo the biblical story of the Garden of Eden. This 3 part a cappella arrangement is in the style of the Appalachian songs that Richie was famous for in the 60's and 70's. The message is very contemporary: have a responsible relationship with the earth, the divine and one another.

Give Us This Day by Ward Swingle (1927-2015). This is a prayer for the earth's rejuvenation and future existence, composed by the director of the Swingle Singers, famous in the 1960s for their recordings of the works of J.S.Bach in a jazz style. His setting of the words by Tony Vincent is homophonic in a 20th century style which includes 7th and 9th chords. The recurring refrain calls for us to cherish the gift of our very beautiful earth and to protect it for the future generations. This is one of Cantabile's favorite choral pieces! We sing it tonight hoping that we all will concern ourselves with the wellbeing of our earth.

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Children Will Listen by Stephen Sondheim (1930-2021) - written for the Broadway musical “Into the Woods”, the song has words of advice for all stages of life and reminds us that children do listen! Let’s say the “right” things to them about protecting our earth!

RRR Song by R.R. Scott (b. 1942) Our messages is: *Reduce, Reuse, Recycle!* We created a new melody and new verses to teach to everyone! Sing along and work along with us to reduce waste, reuse as much as we can and recycle what we cannot reuse. Let’s work to save the sustainability of our planet.

EVERYTHING IS CONNECTED

Every good deed activates a change of positivity that radiates far and wide. We hope our program encourages you to make a thoughtful choice to have a positive impact on our earth. One good deed in the world awakens several others!