



The Music of Living

Vicki Peters, Artistic Director and Conductor

Dan Bridston, Accompanist

Saturday, August 5, 2023 at 7:30 p.m.

Gustavus Adolphus Church

St. Paul, MN

Sunday, August 6, 2023 at 3:00 p.m.

Lutheran Church Of The Good Shepherd

Minneapolis, MN

Free concerts—contributions welcome

www.VoxNovaChorale.org

The Music of Living

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INTERMISSION

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I Sing to the Holy One (premiere performance)	Brian Lewis Steele
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Shenandoah	arr. James Erb
Light of a Clear Blue Morning Soloist: Elsa Swanson, Trio: Val Peterson, Caroline Swanson, Andrea Orem	Dolly Parton/arr. Craig Hella Johnson
Wanting Memories Percussion: Bobby Schlidt	Ysaye M. Barnwell
This Is Me (from The Greatest Showman) Soloist: Courtney Kellogg	Pasek/Paul arr. Mac Huff
The Music of Living	Dan Forrest

Program Notes: The Music of Living

We seem to be living in a time of new uncertainty. The quarantines of COVID have left us isolated. Political fractiousness has polarized the population. Even places we have thought of as safe, such as synagogues and schools, no longer provide certain sanctuary.

So, as Vox Nova returns after several years of an uncertain future, we bring you a program that celebrates life – a program that fosters unity, community, and hope that we can be brought together in the joy and beauty of music.

The Tree of Peace

Gwyneth Walker

We open with Gwyneth Walker's setting of "O Brother Man" by Quaker poet John Greenleaf Whittier. It is a powerfully written composition that evokes the strong Quaker dedication to peace, and focuses on Whittier's simple and practical New England advice. "Listen to one another," and "fold to your hearts each other," he says. He seems to be urging us to get on with it, that it is up to us to plant "the tree of peace."

There Will Be Rest

Frank Ticheli

When poet Sara Teasdale wrote, in her fourth book of poetry, *Love Songs*, "I shall find the crystal of peace," she was expressing the universal human desire to find refuge and calm, whether through meditation, self-examination, or isolation. We often find that soothing musical tones can bring us inner peace, or that singing softly to ourselves can quiet a restless spirit. Teasdale's life, however, can be seen as an object lesson regarding the difficult nature of the last few years. Teasdale herself may have been seeking a more final peace when she wrote these lines. Only three weeks after composing the poem she took her own life. She was a victim of lifelong depression and emotional turmoil.

Composer Frank Ticheli chose to set this haunting text in a style that could be described as "modern madrigal." The structure and overall effect of the composition recall the lushness of Renaissance and Romantic choral music, but its building blocks include tonal clusters and other harmonic elements that are fully contemporary.

Ticheli, in setting this poem, wrote, "*It is dedicated to the memory of the son of my dear friend, conductor Carl St. Clair. His boy died tragically at 18 months of age in a drowning accident, and the dedication was my way of offering some kind of comfort to my friend and his wife in 1999.*"

Can We Sing the Darkness to Light?

Kyle Pederson

According to his own biography, Minneapolis-based Kyle Pederson's musical career began in first grade with the composition "Baalk Baalk Chicken Baalk," which he says sounded like chopsticks, but with words. Along the way he studied philosophy and political science at Augustana College in Sioux Falls, SD, taught middle school geography, and founded his own company, Learners Edge, which focuses on helping educators hone their craft.

Pederson returned to composition in 2009. He has focused on art that dwells at the intersection of faith and music. He provides both the lyrics and the music for this composition in which he challenges the listener with several pointed questions which invite the listener to examine their own heart: "Can we see the other as our brother?" "What if instead of more violence, we let our weapons fall silent?" "Can we sing the darkness to light?" We can hope.

We will try.

Dirait-on

Morten Lauridsen

Composer Morten Lauridsen could easily lay claim to being the dean of American choral composers. His music has been performed and recorded worldwide by hundreds of choirs. Part of his popularity is his penchant for writing beautiful, simple melodies that are also unforgettable. “Dirait-on” is the first of two Lauridsen compositions in our program. Lauridsen has described this as his “attempt at a French folk song.” The repeated refrain “dirait-on,” which translates to “it is said” or “so they say,” does indeed give the song an air of simple directness.

However, the rest of the lyrics are anything but simple. The lyrics are the creation of the Austro-Hungarian author and poet Rainer Maria Rilke, who was a true cosmopolitan. His travels and residencies in Russia, Paris, and Switzerland created in him a love for the world and sense of brotherhood for the many people of Europe. Much of the body of his work is at once mystical and religious, concerned equally with existential suffering and the beauty of the natural world. While most of his work was written in German, he wrote many of his later poems in French.

“Dirait-on” is the fifth of a series of miniature poems written by Rilke, published posthumously as the cycle “Les Roses.” The rose, he says, is a complete world, caressing itself in “tendresse touchant aux tendresses” – tenderness upon tenderness.

Abandon entouré d’abandon,
tendresse touchant aux tendresses...
C’est ton intérieur qui sans cesse
se caresse, dirait-on;

se caresse en soi-même,
par son propre reflet éclairé.
Ainsi tu inventes le theme
du Narcisse exaucé.

Abandon surrounding abandon,
tenderness touching tenderness...
Your oneness endlessly
Caresses itself, so they say;

self-caressing
Through its own clear reflection.
Thus you invent the theme
of Narcissus fulfilled.

Seek Not Afar for Beauty

Leland Sateren

Leland Sateren, in his long life, was a prolific composer with over 400 works to his credit, an author of two books, a conductor, teacher, administrator, and a music director at a radio station. He was a champion of Scandinavian composers, and of nontraditional choral music, both of which he introduced enthusiastically to his singers and audiences. King Olav V of Norway bestowed upon him the St. Olaf Medal, awarded in 1971 for his contributions to furthering Norwegian culture.

For this particular piece, Sateren chose words written by Minot J. Savage, one of the preeminent Unitarian preachers and theologians of the 19th century. Savage was one of the first theologians to support the teaching of evolutionary theory, and wrote several books examining the ethics and morality of Darwinism. In addition, he wrote volumes of sermons, and the lyrics to dozens of hymns. His hymns focused on the beauty and holiness of the natural world.

The composition features three repetitions of the title phrase, sung simply by the treble voices, which are interspersed with powerful, evocative sections by full chorus. Words and music combine to create a picture of the grandeur and sanctity of nature.

Flight Song

Kim André Arnesen

Kim André Arnesen's "Flight Song" is a true example of the music of living. In this case, living relationships between the composer, lyricist, and the places and people that inspired its creation.

Arnesen composed the work with a very specific musical organization in mind. He had previously worked with the St. Olaf Choir, and its director Anton Armstrong on a separate choral work. He was impressed by the musicality and dedication these young musicians displayed, and was equally moved by the leadership of their director, who fostered a safe and welcoming environment in which to grow.

For the lyrics, Arnesen turned to Welsh poet Euan Tait. Tait was moved to draw on his very direct relationship with his home, which is situated overlooking both the Wye and Severn Rivers near the border of Wales and England. Upon hearing of Arnesen's inspiration, Tait was reminded of the constant commotion of many seabirds present in the air nearby. He found the flocks of birds taking flight as an apt metaphor for the budding careers of the young musicians of St. Olaf.

All My Heart This Night Rejoices

Z. Randall Stroope

"Fröhlich soll mein Herze springen" opens the famous hymn by 17th century Lutheran theologian and hymnist, Paul Gerhardt. Gerhardt was a pivotal figure in church hymnody, writing at a time when hymns were shifting from an objective, confessional style to a more personal and devotional one. Next only to Martin Luther himself, Gerhardt is probably responsible for the popularization of hymns in the German language.

Z. Randall Stroope has created new music for this hymn, which is often sung during and associated with the Christmas season. "This Night," of course, is Christmas Eve, when the shepherds on the hills above Bethlehem heard "sweetest angel voices" in the air. The timeless words and beautiful music are a great celebration of life and "joy that can alter never."

If Music Be the Food of Love

David Dickau

"If music be the food of love, sing on" is the opening line of Shakespeare's great comic play *Twelfth Night*. The melancholy Duke Orsino opens the play in a monologue that simultaneously bemoans his single life and declares his love for the very idea of being in love. He is a young nobleman who has the misfortune of adoring a beautiful young courtier who, sadly, seems to be totally uninterested in him. *Twelfth Night* is filled with characters that explore and examine many variations of romantic love, gender identity, androgyny, and sexual attraction. Fittingly for us, it also features a number of scenes in which various characters break into song.

Dr. David Dickau has composed a joyous arrangement of Shakespeare's immortal dialogue. Dickau was a longtime director of choral studies at Minnesota State University – Mankato, conducted the ensemble Magnum Chorum in Minneapolis, and served as president of the Minnesota ACDA. One of over 80 commissions, this arrangement was originally created as a special project sponsored by the Minnesota Music Educators Association and the American Choral Directors Association of Minnesota.

Shakespeare's lines have been masterfully adapted for this music by Henry Heveningham.

INTERMISSION

My Spirit Sang All Day

Gerald Finzi

Gerald Finzi (1901 -1956) was not a prolific composer. His entire life's output encompassed a mere 40 works, nine of them being song cycles for solo voice or choir. The first of our songs of the heart is one of seven part songs in a cycle composed to poems by English Poet Laureate Robert Bridges. The text employs the poetic technique of echo, with the words, "my joy" or "thy joy" being repeated by the rapturous speaker no less than a dozen times.

Finzi was a lover of nature, moving from London to rural England shortly before the onset of World War II. In addition to his composing, he devoted himself to apple growing, and has been credited with saving a number of rare English apple varieties from extinction.

Finzi's distinctive voice is most evident in his response to and unity with each poet's words, resulting from an expert understanding of English literature. Upon his death, his library of rare and definitive volumes of 18th century poetry, manuscripts, and scores was bequeathed to the University of St. Andrews.

I Sing to the Holy One

Brian Lewis Steele

I was struck one day that, while I pray for many things, and we are encouraged to take our concerns to the Lord, I hadn't done much in terms of writing music of thanksgiving and praise. So I sat down at the piano and wrote a choral introit. Later, when contemplating aspects of God in Scripture, verses were added, making it a complete song. BLS

If Only the World (Ubi Caritas)

Michael D. Atwood

Originally commissioned for the Mankato East High School Concert Choir, If Only the World (Ubi Caritas) is intended to express the heart of the people who perform it, wherever and wherever they may be. More than ever before, we are being inundated with messaging from others. It is easy for one's own voice to get lost in the cacophony of voices coming from news outlets, social media platforms, and interactions with the outside world. In every direction, we are hearing more and more of the world's struggles while simultaneously being told what to believe about those struggles. This work is an opportunity for the singers to engage in conversation, build community, and share their message in a way that they can truly be heard. Interweaving the Liturgical Latin text of Ubi Caritas with collected responses from the choir members themselves, this piece aims to amplify the voices of community members and look toward resolution where there is charity and love.

Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est.
Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor.
Exsultemus, et in ipso jucundemur.
Timeamus, et amemus Deum vivum.
Et ex corde diligamus nos sincero.
Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est.
Simul ergo cum in unum congregamur:
Ne nos mente dividamur, caveamus.
Cessent iurgia maligna, cessent lites,
Et in medio nostri sit Christus Deus.

Where charity and love are, God is there.
Christ's love has gathered us into one.
Let us rejoice and be pleased in Him.
Let us fear, and let us love the living God.
And may we love each other with a sincere heart.
Where charity and love are, God is there.
As we are gathered into one body:
Lest we be divided in mind, beware...
Let evil impulses stop, let controversy cease,
And may Christ our God be in our midst

Sure on This Shining Night

Morten Lauridsen

The second of Morten Lauridsen's contributions to this program could be described as his attempt at writing a choral work that sounds like a classic tune from the Great American Songbook. The long, lovely lyric line and catchy melody would be at home on a Broadway stage. Lauridsen has said that he likes nothing better than to get inside the poet's words to create a new and expressive song.

For inspiration, he turned to words of writer James Agee, who could make a claim as one of America's most versatile authors. In 1934, he published his lone volume of poetry, *Permit Me Voyage*, from which this text is taken. Agee was a reporter for *Time* and *Fortune* magazines, book and movie critic, screenwriter of scripts for *The African Queen* and *The Night of the Hunter*, and won a Pulitzer Prize for the novel, *A Death in the Family*.

This wonderful joining of music and lyric have created a poignant and optimistic examination of the waning years of one's life. The narrator could be described as an older man, on a clear night, reflecting upon the arc of his life. He is struck by the thought that even in the darkest of times, there is goodness and hope in the world. He gazes up at the stars and is buoyed by the thought that even in his diminished state, "all is healed, all is health."

Shenandoah

arr. James Erb

The music of the common folk of America is intensely tied to the everyday life of work, adventure and a romantic longing for the comfort of home. *Shenandoah* is one of these familiar American folksongs, dating at least to the early 19th Century. It became popular as a sea shanty, probably first by Missouri flatboatmen who passed it down the Mississippi River and then out onto the wide oceans. Being slow-paced, it was probably used for more lengthy tasks like weighing anchor or docking. The lyrics also differ, based on the source, but the main idea is that people who were traveling West became nostalgic for the home they left behind. James Erb's lyrical and captivating arrangement has become almost synonymous for the original song. The entire piece flows like a river – a simple beginning leading to a deeper and broader flow, then fading into the distance. In addition to composing and arranging, Erb was a choral conductor and musicologist at the University of Richmond.

Light of a Clear Blue Morning

Dolly Parton/arr. Craig Hella Johnson

“It’s been a long dark night.”

So states Dolly Parton in her great song of hope and triumph, “Light of a Clear Blue Morning.” Ms. Parton wrote this song after a difficult period of personal trauma. After achieving early success as a member of musical partner and mentor Porter Wagoner’s band, Dolly sought to venture out on her own to make a name as a solo act, focusing on more mainstream pop music, rather than the traditional country she had been performing with Wagoner’s band. Unfortunately, Wagoner took legal action against her, which began a long and bitter battle lasting a couple of years. As the legal battle was ending, Dolly felt the figurative clouds lifting, and could see that the sacrifices she had made would soon result in the career she had imagined for herself.

Founder and leader of Austin-based choral group Conspirare, Craig Hella Johnson chose to arrange this song for his group in 2009. Conspirare: A Company of Voices has been often nominated for multiple Grammy awards, with its seventh recording, *The Sacred Spirit of Russia*, winning for best choral performance in 2013. “Light of a Clear Blue Morning” premiered in the Grammy-nominated PBS special, *A Company of Voices: Conspirare in Concert*. Johnson is a Minnesota native, and is probably best known for his oratorio, *Considering Matthew Shepard*.

This composition is a joyful arrangement of Parton’s music and lyrics, featuring a solo opening and concluding with a wonderfully layered coda for full chorus that represents the sun coming up on a bright morning – reminding us that, yes “everything’s gonna be okay.”

Wanting Memories

Ysaye M. Barnwell

In the words of Ysaye Barnwell, longtime member of the influential vocal ensemble Sweet Honey in the Rock, "Songs have intention in themselves but when we sing together, we define who we are." She has an impressive resume as a musician, educator, and activist, earning her degrees and doctorate in Speech Pathology at the University of Pittsburgh. She served as a professor in the School of Dentistry at Howard University and as an administrator of health programs at Gallaudet University in Washington, DC. Barnwell also found time to perform in, write songs for, and produce albums of Sweet Honey in the Rock, while also pioneering the use of sign language interpretation for concert presentations. She has been commissioned to write for chorus, film, dance productions, and theatrical presentations. Notably, in 2001 the Plymouth Music Series in Minneapolis commissioned her work “Suite Death,” a setting of four poems by Langston Hughes for baritone, choir and orchestra.

“Wanting Memories” is a highly personal song, full of references to the significance of community, the knowledge to be gained from our ancestors, and the importance of memory for the important task of passing that knowledge on to succeeding generations. There is longing and grief for those departed ones that have had a positive influence on our lives, and gratitude for the lessons learned that have made us better people.

Rooted with a solid bass ostinato, the arrangement utilizes close harmony, evocative vocal sound effects, and an almost improvisational tone. All this lends to a wonderful collective effect, emphasizing the sentiment, “that I am you and you are me and we are one.”

This Is Me (from The Greatest Showman)

Pasek/Paul arr. Mac Huff

The Greatest Showman is a 2017 musical loosely based on the life of legendary entrepreneur and impresario, P. T. Barnum. The phrase “there’s a sucker born every minute” is often attributed to him, and was probably originated by business rivals and detractors, since there is no clear evidence that it was ever uttered by Barnum himself. There is no doubt that he was a master of hype and advertising, a highly charismatic figure in his day. Among the many concepts that he turned into popular attractions of the time was taking a museum of natural oddities on a remote corner in New York City and turning it into a traveling show featuring live performers that all displayed unusual talents and physical properties. Originally the performers in the troupe, demeaningly referred to as “freaks,” were seen as rather lowbrow entertainment. In the hands of Barnum, however, they eventually gained respectability and acceptance in society.

“This Is Me” marks the moment in the musical where the sideshow performers, reflecting on their lives of hardship, take a step into the world of high society. They come to the realization that they should embrace their own uniqueness and celebrate those talents and contributions that only they can make. They realize that they need make no apologies, stating “we are glorious.”

As choral singers, we like what we do, but we know that what we do is somewhat outside the mainstream. Ask the typical person on the street to name a style of music, song, or performer that they like, and it is unlikely that you will hear a single name or title from this program. But for most of us, and most of those in our audience, choral music is a part of who we are. For us, singing in a choir is living and breathing.

This is us!

The Music of Living

Dan Forrest

The final selection in our program is by Dan Forrest, a prolific composer of choral music, as well as for orchestra, band, and wind ensembles. This particular work was commissioned for high school choir and performed at the 2011 Texas Music Educators convention.

“The Music of Living” is set to an anonymous poem, in the form of a prayer to “the giver of life.” It is bold and it is incisive. And it expresses our desire to celebrate the opportunity to sing again, to strive and to grow and to express our joy in glorious song.

*Giver of life, Creator of all that is lovely,
Teach me to sing the words to your song.*

*I want to feel the music of living;
And not fear the sad songs,
But from them make new songs
Composed of both laughter and tears.*

*I want to move in rhythm with your plan.
Help me to follow your leading
To risk even falling to rise and keep trying,
For you are leading the dance.*

*Giver of life, Creator of all that is lovely,
Teach me to sing the words to your song.*

About the Chorale

Vox Nova Chorale is a non-profit summer choir based in St. Paul, MN, founded in 2013. With the goal of encouraging educators, singers, and composers, the Chorale empowers and provides opportunity for musicians of diverse backgrounds to perform excellent choral music at the highest degree of artistry that enriches their lives and the community.

Learning and singing together are the goals of the 26 musicians joining the Chorale in its seventh season. The diverse musical and educational backgrounds of each member—from current undergraduate students to community and professional singers—create an environment in which ideas converge into a shared expression of artistry. In this spirit, we are proud to feature two emerging composers and one emerging conductor to lead the Chorale in rehearsal and performance.

Vox Nova Chorale is regularly featured on Classical Minnesota Public Radio and has been chosen for five MPR Regional Spotlights. In 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019 the Chorale was one of a few regional ensembles selected to be on MPR's "Taste of the Holidays," its annual holiday album distributed nationally.

Personnel

Soprano	Alto	Tenor	Bass
Jill Brown	Courtney Kellogg	Michael Atwood	Jacob Kruse
Kelsey DeGayner	Joan O'Donnell	Kevin Fraley	Ben Parsell
Laurie Meyers	Andrea Orem	Jeff Kidder	Brian Steele
Genevieve Palumbo	Tara Priolo	Calvin La Fave	Mike Steiner
Val Peterson	Anachie Stueve	Kyle Schwartz	Paul Theisen
Caroline Swanson	Suzanne Wiebusch	Conner Wosmek	Jeff Tunseth
Elsa Swanson			Bobby Schlidt

Vicki Peters, Artistic Director and Conductor

Vicki Peters enjoys an active career of conducting, teaching, and singing. Vicki co-founded Vox Nova Chorale in 2013 to bring emerging choral musicians together to collaborate and hone their skills with other excellent choral musicians. She directed The Summer Singers for eight years, including appearances at the 2010 North Central ACDA and 2008 Minnesota State conventions. Vicki is a private voice teacher, was a project singer for the Dale Warland Singers, and was a singer and soloist for the professional choir The Singers, under the direction of Dr. Matthew Culloton. She sang in the Minnesota Beethoven Festival Chorale under the direction of Dale Warland for four summers. She taught choral music at Fridley High School. She developed and led excellent church choirs, hand bell choirs, and orchestral groups at various churches for 16 years. She was the assistant director for Two Rivers Chorale, under the direction of Bruce Phelps, and the North High Alumni Choir, under the direction of Carl Lipke, and a soloist on European tours with both directors.

Vicki graduated with a vocal music education degree from St. Cloud State University, where she received choral, vocal, and opera scholarships and Phi Kappa Phi membership. She is listed as an Outstanding Alumni of the music department. She studied voice, choir, and opera with Charles (Chuck) Peterson. Vicki also is a choral and vocal clinician and judges state large group and solo/ensemble contests. She is a member of ACDA. She serves on the State High School League Contest Music Selection and Review Committee.

Composer and Conductor Biographies

Michael D. Atwood is graduate of the music department at Minnesota State University – Mankato and has taken advantage of numerous semesters studying private composition with Dr. David Dickau. His works have received honors as winner of multiple young composers' competitions and professional calls for scores. Now holding a Bachelor of Music degree in vocal performance as well as a Master of Music degree in choral conducting, Michael currently teaches voice out of his private studio near Minneapolis while serving as music director for local churches and theatre companies.

Brian Lewis Steele is a singer, song writer, and recording artist. His works are published under My Score at JW Pepper. His choir experience started in junior high and has taken him across the country singing in numerous professional choirs such as the Montana Chorale, the Grammy Award winning Oregon Bach Festival Choir, the Dale Warland Singers and The Singers-MCA. Brian is pleased to be a part of Vox Nova Chorale and to be premiering a song of worship and praise recounting the goodness and promises of God.

Anachie Stueve is an aspiring conductor who recently graduated with a Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance from the University of St. Thomas. She has sung under world renowned conductors including Eric Whitacre and Angela Kasper (formerly Broecker) and has been in a variety of ensembles from string quartets to collaborative operas. She is currently growing her music studio in which she teaches piano and voice lessons for students of all ages in the Twin Cities. She aspires to earn a master's degree and eventually, a doctorate in choral conducting. As a person with a visual impairment, she hopes to represent musicians with disabilities in a positive light and hopes to have an open dialogue with her singers and students about disability activism in music. Anachie would like to thank her fellow Vox Nova choristers and Vicki, for the opportunity to make music together this summer. Let us "sing on" until the end of time!

Acknowledgements

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Audition for 2024

Interested in conducting, having your music performed, and/or singing with us? E-mail a music resume to Vicki at vickipeters@voxnovachorale.org. Compositions must be submitted in PDF format along with an MP3 or MIDI recording. Rehearsals are held Monday and Thursday nights, 7 to 10 p.m. beginning in mid-June.

Memorials

In memory of Gloria Wiebusch
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Mission

Vox Nova Chorale exists to educate, empower, and provide opportunity for singers, emerging conductors, and composers, to collaborate and perform excellent choral music at the highest degree of artistry that enriches their lives and the community.

Contribute

We are grateful for your generous financial contributions, 100% of which supports Chorale operations such as securing rehearsal and concert venues, music, accompanists, clinicians, program printing, and more. You may use the envelope enclosed in this program to donate today, or mail your contribution to:

Vox Nova Chorale
9883 Arrowwood Trl
Woodbury, MN 55129
Checks payable to Vox Nova Chorale

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And, thank you to you, our loyal and thoughtful audience. Your encouragement and support means the world to us. See you next summer.