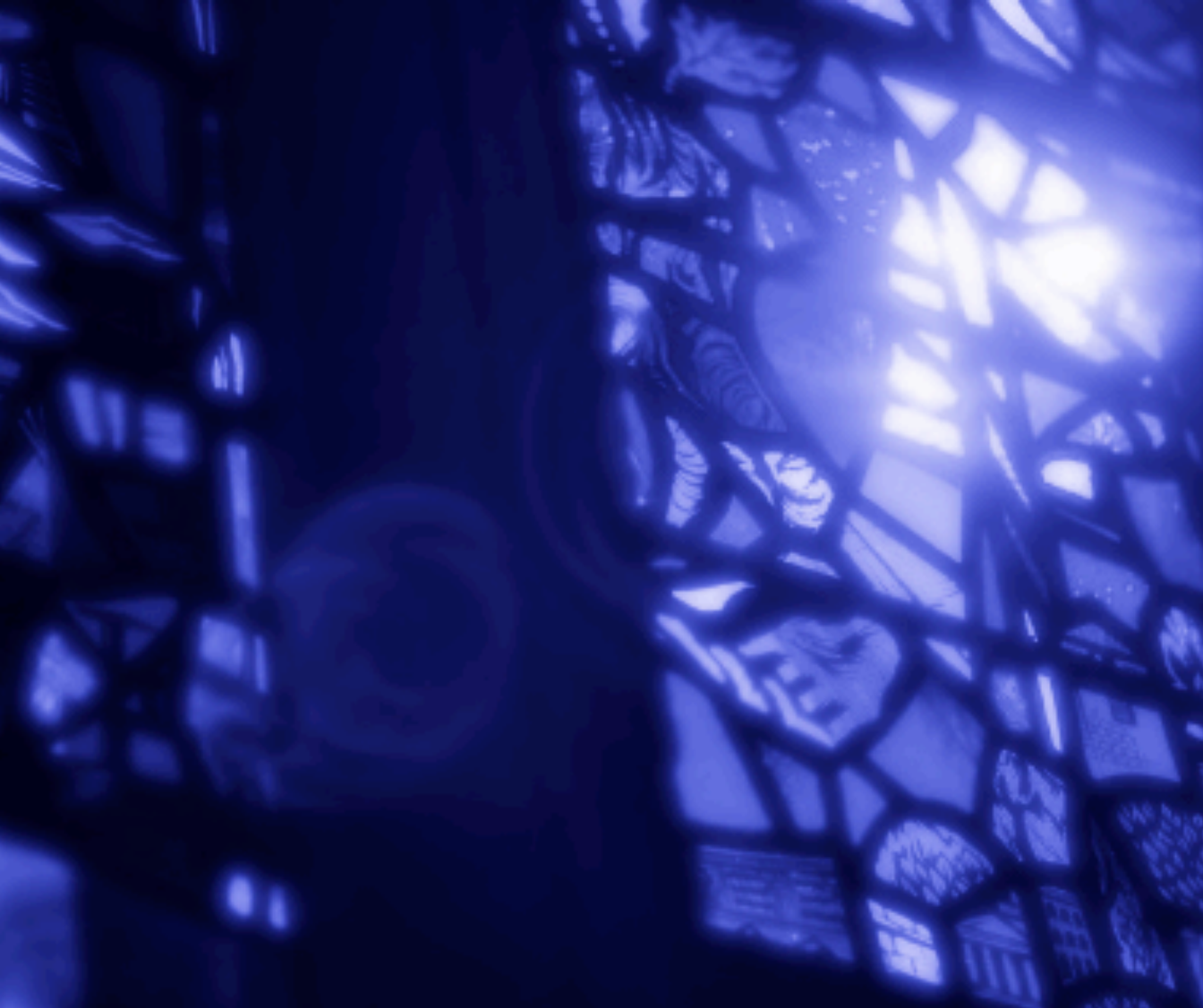


A photograph of a stained glass window, viewed from a low angle looking up. The window features a central circular medallion and a large, multi-paned section to the right. The entire image is overlaid with a deep blue monochrome filter.

SING ME TO HEAVEN

A Choral Conducting Recital

April 28, 2011 at 7:30 P.M.

St. John's Episcopal Cathedral

SING ME TO HEAVEN

A Choral Conducting Recital

*God sent his Singers upon earth
With songs of sadness and of mirth,
That they might touch the hearts of men,
And bring them back to heaven again.*

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

On behalf of the recital choir, thank you for coming to share the joy of music with us this evening. We are blessed by your presence.

Like most art, this project has changed and evolved over time, and it hasn't always been tidy. I began conversations about a possible senior conducting recital with Dr. Gene Peterson last summer, and in July I had the opportunity of a lifetime—to participate in a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Returning with powerful thoughts and images of “pilgrimage” (journey) on my mind, I began experimenting with the notion of *life's pilgrimage* as a broad theme for the concert. To complement this theme, I eventually settled on Daniel Gawthrop's beloved work--and one of my all-time favorites--“Sing Me to Heaven,” as the centerpiece.

However, be informed that I do not mean to present Heaven as simply a “final destination,” but rather as the reality of God's presence through life's pilgrimage in the literal and figurative songs that accompany our journey. In a life filled with “grief and comfort, love and passion, pain and pleasure,” sometimes what we need comes in a lullaby; other times it's a symphony. Regardless, our songs need singers, lest the music of heavenly beauty, wisdom and healing go unsung. And that's why we're here tonight.

Wherever you are on your journey, we invite you to take these next few moments to sit-back, relax, and enjoy this incredible gift of song with us.

Zack Nyein, Conductor

PRIMAL ELOQUENCE

Were You There?

Arr. Zack Nyein (b. 1989)

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble.

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?

Were you there when they nailed him to the tree...

Were you there when they laid him in the tomb...

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.

I once was lost but now am found; was blind but now I see.

Were you there when he rose up from the grave...

Traditional African-American Spiritual

Salmo 150

Ernani Aguiar (b. 1950)

Praise the Lord in his sacred places,

Praise him in the firmament of his power.

Praise him for the mighty acts,

Praise him according to his excellent greatness.

Praise him with the sound of the trumpet,

Praise him with the psaltery and the harp.

Praise him with the timbrel and the dance,

Praise him with strings and pipes.

Praise him with high-sounding cymbals,

Praise him with cymbals of joy.

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord!

Psalms 150

O Vos Omnes

Blake Henson (b. 1983)

All you who walk by on the road, pay attention and see:

if there be any sorrow like my sorrow.

Pay attention, all people, and look at my sorrow:

if there be any sorrow like my sorrow.

Lamentations 1: 12

A LULLABY...

The Seal Lullaby

Eric Whitacre (b. 1970)

*Oh! Hush thee, my baby, the night is behind us,
And black are the waters that sparkled so green.
The moon, o'er the combers, looks downward to find us
At rest in the hollows that rustle between.
Where billow meets billow, then soft by thy pillow;
Ah, weary wee flipperling, curl at thy ease!
The storm shall not wake thee, nor shark overtake thee,
Asleep in the arms of the slow swinging seas.*

Rudyard Kipling

A LOVE SONG...

The Pasture

Z. Randall Stroepe (b. 1953)

*I'm going out to clean the pasture spring;
I'll only stop to rake the leaves away
(And wait to watch the water clear, I may):
I sha'n't be gone long. You come too.*

*I'm going out to fetch the little calf
That's standing by the mother. It's so young,
It totters when she licks it with her tongue.
I sha'n't be gone long. You come too.*

Robert Frost

A REQUIEM...

In Remembrance

Jeffery Ames (b. 1969)

*May everlasting light shine upon them, O Lord.
Turn to me and be gracious, for my heart is in distress.
Oh God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?
My tears linger at night, but joy comes in the morning light.
Lord, in your infinite mercy, grant them rest. Rest forevermore.*

Traditional and Jeffery Ames

SING ME TO GOD

Sing Me to Heaven

Daniel Gawthrop (b. 1949)

*In my heart's sequestered chambers lie truths stripped of poets' gloss
Words alone are vain and vacant, and my heart is mute
In response to aching silence, memory summons half-heard voices
And my soul finds primal eloquence, and wraps me in song*

*If you would comfort me, sing me a lullaby
If you would win my heart, sing me a love song
If you would mourn me and bring me to God,
Sing me a requiem, sing me to Heaven*

*Touch in me all love and passion, pain and pleasure
Touch in me grief and comfort, love and passion, pain and pleasure
Sing me a lullaby, a love song, a requiem
Love me, comfort me, bring me to God*

Sing me a love song, sing me to Heaven.

Jane Griner

Wana Baraka

Arr. Shawn Kirchner (b. 1970)

*They have blessings, those who pray;
Jesus himself said so. Alleluia!*

*They have peace.
They have joy.
They have well-being.*

Traditional Kenyan

PROGRAM NOTES

I arranged "Were You There?" for Dr. Brendan McConville's choral arranging class in the fall of 2010. Beautiful in its simplicity, yet striking in its emotional depth, this traditional African-American spiritual sets the tone for the entire concert program in its ultimate proclamation of a resurrection that reconciles humanity to God. In the words of Richard Rohr (1995), "We can live in hope of the same resurrection for everything that has been tortured, dismissed, abused, denied, or cut short. Resurrection is God's pattern for everything. Grace is everywhere" (p. 150). Likewise, I chose to superimpose "Amazing Grace" over the third stanza, "Were you there when he laid him in the tomb," to paint a musical and textual illustration of grace that enters the world even in our darkest hours. The SSA voicing is intended to represent the women present at Jesus' tomb after his crucifixion.

Ernani Aguiar was born in Rio de Janeiro in 1950. He studied extensively in Europe; his specialty is reviving works of the Minas Gerais School of the 18th century. "Salmo 150's" driving, urgent rhythms are Aguiar's representation of the joy in this psalm. (Wolfston, 2009).

"Salmo 150" is juxtaposed with Henson's "O Vos Omnes," symbolizing the heart's capacity for both uncontainable joy and crippling sorrow. The Latin text of "O Vos Omnes" comes from the Book of Lamentations, which bewails the wrath of an angry God in the destruction of Jerusalem—the city at the heart of Israel and a metaphor for the human heart (Concerts, 2010).

The wildly successful Eric Whitacre originally composed "The Seal Lullaby" for a Disney animated feature based on Rudyard Kipling's classic story. Much to Whitacre's dismay, Disney decided to produce Kung Fu Panda instead. Nevertheless, the Towne Singers commissioned the choral arrangement of "The Seal Lullaby" a few years later. Commenting on the text, Whitacre writes, "The Seal Lullaby is a beautiful story, classic Kipling, dark and rich and not at all condescending to kids. Best of all, Kipling begins his tale with the mother seal singing softly to her young pup." Ironically this product of dreams unrealized has truly become a vessel of reassurance and comfort (Whitacre, 2008).

Z. Randall Stroope's gentle arrangement of Robert Frost's *The Pasture* beautifully expresses his subtle love poem about the simple pleasures of life on the farm. "You come too," begs Frost, as he invites his dear wife Elinor to join him in his daily tasks.

Jeffery Ames dedicated "In Remembrance" to the memory of Dr. William, Becca, and Anna Potts who died in a tragic accident in 2002. Becca was one of his students at Lincoln High School in Tallahassee, Florida. Ames writes, "This text also suits the events that have recently occurred in our world. I believe "In Remembrance" carries a message of healing, peace, and hope applicable to many situations and personal circumstances." His editor, Lynn Gackle praises the Ames, saying "Upon hearing In Remembrance for the first time, I remember how I was moved by the depth of the text and the exquisite beauty and accessibility of the music. I know that many people will be touched by this beautiful tribute in more ways that its composer will ever know-- Inspired works have a way of doing that" (Ames, 2002).

Sing Me to Heaven was commissioned by VOCE, a community chamber choir located in a northern Virginia suburb of Washington, D.C. The director said that she wanted something that "speaks to the way that we, as singers, feel about music in our lives." Composer Daniel Gawthrop knew of no such text in literature and frankly despaired of finding something so specific, so he approached a poet acquaintance, Jane Griner, about writing something original. She noted that there are times in our lives when only music can comfort us: when we're very young ("sing me a lullaby"), when we're in love ("sing me a love song"), and when we've lost someone ("sing me a requiem"). It all seems to add up to "Sing Me to Heaven." When Daniel saw the text that Jane had written, he realized that he had been given something exceptional. "I am the kind of composer who finds the music in the words and, hence, I am more than usually dependent upon finding really strong texts. "Sing Me to Heaven" sang its way onto the page for me and was quickly finished" (Burmeister, List, and Stanley, 2005).

We close the recital with Shawn Kirchner's arrangement of "Wana Baraka," a Kenyan folksong that builds from a simple statement of the melody to a rhythmic dance with the final word "Alleluya" (Leighton, 2010). This rousing closer leaves us with a sense of joyful triumph and is a most appropriate selection for the Easter season that began four days ago.

PERFORMERS

Singers:

Will Brimer
Lauren Brown
Anne Buckle
Richard Clark
Justin Crisp
Jenny Darden
Sheridan Davis
Jacob Elam
Lyndon England
Cara Kitchens
Landon Paul
Hilary Reese
Zac Ribbett
Tré Slezak
Adara Towler
Alex Ward
Ben Warren
Mariel Westervelt

Mark Walker, Accompanist
Emilie Casey, Clarinet
Cassie Pierce, French Horn
Greg Stafford, Percussion
Daniel Aycock, Percussion

SPECIAL THANKS

Dr. Gene Peterson, Faculty Mentor

Gabi Caballero

Ben Hall

Alex Haralson

Paul Ruff

Melissa Sicard

Marilyn Smith

St. John's Cathedral

The Tyson House Lutheran-Episcopal Campus Ministry

The University of Tennessee School of Music

The Chancellor's Honors Program

My teachers, friends, and family, especially my mother, Cathy

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