

— Department of Music Presents —

MUSIC

The Universal Connection

CHORAL CONCERT: *Heaven Full of Stars*

SUNY New Paltz Choral Ensembles
Dr. Colin Britt, Conductor
Alex Ruvinshteyn, Piano

Studley Theatre
Tuesday, October 25
7:30 p.m.

HEAVEN FULL OF STARS

Program

CHAMBER SINGERS

Regina coeli	Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (c. 1525 –1594)
Videntes stellam	Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)
Northern Lights	Ola Gjeilo (b. 1978)

COLLEGE-COMMUNITY CHORALE

O schöne Nacht	Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)
There Shall a Star (from Christus)	Felix Mendlessohn (1809-1847)
Sure on this Shining Night	Samuel Barber (1910-1981)
Choose Something Like a Star (from Frostiana)	Randall Thompson (1899-1984)
Hold Out Your Light	Spiritual, arr. Brandon Waddles

COMBINED TREBLE VOICES

Winter Stars	Jake Runestad (b. 1986)
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Program

CONCERT CHOIR

Night Sky, What Do You Know

Arianne Abela
(b. 1986)

Stars

Ēriks Ešenvalds
(b. 1977)

The Stars Stand Up in the Air

Eric William Barnum
(b. 1979)

City Called Heaven

Gospel, arr. Josephine Poelinitz

Danielle Finelli, Daniel McDonald, and Rachel Sacher, soloists

SUNY New Paltz Choral Ensembles

CHAMBER SINGERS

Soprano

Eileen Bronk
Allyson Holguin
Nicole Pottgen
Jillian Prakelt
Olivia Spiwak

Alto

Alicia Crespo
Isabella Kerr
Ashe Matteson

Tenor

John Alexander
Sydney Tolokonsky

Bass

Daniel McDonald
Aidan Stoddard
Michael Puglisi

COLLEGE-COMMUNITY CHORALE

Soprano

Fern Ashworth
Sandra Cranswick
Isabella DeBenedictis
Katherine Duffy
Mary Fasano
Danielle Finelli
Gianna Geraci
Kathy Gregory
Sandie Hutton
Mary McMullen
Brina Novogrebelsky
Deborah O'Connor
Susan Pitzele

Jennifer Poroye
Jane Ruback
Constance Rudd
Paige Shaver
Pilar Starr
Janet Wiggin

Alto

Yeni Alcantara
Nancy Aronzon
Lisa Avila
Catharine Baldwin
Sue Books
Riley Brite

SUNY New Paltz Choral Ensembles

Alli Byrne
Lee Degnan
Sophia DesMarais
Sophia Guelke
Marlena Lange
Wren MacDonald
Lauren Meeker
Carol Rietsma
Hadley Taylor
Ciara Timoney
Shirley Warren
Susan Wile

Tenor

Nick Fasano
Trevor Keller
John Litton
Richard Mogavero
Tyler Patti
Tom Wanning
Bill Wolz

Bass

Miles North
Paul Osgood
Michael Saunders

CONCERT CHOIR

Soprano

Isabel Arter
Madison Caines
Riley Doyle
Danielle Finelli
Danielle Frucchione
Marissa Gordon
Ronnie Gregor
Sarah Hock
Nicola Kelly
Jenna Lauria
Lauren Loenardi

Nancy Mac Innes
Kristen McQuaid
Nicole Pottgen
Jillian Prakelt
Olivia Spiwak

Tenor

John Cossentino
Calvin Dean
Shay Kessler
Tyler Thurston

SUNY New Paltz Choral Ensembles

Alto

Alyssa Canala
Caris Carbone
Lis Hernandez
Harper Latcholia
Ashe Matteson
Leeza Pantano
Gina Ruiz
Rachel Sacher
Gabrielle Bush
Abby Stritt
Zihui Sun
Alexandra Vaynerchuk

Bass

John Alexander
Isaac Freierman
Ryan Mauer
Daniel McDonald
Aidan Stoddard
Michael Puglisi

Program notes and translations

CHAMBER SINGERS

Arguably the most famous exemplar of 16th century European imitative polyphonic music, Italian composer Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina wrote hundreds of compositions including masses, madrigals, and over 300 motets. His influence on the study of counterpoint was widespread even during his lifetime and continues to be held as the gold standard in many theory classes today. His motet *Regina coeli* follows many of the same conventions seen in his more famous works: alternations between vertical (chordal) sonorities and independent melody lines, an arch-like rising and falling shape to each phrase, careful treatment of dissonance, and text painting.

*Queen of heaven, rejoice, alleluia
The one whom you were worthy
to carry, alleluia, is risen as he said, alleluia,
pray for us to God, alleluia.*

Francis Poulenc was a prolific French composer in the first half of the 20th century whose compositions spanned nearly every genre. Following a personal tragedy in 1936, he underwent something of a spiritual reawakening, and his choral music took on a more serious and devotional quality. First published in 1952, Poulenc's "Quatre motets pour le temps de Noël" depict four moments from the nativity scene. *Videntes stellam* portrays the journey of the three magi, following the star to Bethlehem and giving the newborn Jesus gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

*Seeing the star, the magi rejoiced with great joy;
and entering the house,
they found the boy, with Mary, His mother,
and fell down and worshiped Him.*

*And having opened their treasures,
they offered Him gifts:
gold, frankincense, and myrrh.*

In Northern Lights, Norwegian composer Ola Gjeilo sets a portion of the Song of Solomon text in Latin, drawing inspiration from the aurora borealis of his home country. The shimmering lights begin to emerge in the second part of the piece, culminating in a luminous climax as the voices expand into six parts on the final line of text, followed by a repeat of the opening material that gradually evaporates into silence.

*Thou art beautiful, O my love,
sweet and comely as Jerusalem,
terrible as an army set in array.
Turn away thy eyes from me,
for they have made me flee away.*

COLLEGE-COMMUNITY CHORALE

Johannes Brahms is well known for his wide array of vocal music, ranging from solo songs to large scale choral works and everything in between. His opus 92 cycle “Vier Quartette,” completed in 1884, is a rare later collection of part songs by the aging composer (his previous set of quartets, the second set of Liebeslieder Waltzes, was written over 10 years earlier). Yet this cycle, comprising settings of poems by Goethe, Daumer, Allmers, and Hebbel, is largely about romance, autumn, and secret romantic rendezvous. The first song in this cycle, O schöne Nacht, depicts a peaceful evening with stars and the moon glowing above and a nightingale singing ardently, while a young boy steals away to his lover - ah, lovely night!

*Oh beautiful night!
The moon is fabulously shining in its complete splendour in the sky;
Around it, sweet company of little stars.
Oh beautiful night!*

*The dew is shimmering brightly on the green blades of grass;
The nightingale sings ardently in the lilac bush, and
The boy steals softly to his lover.
Oh beautiful night!*

Felix Mendelssohn died in 1847 while writing his third oratorio *Christus*, a dramatic portrayal of the life of Christ. The extant music from the first part of the work, “Die Geburt Christi,” depicts the appearance of a star in the sky and the arrival of the three wise men. The concluding chorus, “There Shall a Star,” showcases Mendelssohn’s gift for lyrical melodies and intricate contrapuntal writing. The chorus ends with a four-part harmonization of the chorale “Wie Schön Leuchtet der Morgenstern,” a deliberate connection with the Lutheran choral tradition exemplified by J. S. Bach.

One of the most eclectic and well-known American composers of the 20th century was Samuel Barber, whose operas, art songs, instrumental works, and choral music have all taken a prominent place in the concert repertory. He frequently adapted some of his most beloved pieces from one genre for another, such as the choral arrangements of his *Adagio for Strings* (itself a rearrangement of his *String Quartet*, Op. 11) and *Sure on this Shining Night*. The original art song (from *Four Songs*, Op. 13) sets James Agee’s melancholic and reverent text simply yet poignantly, with a gentle interplay between the soloist and the piano. Barber’s choral arrangement develops this relationship further, maintaining the solo line in the soprano part but relocating the original canon in the piano to the tenors and altos, while allowing the expressive dynamic capabilities of the human voice to enhance the drama of the original setting.

Randall Thompson’s name is practically synonymous with American choral music of the mid-20th century. His output includes extended sacred works, a setting of texts by Thomas Jefferson, numerous a cappella motets, and his beloved *Frostiana*, a collection of seven settings of Robert Frost poems for choir and piano. *Choose Something Like a Star* is the final movement of the set, in which Thompson sets the soprano part floating

above the other voices who slowly rise in parallel triads in an ever-ascending climb to the heavens.

In his “Two Light Spirituals,” Dr. Brandon Waddles transcribes two spirituals which were handed down to him aurally (much as spirituals have traditionally been passed down through generations). His setting of Hold Out Your Light begins with a jaunty treatment featuring gospel harmonies and an active piano part, followed by a rousing buildup with layering entrances from all four parts, concluding with a final reprise of the opening chorus.

COMBINED TREBLE VOICES

Jake Runestad’s mesmerizing setting of Sara Teasdale’s Winter Stars uses a recurring motif with ad libitum “twinkling” piano figures to depict the stars in the night sky, while the chorus sings a wordless rising and falling figure. Runestad writes: “Winter Stars provides a sense of hope found in the steadfastness of the stars. Each year, the constellation Orion returns in the winter sky, reminding us that even when there is war and violence and sadness in our lives, we can find hope and constancy in the cosmos.”

CONCERT CHOIR

Of Night Sky, what do you know?”, composer Arianne Abela writes, “When my dear friend Dr. Miles Canaday approached me about writing a piece during the height of the Covid- 19 pandemic, I immediately knew that I wanted to write something about connecting to other people and to the natural world. My family lives in a rural area of western Massachusetts, where the stars are effulgent and plentiful. I knew I wanted to explore the subject of stars: the mystery of the heavens and the glorious beauty of the sky. Though this has been a time of extreme isolation for all of us, when I look up at the sky, I am reminded of the greater unknown and feel much more connected to the world, and to others who might be sharing the same experience of gazing into the stars.

The opening of the piece begins with a single note that grows and grows. At times, when I would look up at the sky, only a single still star would

be visible; but after holding my gaze, I would notice more and more stars scintillating in the dark sky. I wanted to capture both the stillness and the joyful dance of the stars. The E-D- F# theme at the opening of the piano part is called Hazel's theme. Hazel, my 4-year-old, loves the night sky. One evening before I sat down to compose, I asked her what the stars would sound like if they could sing. She sang that exact melody and said, 'Mama, the sky is so beautiful! It is shining in my heart.' My daughter Tala was born during one of the most difficult months of 2020. Tala, which means 'bright star' in Filipino, has been a beacon of light during these dark times."

Eriks Ešenvalds is a Latvian composer who has innovated a characteristic otherworldly sound to his music, introducing mesmerizing sonorities like tuned glasses and hand chimes into his works while vividly depicting images from nature and the skies. He has described trying to sonically capture the Aurora Borealis in his music, and how using the ethereal sounds of tuned glasses helps to create that otherworldly shimmer. One of his most famous choral works is Stars, which expansively sets a poem by Sara Teasdale over a glowing tapestry of water glasses and choral oos and ahs. The climax of the piece arrives at the line, "heaven full of stars," which is also the origin of the title for this concert.

Eric William Barnum's The Stars Stand Up in the Air is a neo-romantic treatment of Thomas MacDonagh's rhapsodic and heartbroken air, which overflows with natural and celestial imagery ("she's more radiant than grass after dew, she's more fair than the stars where they stand..."). Barnum treats the text with a lilting melody that lingers between major and minor, supported by an expressive and at times almost cinematic piano part.

Publisher Henry Leck writes: "City Called Heaven is a 'sorrow song' that is usually performed in the style of 'surge-singing.'" The choral forces first establish the harmonic and dramatic shape of the song before accompanying freely improvised solos, building towards massive block harmonies on the climax: "Sometimes I'm tossed and I'm driven, Lord, sometimes I just don't know which way to turn."

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