

Texts, Translations, and Program Notes

Pseudo-Yoik: Jaakko Mäntyjärvi (b. 1963) has spent the past twenty years as one of Finland's most active choral composers, receiving commissions from such world-renowned groups as the Tallis Scholars, the King's Singers, and Chanticleer. His primary training, however, is as a linguist; he is an Authorized Finnish-to-English translator, a title he has held since 1987. His choral compositions span a wide emotional gamut, from the epic lament *Canticum Calamitatis Maritimae*—composed in memory of the 1994 *Estonia* shipwreck in the Baltic Sea—to the zany satire presented here today: *Pseudo-Yoik* (1995).

A *yoik*, according to the composer, is most easily translated from the Saame language of northern Finland as a “song” composed of short, repetitive sections with a limited melodic range. What is not limited, however, is the rhythmic complexity of these patterns, which are developed with frequent changes of meter. You'll hear both repetition and rhythmic complexity in *Pseudo-Yoik*; however, that is where the similarities with the original genre end. Mäntyjärvi's goal in *Pseudo-Yoik* was to create an “impression of a stereotype” that has “nothing to do with the genuine Lappish or Saame *yoik*.” The choir sings Mäntyjärvi's made-up Finnish-sounding gibberish syllables with a coarse, bright, “almost painfully nasal” sound in an attempt to satirize those who parody traditional Finnish music. This energetic, playful piece sheds light on the possibilities inherent in choral music to simultaneously function as classical art, cultural signifier, and humor.

Afternoon on a Hill: Edna St. Vincent Millay led a passionate, fiercely independent life as a poet and playwright in the first half of the twentieth century. Successful from an early age, she became only the third woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for poetry in 1923. Throughout her life, Millay defied societal norms, devoting time and verse to advance the cause of feminism. She held a deep love of nature and the outdoors, exemplified in her classic poem “Afternoon on a Hill” which depicts an idyllic outing in nature. American composer **Eric Barnum** crafts a musical setting to match the mystery, peace, and euphoria embedded in Millay's verse. Immediately, the piano and the chorus are established as equal participants in the work, with the piano taking center stage at the outset: gentle arpeggios evoke the sound of wind chimes before the chorus blazes through with fierce, D major sunlight. The altos then introduce a flowing, reflective melody that appears throughout the piece, complemented by the gentle yet haunting piano accompaniment. The wind chimes again dominate the texture at “I watch the wind bow down the grass.” As the chorus gently presents the text in block chords, the aleatoric Lydian scale offered by the piano evokes the relaxation and reflection of a peaceful afternoon. After the rhapsodic return of the opening declamation and haunting alto melody, it is the piano that gets the last word: a stunning cadence in the unexpected key of B major dissolves into the final echoing of the wind chimes and the ensuing stillness.

I will be the gladdest thing
Under the sun!
I will touch a hundred flowers
And not pick one.

I will look at cliffs and clouds
With quiet eyes,
Watch the wind bow down the grass,
And the grass rise.

And when lights begin to show
Up from the town,
I will mark which must be mine,
And then start down!

Text: Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892–1950)

O Nata Lux: Thomas Tallis (1505-1585) was a highly influential British composer of the Tudor era whose career and compositions reflect a time of great upheaval and religious turmoil in English history. As a composer employed by the Chapel Royal, his charge was to write church music that reflected the tastes of the monarch. However, he was employed by *four* very distinct British monarchs: Henry VIII, whose search for political power led him to break with Rome and form the Church of England; his young son, Edward VI, who was swayed by a growing wave of Protestantism; Mary Tudor, who reinstated Catholicism—and earned the nickname “Bloody Mary” in the process; and finally Elizabeth I, a Protestant who was known to quietly allow Latin-language music (*if* she approved of the composer).

“O Nata Lux” comes from the 1575 collection of works titled *Cantiones Sacrae*, a project Tallis undertook with his student and protégé William Byrd. Tallis and Byrd had been granted a publishing monopoly by Queen Elizabeth, allowing them to be the sole publishers of music in England; however, this business venture was frightfully unsuccessful at the time. Nevertheless, many works from this collection became standards for choirs across Britain (and eventually the Western choral world). “O Nata Lux” reflects a synthesis of styles throughout Tallis’s career, embodying both the rich sonorities and Latin text common in his music for Mary Tudor and the Catholic Church as well as the direct, text-forward homophonic style he used for Protestant monarchs.

*O nata lux de lumine,
Jesu redemptor saeculi.
Dignare clemens supplicum
Laudes precesque sumere.*

*Qui carne quondam contegi
Dignatus est pro perditis,
Nos membra confer effici
Tui beati corporis.*

O Light born of Light,
Jesus, redeemer of the world,
with loving-kindness deign to receive
suppliant praise and prayer.

Thou who once deigned to be clothed in flesh
for the sake of the lost,
grant us to be members
of thy blessed body.

Text: 10th century hymn; translation from the Public Domain

To See the Sky: Minnesota-based composer **Jocelyn Hagen** (b. 1980) has written music described as “simply magical” (Fanfare Magazine) and “dramatic and deeply moving” (Star Tribune, Minneapolis/St. Paul). From large-scale multimedia works, electro-acoustic music, dance, and opera to intimate choral works and classical solo vocal pieces, Hagen is at home in many genres. She is a sought-after collaborator around the world and has been commissioned recently by such prominent groups as Conspirare, the Santa Fe Desert Chorale, and the Chione Woodwind Quintet. She is a frequent collaborator with Minneapolis-based hip-hop artist Dessa, and she regularly performs as a vocalist with her husband (and fellow composer) Tim Takach as part of the band OneNation.

“To See the Sky” embodies the sensitivity to text, careful musical pacing, and exquisite sense of wonder that Hagen often evokes in her music. Her setting of Sara Teasdale’s poem “Leaves” begins with a gently lilting piano accompaniment, setting the stage for spacious, expansive melodies that prompt the listener to look upward. The repeated ostinati are hypnotizing in their simplicity, allowing the vocal lines to shine; the occasional sudden harmonic shifts act as musical kaleidoscopes, drawing particular attention to the emotional messages in the text: “...but a rustle of delight in the wistful heart of night” is a particularly fine example for which to listen. Hagen’s real genius, however, is her sense of musical pacing, most evident in the work’s conclusion. The lush harmonies of the choir fade into the distance while the piano gets the final word: sparse, widely-spaced final notes that somehow *sound* like the stars twinkling overhead and the grounding earth below.

One by one, like leaves from a tree
All my faiths have forsaken me;
But the stars above my head
Burn in white and delicate red,
And beneath my feet the earth
Brings the sturdy grass to birth.
I who was content to be
But a silken-singing tree,
But a rustle of delight
In the wistful heart of night—
I have lost the leaves that knew
Touch of rain and weight of dew.
Blinded by a leafy crown
I looked neither up nor down—
But the little leaves that die
Have left me room to see the sky;
Now for the first time I know
Stars above and earth below.

Text: “Leaves” by Sara Teasdale (1884-1933)

Wondrous Glow: **Mari Esabel Valverde** (b. 1987) is a composer, vocalist, and pedagogue based in Texas. Her commissions for the American Choral Directors Association, the Texas Music Educators Association, the Gay and Lesbian Choruses Association, and the Boston Choral Ensemble, among others, have been performed at various venues and festivals throughout the country. A graduate of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music,

the European American Musical Alliance in Paris, and St. Olaf College, she is a strong advocate for the trans community and currently teaches transgender voice training with the organization Your Lessons Now. As a professional singer, she is a member of the Dallas Chamber Choir and EXIGENCE (Detroit).

“Wondrous Glow” is the result of Valverde’s collaboration with poet **Amir Rabiya** (b. 1978) who strongly claims their queer, trans, two-spirit, mixed race, and disabled identities in their work. Rabiya’s writings “[explore] living life on the margins and at the intersections of multiple identities,” with common themes including living with chronic pain and illness, war, trauma, spirituality, healing, redemption and “[speaking] on silenced places.” In Valverde’s setting of Rabiya’s poem “Grand Design,” the resilience of the human spirit and connection to the broader universe take center stage. Bold, imitative explosions alternate with lush, slowly unfolding harmonies to create contrast between the outward expressions of creative energy and the inner reflection central to the text. Images of galaxies, comets, and planets coexisting in humans themselves come to a musical apex at the text “let your mouth be a wondrous glow, your words a beacon” — a call to all listeners to embody their truest sense of identity, even when everything feels lost.

today collect the dazzling shelter of flowers
stitch a crown large enough for the globe
fragrant enough for satellites to lift their noses
take the prayer of night into your arms
as she sleeps, breathe with her
breathe with the night
there are times when there is nothing
left to do, but create
form the unseen into a tangible communion
of stardust, place the galaxy on your tongue
let your mouth be a wondrous glow
your words a beacon
when everything is lost
imagine yourself as more than an earth-
quaking body a gift
the streaking tail of a comet
become that which holds your eye
that which makes you gasp

Text: “Grand Design” by Amir Rabiya (b. 1978)

Abide with me: One of the most beloved hymns in the Christian repertory is the hymn Abide with Me. Penned by Scottish cleric Henry Francis Lyte in 1847 as he was dying of tuberculosis, “Abide with Me” resonates through the centuries as a message of hope and comfort in the face of adversity. The tune, EVENTIDE, was composed by British organist William Henry Monk in the 19th century; composer and arranger **Greg Jasperse** (Associate Professor of Music, Western Michigan University) takes Monk’s tune and imbues it with jazz harmonies, creating a stunning, sincere take on this classic hymn.

Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide.

When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim; its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see;
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.

Hold thou your cross before my closing eyes;
Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies.
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.

Text: Henry Francis Lyte (1793-1847)

Abend: Kansas-based composer Jacob Narverud (b. 1986) is one of the best-selling composers of this generation. Jake is perhaps best known for his well-crafted arrangements of popular songs; his original compositions, too, are exquisite and often accessible to a broad range of choral groups from elementary school to high school and beyond. When he formed the Tallgrass Chamber Choir, a Kansas City-based professional choral ensemble, he crafted several new compositions, including this haunting setting of Rainer Maria Rilke's poem *Der Abend*. Narverud's harmonic language from the outset is neo-impressionistic; one thinks of Debussy and rich clouds of sound. Harkening back to the Renaissance madrigal, each phrase of text receives its own musical treatment. Listen for moments of stillness, surprise unison passages, and the epic unfolding of "what becomes a star each night" before it recedes into the distance.

Der Abend wechselt langsam
die Gewänder,
die ihm ein Rand von alten Bäumen hält;
du schaust: und von dir scheiden sich
die Länder,
ein himmelfahrendes und eins, das fällt.

Und lassen dich,
zu keinem ganz gehörend,
nicht ganz so dunkel wie das Haus,
das schweigt,
nicht ganz so sicher Ewiges beschwörend
wie das, was Stern wird jede Nacht
und steigt.

Und lassen dir
(unsäglich zu entwirrn)
dein Leben bang und riesenhaft
und reifend

The evening sky puts on slowly
the darkening blue coat
held for it by a row of ancient trees:
you watch: and the lands grow
distant in your sight,
one heaven-bound, one that falls;

and leave you,
not at home in either one,
not quite so still
as the darkened houses,
not calling to eternity with the passion
of what becomes a star each night,
and rises;
And leave you
(inexpressively to unravel)
your life, with its immensity
and fear,
so that, now bounded,

sodaß es, bald begrenzt
und bald begreifend,
abwechselnd Stein in dir wird und Gestirn.

now immeasurable,
it is alternately stone in you and star.

Text: Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926)

The Word Was God: When contemplating the idea of the night sky, one must confront the idea of darkness. The idea of darkness as an absence of light—and absence of divine presence—takes center stage in **Rosephanye Powell's** setting of the opening verses of the Gospel of John. Driven by layers of ostinati (repeated musical ideas) and gradually unfolding, this work churns with musical energy. A single melodic line presented at the outset of the work morphs into a polyphonic deluge of sound before receding as quickly as it appeared. In the middle section, a bass drone undergirds gently swirling harmonies in the upper voices as they describe the mystery of creation. As the layers of musical lines begin to build, it is still shrouded in mystery; even the final statement, “and the Word was God,” is set to an unresolved, dissonant chord. Darkness is often unknowable, particularly the depths of space: but there is *possibility*, a spark, a creative force at work, even when we cannot perceive it.

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.
The same was in the beginning with God.
All things were made by him; and without him nothing was made that has been made.

Text: John 1:1-13

Stars: George Walker (1922-2018) was a unique and sincere voice in the American compositional establishment. He held the honor of being the first Black composer to win a Pulitzer Prize in music (1996) for his vocal-orchestral work *Lilacs*. His diverse oeuvre includes choral, orchestra, chamber, and vocal works that do not conform to a singular style but rather display an eclecticism that transcends typical stylistic boundaries. His short work “Stars” is a study in compositional efficiency and depth, juxtaposing modern chromatic harmony with imitative polyphony often found in Renaissance motets and madrigals. After a haunting opening, the sopranos and altos of the choir embark upon an arduous ascent describing the “scars of sorrow” that persist through time. After a brief restatement of the original theme led by the tenors and basses, the chorus comes together for a final homophonic retelling of the main idea: “I cannot always stand upon the peak and touch the stars.” This reflective, plaintive work challenges us to face the realities of chasing stars: that sometimes, despite our best efforts, the bleak forces of the world and our own scars ground us in place.

I cannot always stand upon the peak and
touch the stars.
Sometimes the wind is thick with snow and
Bleak,
And there are scars of sorrow that are long
since past.
How long they last, how long they last.

Text: Susan D. Keeney

Rivers of Light: Latvian composer **Ēriks Ešenvalds** (b. 1977) says that, for his compositional process, “...harmony is most important—how it flows and becomes a new harmony.” He is known for his rich harmonic landscapes that evoke the scenery of the Baltic region: immense, unknowable, yet somehow intimate and emotionally charged. Those landscapes turn into skyscapes in “Rivers of Light,” a piece that seeks to describe the phenomenon of the aurora borealis. This polytextual work operates on two levels. First, a soloist introduces a traditional Finnish folk song describing the aurora “[sliding] back and forth.” The chorus provides a shimmering harmonic backdrop that evokes these subtle changes. Second, we have the English texts, which describe the reactions of explorers upon seeing the Northern Lights — the phrase “the sky is flooded with rivers of light” presents a shockingly gorgeous canvas upon which Ešenvalds works his harmonic magic. The duality between traditional texts and English texts continues as we return to the Saami language of northern Finland and a traditional *yoik* (a nod to our opener, Pseudo Yoik) before a cinematic depiction of the light-dragons in the sky chases away any sense of stasis we may have felt. “Rivers of Light” presents us as performers and listeners with a glimpse into the wonder of the night, viewed by so many people throughout time; it evokes the same wonder as I felt when viewing the blazingly colorful images of the James Webb telescope, and it truly is the heart of our program today.

Kuovsakasah reukarih tåkko teki, sira ria
tåkko teki sira ria, sira siraa ria
(Northern Lights slide back and forth, fa la la...)
(back and forth, fa la la...)

Guovssat, guovssat radni go,
libai libai libaida
ruoná gákti,
nu nu nu
(Northern Lights, Northern Lights, blanket shivering
Fa la la...
Green coat [name for Saami traditional costume]
Fa la la...)

Winter night,
the sky is filled with symphony of light,
the sky is flooded with rivers of light.
The doors of heaven have been opened tonight.

From horizon to horizon
misty dragons swim through the sky,
green curtains billow and swirl,
fast-moving, sky-filling,
the tissues of gossamer.
Nothing can be heard.

Light shakes over the vault of heaven,
its veil of glittering silver
changing now to yellow, now to green, now to red.
It spreads in restless change, into waving,
into many-folded bands of silver.
It shimmers in tongues of flame,
over the very zenith it shoots a bright ray up
until the whole melts away
as a sigh of departing soul in the moonlight,
leaving a glow in the sky
like the dying embers of a great fire.

Text: Saami (Old Finnish) folksong and yoik; English texts by Charles Francis Hall, Fridtjof Nansen, and the composer

My Lord, what a morning: Composer and professional singer **Harry T. Burleigh** (1866–1949) was one of the earliest and most prolific arrangers of African American concert spirituals. Born in Erie, Pa, he displayed conspicuous musical talent early in his life; his grandfather taught him the slave songs that would shape his musical career. At age 26, he was accepted into the prestigious National Conservatory of Music, where he studied voice, counterpoint, harmony, and played bass in the orchestra. During his tenure as a student, Burleigh met Antonín Dvořák, who at the time was the director of the Conservatory. Burleigh introduced Dvořák to slave songs, which had a profound impact on him: Dvořák would go on to incorporate elements of these spirituals into his Symphony “From the New World” and his “American” String Quartet, saying “in the negro melodies of America I discover all that is needed for a great and noble school of music.”

Burleigh was a prolific composer of art songs and arranger of spirituals for solo voice and piano. Burleigh’s choral arrangements arose as the result of the proliferation of groups following in the footsteps of the Fisk Jubilee Singers who wanted accessible, well-crafted arrangements of spirituals that would appeal to a broad base of singers and audiences alike. Unlike many other Black composers of the day, Burleigh was well-connected with publishing houses; because of his relationship with George Maxwell and the G. Ricordi Company, his music was distributed and performed widely during his lifetime.

“My Lord, what a morning” is emblematic of Burleigh’s style: direct, sincere, and impeccably constructed according to Western tonal processes. The spiritual itself has somewhat convoluted origins; however, pioneering American musicologist Eileen Southern (1922–2002) contended “My Lord, what a morning” arose from free African Americans in the North, where “freed from the supervision of white clergymen, [they] could conduct their religious services as they wished.” Scholar C. Michael Hawn of Southern Methodist University places the date of origin sometime between 1801 and 1867, most likely in Philadelphia. Its prophetic text, highlighted by the image of falling stars, has powerfully resonated as a symbol of both justice and hope tied to the biblical book of Revelation. Burleigh’s arrangement is both impossibly intimate and outwardly rhapsodic, true to its history and yet crafted for wide modern appeal.

My Lord, what a mornin’
My Lord, what a mornin’

My Lord, what a mornin'
When de stars begin to fall.

Done quit all my worl'ly ways
Done quit all my worl'ly ways
Done quit all my worl'ly ways
Jine dat hebbently band.

Oh, my Lord, what a mornin'...

Text: Traditional Spiritual

Light of a Clear Blue Morning: American country star **Dolly Parton** (b. 1946) is one of the most successful singer-songwriters of the past century, with 11 GRAMMY awards, 30 #1 singles, and over 3,000 songs in her name. Her 1977 hit “Light of a Clear Blue Morning” stole the hearts of generations with its hopefulness, candor, and sincerity. Composer/conductor Craig Hella Johnson (b. 1962) arranged Parton’s song for his professional choir, Conspirare, for their 2009 production of “Conspirare: A Company of Voices.” He retains Parton’s melody, harmonic structure, and sense of optimism, buoyed by lush chords and patient ostinati.

It's been a long dark night
And I've been a waitin' for the morning
It's been a long hard fight
But I see a brand new day a dawning
I've been looking for the sunshine
You know I ain't seen it in so long
But everything's gonna work out just fine
And everything's gonna be all right
It's gonna be okay.

'Cause I can see the light of a clear blue morning
I can see the light of a brand new day
I can see the light of a clear blue morning
Oh, and everything's gonna be all right
It's gonna be okay.

Text: Dolly Parton (b. 1946)

Hark! I hear the harps eternal: At 96 years of age, composer **Alice Parker** (b. 1925) occupies an honored place in American choral music history. After receiving her bachelor’s degree in organ and composition from Smith College, she studied choral conducting at the Juilliard School. While at Juilliard, she began her over 20-year association with Robert Shaw as co-arranger for the Robert Shaw Chorale. Founded in 1948, the Robert Shaw Chorale was a benchmark ensemble noted for its homogeneity of tone, careful attention to diction and phrasing, and rhythmic precision; Parker’s many compositions for the group include arrangements of hymn tunes, spirituals, and folk songs that remain staples in the repertoire today.

“Hark, I Hear the Harps Eternal” is perhaps one of Parker’s most well-loved arrangements. The hymn tune Parker sets, called *Invitation*, dates from sometime in the early- to mid-19th century, published first in William Walker’s 1835 hymnal *Southern Harmony*. It appeared for the first time paired with the “Hark, I Hear” text in William Hauser’s 1878 shape-note book *The Olive Leaf*. The text, attributed to F.R. Warren, speaks of “flood-crossing,” wherein a soul embarks upon a journey through water to eternal life in Heaven. With its sturdy yet vivacious rhythmicity, tuneful melody, and spirited text painting, “Hark I Hear” represents a fine example of both Parker’s careful attention to her source material and her compelling sense of compositional craft.

Hark, I hear the harps eternal ringing on the farther shore,
As I near those swollen waters with their deep and solemn roar.

And my soul, tho’ stain’d with sorrow, fading as the light of day,
Passes swiftly o’er those waters, to the city far away.

Souls have cross’d before me, saintly, to that land of perfect rest;
And I hear them singing faintly in the mansions of the blest.

Refrain: Hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah, praise the lamb!
Hallelujah, hallelujah, glory to the great I AM!

Text: attributed to F.R. Warren