

Vox Grata

WOMEN'S CHOIR

Presents

The Poet Sings

Conducted by Jeanette MacCallum

Dr. John Semingson, Accompanist

Westminster Presbyterian Church

Nashville, Tennessee

Thursday, May 22, 2014

7 PM

Free will offering to benefit the YWCA Weaver Domestic Violence Shelter

The Poet Sings

Please silence all cell phones and pagers for the duration of the program.

I See the Heaven's Glories Shine (Emily Bronte) Andrea Ramsey

Choose Something Like a Star (Robert Frost) Randall Thompson

Reflections on Humanity (Sara Teasdale) *Laura Ann Ross, oboe* Kevin A. Memley

1. Anadyomene

2. If I Were the Velvet Rose *Erica Scaramuzza, soloist*

3. There Will Come Soft Rains

Hope is the thing with feathers (Emily Dickinson) Emma Lou Diemer

Echo (Christina Rossetti) Frank La Rocca

The Bike Let Loose (Serena Fusek) Edie Hill

I am not yours (Sara Teasdale) Stephen Chatman

Now I Become Myself (May Sarton) Gwyneth Walker

We dedicate this song to all victims of domestic violence

Vox Grata Women's Choir

Soprano 1 Leigh Anderson, Susan Holt, Emily Neely, Marissa Parkes, Sarah Stallings, Charlotte Sublett, Sharon Warfield, Jen Way

Soprano 2 Emily Beavers, Mary Biddlecombe, Alexa Coulton, Jenny Knott, Katie Mullins, Erica Scaramuzza

Alto 1 Annabelle Absar, Jennifer Barnes, Kelly Christie, Jane Kirchner, Mareike Sattler, Caroline Sheridan

Alto 2 Carol Callaway-Lane, Alissa Floyd, Denise Statham, Karen Weir

Jeanette MacCallum teaches choral music at Pope John Paul II High School, Hendersonville, Tennessee and is founder and Artistic Director of *Vox Grata*. She previously taught music theory and music history at Belmont and Lipscomb Universities in Nashville, Tennessee. From 2002, to 2012, she served as the Director of Choral Activities at St. Cecilia Academy in Nashville, where she conducted various ensembles and taught AP Music Theory. During her tenure at St. Cecilia, the Advanced Choir received superior ratings at all regional and state adjudication festivals in which it participated. Her students also earned positions in numerous All-State and American Choral Directors Association Honor Choirs. In addition, the St. Cecilia Advanced Choir performed at ACDA and TMEA state conferences. Mrs. MacCallum also led the St. Cecilia Choir on performance tours to Carnegie Hall, Canada, and Italy. In 2007, the St. Cecilia Choir performed by invitation at the *Ospedale della Pietà* and the *Ospedale dei Derelitti* in Venice.

Reared in Princeton, New Jersey, Mrs. MacCallum's passion for choral music began as a member of the distinguished Princeton High School Choir. She received her musical education at the Eastman School of Music and Belmont University, and received the Master of Church Music degree from Belmont. A singer, pianist, and conductor, Mrs. MacCallum has also directed choirs at the Blair School of Music at Vanderbilt University, as well as at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Nashville. She currently serves as the ACDA Tennessee Chair for Women's Choir Repertoire and Standards. Mrs. MacCallum has served as the Treasurer and President of the Middle Tennessee Vocal Association. She is also the author of *"The Sacred Choral Works of the Venetian Ospedali,"* published by GIA in *"Conducting Women's Choirs: Strategies for Success,"* Debra Spurgeon, Editor and Compiler (2012).

John Semingson, Accompanist for Vox Grata Women's Choir, has served as the Director of Music Ministries for Westminster Presbyterian Church, Nashville, since 2001. He oversees a multi-faceted music program of nine choirs involving nearly 200 children, youth, and adults. John holds the Doctor of Musical Arts degree in choral conducting, the Master of Church Music in both conducting and organ, and the Bachelor of Music in organ performance. Over the past 26 years, he has conducted and/or served as an accompanist for church, community, university and honor choirs in Illinois, New Jersey, North Carolina, and Tennessee.

Mission of Vox Grata

Vox Grata is comprised of joyful women who, out of gratitude for the fullness of their own lives, possess a desire to sing together for the benefit of others. The group performs repertoire that expresses a uniquely feminine spirit, especially works that promote the best interests of women in society. Vox Grata sings concert programs that directly benefit the needs of women in the Nashville community. The singers also enjoy the opportunity to mentor exceptional high school and college-aged women who participate in the choir as part of its choral scholar program.

For information about supporting Vox Grata or to find out about auditions and upcoming events, please visit our website at www.voxgrata.com, or like us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/VoxGrata>.

Special Thanks

Vox Grata Board of Directors – Sallie Bailey, Jennifer Barnes, Susan Baughman, Kelly Christie, Susan Holt, Doug MacCallum, and Jeanette MacCallum

Dr. John Semingson, Director of Music Ministries, Westminster Presbyterian Church

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Poetry Texts

No Coward Soul Is Mine by Emily Bronte (1818-1848)

No coward soul is mine
No trembler in the world's storm-troubled sphere
I see Heaven's glories shine
And Faith shines equal arming me from Fear

O God within my breast
Almighty ever-present Deity
Life, that in me hast rest,
As I Undying Life, have power in Thee

*Vain are the thousand creeds
That move men's hearts, unutterably vain,
Worthless as withered weeds
Or idlest froth amid the boundless main*

*To waken doubt in one
Holding so fast by thy infinity,
So surely anchored on
The steadfast rock of Immortality.*

With wide-embracing love
Thy spirit animates eternal years
Pervades and broods above,
Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates and rears

Though earth and moon were gone
And suns and universes ceased to be
And Thou wert left alone
Every Existence would exist in thee

There is not room for Death
Nor atom that his might could render void
Since thou art Being and Breath
And what thou art may never be destroyed.

Choose Something Like a Star by Robert Frost (1874-1963)

O Star (the fairest one in sight),
We grant your loftiness the right
To some obscurity of cloud—
It will not do to say of night,
Since dark is what brings out your light.
Some mystery becomes the proud.
But to be wholly taciturn
In your reserve is not allowed.
Say something to us we can learn
By heart and when alone repeat.
Say something! And it says, 'I burn.'
But say with what degree of heat.
Talk Fahrenheit, talk Centigrade.
Use language we can comprehend.
Tell us what elements you blend.
It gives us strangely little aid,
But does tell something in the end.
And steadfast as Keats' Eremite,
Not even stooping from its sphere,
It asks a little of us here.
It asks of us a certain height,
So when at times the mob is swayed
To carry praise or blame too far,
We may choose something like a star
To stay our minds on and be staid.

Anadyomene**by Sara Teasdale (1884-1933)**

The wide, bright temple of the world I found,
And entered from the dizzy infinite
That I might kneel and worship thee in it;
Leaving the singing stars their ceaseless round
Of silver music sound on orbéd sound,
For measured spaces where the shrines are lit,
And men with wisdom or with little wit
Implore the gods that mercy may abound.
Ah, Aphrodite, was it not from thee
My summons came across the endless spaces?
Mother of Love, turn not thy face from me
Now that I seek for thee in human faces;
Answer my prayer or set my spirit free
Again to drift along the starry places.

A Maiden**by Sara Teasdale (1884-1933)**

Oh if I were the velvet rose
Upon the red rose vine,
I'd climb to touch his window
And make his casement fine.

And if I were the little bird
That twitters on the tree,
All day I'd sing my love for him
Till he should harken me.

But since I am a maiden
I go with downcast eyes,
And he will never hear the songs
That he has turned to sighs.

And since I am a maiden
My love will never know
That I could kiss him with a mouth
More red than roses blow.

There Will Come Soft Rains**by Sara Teasdale (1884-1933)**

There will come soft rains and the smell of the ground,
And swallows circling with their shimmering sound;
And frogs in the pools, singing at night,
And wild plum trees in tremulous white,
Robins will wear their feathery fire,
Whistling their whims on a low fence-wire;
And not one will know of the war, not one
Will care at last when it is done.
Not one would mind, neither bird nor tree,
If mankind perished utterly;
And Spring herself, when she woke at dawn,
Would scarcely know that we were gone.

Hope is the thing with feathers**by Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)**

“Hope” is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -

And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -
And sore must be the storm -
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm -

I've heard it in the chillest land -
And on the strangest Sea -
Yet - never - in Extremity,
It asked a crumb - of me.

Echo**by Christina Rossetti (1830-1894)**

Come to me in the silence of the night;
Come in the speaking silence of a dream;
Come with soft rounded cheeks and eyes as bright
As sunlight on a stream;
Come back in tears,
O memory, hope, love of finished years.

O dream how sweet, too sweet, too bitter sweet,
Whose wakening should have been in Paradise,
Where souls brimfull of love abide and meet;
Where thirsting longing eyes
Watch the slow door
That opening, letting in, lets out no more.

Yet come to me in dreams, that I may live
My very life again though cold in death:
Come back to me in dreams, that I may give
Pulse for pulse, breath for breath:
Speak low, lean low
As long ago, my love, how long ago.

The bike let loose
by Serena Fusek (1948-)

July in the heartland
the bike let loose
on empty road
speeding through
tall corn at
the bottom of
immense sky
wrapping around
the world's rim
the sun shimmering
and the air
like a bell
with perfect pitch
bathing us in
the heat that
swells the ears
in their green
jackets spilling
silk. Miles and
miles of corn
the towns –
populations eight
hundred nine hundred
two thousand souls –
marooned islands
in a green sea;
we pause at
the single stoplight
crossing the highway
plunge back into
corn.

I am not yours
by Sara Teasdale (1884-1933)

I am not yours, not lost in you,
Not lost, although I long to be
Lost as a candle lit at noon,
Lost as a snowflake in the sea.

You love me, and I find you still
A spirit beautiful and bright,
Yet I am I, who long to be
Lost as a light is lost in light.

Oh plunge me deep in love—put out
My senses, leave me deaf and blind,
Swept by the tempest of your love,
A taper in a rushing wind.

Now I Become Myself
by May Sarton (1912-1995)

Now I become myself. It's taken
Time, many years and places;
I have been dissolved and shaken,
Worn other people's faces,
Run madly, as if Time were there,
Terribly old, crying a warning,
“Hurry, you will be dead before—“
(What? Before you reach the morning?
Or the end of the poem is clear?
Or love safe in the walled city?)
Now to stand still, to be here,
Feel my own weight and density!
The black shadow on the paper
Is my hand; the shadow of a word
As thought shapes the shaper
Falls heavy on the page, is heard.
All fuses now, falls into place
From wish to action, word to silence,
My work, my love, my time, my face
Gathered into one intense
Gesture of growing like a plant.
As slowly as the ripening fruit
Fertile, detached, and always spent.
Falls but does not exhaust the root,
So all the poem is, can give,
Grows in me to become the song,
Made so and rooted so by love.
Now there is time and Time is young.
O, in this single hour I live
All of myself and do not move.
I, the pursued, who madly ran,
Stand still, stand still, and stop the sun!

Program Notes

I See the Heaven's Glories Shine

Andrea Ramsey

Dr. Andrea Ramsey is a composer, conductor and music educator. Currently, Dr. Ramsey teaches and conducts choirs at The Ohio State University. Having extensive experience teaching youth and children, Andrea believes strongly in the growth of young people as musicians and singers. This piece was commissioned by the Allegro Community Children's Choir of Kansas City.

Choose Something Like a Star

Randall Thompson

This piece is the final movement of *Frostiana*, Seven Country Songs for men's, women's and mixed voices with band or orchestra. The set was commissioned in 1958 for the 200th anniversary of the incorporation of Amherst, Massachusetts. The premiere was conducted by the composer, and the poet was present for the occasion. Randall Thompson, eminent American composer, led a successful career as both composer and educator, holding academic positions at a number of prestigious colleges and universities, including Princeton and Harvard, New England Conservatory of Music and the Curtis Institute of Music.

Anadyomene

Kevin A. Memley

Kevin A. Memley is a refreshing and versatile composer whose works have received world-wide acclaim. Though largely self-taught, his works have been prominently featured in ACDA conventions since 2009. In addition, he has composed and orchestrated music for film.

He states: "When I wrote *Anadyomene*, I wanted to explore Teasdale's representation of worship, specifically through the prism of Greek Mythology and the goddess Aphrodite. I find it compelling that she closes the poem with such an 'all-or-nothing attitude.'" Anadyomene is defined as "Venus Anadyomene" and is one of the iconic representations of Aphrodite.

If I Were the Velvet Rose

Kevin A. Memley

This piece is based upon the poem "The Maiden" which expresses Teasdale's thoughts on unrequited love, a theme that resonates greatly in her body of work. Memley's approach to the text is simple and direct, in the style of an English folk song. It is sung a cappella and provides a nice contrast to the first and third pieces in the *Reflections on Humanity* set, both of which feature strong piano accompaniments and oboe.

There Will Come Soft Rains

Kevin A. Memley

This piece is moving in its depiction of Teasdale's poem concerning the absence of humanity. The poem may have been a reference to her own time period (during war). Memley states: "I find it more haunting to imagine that she could be describing the things of today."

The poetry of Sara Teasdale is full of musical language and evocative emotion. Today her words are set to music by some of the finest composers of our time.

Hope is the Thing with Feathers

Emma Lou Diemer

This piece is the first from the set entitled "*Hope is the Thing: An Emily Dickinson Suite for Women's Chorus and Keyboard*". Diemer is an American performer and composer of works for keyboard, orchestra, chamber group and choir. The relentless 9/8 eighth notes in this piece mirror the urgent fluttering of the bird that never gives up.

Echo

Frank La Rocca

Frank La Rocca is a composer of contemporary art music, especially sacred choral music. His catalog includes works in nearly all genres and his influences are as diverse as Josquin, Byrd, Stravinsky, George Crumb and Arvo Pärt. His music has been described as possessing a "luminous beauty" with "a profound sacred sensibility". La Rocca is on the composition faculty of California State University.

He writes: "This poem is about great love and deep loss. Sensual and mystical images communicate the physical and spiritual bonds that united the poet to her beloved. In dream and memory, she hopes to bring her lover back to life so that she may feel life in her veins again. My setting focuses on the role of memory by echoing musical motifs and fragments of text throughout the course of the piece, so that past and present intermingle in ways that illuminate the poet's experience. Lush harmonic and textural elements underscore the sensuousness of Rossetti's imagery."

The Bike Let Loose

Edie Hill

Edie Hill studied composition with Vivian Fine at Bennington College and Lloyd Ultan at the University of Minnesota. As a freelance composer residing in Minneapolis, she has composed choral works for such renowned ensembles as The Dale Warland Singers, VocalEssence and Cantus. Hill composes for all genres, but her “masterful facility for setting words and exploiting the richness of texts keeps her in demand as a choral composer.”

Hill’s setting of this humorous poem captures the motion of the bicycle in the repetitive patterns of the piano accompaniment. The singers take us on a journey as well, as the melodic lines ascend and accelerate to the conclusion—a vocal glissando.

I Am Not Yours

Stephen Chatman

Born in Minnesota, Stephen Chatman resides and teaches in Vancouver, British Columbia. He studied composition with William Bolcom, among others. He has been commissioned by major orchestras and choirs throughout Canada and the United States. His music has been warmly received by critics and audiences alike, eliciting adjectives such as “shimmering”, “evocative”, “eclectic” and “compelling”. Though he has experimented with various styles, his more recent choral works embrace a predominantly tonal language. *I Am Not Yours* is a good example of the lyricism, melody and traditional form found in the choral works.

Now I Become Myself

Gwyneth Walker

This choral setting of May Sarton’s poem aims to capture the process of growing into one’s own self as a complete person. Thus, the opening eight measures present forceful chords in piano and chorus—the strength of knowing oneself. This section is an introductory statement. The main portion of the song then begins with rapid accompaniment patterns and vocal effects (“t k t k”) to represent the scattered and scurrying person, running through life, searching. The music slows with the words “Now to stand still...” The self-discovery process is unfolding. The scurrying patterns return, this time yielding to a full growth into the glorious final statement: “I, the pursued, who madly ran, stand still, stand still, and stop the sun!” And the opening piano chords now return in triumph beneath the chorus.

Gwyneth Walker, a former composition faculty member at Oberlin College Conservatory, currently resides in Vermont. Her catalog includes over 130 commissioned works for orchestra, band, chamber ensemble and choir. Her compositional output for women’s choirs is significant in quantity and quality.

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