

VOX GRATA

presents

“A Path of Yearning”

to benefit



Friday, November 3, 2023, Second Presbyterian Church
Thursday, November 9, 2023, Westminster Presbyterian Church

Conducted by
Jeanette MacCallum, Susan Kelly and Ashley Vance
John Semingson, Accompanist

“A Path of Yearning”

Opening Ourselves

“Openness is essentially a liberating force; it frees us from the bonds of intolerance and opposition to others.”

Rabbi Yoel Glick

Tonic of Wildness

Braeden Ayres

The Contemplative Life

“Contemplation is the highest expression of [one’s] intellectual and spiritual life...it is spiritual wonder.”

Thomas Merton

Where Shadow Chases Light

Deanna Witkowski

Many Gods

“Tolerance is the only thing that will enable persons of different religions to live as good neighbors and friends.”

Mahatma Gandhi

Moon Goddess

Alan Fey, percussion

Jocelyn Hagen

A Prayer for Peace

Paula Foley Tillen

All I Was Doing Was Breathing (from *Ecstatic Songs*)

Ashley Vance, soloist; Chris Stenstrom, cello; Kirby Shelstad, tabla; Alan Fey, percussionist

David L. Brunner

Finding Our Way

“Everything can be taken from a [person] but one thing: the last of the human freedoms – to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one’s own way.”

Viktor E. Frankl

Even When He Is Silent

Kim André Arnesen

The Call of Wisdom

Will Todd

Every Child Has Known God

Ivo Antognini

A Song of Life

Katherine Kimbrough, soloist

Marques L.A. Garrett

Song Texts

Tonic of Wildness

Heaven is under our feet and overhead! I wish to live deep and suck all the marrow of life; to cut a broad swath; shave close; drive life into a corner, reduce it to the lowest terms. Rather than love, than money, than fame, give me truth. Things do not change, we change. Simplicity! Not 'till we lose the world will we find ourselves. I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to see if I could learn what it had to teach; and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived. The universe is larger than our view of it!

Where Shadow Chases Light

This is my delight, thus to wait and watch at the wayside, where shadow chases light and the rain comes in the wake of the summer. Messengers, with tidings from unknown skies, greet me and speed along the road. My heart is glad within, and the breath of the passing breeze is sweet. From dawn till dusk, I sit here before my door, and I know that of a sudden, the happy moment will arrive when I shall see. In the meanwhile, I smile and sing all alone. In the meanwhile, the air is filling with the perfume of promise.

Moon Goddess

O my lady, on hearing your sound,
hills and flatlands bow.
O my lady, guardian of all the great essences,
you have picked them up and hung them on your hand.
You are lofty like Heaven. Let the world know!
You are wide like the earth. Let the world know!
You strike everything down in battle.
O my lady, on your wings you hack away the land and
charge disguised as a charging storm,
roar as a roaring storm,
thunder and keep thundering, and snort with evil winds.
O primary one,
moon goddess Inanna of heaven and earth!
On your harp of sighs I hear your dirge.
O my lady, this song has made you great and exalted you.
O my lady, wife of An, I have told your fury!

A Prayer for Peace

In beauty, sitting on a lotus flower, Lord Buddha, quiet and solid. Your humble disciple, calm and pure of heart, forms a lotus flower with the hands, and offers this heartfelt prayer: Homage to all Buddhas in the ten directions. Because of your love for all people, have compassion on us. Help us to remember we are just one family: North and South. Help us rekindle our compassion and brotherhood. May your compassion help us overcome our hatred. Humbly, we open our hearts to you, water the flowers of our spirits. With your deep understanding, help our hearts grow light. Because of your love for all people, please have compassion on us. May the merit of this prayer be transformed into peace. May each of us realize this, our deep aspiration.

All I Was Doing Was Breathing

Something has reached out and taken in the beams of my eyes. There is a longing, it is for his body, for every hair of his body. All I was doing was being. And the dancing energy came by my house. His face looks curiously like the moon. I saw it from the side, smiling. My family says, "Don't ever see him again," and imply things in a low voice. But my eyes have their own life; they laugh at rules, and know whose they are. I believe I can bear on my shoulders whatever you want to say of me! Mira says: "without the energy that lifts mountains, how am I to live?"

Even When He Is Silent

I believe in the sun even when it's not shining.
I believe in love even when I feel it not.
I believe in God even when He is silent.

The Call of Wisdom

Lord of wisdom, Lord of truth; Lord of justice, Lord of mercy;
walk beside us down the years till we see you in your glory.
Striving to attain the heights, turning in a new direction;
entering a lonely place; welcoming a friend or stranger.
I am here, I am with you; I have called, do you hear me?
Silver is of passing worth; gold is not of constant value;
jewels sparkle for a while; what you long for is not lasting.
Rulers govern under me with my insight and my wisdom.
Those who know me know my love;
those who seek me find their answer.
God the Father and the Son, Holy Spirit co-eternal;
glory ascribed to you, now and to the end of ages.

Every Child Has Known God

Every child has known God, not the God of names,
not the God of don'ts, not the God who ever does
anything weird, but the God who knows only four words,
and keeps repeating them, and keeps repeating them,
saying, "Come dance with me."

A Song of Life

In the rapture of life and of living, I lift up my heart and rejoice, and I thank the great Giver for giving the soul of my gladness a voice. In the glow of the glorious weather, in the sweet-scented sensuous air, my burdens seem light as a feather; they are nothing to bear. In the strength and the glory of power, in the pride and the pleasure of wealth, I can laugh at the world and its sages; I am greater than seers who are sad, for they are most wise in all ages who know how to be glad. I lift up my eyes to the beautiful days, and my spirit soars off like a swallow and is lost in the light of its rays. Are you troubled or sad? I beseech you to come out of the shadows of strife; come out in the sun while I teach you the secret of life. Come out of the world, come above it; up over its crosses and graves. Come up where the dust never rises, but only the perfume of flowers. And your life shall be glad with surprises of beautiful hours. And your life shall be happy as mine is and as full of delight.

Program Notes

Tonic of Wildness

Braeden Ayres

Tonic of Wildness is derived from a larger work entitled *Axis Mundi*, or “where the earth meets the sky.” The piece celebrates the sacredness of the natural world with its text, adapted from Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden Pond*. Thoreau’s transcendentalist views suggest the intersection of philosophy and spirituality. The central themes of this text (simplicity, truth and living life deliberately) are expressed through textual repetition, often layered within the voice parts and through an unceasing, driving piano accompaniment. The musical climax occurs with the a cappella choral statement: “the universe is larger than our view of it!”

Where Shadow Chases Light

Deana Witkowski

Where Shadow Chases Light evokes the richness of the contemplative experience with its text by the Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore. Tagore did not adhere to a particular religious system or practice but rather believed that organized religions act as a barrier to communal harmony. The composer, a jazz pianist, vocalist and composer based in New York City was inspired through yearly silent retreats where she experienced the same delight in waiting, in noticing, in knowing that “the happy moment will arrive when I shall see.” This music is imbued with that same active waiting, as well as occasional moments of ecstasy.

Moon Goddess

Jocelyn Hagen

Enheduanna (born c. 2300 BC) was a moon priestess, the daughter of King Sargon of Agade, who reigned over the world’s first empire, extending from the Mediterranean to Persia. Sargon is the first important leader to emerge from the half-light of prehistory into the full light of a written record. His daughter, Enheduanna, is the first writer, male or female, in history whose name and work have been preserved. Her personal history survives in highly politicized poems, which in their cosmic vision and ethical outrage recall Isaiah. In her poems to the Sumerian goddess of love Inanna, she speaks to a deity who has descended to earth as an ally, as a friend to help her in her need. In the poems’ sensuality, surprising metaphors and intimacy recall Sappho’s poems to her ally Aphrodite.

Composer Jocelyn Hagen (born 1980) composes music that has been described as “dramatic and deeply moving” (Star Tribune, Minneapolis/St. Paul). Much of her compositional output is for voice—solo, chamber and choral. An accomplished pianist and accompanist, Hagen holds degrees in Theory, Composition and Vocal Music Education from St. Olaf College and the University of Minnesota. This piece was commissioned in 2011 by a large consortium of women’s choirs through the American Choral Directors Association.

A Prayer for Peace

Paula Foley Tillen

Paula Foley Tillen (born 1958) was a founding member and composer-in-residence of the Milwaukee Choral Artists, the premier professional women’s vocal ensemble of the Midwest (now disbanded). She is an active composer and director for musical theatre productions in the Midwest. She is also the winner of the 2008 Joe Shepley Choral Composition Competition sponsored by Namasté Women’s Choir, Los Angeles, CA.

Thich Nhat Hanh is a Zen Master, poet, and author of over one hundred published titles. A peace and human rights activist, he is known for championing a movement known as “engaged Buddhism”. He was exiled from Vietnam in 1966 when he came to the United States on the first of many humanitarian visits. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1967 for his efforts in the peace movement. This text was used throughout South Vietnam in 1965 in the “Don’t Shoot Your Own Brother” campaign to rouse the willingness to work for peace.

All I Was Doing Was Breathing

David L. Brunner

The songs of Mirabai (1498-1547) are startling in the power of their imagery – words at once mystical and religious, earthy and sensual. They are private and personal, words that seem to belong in a diary. In this text, Mira renounces worldly things and expresses her devotion to the Hindu god of Krishna through intense desire and unflinching devotion, even frequently entering into states of ecstasy and trance.

This devotion came not of her own volition as expressed in the words, “something has reached out and taken in the beams of my eyes; all I was doing was being.” These sentiments begin in hushed tones but ultimately give way to resolve and inner strength with the words, “I believe I can bear on my shoulders whatever you want to say of me.” This becomes a mantra and the bulk of the composition. Its insistence builds with repetition, suggesting a trance state, as her confidence and inner resolve strengthens through both solo and full choir statements. What results is a powerful declaration, an affirmation of the strong female spirit. The piece concludes with a final utterance – a cry of desperation – with Mira exclaiming, “without the energy that lifts mountains, how am I to live?”

Brunner expertly portrays the text through sinuous and sensual solo lines, drones, vocal embellishments, rhythmic ostinato and the layering of voices and instruments. There is a strong presence of breath throughout the piece in the vocal falloffs, drones, long solo phrases and overtone singing. The voice of Mira is present in an ornate solo vocal line. The solo cello is a grounding presence and might represent the voice of Krishna.

Even When He Is Silent

Kim André Arnesen

Even When He Is Silent was commissioned in 2011 by the St. Olaf Festival in Trondheim, Norway. It was composed in two versions—one for women’s choir and one for mixed choir. The text was found written on a wall at a concentration camp after World War II.

Kim André Arnesen (born 1980) grew up in Trondheim and sang in the Nidaros Cathedral Boys’ Choir. His choral experiences as a young boy inspired his earliest compositions. His largest scale works include *Magnificat* (premiered by the Nidaros Cathedral Girls’ Choir) and *Requiem* (premiered by the Nidaros Cathedral Boys’ Choir) which received its US premiere in April 2015.

The Call of Wisdom

Will Todd

British composer and pianist Will Todd is well known for his choral works, large and small, and for opera, musical theatre, orchestral pieces, jazz compositions and chamber works. This beautiful anthem was commissioned and performed for the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee celebrations with a TV audience of 45 million people. A best-selling choral disc entitled *The Call of Wisdom* is available on the Signum Classic label. His music is regularly broadcast on Classic FM and on BBC Radio 3. The text was written by Michael Hampel and is based upon Proverbs 8.

Every Child Has Known God

Ivo Antognini

Swiss pianist and composer Ivo Antognini is devoted almost entirely to the composing of choral music. His pieces have been performed in over 50 countries by the world’s most renowned choirs. In 2020, he received the prestigious Raymond W. Brock Memorial Commission Award from the American Choral Directors Association. Earlier this year, the Trinity College Choir of Cambridge (Stephen Layton, conductor) released a full-length album of his works on the Hyperion Records label.

Every Child Has Known God is set to a text by the Sufi poet Hafiz. Hafiz did not approve of formal religion but rather believed in a God that manifests in every aspect of life.

A Song of Life

Marques L.A. Garrett

A Song of Life is a fiery musical setting of a text by Ella Wheeler Wilcox, a 19th century American poet whose works were popular in the New Thought Movement of her time. Wilcox was interested in the occult and her writings express a unique blending of New Thought, Spiritualism and a Theosophical belief in reincarnation.

Composer Marques Garrett is an active educator, clinician and choral conductor who was commissioned to compose this piece by the University of Kentucky Women’s Choir for their 2023 performance at the national conference of the American Choral Directors Association. The piece expresses ecstatic joy and gratitude for the “Giver” of the soul’s voice in the lines, “I can laugh at the world and its sages; I am greater than seers who are sad.” These words recall similar words in the poem “Solitude” by Wilcox: “Laugh, and the world laughs with you.” A middle section of the piece offers musical contrast through aleatoric singing with a soprano soloist singing, “are you troubled and sad? I beseech you, come out of the shadows of strife; come out in the sun while I teach you the secret of life!” The piece concludes with a choral outcry to “come out of the world, to come above it, and your life shall be happy and glad with surprises.”

Vox Grata Women's Choir

Sopranos

Nicole Allen, Jan Allison, Bailey Anderson, Hannah Baisley, Sidney Campbell, Brittany Carnegis, Carissa Cascio, Kathryn Duncklee, Isabella Hord, Susan Kelly, Janice Kemp, Katherine Kimbrough, Lauren King, Terry Maroney, Amanda Max, Diana Neely, Kathryn Nobbe, Emma O'Neal, Anne Osborne, Kitty Schleimer, Sandra Shepherd, Brittany Smith, Beth Thorneycroft, Deborah Torgersen-Paul, Ashley Vance, Kelly Walsh, Bronwen Yoncak

Altos

Annabelle Absar, Amanda Craft, Alison Craig, Hannah Elliott, Emily Fenech, Amy Finka, Molly Gillespie, Bri Givens, Abigail Hawkins, Nicole Keller, Megan Kucenski, Katelyn Lover, Jeanette MacCallum, Lily Norton, Mareike Sattler, Molly Skaggs, McKenna Schmidt, Channing Shippen, Rosie Smith, Suzanne Stiles, Maggie Ward, Becky Yates

Board of Directors

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Vox Grata is grateful to John Semingson and Westminster Presbyterian Church for providing rehearsal space for us each week!

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Thank you for helping us GIVE VOICE TO WOMEN IN SONG!

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Charles Carlisle
Booth and Georgeanne Chapman
Janet Davies
Hattie DeWalt
Kevin Edlin
Loucinda Elkins
Midge Folger
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Susan Holt
Jocelyn Kasper
Janice Kemp
Carie Lee Kennedy
Marcia Kirby
Suzie Lane
Clee Lee
Denise and David Linn
Kevin Max

Gold Circle (continued)

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Sandra Shepherd
Chip and Becky Smith
Elsbeth Smith
Deborah Torgersen-Paul
Emilie Townes
Brian Wilcox
Rebecca Yates

Silver Circle \$50 - \$99

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Barry and Susan Brantley
Kathleen Dennis
Frances Duvall
Linda Edwards
Melinda Fondren
Cricket Handler
Perry Macdonald
Sally Phillips
Roberta Rodgers
Christy Smith
Tatyana Wanderer

Bronze Circle \$1 - \$49

Allison Balthrop
Cynthia Crane
Sarah Dunnevant
Tim Hauk
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Vivian Jean Jackson
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Cheryl Morris
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