

Women's Voices CHORUS

presents



Sunday, April 30, 2023, 3:00 p.m.

Laura Sam, Artistic Director

womensvoiceschorus.org

Women's Voices CHORUS
presents

My Soul Is Awakened

Sunday, April 30, 2023, 3:00 p.m.

First Presbyterian Church, Durham, North Carolina

My Soul Is Awakened includes repertoire conveying themes of renewal, transformation, enlightenment, and self-realization through the lenses of varied cultures, languages, and musical styles. Women composers of note featured include Elizabeth Alexander, Marjan Helms, Susan LaBarr, Marie-Claire Saindon, Joan Szymko, Sarah Quartel, Gwyneth Walker, and Lana Walter.

Program

Laura Sam, Artistic Director

Deborah Hollis, Pianist

Guest Musicians: *Julia Reeves, violin; Tim Turkington, percussion*

Caritas Abundat

Music and translation: Michael John Trotta (b. 1978)

Text: from *Liber Divinorum Operum*, Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179)

I am the great and fiery force that breathes life into all things.

I am what awakens and supports life and enkindles all living things.

Everything in the cosmos is encircled with my wisdom.

I am the beauty in the fields, the force, that moves like a graceful wind.

I shine in the waters, and burn in the sun, glimmering in the stars.

Caritas abundat in omnia. (Grace abounds for everyone.)

Michael John Trotta's *Caritas Abundat* was commissioned in 2018 by the Montgomery High School Chorale Women, Montgomery, Texas. Opening with a homophonic section in G Dorian mode, the powerful text, "I am the great and fiery force," is fully realized by the fortissimo singing of the chorus accompanied by body percussion, drum, and violin. As the piece progresses in G minor, contrasts in tempo, texture, and meter further create the dramatic sweep of this work.

This ... is an energetic reimagining of a timeless text and tune from the twelfth-century poet, composer, and philosopher Hildegard von Bingen. The text was selected as a reflection of the students' desire to express the empowerment that comes from singing in a choir, especially the power of belonging to a group united for a purpose greater than oneself.

This piece marries the chant *Caritas Abundat* with a text taken from *Liber Divinorum Operum* ("The Book of Divine Works"), creating an entirely new work that expresses themes of empowerment. An adapted quotation of the tune is introduced in the violin, then taken up by the choir, treated to a five-part canon in the more reflective middle section, and finally changes meter for an energetic finish.

—Michael John Trotta

Luminous Awakening

Music and translation: Elizabeth Alexander (b. 1962)

Text: Hildegard von Bingen (1098–1179)

Holy Spirit, breath of every being, root of every creature,
moving in all, bathing all lives with forgiveness and grace,
and caressing wounds with the balm of boundless joy –
Pure light beyond light, luminous awakening, radiant, bountiful,
resurrecting everything again and again and again.

Luminous Awakening, by American composer Elizabeth Alexander, was commissioned in 2016 by Jonathan Kopplin for Bethlehem Academy of Faribault. In correspondence with Ms. Alexander regarding the mode of this piece, she offered, “The piece is in a mode that is Lydian on the bottom (F-G-A-B) and Mixolydian on the top (C-D-Eb-F). I think of the whole mode as having a ‘color.’ In this case there is a raised 4 which adds brightness and a lowered 7 which means there is no leading tone.”

Luminous Awakening is the second movement of *Pure Light Beyond Light: Three Invocations of the Holy* with texts spanning different times, places and religious traditions, each expressing mystery and devotion through the imagery of light, fire, and radiance.

Hildegard von Bingen was a German nun, theologian, writer, composer, mystic, and *magistra*, or spiritual teacher, who founded and led convents in Rupertsburg and Eibingen. Her plainsong settings of chants, with both original and liturgical texts, were composed for the use of her fellow nuns. Recent decades have brought interest in her music, along with thousands of publications, performances, and recordings.

–Elizabeth Alexander

Gate Gate (*Gone, Gone*)

Music and English text: Brian Tate (b. 1954)

Text: 1st Century Sanskrit from *Prajñāparamita Heart Sutra*

Gate gate (*gone, gone*)
Paragate (*gone beyond*)
Parasamgate (*gone altogether beyond*)
Bodhi Svaha (*O awakening, all hail!*)

Yonder, yonder, cross the river, everyone gone now, halleluia!
Everybody singing, everybody laughing, everybody gone now, halleluia!
Everybody talking, everybody walking, everybody gone now, halleluia!
No more tears, no more suffering, no more fears as we cross into the light!

Gate Gate, written in 1998 by Canadian composer, Brian Tate, represents his musical interpretation of the end of the *Prajñāparamita Heart Sutra*. Tate offers, “I have been strongly influenced by Buddhism most of my life, and at the time I was studying the *Heart Sutra*. The Sanskrit words suggested a strong rhythmic and melodic line and I took it from there.” The opening a cappella chant-like section, followed by the entrance of the energetic piano accompaniment, major key, and quickly changing meters accented by percussive clapping and stomping contribute to Tate’s unique interpretation of this text.

The *Heart Sutra*, aka the *Heart of Transcendent Wisdom* (Skt. Prajñāpāramitā hṛdaya), is one of the most important texts within the Sanskrit Mahayana tradition. It is said to present the *heart*, or the *essence*, of the *Prajnaparamita* teachings, which are the definitive teachings on the Mahayana view of the interdependent nature of reality.

The *Prajnaparamita* teachings comprise a large corpus of literature, including sutras of great length, and many commentaries by great masters of India, East Asia and Tibet. These teachings are revered within the Mahayana tradition as representing the highest, most subtle view of the nature of reality. The *Heart Sutra*, which is no more than a page in length, presents an essential summary of this view.

The *Heart Sutra* is the most well-known and most recited Mahayana sutra, particularly in East Asia, where it is common for monks and lay practitioners to recite the *Heart Sutra* daily. Tibetan Buddhist scholar Thupten Jinpa writes: “Even today, the chanting of this sutra can be heard in Tibetan monasteries, where it is recited in the characteristically deep overtone voice, in Japanese Zen temples, where the chanting is done in tune with the rhythmic beating of a drum, and in Chinese and Vietnamese temples, where it is sung in melodious tunes.”

–EncyclopediaofBuddhism.org

I Thank You God

Music: Gwyneth Walker (b. 1947)

Text: e.e. cummings (1894-1962)

I thank You God for most this amazing day:
For the leaping greenly spirits of trees
And a blue true dream of sky;
And for everything which is natural, which is infinite, which is yes.

I who have died am alive again today,
And this is the sun's birth day
This is the birth day of life and love and wings;
And of the gay great happening illimitably earth.

How should tasting, touching, hearing, seeing, breathing any
Lifted from the no of all nothing,
Human merely being doubt unimaginable You?
Now the ears of my ears awake, now the eyes of my eyes are opened.

The text is adapted from the e. e. cummings poem “i thank you God for most this amazing day.” This is a song of praise. A piano introduction marked ‘slowly unfolding, with wonderment,’ spans the broad range of the keyboard, as if expressing the breadth of space and life. The chorus enters, offering thanks to God for ‘the leaping, greenly spirits of trees,’ a ‘blue true dream of sky,’ and ‘everything which is infinite.’ A central phrase of ‘I who have died am alive again today’ returns frequently. This is an expression of the rebirth of the soul with each ‘amazing day.’

–Gwyneth Walker

Tabula Rasa

Music: Don Macdonald (b. 1966)

Text: Allison Girvan (b. 1967)

En mis brazos, respire.
Vida sin límites.
Luz del día, noche oscura
Duerme, sueño, resto con seguridad.
Con su corazón, tu alma,
escucha y sabe esta verdad:
Dentro de ti hay futuros ilimitados
si le dan la libertad;
libertad de crecer, libertad de aprender,
libertad de tocar, libertad de sentir,
libertad de imaginarse, libertad de volar,
libertad de adorar, libertad de ser amado,

*In my arms, breathe.
Life without limits.
Light of day, dark of night.
Sleep, dream, rest in safety.
With your heart, your soul,
listen and know this truth:
Within you are boundless futures
if you are given freedom;
freedom to grow, freedom to learn,
freedom to touch, freedom to feel,
freedom to imagine, freedom to fly,
freedom to love, freedom to be loved.*

Composer Don Macdonald had a specific image in mind when composing this music. A quiet moment between a mother and child when the mother sees, as she has never seen, the potential of the precious life she holds in her arms. A silent acknowledgement of her child and every child as a “blank slate” with seemingly limitless potential.

My Soul Is Awakened

Music: Sarah Quartel (b. 1982)

Text: Anne Brontë (1820-1849)

Chamber Choir

My soul is awakened, my spirit is soaring,
And carried aloft on the wings of the breeze;
For, above, and around me, the wild wind is roaring,
Arousing to rapture the earth and the seas.

The long withered grass in the sunshine is glancing,
The bare trees are tossing their branches on high;
The dead leaves beneath them are merrily dancing,
The white clouds are scudding across the blue sky.

I wish I could see how the ocean is lashing
The foam of its billows to whirlwinds of spray,
I wish I could see how its proud waves are dashing,
And hear the wild roar of their thunder today!

This is a beautiful piece setting an evocative text by Anne Brontë that explores natural imagery on a blustery day and the feelings they inspire. Supported by the piano accompaniment, Quartel’s soaring melodies, rich harmonies, and syncopated rhythms illustrate the power of the wind, while its unpredictable nature is hinted at by the hemiolas and cross-rhythms throughout the texture.

Dechrau eto

Music: Marie-Claire Saindon (b. 1984)

English Text: Sarah Windle (b. 1985)

Welsh Translation: Iwan Edwards (1937-2022) and Undeg Edwards

Chamber Choir

lleuad yn tynnu, yn cilio, yn pylu
dyfroedd yn codi, wedyn yn disgyn,
i garu, i fyw, i garu eto
dechrau eto,
eto, eto

*moon pulls, waxes, wanes
waters rise and fall,
to love, to live, to love again
begin again,
again, again*

Dechrau Eto (Begin Again) was composed in 2014 by Canadian Maire-Claire Saindon, an award-winning composer specializing in choral writing and film scoring. Composer-in-residence for the Montreal treble ensemble, Adleisia, Saindon also runs creative choral/vocal composition workshops for youth and adults and teaches and performs Irish fiddle music.

Written for the documentary “Once & For All,” this piece was used as an example as to how Artistic Director of Concerto Della Donna, Iwan Edwards, tackles a new piece, from commissioning it to learning and rehearsing it with his ensemble, and to bringing it to performance-ready level. ‘Lleuad yn tynnu’ also had to lend itself to the actual soundtrack of the film, and the filmmakers were included in the creative direction of this piece.

“Dechrau eto” is about the waxing and the waning of certain periods in our lives, and how there is always a rebirth or a new beginning to look forward to. —Marie-Claire Saindon

Edwards was a member of the Order of Canada and received the Queen’s Golden Jubilee Medal in 2022, awarded to Canadians who made a significant contribution to their fellow citizens, their community, or to Canada. The film, “Once & For All,” is currently in post-production and is expected to be released later this year.



Sukkat Shelomekha

Music: Marjan Helms (b. 1951)

Text: Traditional Hebrew from the Hashkiveinu

Ufros aleinu
Adonai Eloheinu,
Ufros aleinu
sukkat shelomekha.

*Spread over us,
Lord our God,
Spread over us
the shelter of your peace.*

Hashkivenu
Adonai Eloheinu l'shalom
V'ha-amideinu
malkeinu l'chaim

*Lay us down,
Lord our God, in peace
And raise us up again,
our King, to new life.*

Sukkat Shelomekha by Michigan State University Community Music School Composer-in-Residence Marjan Helms, uses Hebrew text drawn from the Hashkiveinu, a traditional prayer in the Jewish evening service that is also said at bedtime. Complemented by the flowing piano and violin accompaniment in E harmonic minor, this piece evokes a peaceful ending of the day and a hopeful wish of the new day to come.

Gaudete! Gaudete!

Music: arr. Lana Walter (b. 1948)

Text: Latin from *Piae Cantiones*, 1582

Gaudete, gaudete!
Christus est natus
Ex Maria virgine; gaudete!

*Rejoice, rejoice!
Christ is born
Of the Virgin Mary; rejoice!*

Tempus adest gratiæ,
Hoc quod optabamus;
Carmina lætitiæ
Devote reddamus.

*The time of grace has come,
What we have wished for;
Songs of joy
Let us give back faithfully.*

Deus homo factus est,
Natura mirante;
Mundus renovatus est
A Christo regnante.

*God has become man,
With nature marveling;
The world has been renewed
By the reigning Christ.*

Ezechielis porta
Clausa pertransitur,
Unde lux est orta,
Salus invenitur.

*The closed gate of Ezekiel
Is passed through,
Whence the light is risen,
Salvation has been found.*

Ergo nostra contio
Psallat jam in lustris;
Benedicat Domino:
Salus Regi nostro.

*Therefore let our assembly
Now sing in brightness;
Let it bless the Lord:
Salvation to our King.*

Renowned American composer and educator Lana Walter composed *Gaudete! Gaudete!* This piece was published in 2000 by Treble Clef Music Press, a desktop publishing venture created in 1995 by Women's Voices Chorus's Founding Artistic Director, Mary Lycan. The establishment of Treble Clef Music Press was in response to a call by choral conductors for more good repertoire for women's voices choruses. Lycan amassed a database of a thousand pieces by women, for women, through research at the Library of Congress which became an invaluable resource for treble choruses nationwide. In its rich history, Women's Voices Chorus has performed numerous works by Lana Walter and has commissioned several including *Welcome Love* (2003), *Sparks of Divinity* (2009), and *On His Blindness* (2011, by member Diane Wold).

Since the commissioning of *Sparks of Divinity*, WVC member Susan Brown has kept in contact with Lana Walter, as the piece was composed in celebration of the life of her mother, Janie Brown. When Susan contacted Lana to let her know that Women's Voices Chorus was once again performing her *Gaudete! Gaudete!*, Lana responded with, "Ah *Gaudete!*! I had such fun writing that one. It came right out of my belly, that one did. The melody just inspires drama."

The form of *Gaudete! Gaudete!* is typical of its time with a refrain followed by four-line verses. The message is of Christians rejoicing and singing at the birth of Jesus as nature marvels, the world is renewed, and salvation is found.

In 1582, Theodoricus Petri, a Finnish student at the university in Rostock, compiled a song book containing 74 Latin church and school songs, intending to preserve some ancient hymns and songs of his fatherland. The rector of the Turku Cathedral School, Jaakko Finne (or *Suomalainen*), edited and then published the first edition in Greifswald, Sweden.

This *Piæ Cantiones* collection of medieval songs from Finland, Sweden, and other European countries became one of Finland's greatest musical treasures and demonstrated Finland's link to other medieval European cultural centers. About half of the songs are believed to be of Finnish origin, as they have not been found in other sources; other songs came from France, England, Germany, and Bohemia.

—HymnsandCarolsofChristmas.com



Where the Light Begins

Music: Susan LaBarr (b. 1981)

Text: Jan Richardson (b. 1967)

Perhaps it does not begin.
Perhaps it is always.
Perhaps it takes a lifetime
to open our eyes, to learn to see—
the luminous line of the map in the dark
the vigil flame in the house of the heart

the love so searing
we can't keep from singing, from crying out.
Perhaps this day the light begins in us.
We are where the light begins.
Perhaps it does not begin.
Perhaps it is always.

American composer Susan LaBarr was commissioned to compose *Where the Light Begins* for the Henry Middle School Varsity Treble choir for their performance at the 2019 American Choral Directors Association National Conference. Quickly gaining popularity, this piece has been performed widely by treble choirs.

This beautiful poem was originally written as a blessing for Christmas by writer, artist, and ordained UMC minister, Jan Richardson. On her blog (adventdoor.com), she writes, “though we cannot see or feel or know all the ways that God is radiantly illuminating us, may we open ourselves toward that light. May we open our eyes, our hands, our hearts to meet it. May we lean into the light that begins in the deepest, dark, bearing itself into this world for us.”

In writing this piece for the Henry Middle School Varsity Treble Choir, their director asked me to contemplate the theme of “peace” for their concert program. This text, while originally written about Advent and the anticipation of Christmas, uses wonderfully universal words that relate to ideas of peace and hope. Jan’s blessing makes me think that within each of us is the ability to work toward peace. It doesn’t take a monumental action, just many little kindnesses that we can show to others every day which radiate out to bring light to the whole of humanity. When we love, accept, and care for all our neighbors—despite our differences—we find that the light that the dark world so desperately needs begins in us.

—Susan LaBarr



A Bell Awakened

Music: Joan Szymko (b. 1957)

Text: "Variations on a Theme by Rilke," Denise Levertov (1923-1997)

A certain day became a presence to me; there it was, confronting me
—a sky, air, light: a being. And before it started to descend from the height of noon,
it leaned over and struck my shoulder as if with the flat of a sword, granting me honor and a task.
The day's blow rang out, metallic—or it was I, a bell awakened,
and what I heard was my whole self saying and singing what it knew: I can.

A Bell Awakened was composed in 2017 by American composer and conductor, Joan Szymko. Szymko is widely regarded as a foremost composer of literature for women's voices who has composed for professional, church, LGBTQ, children's, and all manner of academic and community choirs.

An ode to the power of "I can," Denise Levertov's poem pays homage to a poem by Rainer M. Rilke (1875-1926) by invoking the stirring imagery from Rilke's poem and further exploring and personalizing the notion of "vocation."

My goal is to compose music that invites the audience in while challenging the notion that accessibility and musical integrity are incompatible concepts. I have composed choral music to be performed with actors, poets, Taiko drummers, modern dancers, aerialists, and accordion players. I have set texts by fourth graders and Pulitzer Prize winners, medieval mystics, and contemporary poets. I am drawn to texts that invoke divine grace, speak to the universal yearning for good and that nurture a compassionate heart.

—Joan Szymko

Sing, Wearing the Sky

Music: Jake Runestad (b. 1986)

Text: Excerpts of poetry by Lalla (1320-1392); English translation: Coleman Barks (b. 1937)

Meditate within eternity. Don't stay in the mind.

The soul, like the moon, is new and always new again.

Since I scoured my mind and my body, I too, Lalla, am new, each moment new.

My teacher told me to "live in the soul." When that was so, I began to go naked and dance!

Dance, Lalla, with nothing on but air. Sing, Lalla, wearing the sky.

Look at this glowing day, what clothes could be more beautiful or more sacred?

Co-commissioned in 2014-2015 by the American Choral Directors Association of Minnesota and the Minnesota Music Educators Association, American composer Jake Runestad composed *Sing, Wearing the Sky* for women's voices accompanied by piano, violin, and percussion. This exuberant work begins with overtone singing, finger cymbals, and piano accompanying a plaintive violin solo before gradually building to a buoyant and ecstatic climax of vocal accents and glissandos accompanied by high-spirited piano, violin, and tambourine.

Lalla, a 14th century Sufi-mystic poet from the Kashmir region of India, believed strongly in the development of self while reaching enlightenment. The metaphor of dancing while feeling free or naked exemplifies the beauty of empowerment and self-worth. Influences of Classical Indian music and other vocal effects allow Lalla's message to come to life.

—Jake Runestad

About Women's Voices Chorus

Women's Voices Chorus has evolved into the premier Triangle chorus for sopranos and altos. While performing a wide and diverse repertoire, we remain steadfast in support of our threefold mission: to provide a welcoming place in the Triangle for women to share the joy of singing together, to promote choral works written by and for women, and to strive to achieve the highest standards of musical excellence. WVC strives to foster a climate of purposeful inclusion. A diverse, multicultural, multiracial choral community enriches a chorus and its music. We welcome women regardless of race, sexual orientation, past gender identity, culture, religion, disability, or educational, financial, or class status. We rehearse from 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. on Mondays from late August through late April, and give concerts in January and April or May. We invite sopranos and altos who are interested to consider auditioning in late August 2023. Information will be posted on the 'Sing' page of our website.



Artistic Director Laura Sam began her tenure with the chorus in summer 2019. A North Carolina native, she has been a choral conductor and music educator for the past 38 years, directing choruses at Meredith College, North Carolina State University, Cary Academy, North Carolina Governor's School East, and Walter M. Williams High School. Laura received a Bachelor of Music in Music Education from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, where she studied conducting, voice, and choral methods. When not immersed in choral music, she serves as the director of the North Carolina Governor's School East, leading a summer residential program for intellectually gifted high school students.



Pianist Deborah Lee Hollis is highly respected for her sensitivity and skill as a collaborative partner. In addition to working with many prominent music organizations in the Triangle area, Deb has conducted masterclasses with pianists and vocalists at Shenandoah, Furman, and Longwood Universities, served on faculty at Wheaton and Guilford Colleges and UNC-Greensboro, and as collaborative pianist/coach at Duke University and UNC-Chapel Hill. Hollis holds piano performance degrees from Oberlin Conservatory and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and received her Doctor of Musical Arts in Collaborative Piano from UNC-Greensboro. Deb is an active recitalist and maintains a private piano studio.

Women's Voices Chorus

Artistic Director: Laura Sam

Pianist: Deborah Hollis

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Rachel Bowman-Abdi ✧	Wendy Hua ✧	Trisha Socias ✧
Rebecca Bruening	Brystana Kaufman ✧ ☿	Marley Steffens
Jennifer Canada ✧	Lauren Keller ★	Shelley Turkington

Soprano 2

Hannah Andrews	Virginia Byers Kraus ☿	Leandra Merea Strobe
Carly Broadwell	Allison Mangin ✧	Amie Tedeschi
Jenn Collins	Mia Prior	Sarah Town
Kate DeAlmeida ✧	Kinley Russell ✧	Darcy Wold
Amy Glass		Diane Wold

Alto 1

Christa Abedi	Sheryl Fowler	Anne J. Menkens ✧
Rah Bickley ✧ ★	Jan French	Susan Regier
Diana Coble	Kay Johnson ✧ ☿	Megan Shepherd-Banigan
Marsha Ferguson ✧	Jacqueline Little	Clare Strayhorn

Alto 2

Meg Berreth	Susanna Lambert ✧	Doris Sigl
Susan E. Brown ✧	Caryl Price	Kimberly Slentz-Kesler ✧
Karla Byrnes ✧	Betty Schumacher	Sharon Smith ★
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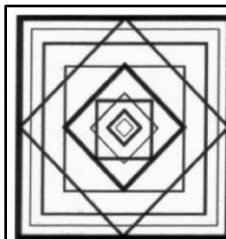
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There is the
music of heaven
in all things

-Hildegard von Bingen

Thank you, Laura and Deb, for making the music of heaven come alive for WVC!

-Love, the SIs (singing high C's since '93)



*Top, L-R: Jackie, Diana, Clare, Sue R., Sue G., Marsha, Jan, Anne.
Bottom, L-R: Sheryl, Rah, Christa, Megan. Not pictured: Kay and Ann.*



The First Altos are
proud to harmonize
with all our sisters in
Women's Voices
Chorus

The Alto 2s of Women's Voices Chorus, past and present, honor two of our beloved sisters who are no longer with us. Thank you for the many years of friendship, humor, wisdom, and musicianship.

We miss you every day and sing in your honor always.



"Once an Alto 2, always an Alto 2"
You are forever in our hearts



Elisabeth Curtis
Alto 2
Founding Member 1993



Gail Freeman
Alto 2
Member since 2001

*Please turn off or silence all cell phones and other noise-making devices before the concert begins.
Note that the use of cameras and other recording equipment is strictly prohibited. Thank you!*

We strive to host inclusive, accessible events that enable all individuals, including individuals with disabilities, to engage fully. If you would like accommodation such as reserved seating or have questions about accessibility, please ask at the box office table or see any usher. All concert and rehearsal venues are ADA compliant.

Restrooms are located on the lower level, accessible by stairs at the back of the church or on the main level across from the lobby. See any usher for help.

Special thanks to:

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church for rehearsal
First Presbyterian Church, Durham for performance space
Our advertisers—please patronize them
Our numerous volunteers, within and outside the chorus

Support Women's Voices Chorus

It takes more than love of music to keep a chorus running. Ticket sales, grants, and singers' dues payments help pay the bills, but private donations, large and small, make the difference between merely surviving and truly thriving. If you would like to support WVC with a donation, baskets are available at the door. You can also visit the [donate page](#) of our website, donate via Venmo @WomensVoicesChorus, or scan one of the QR Codes below.



Square Store



Venmo

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