

Concert Choir

"Afternoon on a Hill"

John McDonald, conductor
Sandra Geary, collaborative pianist

Program

I.

Afternoon on a Hill (2008)

Eric William Barnum (b. 1979)
(poet) Edna St. Vincent Millay

Now I Walk in Beauty (1969)

Gregg Smith (1932 - 2016)
Traditional Navajo Prayer

Jared Berger, soloist

For This Joy (2021)

(arr.) Susan LaBarr (b. 1981)
(poet) Charles Anthony Silvestri

Felix Guo, clarinet

II.

Angel By the Wings (2018)

Sia Kate Isobelle Furler
(arr.) André van der Merwe (b. 1968)

Measure Me, Sky! (2020)

Jonathan Reid (b. 1991)
(poet) Leonora Speyer

III.

Veni, Sancte Spiritus (2011)

Zanaida Stewart Robles (b. 1979)

Light of a Clear Blue Morning (2010)

Dolly Parton
(arr.) Craig Hella Johnson (b. 1962)

Katie Furby, soloist

Emily Li, Nora Jarquin, Melena Braggs, trio
Lillie Kang, flute

IV.

Unclouded Day (2010)

Words and Music by Rev. JK Alwood
(arr.) Shawn Kirchner (b. 1970)

Program Notes by Aidan Tierney

Afternoon on a Hill

Afternoon on a Hill explores the commonly misunderstood emotion of joy and its interrelatedness to the beauty of nature and the human experience. Eric William Barnum is an internationally renowned composer and choral director currently working as the director of choral activities at Drake University in Des Moines, Iowa. This piece was commissioned for the 2007 Minnesota All-State mixed choir. As one of Barnum's early accompanied works, he experimented using the piano to create a "momentary universe" which serves to enhance the emotions evoked by the text.

Now I Walk in Beauty

Now I Walk in Beauty evokes a sense of wonder through its earthly melody and text describing one's surroundings with awe. This text is originally a Navajo ceremonial prayer depicting the interconnectedness of humans with their environments. "Above" symbolizes the sky and heavens, "beside" the community surrounding us, "before" represents our past and cultural lineage, and "below" the soil and bones of our ancestors. Gregg Smith was a titan in American choral music, founding the Gregg Smith Singers, an ensemble that redefined the industry of professional choral singing and conducting. Smith set this Navajo prayer to music in 1988 with the intent of paying homage to the marginalized community.

For This Joy

With an ambiance that brings about the feeling of a sunny spring day, *For This Joy* celebrates the bounty of life and the small joys found in the everyday. Susan LaBarr, a Springfield, Missouri resident, is a widely known and beloved composer who breathed life into this largely antiquated tune. The original chorale tune, *Lobe den Herren*, was set by German composer, Joachim Neander, in 1680 and later was expanded into a chorale cantata by Johann Sebastian Bach in 1725. For this setting, Charles Anthony Silvestri was commissioned to pen a new ecumenical text, focusing on the richness of life and creation and the joy that is found in all aspects of life.

Angel by the Wings

This piece was written by Sia for the Otto Bell documentary film *The Eagle Huntress*. The film premiered in 2016 and it gained popularity heightened by the song's captivating tune and the popular artist behind it. The arranger of this setting, André van der Merwe, is a South African conductor, choral music arranger, and composer. He currently conducts the Stellenbosch University Choir, the oldest choir in South Africa (1936), and ranked the number one mixed amateur choir by Interkultur since 2012.

Measure, Me Sky!

American poet and Pulitzer Prize winner, Leonora Speyer's evocative text explores our relationship to the universe and the impact over the course of a life. Jonathan Reid harnesses this spirit in the music through soaring melodic lines, close harmonies, and an undulating piano accompaniment that creates a sense of motion and mystique.

Veni Sancte Spiritus

Rich in history and deeply connected to the Roman Catholic Mass tradition, the *Veni Sancte Spiritus* text has also been set for choral performances by composers such as W. A. Mozart, John Rutter, Morten Lauridsen, and many others. This text was one of only four medieval sequences preserved by the Council of Trent in 1563 and is still included in modern mass services. Zanaida Robles composed this setting in the spring of 2012 while working with the guidance of her teacher, Dr. Morten Lauridsen, at the University of Southern California. Robles shaped her interpretation through the lens of popular music styles joined with the classical choral tradition. She does so through delicate piano lines, compound meter, and strong choral voicing with a modern spin on the harmonic treatment of this ageless text.

*Come Holy Spirit and send down from heaven the ray of your light.
Come, Father of the poor. Come, Giver of gifts. Come, Light of hearts.
Best consoler, sweet host of the soul, sweet refresher.
Come, Holy Spirit. Rest in labor. Cooling in heat. Comfort in times of grief.
O most blessed light, fill the inmost heart of your faithful.
Without your power, there is nothing in us. Nothing that is not harmful.*

Light of a Clear Blue Morning

Dolly Parton's iconic *Light of a Clear Blue Morning* has captivated the hearts of audiences since its release in 1977. Dolly Parton, who needs no introduction, is a massively successful American singer-songwriter, actress, and businesswoman born in 1946 who, in addition to selling more than 100 million records and winning countless awards, has made an incredible contribution to society through her philanthropy. One such notable example is the Dollywood Foundation which manages many projects to bring financial relief and education to the area of East Tennessee where she grew up. Arranger Craig Hella Johnson is an acclaimed choral conductor and musical innovator most known for his work with the Grammy Award-winning ensemble, Conspirare.

Unclouded Day

The culmination of this concert's theme of finding joy in the ordinary is summed up in the untroubled tune and text of *Unclouded Day*. Shawn Kirchner is a composer, singer, and pianist whose works are widely performed and represent a diversity of genres. Kirchner studied at Manchester College, Indiana, and later received a master's in choral conducting from the University of Iowa. It is said that the song *Unclouded Day* came to 19th-century preacher, Josiah K. Alwood while riding home to Michigan on horseback through the late hours of the night. During this ride, he saw an extravagant sight: a rainbow by moonlight against the dark sky. When Alwood awoke the next morning, he had these words and melodies running through his mind and eventually passed them on to his family and congregation.

Concert Choir

Members (A-Z):

Elma Ademovic
Kiersten Anderson
Jared Berger
Melena Braggs
Chris Chung
Anya Coughlin
Miko Dai
Mazie Drummond
Katie Furby**
Zoe Geyman*
Sam Gil
Elizabeth Girling
Deborah Collins Grossman
Michael Hanson
Evan Hunt
Martín Ibarra
Nora Jarquin
Cory Johnson
Lily Johnson
Landon Kahl
Viktoria Knyaz

Josie Kopff*
Emily Li
Maseo Mercer
Marcus Negron
Kathryn Sarullo-Plano*
Mariel Scher
Mitchell Shannon
Sydney Spangler
John Speas
Veronica Spillman
Ashwin Srinivasan
Vytautas Staniskis*
Matthew Sullivan*
Patty Weisensee
Emma Wells
Abi Wileman
Ryan Williamson
Sandra Xie

Reader
Aidan Tierney

*Section Leader

**Choir Manager

Director



Dr. John McDonald is the Director of Choir and Vocal Studies at Washington University in St. Louis, conductor of Cantus, the St. Louis Children's Choirs tenor-bass ensemble, and artistic director and founder of the St. Louis based professional group, Continuum Vocal Ensemble. He is frequently invited as a guest conductor and adjudicator for events across the United States. An active member of the American Choral Directors Association, Dr. McDonald serves on the Education and Communication national standing committee and was selected as one of six conductors for the 2023 International Conductors Exchange Program with Germany.

Dr. McDonald earned degrees from the University of Missouri-Kansas City, East Carolina University, and Middle Tennessee State University.

Collaborative Pianist



Sandra Geary is a native of County Cork, Ireland and has received piano performance diplomas from the Royal Schools of Music, Trinity College, London; the Cork School of Music, Ireland and a Bachelor of Music degree from the St. Louis Conservatory of Music. Her teachers include John O'Connor, Joseph Kalichstein, and Carole Tafoya.

On the piano faculty of Washington University, Sandra also accompanies the WashU Concert choir. She has been the Bach Society of St. Louis accompanist for the past 25 years and is also the accompanist for Webster University Opera studio. She is a vocal coach for the Opera Theatre of St. Louis Artist-in-Training program and the Union Avenue Opera Crescendo Young Artist program.

She has collaborated in voice masterclasses given by Nathan Gunn, Stanford Olsen, Kevin Short, Erie Mills, Christine Brewer, Mary Ann McCormack, and Jennifer Johnson Cano.

Sandra regularly accompanies recitals, auditions, and competitions in the St. Louis area.

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