Peninsula Women's Chorus Presents
A LIVESTREAM CONCERT

Hands upon the Plow

SAT, OCTOBER 3, 2020 @ 4PM PDT
Peninsula Women's Chorus Presents
A LIVESTREAM CONCERT

Hands upon the Plow
SAT, OCTOBER 3, 2020 @ 4PM PDT

Welcome
Martín Benvenuto, Artistic Director

Rise Up
Jake Runestad (b. 1986)
Commissioned by the ACDA Women's Choir Commissioning Consortium

from displacement
Movement V: San Francisco
Eric Tuan (b. 1990)
Commissioned by the Peninsula Women's Chorus

Trailblazers Project
Martín Benvenuto

Child of Impossibles*
Julia Adolphe (b. 1988)
Performed jointly with Musae and Piedmont Ancora at the 2018 NMFTV Festival

When the Dust Settles*
Mari Esabel Valverde (b. 1987)

Our first virtual choir
Martín Benvenuto

Hands upon the Plow* world premiere
Jocelyn Hagen (b. 1980)
Virtual Choir World Premiere
Margaret Fondbertasse, piano
Charles Keagle, alto saxophone

*Commissioned by the Peninsula Women's Chorus as part of the Trailblazers Project

Farewell remarks
Martín Benvenuto

from The Winged Joy
A Farewell
Kirke Mechem (b. 1925)

Closing remarks, tribute video, and next season
Tricia Baldwin, Board President

Will the Circle Be Unbroken
trad. Appalachian, arr. J. David Moore
Ciara Karski, Michelle Staley, Sarah Etheredge, Jennifer Katz,
Eithne Pardini, and Martha Morgan, sextet
Andrew Davies and Julian Brown, violins; Michael Goldberg, guitar; Marie Laskin, bass

I Thank You God
Gwyneth Walker (b. 1947)
Texts & Program Notes

**Rise Up**, Jake Runestad, text by Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906)

The text of “Rise Up” was adapted from speeches and writings by U.S. suffrage leader Susan B. Anthony. The energetic drive of the music sets Anthony’s rhetoric imploring women to “deepen your sympathy then convert it to action.”

Rise Up!

There shall never be another season of silence.
Deepen your sympathy then convert it to action.

Pray every single second of your life, not on your knees but with your work.

Think your best thoughts,
speak your best words,
do your best work.

There is so much yet to be done.
Rise Up!

**displacement**, Eric Tuan

*displacement* is a choral meditation on exile. The fifth movement explores the ongoing process of displacement in the San Francisco Bay Area, and draws upon the searing poetry of housing activist Tony Robles. His lament for San Francisco captures the sense of loss for historic communities forced out of the city by gentrification and soaring rents.

**Movement V: San Francisco**
San Francisco, your eyes are empty, your houses are empty, your canvas is bare of poems.
Your mirrors and windows are missing reflection. Your flowers are drained of color.

Your eyes hold no murals, your skin is scrubbed raw. Your canvas contains no art. Your poems are eviction notices. Your skin is a thin postcard that reads non-deliverable. Your tongue is a torn bus transfer out of town.

I don’t know you anymore.
Safiya Sinclair’s “Child of Impossibles” is a composer’s dream: rich with color, textures, sounds, and evocative imagery. The music begins in a low vocal register with close harmonies, capturing the “dark sleep,” the lingering wound. As the harmonies slowly strive upwards, the music “unfurls” and “circles,” leading the voices out of the darkness and into a brighter, yet still dissonant, sound world. The music continues to blossom from dense textures to open harmonies. The many echoing voices and repetitions throughout the piece channel “all my mothers,” illuminating the dream and desire that our ancestors could speak to us, to guide us towards an imagined home, to remind us of how many lives were impacted and are still impacted by the legacy of American slavery. The music continues to swirl through the array of evocative colors and landscapes depicted in Sinclair’s poem: the warm heat of Maryland populated by chokecherry trees, the glint of the knife and the sunlight in heaven, the transformation from the deep blooming wound to the bright fire, and finally, the arrival from “Green,” to “gold,” a harmonious vision of a sanctuary that does not yet exist, a home where all are welcomed.

— Julia Adolphe

When Harriet Tubman was a teenager, a slave-owner’s overseer threw an iron weight at her head, severely injuring her and causing her to suffer from acute seizures, headaches, and narcolepsy for the rest of her life. After this injury, Tubman also began experiencing intense dream-states and visions. For my poem, “Child of Impossibles,” I wanted to examine the systemic hurt, both current and centuries-long, that affects Black people—Black women specifically—in the African Diaspora. By beginning in darkness, I am channeling the spirit of her long sleep of narcolepsy, the fracturing of being both Black and woman, all this inherent pain that shadows us at every turn. By tracing Harriet’s brave footsteps through the treacherous southern forest, and echoing her resolve in leading 140 slaves to freedom, I wanted the poem to turn, impossibly, from horrific to hopeful—a hope that by looking forward, by believing in the possibility of Home, we might one day find it. Just as her wound led to her incredible visions of freedom, Harriet’s sorrow eventually led to her enduring strength. From something horrific, she uncovered a great gift. This poem is my way of paying tribute to Harriet’s gift to us, her starshine of hope, her light in the dark, urging me and all people like me—downtrodden and discriminated-against—to keep going forward, to believe in our future even though we cannot see it. All the while I hear her saying, Don’t look back: Ahead of us is wonder, ahead of us is a world that one day, one bright day, will welcome us with beckoning arms as her own, her only.

— Safiya Sinclair

Caught in a dark sleep I shelter the weight
of this long night inside me, great unfurling
knife of heaven on my back. How the hurt circles
like a famished bird. Don’t look back, she tells me,
Don’t look back. Child of impossibles, you are here,
dazzling. Still blooming wonder from the wound.
Don’t you hear them? All my mothers in the chokecherry
tree—she a Green June beetle, she the last fruit gifted
to the weary. Feet in the fire, I am chasing what I cannot see;
future of our own lost dreaming, her thousand warm hands
washed in gold, home renaming me. And she always beckoning
Welcome
Welcome
Welcome.
**When the Dust Settles**, Mari Esabel Valverde, text by Amir Rabiyah (b. 1978)

We look to the intersections between those in the margins for humanity’s nerve endings—our vastest source for empathy and nuanced outrage. There we find Miss Major Griffin-Gracy, holding the door open for “the forgotten ones, the discarded, and misunderstood,” asking us all to stay “strong and delicate.”

A former grassroots organizer and lifelong transgender and intersex rights activist from coast to coast, Miss Major is a “veteran” of the Stonewall Riots. Hearing her speak today, you would not perceive within her voice the years of surviving our historically transphobic, racist, and often violent systems of oppression. And, her fight to liberate her trans and queer descendants continues. At age 78, she opened the House of GG, the Griffin-Gracy Educational Retreat and Historical Center for the transgender and gender non-conforming community, in Little Rock, Arkansas. For more information please visit: https://HouseOfGG.org.

“When the Dust Settles” is a culmination of trans stories brought to life through singing written in homage to Miss Major. Amir Rabiya’s original poem, created only for this song, synthesizes themes of intersectional identity, survival, and humanity, striving to share a bit of Miss Major’s perspective. They note, “Phrases such as ‘when the dust settles,’ and ‘we are still here,’ are direct quotes, while other statements and themes are paraphrased.” Their words furthermore point toward a trans woman’s right to life and to pleasure.

The choice of Db major, the key of the earth, hearkens back to “Our Phoenix,” my first collaboration with Rabiyah, memorializing the lives of our trans siblings who are murdered across America every year. But now, we celebrate trans lives and mold the relative minor into its parallel major—Bb—carrying along tones of Db major as badges for what we have survived to get to our “honeyed” days. — Mari Esabel Valverde

---

You opened your arms for the forgotten ones  
the discarded & misunderstood  
you showed them a mother’s love  
enveloped them in a delicate  
and powerful embrace, beautiful star  
when the dust settles, we’ll always remember  
how you showed us how to fight  
even while the jagged blade of sorrow  
pressed on us, to fight  
ceaselessly, to tend to one another  
You said, when the dust settles  
I hope my girls will be okay  
You cried out from the cells of Attica  
and outside Stonewall’s battered streets  
Do you hear me? Are you listening?  
How many more have to die?  
your heart bigger than any cage  
even in the midst of so much loss  
you remind us to dream  
to hold tomorrow between our lips  
we deserve to kiss without fear  
to grow old  
to sway our hips  
to wear what we wish  
to relish in the pleasure of our bodies  
the seeds you planted continue to grow  
into blooming song  
when the dust settles, we will raise our voices  
just as you have always done, in glorious proclamation  
we will let everyone know—  
We are still here!  
We are still here!


**Hands upon the Plow**, Jocelyn Hagen, text by Barbara Saxton

Although I have tremendous respect for all three of our Trailblazers women honorees, I feel the greatest gratitude and personal empathy toward suffragist and women’s rights champion Alice Paul. I have voted in every election since 1968, and doing so is a right I’ve taken for granted. Of course, I was aware of “the Movement,” but until I researched the life and work of Alice Paul and other women’s rights pioneers, I didn’t realize how long they had labored nor how deeply they suffered to obtain this gift of rightful participation in the democratic process for American women! Alice never married or had children. She organized, marched, confronted for decades—she was even painfully force-fed through a nose tube while on a hunger strike. She knew exactly how difficult it was to wield that heavy plow through the muddy fields of prejudice, distrust and ignorance women faced as they tried to obtain even the most basic rights in a democracy. And that is why she entreated women to never stop pushing for equal rights until we reached the end of each row, or obstacle. We’ve come a long way, but we’re not there yet...

Some of the lines of my poem are quotes from Alice herself—e.g., “the movement as mosaic” and “no new worlds without female power.” Other original lines were inspired by her incredible bravery and persistence, ending (as any poem or song about Alice and her fellow suffragists must) with an exhortation to lift our voices and VOTE!

— Barbara Saxton

She likened our Movement
to mosaic tiles—more vibrant
and stronger when linked
by the mortar of women,
our undaunted will.
She placed trembling hands
upon the true plow;
told us not to let go,
to push hard till we reach
the end of each row.
She claimed *No New Worlds*
without female power—
peace, progress, discovery all grow
in our hearts, our wise voices,
our votes.
The Winged Joy, Kirke Mechem

San Francisco composer Kirke Mechem’s The Winged Joy is a landmark work for women’s chorus written in 1963-64. It sets seven love poems by turn-of-the-century women poets that express in contrasting movements the joys and pain and ambiguity of love. In “A Farewell,” the piano accompaniment sets the mood of resignation with a ground bass in the left hand, a cantilena melody in the right hand, and a gracious, lyrical, unison melody on top.

**A Farewell**, text by Harriet Monroe

Goodbye!—no, do not grieve that it is over,
   The perfect hour;
That the winged joy, sweet honey-loving rover,
   Flits from the flower.

Grieve not—it is the law. Love will be flying—
   Yes, love and all.
Glad was the living—blessed be the dying.
   Let the leaves fall.

Will the Circle Be Unbroken, traditional Appalachian, arr. J. David Moore

The hymn “Will the Circle Be Unbroken” first appeared in a gospel song collection in 1908. It was reworked by A.P. Carter in 1935 and experienced a renaissance when released by The Nitty Gritty Dirt Band in 1973. The updated lyrics of this arrangement by J. David Moore were written by folks singers Betsy Rose, Cathy Winter, and Marcia Taylor. These lyrics were the ones requested by the MUSE Women’s Choir of Cincinnati when they commissioned the arrangement for a celebration of Appalachian cultural heritage in 2001.

The bright and joyful arrangement by Moore makes use of two traditional vocal ensemble styles, the bluegrass trio (unapologetically inspired by Dolly Parton) and the gospel quartet. It is a celebration of the power of song to create community.
I Thank You God, Gwyneth Walker, text by E. E. Cummings

When you are singing "I Thank You God," I would like for you to keep in mind the grandeur and triumph of the poem and the song. This is a very BIG 'thank you' to God for creating this world, and for giving us the faith to overcome any obstacles in our lives. 'I who have died am alive again today.' Because the message of this song is so large, I constructed the music to rise from the very low C at the beginning to the very high C major chord at the end. The song moves through different keys in the middle as a way of gathering energy for the dramatic return to C Major at the end.

I gave all of my energy to composing this music. At the time of writing this song, I had moved back to my home to care for my mother during the last years of her life. There was sorrow in my daily life. But I knew that the music would keep my spirit strong. And thus, whenever I listen to a performance of "I Thank You God," I remember those special days when I lived primarily through my music. I hope that this song will be as strengthening to you as it was to me.

— Gwyneth Walker

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 birthday; this is the birth
day of life and of 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 and
now the eyes of my eyes are opened)

Thank you for joining us today!

To find out about our future virtual & live performances, please visit us at

WWW.PWCHORUS.ORG

Please click here for a quick survey to share your thoughts about our first ever virtual concert.