

Program Notes:

*Songs of Celestial Spheres* features music and poetry inspired by the sun, moon, and stars, spanning numerous cultures, languages, historical periods, and musical styles. This repertoire illumines the emotional complexities of life, death, power, and love as expressed through metaphors of these luminous orbs.

“Yours is the light by which my spirit’s born: - you are my sun, my moon, and all my stars.”

– E.E. Cummings

The mysteries of the cosmos have long inspired scientists, storytellers, poets, artists, musicians, philosophers, religious leaders, explorers – virtually all of humankind from the earliest days of recorded history to the present – to gaze upward and wonder.

Modern scientists have provided us with increasing amounts of knowledge about the solar system, most spectacularly with the first images transmitted from the recently launched James Webb Space Telescope. These images give us a startlingly clear picture of the early universe, showing some of the first galaxies and stars – the dawn of time.

The light of the sun sustains the earth and all living creatures. Reflecting the sun’s light, the moon in many ways shapes the rhythms of life on Earth. Stars radiate light, providing points of navigation, and are consistent timekeepers. Astronomer Carl Sagan said, “We are a way for the universe to know itself. Some part of our being knows this is where we came from. We long to return. And we can because the cosmos is also within us. We’re made of star stuff.”

***Moon Goddess*** was commissioned by the 2011 American Choral Directors Association Women’s Choir Repertoire & Standards Commissioning Consortium. Since then, this intricately crafted piece has been performed worldwide by accomplished treble choruses. The text was written by Enheduanna and adapted by composer Jocelyn Hagen, based on adaptations by Aiki and Willis Barnstone, from William W. Hallo and J.J.A. van Dijk, *The Exaltation of Inanna* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).

Enheduanna 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, they recall Sappho’s poems to her ally Aphrodite. – *A Book of Women Poets, From Antiquity to Now*, Ed. By Aiki and Willis Barnstone.

***Two Eastern Pictures 2. Summer*** was composed by Gustav Holst in 1909-10 during a period in which he became interested in Hindu mysticism and spirituality. This interest led to the composition of several works set to translations of Sanskrit texts, which Holst translated himself after enrolling at University College in London to study the language. The poetry of this piece was written by Kalidasa, a Classical Sanskrit author of 4-5<sup>th</sup> century CE, considered to be ancient India’s greatest poet and playwright. The harmonic language of this composition is based on Raag Yaman, considered to be one of the most fundamental and basic ragas in the Hindustani tradition.

***Bright Morning Stars*** was collected in 1937 by Alan Lomax in Harlan County, Kentucky. Lomax was an American ethnomusicologist best known for his numerous field recordings of folk music of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The origin of this song predates Lomax’s recording and was referenced in *The Sweet Songster*, a Baptist hymnal from Kentucky, published in 1854. The morning star is the planet Venus, which shines so brightly that it is the first “star” to appear in the sky after the Sun sets, or the last to disappear before the Sun rises. Its orbital position changes, thus causing it to appear at different times of the night throughout the year.

The words of this song are typical of the shape-note hymn, especially in the apostrophe of the ancestors (father, mother, and so forth), but the original singer probably delivered their own version which throws the

ordinary strict-tempo melody into an alternation of 5/4 – 4/4 – 3/4 measures.  
— from the Archive of American Folksong in the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

***The Dawn is Not Distant***, composed by Canadian Christine Donkin, contrasts the legato choral phrases with the piano's points of sounds, representing stars. It joins fragments of text from two very different sources: the Latin translation of Genesis Chapter 15 and *Tales of a Wayside Inn* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. When read together out of their original context, a new meaning is created.

“Around the time that I began writing this piece, I was thinking about earlier times of my life, and in particular one event that left me heartbroken. *The Dawn is Not Distant* contains the message of hope and optimism that I would convey to my former self if I were able to travel back in time.” – Christine Donkin

Josu Elberdin, born in northern Spain, was commissioned by the Federation of Choirs of Gipuzkoa as part of the Choral Creation grant program to compose ***Ezar Ederrak***. The Basque text tells the story of a beautiful, shining star surrounded by eight angels, one of whom is ‘lovesick’ for the star. The inscription reads:

“For Ainhua, my beloved wife, who gives me the most important reason to live each day. Love forever.”

Commissioned by her family to honor Catherine Roma, retiring founding conductor of Muse (Cincinnati's Women's Choir), ***My Lord, What a Morning*** was arranged by J. David Moore. The rich history of this piece includes the following:

Eileen Southern (1920-2002) credits *A Collection of Spiritual Songs and Hymns Selected from Various Authors* (Philadelphia, 1801) by Richard Allen (1760-1831) for the inspiration behind *My Lord, What a Morning*. Allen was the first bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the first independent African American denomination. While many spirituals have been conceived on plantations in the southern United States, Southern contends that free African Americans also composed them “in the independent black congregations of the North, where black congregations, freed from the supervision of white clergymen, could conduct their religious services as they wished” (Southern, 1972, p.11). *My Lord, What a Morning* appears to have been one of those composed in the North. The numerous apocalyptic images in this hymn have scriptural foundations. “The falling stars” is a particularly powerful metaphor. Revelation 6:12-14 provides a stark description of the end of the world: “And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; **And the stars of heaven fell unto the earth**, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.” Another prominent image is the reference, “nations underground,” a vision of global humanity on earth, under the ground of heaven, viewed from the perspective of heaven, the source of the trumpet's sound. – C. Michael Hawn

***Song to the Moon (La Luna)*** was composed by Z. Randall Stroope for the Cantabile Women's Chorus, Kingston ON Canada.

The text of *Song to the Moon (La Luna)* is a very free paraphrase of a small portion of the original Jaroslav Kvapil (1868-1959) text in Czech, written in 1899. Antonin Dvorak used Kvapil's libretto in his masterful opera, *Rusalka*, completed in 1900. Jaroslav Kvapil's plot in the complete text centers around a water nymph (named Rusalka) who lives in a fairy-tale kingdom of the Czech imagination. She yearns to be human so she can fall in love with a human prince who has been coming to her pond to bathe. The text used for this work, *Song to the Moon (La Luna)*, appears at the beginning of the story when Rusalka asks the moon to find her lover (the prince) and tell him that she loves him. – Z. Randall Stroope

***Par'ó Era Estrellero*** was composed for Zemer Chai, one of the nation's leading Jewish choirs, conducted by founding director and composer, Eleanor Epstein. Its characteristic sound is the Spanish Phrygian scale, also known as the Jewish scale. This scale occurs in Spanish, Indian, Middle Eastern, Eastern European, Central Asian, Arabic, and Egyptian music and is used in Hebrew prayers and Klezmer music.

This ancient song, written in the Judeo-Spanish language, Ladino, celebrates the quiet but indispensable role that women played in the redemption of the Jewish people from Egyptian slavery. – Eleanor Epstein

***Lakutshon 'Illanga***, composed by Mackay Devashe, was arranged by former Women's Voices Chorus Artistic Director, Allan Friedman, when he was studying abroad and singing in a jazz choir in Durban, South Africa.

*Lakutshon 'Illanga* is known and beloved by South Africans because many relate to its lyrics. During the apartheid era, freedom fighters would get arrested by the government and many would later be found in prisons, hospitals, or mortuaries. Some would never be found by their loved ones again. *Lakutshon 'Illanga* narrates a story of someone searching for their loved one who has gone missing. She promises that she will think of him with every sunset, and she will search everywhere and every day even when the sun sets, until she finds him. – Thabilé

***Mēnestiņis Naki Brauca***, a Latvian folksong, was arranged by Latvian composer, Laura Jēkabsone, internationally renowned for her choral and orchestral works.

It isn't easy to have an obvious translation of any Latvian folksong because mostly, they talk in symbols. In mythology, the Sun and Moon symbolize young love, so "Mēnestiņis Nakti Brauca" could be considered a wedding song. – Laura Jēkabsone

***I Got the Sun in the Morning*** was composed by Irving Berlin, whose body of work forms a large part of the *Great American Songbook*. It is from the 1946 Broadway musical, "Annie Get Your Gun," a fictionalized version of the life of Annie Oakley, a sharpshooter who starred in Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. In Act II, Annie sings *I Got the Sun in the Morning* after deciding to sell her sharpshooting medals worth one hundred thousand dollars, received from all the rulers of Europe, to finance the merger of two shows - Buffalo Bill's Wild West and Pawnee Bill's after discovering both shows are broke. In this song, Annie Oakley rejoices in the simple things.

***When You Wish Upon a Star*** was written for Walt Disney's animated classic, *Pinocchio*. The original version of the song was sung by Cliff Edwards in the character of Jiminy Cricket at the beginning and end of the movie. It won the 1940 Academy Award for Best Original Song and was the first Disney song to win an Oscar. The Library of Congress deemed Edwards's recording of the song "culturally, historically, or aesthetically significant" and inducted it into the National Recording Registry in 2009. In Japan, Sweden, Finland, Norway, and Denmark, the song became a Christmas tradition, often referring to the Star of Bethlehem.

According to animation director, Woolie Reitherman, "When You Wish Upon a Star" became one of Walt Disney's favorite songs, indicative of how he liked to "dream big, to attempt the impossible." Aside from its catchiness, the song's popularity in the US can be pinned, in part, to the context of the period. Disney's rise came at the tail end of the Great Depression and *Pinocchio*, like *The Wizard of Oz*, responded to the public's need for escapism. "When You Wish" — sung, let's not forget, by a character dressed in the tattered rags of a drifter — embodied a Disneyfied infantilization of the American Dream. Its schmaltzy optimism spoke to those who longed for something better, and Harline's melody — which opens, like "Over the Rainbow", with a searching, octave leap — seemed to reflect a collective yearning. Perhaps the composer was mining his own life story. He was the 13th child of Swedish immigrants whose rise from Utah obscurity to Hollywood royalty is the stuff dreams are made on. – Timmy Fisher of Financial Times, September 19, 2022