

Hearts Afire

Extended Program Notes



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February 20, 2022

Your Stars To Hold - Stuart Beatch

Note from the composer:

The text of this piece...depicts love as an act of comfort and assurance, using cosmic imagery to express the profound safety found in the arms of a loved one. My music tries to capture this warmth through a lush harmonic language and thick choral textures, culminating in a simple repetition of the titular line—suddenly inward and intimate, as if gently whispered.

Constellation - Frank Ticheli

Note from the composer:

Constellation is my second choral setting of Sara Teasdale's poetry, the first being *There Will Be Rest* in 1999. Her words almost set themselves, inspiring natural, flowing melodic lines and vivid sound worlds. Each of the three poems I chose for this cycle utilizes the image of stars (a recurring image in her poetry) as a powerful symbol of eternal beauty and peace. Feelings of longing and melancholy never far from the surface – are poignantly balanced by feelings of hope and an underlying sense of awe and wonder.

Let It Be Forgotten - Steven Chatman

Note from the composer:

"I am strongly attracted to the poetry of Sara Teasdale. Particularly inspiring are her symbolic imagery, direct vocabulary and open vowels. In common with many of Teasdale's poems, *Let It Be Forgotten* embraces the theme of love – memories of love and forgotten or lost love."

Ēriks Ešņvalds: There Will Come Soft Rains, Only In Sleep, Stars

It was a realization that several new works by Ešņvalds that had struck a chord with me were all settings of the same poet that first inspired the concept of a full program of settings of Sara Teasdale. I'll share more about each of these works verbally as the program goes along. When we canceled the original *Hearts Afire* production that was to be held in April 2020, the choir members were already in possession of each of these scores. So when we could resume careful singing in September of that year after our first hiatus (six months!), it's these pieces that we first began to rehearse. Over the course of the

2020–2021 Season we released each of them in video form (find them all on our YouTube channel), and we're excited to bring you them live tonight. – JVB

Spring Rain

Commissioned by Chronos Vocal Ensemble in 2020 and delivered in early 2021, Spring Rain was first rehearsed by the choir more than a year ago and we're excited to finally be able to present it to our audience. Katerina Gimon has written us an exciting and emotionally-charged piece for choir and percussion. For some of the composer's own thoughts on her process with the text and music, view our "Upcoming Premieres" video from May 2021 on our YouTube channel at

[▶ Upcoming Premieres: Interviews and Excerpts](#) . – JVB

Sorrow Into Song - Christine Donkin

From the composer:

[Sorrow into Song] was inspired by my mother, who passed away in April 2021. In the last years of her life, she was unable to speak or understand language due to dementia, but she never stopped singing. As communication became more and more difficult, and as she gradually stopped recognizing her friends and family, it became clear that music was the last remaining connection that we had with her.

The way that my mother continued "singing in hard sind ceaselessly" after she lost the ability to speak is reflected in the way that I have set the poem: while the tenor and bass parts contain all of the text, the soprano and alto parts consist almost entirely of wordless singing. The only words sung by the sopranos and altos are "rise from pain" – words which I think encapsulate both the essence of the poem and the role of music in my mother's life, especially when she was ill.

In A Railroad Station - David Von Kampen

From the composer:

In a Railroad Station paints Sara Teasdale's text into the fabric of the music. The relentlessly busy piano part is the "shrill electric light;" the "whirling din." The drawn-out melodie lines sung by the choir depict the slow-motion farewell that is occurring between two people as chaos swirls around them.

Snow Song - Trent Worthington

This piece comes from a set of three called "Winter Songs", which was the first set of Sara Teasdale settings we performed with Chronos, back in 2016. The full set is featured among other accompanied and a cappella music on the album "The Simplest Way: The Music of

Trent Worthington” which we undertook together with the composer in that year. We’re pleased to have Trent here tonight. –JVB

Alchemy - Karen P. Thomas

Composer Karen Thomas reached out to me recommending this piece when I posted online searching for repertoire for my choir, Vocal Alchemy. When I saw it was a Teasdale setting, I immediately wanted to check it out and saw that it would fit exceptionally well on this program, particularly given its exuberant piano part for Kim Cousineau. We have the pleasure of presenting its Canadian premiere! –JVB

The Music of Stillness - Elaine Hagenberg

From the publisher:

Sara Teasdale’s poem “There will be Rest” frames this stunning piece...Soaring choral phrases conjure up images of stars shining, rooftops covered with snow, crystal peace....finding the music of stillness.” Following a serene opening, the piece rises and falls through affecting climaxes as well as passages of great tranquility, ending with the same sense of stillness with which it begins.