Saturday, 7 November 2026
7:30 p.m.

Biemesderfer Concert Hall
Winter Center of Visual and Performing Arts

presents

Born in the U.S.A.

Dr. Jeffrey S. Gemmell, conductor
Dr. Xun Pan, collaborative pianist

Welcome to the final installment of choral concerts presented to celebrate our country's Semiquincentennial. We began in February with *American Dreams, New Beginnings*, a program featuring immigrant composers, followed by *American Choral Classics: Stage and Screen.* Tonight's focus is on home-grown American composers from the colonial period to the present.

Cantilena opens the concert with an arrangement of *Simple Gifts*, the familiar Shaker hymn adapted by the esteemed twentieth-century American composer Aaron Copland. Although best known for his orchestral works, many of which are considered quintessential expressions of the American sound, Copland also incorporated *Simple Gifts* into his celebrated ballet score, *Appalachian Spring*, where the melody serves as the basis for a set of theme and variations. Another Copland adaptation, *Zion's Walls*, is performed by University Choir in a choral arrangement drawn from the composer's collection *Old American Songs*, which includes numerous melodies rooted in nineteenth-century American musical traditions.

The concert also features an example of eighteenth-century American choral music in an anthem by William Billings, the most significant musical figure of the colonial period. In addition to his work as a composer, Billings was a singing-school teacher and worked as a tanner. The Chorale's performance of *O Praise the Lord of Heaven* seeks to capture the distinctive character of his musical style: bold, direct, bright, clear, and articulate. Particularly characteristic is the spontaneous doubling of soprano and tenor parts in octaves during repeated sections. The energetic rhythms and optimistic character of the music evoke the vitality and hopeful spirit of the young American nation.

To buck current trends choral programming, we celebrate the twentieth century with distinguished composers whose music receives less attention in today's choral culture fixated on an over-abundance of newly composed works. The three pieces by Randall Thompson (*A Girl's Garden*, *The Last Words of David*, and *Alleluia*), as well as James Erb's *Shenandoah,* were performed often in the mid-century. How many audience members here performed these very pieces in high school for Regional, District, or All-State Choirs…or perhaps during choral tours in college?

The compositional voice of Charles Ives is arguably the most distinctive and innovative of the evening. Equally renowned for his pioneering career in the insurance industry, Ives composed music in his spare evening hours, keeping his work largely to himself under the assumption that audiences were not yet ready for it. His core mission was to forge a genuinely American musical idiom – one that captured life exactly as it was experienced around him. This meant incorporating clashing dissonances to simulate an out-of-tune reed organ accompanying a struggling congregation or layering entirely different melodies to recreate the chaotic sound of two marching bands overlapping at a Fourth of July parade. The two pieces performed tonight by Chorale vividly demonstrate these experimental techniques. The *a cappella* setting of *Sixty-Seventh Psalm* relies on bi-tonality, where the upper voices (soprano and alto) sing in C major while the lower voices (tenor and bass) simultaneously sing in G minor. By contrast, *Circus Band* is a nostalgic quick-step march. Composed in 1894 while Ives was an undergraduate at Yale and self-published in 1922, it perfectly captures the quirky energy of turn-of-the-century popular culture. Working in relative musical isolation, Ives utilized radical techniques that anticipated the avant-garde movements of later twentieth-century modernist composers by decades.

African American composers are also well represented in this repertoire. William Dawson composed both chamber music and orchestral works, achieving early recognition with his *Negro Folk Symphony*, which was premiered by Leopold Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra at Carnegie Hall in 1934. In the choral world, however, Dawson is best known for his ground-breaking approach to arranging African American Spirituals. *Ezekiel Saw de Wheel* exemplifies his compositional techniques including carefully detailed musical notation and dialectal spelling to encourages authentic performance practice, energetic rhythms, rich sonorities, and what Dominique-René de Lerma describes as a "remarkable insight into vocal potentials."

Rollo Dilworth is another prominent figure, recognized as a composer, arranger, conductor, and music educator whose works are widely published and performed. His arrangement of *Shine on Me* demonstrates a deep understanding of authentic Gospel and Spiritual traditions, reflecting the influence of composers and arrangers such as Robert Ray and Moses Hogan. From an educational perspective, the accessibility of Dilworth's arrangements provides opportunities for broader engagement with this repertoire, helping to ensure continued interest in and appreciation for the genre among future generations.

Significant contributions by female composers are also included in this program. Cantilena performs two songs by Amy Beach, one of the first prominent American women composers to achieve national and international recognition at a time when few women pursued composition professionally. Alice Parker, familiar to many through her arrangements for the Robert Shaw Chorale, is represented by a later work, *On the Common Ground* (2020). Performed by the Choral Union as the penultimate piece of the concert, the work's message of unity and shared responsibility is especially timely. Parker articulates its inspiration in her own words:

> In many New England villages there is a central green space known as The Common. Originally providing a safe overnight pasture for the villagers' cattle, the land belonged to all. This example was clear in my mind as I sought for a cure for the deep divides in our country. Surely, we, like the pioneers, can find common ground on which we can respectfully share our concerns and debate our differences. Our common heritage demands it.

The concert concludes with Peter J. Wilhousky's rousing arrangement of *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, the enduring Civil War-era anthem featuring music by William Steffe and lyrics by Julia Ward Howe. We invite you to join the Choral Union in singing the final repetition of the chorus as we bring this celebration of 250 years of American music to a spirited and memorable close!

Program

I. Cantilena Women's Choir

Simple Gifts (Shaker Song)…….....Adpt., Aaron Copland (1900-1990), Brooklyn, NY
Arr., Irving Fine (1914-1962), Boston, MA

'Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free, 'tis the gift to come down where you ought to be,
And when we find ourselves in the place just right, 'twill be in the valley of love and delight.
When true simplicity is gained, to bow and to bend we shan't be ashamed.
To turn, turn will be our delight 'till by turning, turning we come round right.

"Two Songs"
from *Three Browning Songs*…….....Amy Beach (1867-1944), Henniker, NY
Arr., Brandon Williams (b. 1981)

I. "Ah, Love, But a Day"

Ah, Love, but a day, and the world has changed! The sun's away, and the bird estranged;
The wind has dropped, and the sky's deranged; summer has stopped.
Ah, Love, but a day, and the world has changed! Look in my eyes! Will thou change too?
Should I fear surprise? Shall I find aught new in the old and dear, in the good and true,
With the changing year? Ah, Love, look in my eyes! Wilt thou change too?

II. "The Year's at the Spring"

The year's at the spring, and the day's at the morn; morning's at seven; the hillsides dew-pearled;
The Lark's on the wing; the snail's on the thorn; God's in his heaven all's right with the world!
Robert Browning (1812-1889)

"A Girl's Garden"
from *Frostiana (Seven Country Songs)*…….Randall Thompson (1899-1984), New York, NY

A neighbor of mine in the village likes to tell how one spring
When she was a girl on the farm, she did a childlike thing.
One day she asked her father to give her a garden plot
To plant and tend and reap herself and he said, 'Why not?'
In casting about for a corner he thought of an idle bit
Of walled-off ground where a shop had stood, and he said, 'Just it.'
And he said, 'That ought to make you an ideal one-girl farm,
And give you a chance to put some strength on your slim-jim arm.'
It was not enough of a garden, her father said, to plow;
So she had to work it all by hand, but she don't mind now.
She wheeled the dung in the wheelbarrow along stretch of road;
But she always ran away and left her not-nice load,
And hid from anyone passing, and then she begged the seed.
She says she thinks she planted one of all things but weed.
A hill each of potatoes, radishes, lettuce, peas,
Tomatoes, beets, beans, pumpkins, corn and even fruit trees.
And yes, she has long mistrusted that a cider apple tree

In bearing there today is hers, or at least may be.
Her crop was a miscellany when all was said and done,
A little bit of everything, a great deal of none.
Now *when she sees in the village how village things go,*
Just when it seems to come in right, she says, I know!
'It's as when I was a farmer – ' oh, never by way of advice!
And she never sins by telling the tale to the same person twice.

Robert Frost (1874-1963)

Shine on Me…….....Traditional Spiritual, arr. Rollo Dilworth (b. 1970), St. Louis, MI

Shine on me. Shine on me. I wonder if the lighthouse will shine on me.
Is a light shinin' above? Is it shinin' above in the heavens for me?
I'm wonderin' if there's a light that is shinin' above in the heaven for me.

II. Chorale

"O Praise the Lord of Heaven"
from *The Continental Harmony* (1794)……..William Billings (1746-1800), Boston, MA

O praise the Lord of heaven; praise him in the height, praise him in the depth;
O praise the Lord of heaven; praise him all ye angels, praise him Jehovah.
Praise him sun and moon and blazing comets, praise the Lord.
Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he spake the word and all were made;
He commanded and they were created; admire, adore.
Ye dragons whose contagious breath, people the dark abodes of death,
Change your dire hissings into heavenly songs and praise your maker with your forked tongues.
O praise the Lord of heaven; fire, hail and snow, wind and storms,
Beasts and cattle, creeping insects, flying fowl, kings and princes, men and angels, praise the Lord;
Jew and Gentile, male and female, bond and free, earth and heaven, land and water, praise the Lord;
Young men and maids, old men and babes, praise the Lord.
Join creation, preservation, and redemption join in one;
No exemption, nor dissention, one invention, and intention reigns through the whole to praise the Lord.
Hallelujah. Praise the Lord.

Psalm 148, interpolations by Roscommon and Billings

Alleluia.....Randall Thompson

Sixty-Seventh Psalm……..Charles E. Ives (1874-1954), Danbury CT

God be merciful unto us, and bless us; and cause his face to shine upon us;
That thy way may be known upon earth, Thy saving health among all nations.
Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee.
O let the nations be glad and sing for joy: for thou shalt judge the people righteously,
And govern the nations upon the earth. Let the people praise thee, O God; let all the people praise thee.
Then shall the earth yield her increase; and God, even our own God, shall bless us.
God shall bless us; and all the ends of the earth shall fear Him.

Circus Band……...Charles E. Ives

All summer long, we boys dreamed 'bout big circus joys!
Down Main Street, comes the band, Oh! "Ain't it a grand and glorious noise!"
Horses are prancing, Knights advancing;
Helmets gleaming, pendants streaming, Cleopatra's on her throne!
That golden hair is all her own!
Where is the lady all in pink? Last year she waved to me I think,
Can she have died? Can! that! rot! She is passing but she sees me not.
Where is the clown, that funny gink, Last year he winked at me, I think,
Can he have died? Can that rot! He's still a-winkin' but he sees me not.

Katarina Lingo and Dr. Xun Pan, piano

III. University Choir

The Last Words of David.....Randall Thompson

He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.
And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds;
As the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain. Alleluia.

II Samuel XXIII: 3, 4

Shenandoah.....American Folk Song, arr. James Erb (1926-2014), La Junta, CO

O Shenando', I long to see you, and hear your rolling river,
O Shenando', I long to see you, 'way we're bound away, across the wide Missouri.
I long to see your smiling valley, and hear your rolling river,
I long to see your smiling valley, 'way, we're bound away, across the wide Missouri.
'Tis sev'n long years since last I see you, and hear your rolling river,
'Tis seven long years since last I see you, 'Way we're bound away, across the wide Missouri.

Zion's Walls (Revivalist Song).....Adpt., Aaron Copland,
Arr., Glenn Koponen (1943-2021)

Come fathers and mothers, come sisters and brothers,
Come join us in singing the praises of Zion.
O fathers don't you feel determined to meet within the walls of Zion.
We'll shout and go round the walls of Zion.

Note: original melody and words credited to John G. McCurry, compiler of the *Social Harp* (1855).
Published by George P. Jackson in *Down East Spirituals* (1943).

Ezekiel Saw de Wheel.....Traditional Spiritual, arr. William Dawson (1899-1990), Anniston, AL

Jemai Mallory, soloist

IV. Choral Union

On the Common Ground.....Alice Parker (1925-2023), Boston, MA

Help me, Lord, find the common ground between the high and the low, between the poor and the rich,
Between the old and the young, between the black and the white.
Help me find the common ground between the shouting and the silence,
Between the bound and the free, between the grief and the joy, between the heart and the mind.
Open us, Lord, guide us to that meeting place, where we can see each other, hear each other, care for each other.
Where we can sing together, work together, play together on the common ground.
Come, let us meet together on the common ground.

Alice Parker

Michael Orth and Teanna Fogle, soloists

Battle Hymn of the Republic.....William Steffe (1830-1890), SC
Arr., Peter J. Wilhousky (1925-2023)

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword: He truth is marching on. Gloria!
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! His truth is marching on.
I have seen Him in the watchfires of a hundred circling camps;
They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps;
I can read His righteous sentence in the dim and flaring lamps, His day is marking on!
In the beauty of the lilies, Christ was born across the sea,
With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me;
As He died to make me holy, let us die to make men free, while God is marching on.
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!
Glory! Glory! Hallelujah! His truth is marching on! Amen! Amen!

Julia Ward Howe, (1819-1910)

PERFORMING PERSONNEL

CANTILENA CHOIR

Dr. Jeffrey S. Gemmell, conductor

Eva Anderson
Lyn Bingaman
Ava Bird
Kaylie Boas
Lydia Burke
Gianna Carbone
Kate Cieri
Victoria Dorsch
Isabelle Ebersole
Zoey Fizz
Teeanna Fogle
Rachel Francis
Fiona Grim
Anna Hennessy
Lilly Houck
Ella Hughes
Kylie Hunt
Maria Kelly
Ava Kurtzman
Madalyn Miller
Natalia Miller
Makena Okamoto
Dana Raugh
Charlie Reisse
Catherine Samer
Molly Schaeffer
Nenea Schimek
Olivia Shaheen
Eva Shaw
Morgan Shultz
Cameron Smeltz
Bozhena Sobkevych
Felicia Spinks
Emily Stinchfield
Ava Zink

CHORALE

Dr. Jeffrey S. Gemmell, conductor

Soprano
Emma Agis
Katarina Lingo
Molly O'Shea
Dana Raugh
Sarah Rothermel
Madelyn Stern
Katerina Zdrojewski

Alto
Hannah Buckbee
Teeanna Fogle
Abbey Giughlo
Leah Halcisak
Madalyn Miller
Caris Rolph
Celia Romero

Tenor
Blake Atkins
Grayson Conrad
Donovan Fox
Nicholas Keilholtz
Xavier Polite
Roberto Santana
Michael Tchernev

Bass
Jackson Cogle
Ezekiel MacCloskey
Mathieu Moore
Liam Moss
Michael Orth
Samuel Pedersen
Anthony Ramos Calderon
Lucas Sinkinson

UNIVERSITY CHOIR

Dr. Jeffrey S. Gemmell, conductor

Soprano
Emma Agis
Ava Bird
Lydia Burke
Isabelle Conicella
Sarah Criswell
Isabelle Erb
Zoey Fizz
Maggie Fogleman
Alec Gartner
Renae Greak
Sarah Hamm
Lilly Houck
Zining Hu
Kylie Hunt
Dana Raugh
Charlie Reisse
Grace Ritter
Ava Rodriguez
Vera Roth
Molly Schaeffer
Noah Schenke
Charlotte Schnur
Johanna Snyder
Bozhena Sobkevych
Devin Sparwasser
Katerina Zdrojewski

Alto
Astra Bathjer
Alyssa Brodsky
Jocelyn Cornwall
Angelica Cressley
Liora Cheek
Teeanna Fogle
Keith Gangewere
Kaiya Haas
Talia Hall
Jaden Hoffman
Ayla Holgate
Isabelle Honabach
Kirsten Lindemuth
Jemai Mallory
Madalyn Miller
Grace Naughton
Makena Okamoto
Molly O'Shea
Jozie Papcun
Genesis Pichardo
Elliana Roberti
Caris Rolph
Kennedy Seigler-Lewis
Naomi Sharpless
Natalie Spagnoletti
Madelyn Stern
Madison Sweeney
Rain Yagüé Cowfer

Tenor
Jayvion Allison
Jackson Baker
Isaiah Baughman
Enzo Bellini
Ricardo Carrero Bonilla
Jackson Cogle
Daniel D'Albora
Alex Dewhirst
Donavan Fox
Timothy Grundy
Eamon Helfrich
Nicholas Keilholtz
Conley LaPratt
Adrian Medina
Samuel Messersmith
Dakota Shertzer
Michael Seidick
Elliott Stabler
Liam Ventrella

Bass
Nicholas Albano
Enrique Angeles
Timothy Breckbill
Justin Davis
Joaquin De Los Rios
Lucas De Los Rios
Trevor Engel
Robert Harden
Samuel Heebner
Rohit Kandala
Jaydon King
Tyler Leakway
Callum MacCloskey
Mathieu Moore
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Jackson Parr
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