

## Program Notes

Audiences attending past **Capitol Hill Chorale** concerts know that Artistic Director Fred Binkholder and the Chorale love performing with other musicians – be they small instrumental ensembles, large orchestras, or solo singers. On only a couple of occasions has the Chorale collaborated with another vocal ensemble. So, in the spirit of friendship, the theme of this season's Chorale concerts, the Chorale is excited to share the stage with new friends, **Voce Chamber Singers** and its Artistic Director, Richard Giarusso.

A collaboration between these two ensembles grew out of a collegial relationship that has developed between Fred Binkholder and Dr. Giarusso, a bond between Artistic Directors not common in the music world, the kind of relationship that leads to a “wouldn't it be fun if we ...” conversation that can spark the artistic process. The result we think will be a rare chance to hear a rich and diverse blend of choral music as performed by these two groups, together and separately, one ensemble of almost 100 voices, the other of 30. The pieces on the program vary from 1 voice to 6, 7, and 8 voices, and vary in texture from thick and contrapuntal to a more spare choral sound. Works on the program span over 400 years, include the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the middle and late 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, the 20<sup>th</sup>, and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

Opening the concert are two works which the groups will perform together in double choir. “Helig” is a relatively short piece for 8 voices which Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy (1809-1847) wrote in the year before his death. Some have suggested that the opening tiered vocal entrances of “Helig” suggest Mendelssohn's appreciation for Baroque and Renaissance composers, such as Claudio Monteverdi (1567-1643). ....Who happens to be the composer of the next work on the program, “Ave Maris Stella,” a setting of an 8<sup>th</sup> century hymn to the Virgin Mary from Monteverdi's monumental *Vespro della Beata Vergine*, (*the Vespers of 1610*). In the concert's second half, **Voce** will present an elegant setting of the same text written in 1893 by the Norwegian composer, Edvard Grieg (1843-2007), who is best known for his orchestral and piano music, but reveals here a facility for rich choral texture. The two ensembles will also join together at the end of the concert for a final piece, Anton Bruckner's (1824-1896) “Ave Maria gratia plena,” a 7-part motet to the Virgin Mary that Bruckner wrote in 1861 when Bruckner's career was just beginning to blossom.

The first half of the program features two large works by German-speaking composers, sung by each ensemble individually, one from the height of 19<sup>th</sup> century German Romanticism, the other in a neoclassical style that emerged after World War I in reaction. The 100 voices of the **Chorale** will perform the 4 “six-voiced” motets, Opus 133 by Joseph Gabriel Rheinberger (1839-1901) written in 1881 in Munich, where Rheinberger was a church musician, organ professor, renowned teacher, and choral conductor. Perhaps the greatest composer ever born in Liechtenstein (where he is buried), Rheinberger is appreciated now largely as a composer for organ, but his choral works are favorites of Director Binkholder and the Chorale.

Paul Hindemith (1895-1963) near Frankfurt Germany, fought in WWI, and emigrated first to Switzerland and then, in 1940, to the United States, where he taught primarily at Yale. As a composer, he was a leader in the movement to escape German Romanticism, which for Hindemith, meant looking to “pre-Romantic” traditions (especially music of the Renaissance and Baroque) for

influence. In doing so, Hindemith's compositional outlook places him in line with "neoclassicists" like Stravinsky, Ravel, Milhaud, and Poulenc—all of whom were working in Paris at this time and whose music reflected the post-war "spirit" of French music. In forging this new style, Hindemith looked not only to earlier styles but also to international styles. **Voce's** 30 voices will perform a prominent example -- his *Six Chansons*, a set of short, a cappella part songs, that offer a twentieth-century gloss on the sixteenth-century French chanson. Written in the late 1930s and first performed by a Swiss choir, the complex national identity of the *Six Chansons* is further complicated by their texts—a set of poems in French by Rainer Maria Rilke, the Prague-born writer most famous for his German poetry.

Each of the ensembles has made a special point of working with composers in the commissioning of new works. The **Chorale** will be performing four works by Boston-based composer, Kevin Siegfried. Although Dr. Siegfried became the Chorale's Composer-in-Residence in March 2014, the Chorale has premiered a number of major new works by Dr. Siegfried (b. 1969) over a 10 year period, including *I sing of a maiden* (December 2007), *Child of Earth, Cantata, op. 35* (June 2011), *Angels Hovering 'Round* (March 2014), and *Angel of Light, Cantata, op. 46* (June 2015). Today's program includes another premiere and Capitol Hill Chorale commission from Dr. Siegfried, "Consolation," with text by Isaac Watts. Other works on the program by Dr. Siegfried include "Annunciation" (2011), "Vidi Aquam" (2013) commissioned by St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Annandale, VA, where Director Binkholder is Minister of Music, and "Star of Purity", one of the many Shaker hymns that Dr. Siegfried has arranged, which were the focus of the Chorale's June 2015 concert, *Harmony of Angels*.

Since its founding in 1989, **Voce** has also been committed to the cultivation and performance of contemporary choral music, including an active commissioning program. In particular, Voce has developed in recent years a close relationship with New York-based composer Matthew Harris (b. 1956), whose setting of e.e. cummings's "i love you much," was commissioned and premiered by Voce in 2013. Harris's vivid setting of cummings's text has since been published by Peters and recorded by Kantorei of Kansas City on the Resonant Classics label. Voce is grateful to the Winter-Skerritt family, whose generous support over the years enabled the commissioning of this piece.

**Voce** will also be presenting three pieces by 20<sup>th</sup> masters, Samuel Barber (1910-1981), Henryk Górecki (1933-2010), and Pierre Villette (1926-1998). *Reincarnations* is one of Barber's most often-performed choral pieces. It was written between 1936 and 1940, when Barber was directing a new vocal ensemble at the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia. The texts are by Irish writer, James Stephens built on (or 'reincarnating') the style of earlier Gaelic poets, around which, Stephens writes, he has "blown a bubble of verse and made my poem."

"Totus tuus" is a motet that demonstrates the "sacred minimalist" style of Polish composer Henryk Górecki, a style often linked also with Estonian mystic, Arvo Pärt, and the English composer, Sir John Tavener. Built on simple triadic harmonies and a series of short, repeating melodies, the piece takes on a meditative quality that mirrors the intensely personal tone of the devotional text by Maria Boguslawska. Górecki wrote the piece in honor of his countryman, Pope John Paul II, and it was first performed in 1987 at a papal mass in Victory Square, Warsaw, during the former pontiff's third visit to his homeland.

“Hymne à la vierge” is undoubtedly the best-known work of French composer Pierre Villette, its graceful melodic contours and iridescent harmonies the discernable influence of Villette’s teacher, Maurice Duruflé. The piece has been popularized in recent years by its frequent inclusion on the famous Service of Lessons and Carols from King’s College, Cambridge, but it is only one of a distinguished series of choral works by Villette that is just now beginning to come into wider circulation.

- Parker Jayne, with notes by Dr. Richard Giarusso