

Williams College Choirs Fall Concert November 17th, 7:30pm

Director's Note

Tonight's concert from the Williams Choirs features music that explores the concept of fun. In a world full of brokenness and suffering, the word "fun" often feels like a bit of a taboo. We may feel afraid of falling victim to the crime of triviality in a time when so much seems to need our undivided attention and seriousness. But I would argue that it is precisely in these moments of chaos and pain that fun is most necessary. You will notice that not every piece on this program is happy or joyful; I believe that "fun" doesn't necessarily need to correspond to a particular mood or feeling. For me, it represents a state of being rather than an emotion – a state of being in which you are in touch with yourself and with those around you, and you are living entirely in the moment.

Each year, the Williams Choirs pair one of their concerts with a community engagement project. This fall, the choirs are focusing their efforts on the Elizabeth Freeman Center. EFC is the front line and major safety net in our community for victims of domestic abuse seeking safety and a new life. The members of the choir felt that this was a perfect place to support through our concert, since no one can experience fun without a place of safety. If you feel moved by tonight's performance, we encourage you to donate to EFC via the QR code below.

Additionally, on Sunday November 19th, the choir will hold a community event at Williamstown Elementary School from 2-3pm. We will be reprising a few pieces from this concert alongside crafts, snacks, and a community art project. We will also be accepting donations for EFC. They are most in need of baby wipes, shampoo and conditioner (especially for Black hair), travel bottles of lotion, and chapstick. We hope that this will be an opportunity to connect more directly with the members of our community, especially those who might feel wary of attending a more "formal" concert like this one.

One of my goals in crafting this concert was to include a variety of music from different cultures and musical styles. Tonight you will hear music from Bulgaria, India, South Africa, America, Finland, and Germany. As part of our learning process, the choirs spent some time discussing issues surrounding cultural appropriation and how to approach music from marginalized communities and cultures to which we do not belong. There are no easy answers to these questions, but I believe that it is more than worthwhile to grapple with them, especially if it means bringing this incredible music to a wider audience. The choirs would especially like to thank the Davis Center for their work with us this semester.

Below, you will find texts, translations, and a few notes for the pieces on tonight's program. I have not given contextual information for every piece, mostly because I hope that you will spend most of your time listening, rather than reading! But I felt a few of the pieces required some additional context to aid in your enjoyment and understanding.

We thank you again for attending tonight's concert, and we wish you an evening of fun, community, and incredible music.



Texts, Translations, and Notes

Tuttarana

The title of this piece is a conglomeration of two words: the Italian word ‘tutti’, means ‘all’ or ‘everyone’, and the term ‘tarana’ designates a specific Hindustani (North Indian) musical form, whose closest Western counterpart is the ‘scat’ in jazz. Made up of rhythmic syllables, a tarana is the singer’s chance to display agility and dexterity. While a Hindustani tarana is a solo form, I wanted to bring the tarana into an ensemble setting.

Tuttarana was commissioned by the Mount Holyoke College Glee Club for their 2014-15 season, and has since been performed across the US, also in arrangements for SATB and brass quintet.

-Reena Esmail

Panda Chant

“Panda Chant” is a section from *The Games: a science fiction opera* by Merdith Monk and Ping Chong, which was originally created for the Schaubühne Ensemble of West Berlin. Monk composed the music and also collaborated with Ping Chong on the scenario, choreography, and direction. Set on an imaginary planet, *The Games* takes place in a post-nuclear future where survivors and their descendants are involved in the repetition of ritual games re-enacting Earth’s culture in order to preserve the shards of civilization. Coming at the middle of the opera, “Panda Chant” is an energetic ritual performed by the whole community as preparation for the third game, Memory. *The Games* won the National Music Theatre Award in 1986.

Lobet den Herrn

Lobet den Herrn, alle Heiden;
preiset ihn, alle Völker!
Denn seine Gnade und Wahrheit
waltet über uns in Ewigkeit.
Alleluja!

O praise the Lord, all ye nations:
praise him, all ye peoples.
For his merciful kindness is evermore towards
us: and the truth of the Lord endureth forever.
Alleluia!

Psalm 117: 1-2

Say Something

Say something, I'm giving up on you
I'll be the one, if you want me to
Anywhere, I would've followed you
Say something, I'm giving up on you
And I am feeling so small
It was over my head
I know nothing at all

And I will stumble and fall
I'm still learning to love
Just starting to crawl
Say something, I'm giving up on you
I'm sorry that I couldn't get to you
Anywhere, I would've followed you
Say something, I'm giving up on you
And I will swallow my pride
You're the one that I love
And I'm saying goodbye
Say something, I'm giving up on you
And I'm sorry that I couldn't get to you
And anywhere, I would have followed you
Oh-oh, say something, I'm giving up on you
Say something, I'm giving up on you
Say something

Ian Axel and Chad King

A Boy and A Girl

Stretched out on the grass
A boy and a girl
Savoring their oranges
Giving their kisses like waves exchanging foam

Stretched out on the beach
A boy and a girl
Savoring their limes
Giving their kisses like clouds exchanging foam

Stretched out underground
A boy and a girl
Saying nothing, never kissing
Giving silence for silence

Octavio Paz, 1914-1998
English Translation by Muriel Rukeyser, 1913-1980

Kaval Sviri

In 1975, Swiss ethnomusicologist Marcel Cellier released an album featuring the Bulgarian State Television Female Vocal Choir singing arrangements of traditional Bulgarian folk songs. The singers for the choir were chosen from villages around the country and trained in traditional

Bulgarian singing technique. Though this original recording only reached a small audience, it was re-released in the 1980s on the Nonesuch label to wide acclaim, and a sequel album went on to win a Grammy in 1989. Kaval Sviri was one of the pieces on this sequel album, entitled *Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares, Vol. 2*. This traditional song, arranged for choir by ethnomusicologist and composer, Petar Liondev, tells the story of a young girl who is enticed by the sound of a kaval (a type of flute) near the village. To prepare to sing this piece, the sopranos and altos in the Concert Choir relied heavily on video instruction from Dessislava Stefanova, the founder and leader of the London Bulgarian Choir. The choir members feel privileged to have spent time learning about and exploring this unique and powerful singing style.

Кавал свири, мамо,
горе доле, мамо, горе доле, мамо.
Кавал свири мамо,
горе доле, мамо, под селото.

A flute (kaval) is playing, mother,
up, down, mother, up, down, mother.
A kaval is playing, mother,
up, down, mother, near the village.

Я ще ида, мамо, да го видя,
да го видя, мамо, да го чуя.

I will go, mother, to see it,
to see it, mother, to hear it.

Ако ми е нашенчето
ще го любя ден до пладне,
Ако ми е ябанджийче
ще го любя дор до живот.

If it's someone from our village
I'll love him only for a short time,
If it's a foreigner (i.e. from another village)
I'll love him all my life.

Bulgarian folk song

Tshotsholoza

Often referred to as the “unofficial” anthem of South Africa, Tshotsholoza is a freedom song originally sung by the mixed tribes of gold miners in South Africa. Its text is a mix of Zulu and Ndebele, and is sung in a call and response style. In his autobiography, Nelson Mandela references singing this song during his imprisonment on Robben Island, and describes it as “a song that compares the apartheid struggle to the motion of an oncoming train.” It was brought to more recent and global attention at the 2010 World Cup, when the South African football team sang it as they entered the field. The choir would like to thank Tendai Muparutsa for his guidance in our learning and performance of this piece.

Tshotsholoza
He kulezon taba
Stimela si phu me South Afrika

Go forward
From those mountains
On this train from South Africa

Wen`u ya ba leka
He kulezon taba
stimela si phu me South Afrika

You are running away
From those mountains
On this train from South Africa

South African folk song

Shenandoah

Oh, Shenandoah, I long to see you
And hear your rolling river
Oh, Shenandoah, 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 seven long years since last I've seen you
And hear your rolling river
'Tis seven long years since last I've seen you
way, we're bound away
Across the wide Missouri.

Appalachian folk song

Tell me where is fancy bred

Tell me where is fancy bred,
Or in the heart or in the head?
How begot, how nourished?

Reply, reply.

It is engender'd in the eyes,
With gazing fed; and fancy dies
In the cradle, where it lies.

Let us all ring fancy's knell;
I'll begin it – Ding, dong, bell.

Ding, dong, bell.

*William Shakespeare
The Merchant of Venice, Act III, Scene 2*

Come away death

Come away, come away, death,
And in sad cypress let me be laid.
Fly away, fly away, breath;
I am slain by a fair cruel maid.
My shroud of white, stuck all with yew,

O, prepare it!
My part of death, no one so true
Did share it.

Not a flower, not a flower sweet,
On my black coffin let there be strown.
Not a friend, not a friend greet
My poor corpse, where my bones shall be thrown.
A thousand thousand sighs to save,
Lay me, O, where
Sad true lover never find my grave,
To weep there!

William Shakespeare
Twelfth Night, Act II, Scene 4

Double, double toil and trouble

As the choir and I prepared this thrilling setting of Shakespeare's famous witchy chant from *Macbeth*, we struggled to grapple with the line "Liver of blaspheming Jew." Though antisemitic rhetoric is certainly not unusual in written work from this time period, the current conflict in the Middle East meant that this line felt particularly uncomfortable to sing. We would like to thank Professor Jonathan Baldo from the Eastman School of Music for giving us some additional context around Shakespeare, antisemitism in Elizabethan England, and this particular line.

Jews were expelled from England in 1290 and not legally allowed to return until 1656, some 40 years after Shakespeare's death. The few Jews in Shakespeare's London were mostly from Portugal, and had to convert to the state religion in order to remain in the country. One of them was Roderigo Lopez, Queen Elizabeth's personal physician. In 1581 he was accused, most likely falsely, of attempting to poison the Queen, and was publicly executed. After his execution, which Shakespeare may have witnessed firsthand, there was a revival of Christopher Marlowe's crudely anti-semitic play *The Jew of Malta*. Shortly after, Shakespeare probably wrote *The Merchant of Venice*. There are many possible readings of *Merchant*, but some scholars believe that it may have been written in response to Lopez's execution and the revival of Marlowe's play in an attempt to expose and critique antisemitism and the hypocritical scapegoating practiced by Shylock's enemies.

Anti-semitism thrived in Elizabethan England, and Jewish characters in literature were almost always depicted as villainous, or indeed "blaspheming." Shylock is one such example, though he can be seen as a particularly complex instance. Like *Othello*, *Merchant of Venice* can be seen as either reinforcing or challenging vicious racial and cultural stereotypes – most likely both.

This particular reference to Jewishness in *Macbeth* comes within a string of particularly vicious cultural references: Shakespeare also uses as ingredients in the witches' potion body parts of the Turks (a predominantly Muslim population) and the Tartars (also Muslim, some Christian Orthodox). It seems pertinent to note that this moment in the play features a group of outsiders

(the witches themselves) disparaging other outsiders. Did Shakespeare mean to be deliberately provocative with these references at this moment in the play? It's hard to say. The witches are certainly meant to be viewed as repulsive and evil characters, so it is not hard to imagine a hardened anti-Semite in Shakespeare's time being alarmed to hear his own thoughts reflected by such a person.

Ultimately, we cannot know exactly what Shakespeare was thinking when he wrote these words, but it is undeniable that blatant antisemitism, whether in Shakespeare's own heart or in his wider community, played a significant role. I know for this reason, even with the context above, many of us will still feel discomfort as the choir sings these words. Art is, after all, intimately intertwined with humanity, and human beings are flawed, complicated creatures. But I also believe that when we acknowledge our discomfort, arm ourselves with knowledge, and approach these moments with compassion for one another, the power of these harmful words over us is lessened.

Thrice the brinded cat hath mew'd
Thrice and once the hedge-pig whined
Harpier cries 'Tis time, 'tis time
Round about the cauldron go;
In the poison'd entrails throw
Toad, that under cold stone
Days and nights has thirty-one
Swelter'd venom sleeping got
Boil thou first in the charmed pot

Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn, and cauldron bubble
Fillet of a fenny snake
In the cauldron boil and bake;
Eye of newt and toe of frog
Wool of bat and tongue of dog
Adder's fork and blind-worm's sting
Lizard's leg and owlet's wing
For a charm of powerful trouble
Like a hell-broth boil and bubble

Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn and cauldron bubble

Scale of dragon, tooth of wolf
Witches' mummy, maw and gulf
Of the ravin'd salt-sea shark
Root of hemlock digg'd in dark
Liver of blaspheming Jew
Gall of goat, and slips of yew

Silver'd in the moon's eclipse
Nose of Turk and Tartar's lips
Finger of birth-strangled babe
Ditch-deliver'd by a drab
Make the gruel thick and slab:
Add thereto a tiger's chaudron
For the ingredients of our cauldron

Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn and cauldron bubble

By the pricking of my thumbs
Something wicked this way comes
Open locks, whoever knocks

*William Shakespeare
Macbeth, Act IV, Scene 1*

My Soul's Been Anchored in the Lord

In our work with the Davis Center this semester, the choir read excerpts from W.E.B. Du Bois's *The Souls of Black Folk* and discussed how it related to our experience of singing this particular spiritual. In one of the passages we examined, Du Bois says, “the Negro folk-song—the rhythmic cry of the slave—stands to-day not simply as the sole American music, but as the most beautiful expression of human experience born this side the seas. It has been neglected, it has been, and is, half despised, and above all it has been persistently mistaken and misunderstood; but notwithstanding, it still remains as the singular spiritual heritage of the nation and the greatest gift of the Negro people.”

The history of this very institution is heavily intertwined with the suffering of Black people. Our own founder, Ephraim Williams Jr., was himself a slave owner. Performing this music on this campus means we must wrestle with this troublesome history. The choir acknowledges and mourns the college's troubled past and the wrongs that it has brought upon the Black community and other marginalized people. At the same time, we rejoice in sharing and uplifting this “most beautiful expression of human experience born this side the seas.”

In the Lord, in the Lord,
My soul's been anchored in the Lord.
Before I'd stay in hell one day,
My soul's been anchored in the Lord;
I'd sing and pray myself away,
My soul's been anchored in the Lord.
I'm going to pray and never stop,
My soul's been anchored in the Lord;
Until I've reached the mountain top,
My soul's been anchored in the Lord.

African-American Spiritual

By Night

Deep in the tarn the mountain
A mighty phantom gleamed,

She leaned out into the midnight,
And the summer wind went by,
The scent of the rose
on its silken wing
And a song its sigh.

And, in depths below, the waters
Answered some mystic height,
As a star stooped out
of the depths above
With its lance of light.

And she thought, in the dark
and the fragrance,
How vast was the wonder wrought
If the sweet world
were but the beauty born
In its Maker's thought.

Harriet Prescott Spofford