



Women of Note
PRESENTS
**THE LIGHT OF
HOPE RETURNING**

*A Folk Oratorio for the Winter Solstice
of Traditional Carols & New Winter Carols*

Music by Shawn Kirchner
Artwork by Kevork Mourad
Featuring Patricia Hunter

December 10 at 3:00 pm
At The United Church in Meadowood

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Women of Note

Presents

The Light of Hope Returning

A Folk Oratorio for Winter Solstice

Composer: Shawn Kirchner

Video Animation: Kevork Mourad

Sunday, December 10, 2023

The United Church in Meadowood

Founder/Artistic Director: Patricia Rabson

Accompanists: Megan Dufurat, Kimberly Lapatha

WoN Soloists: Elena Mallin, Jodi Robillard

Choir Manager: Anne Burns

Special Guests:

Reader: Patricia Hunter

Musicians:

Flute: Anna Torquato

Violin: Paul Baek

Cello: Cadence Penner

Bass: Ian Olson

Alto Saxophone: Kyle Wedlake

Live-to-Music Artist: Karen Santos

PROGRAM

To ensure continuity in this beautiful tale of The Light of Hope Returning, please hold your applause until the Intermission (after #10) and until the end of the Finale (after #19). Thank you!

I WELCOME

1. How Have You Come This Night?
2. The Light of Hope Returning

II THE MORNING STAR

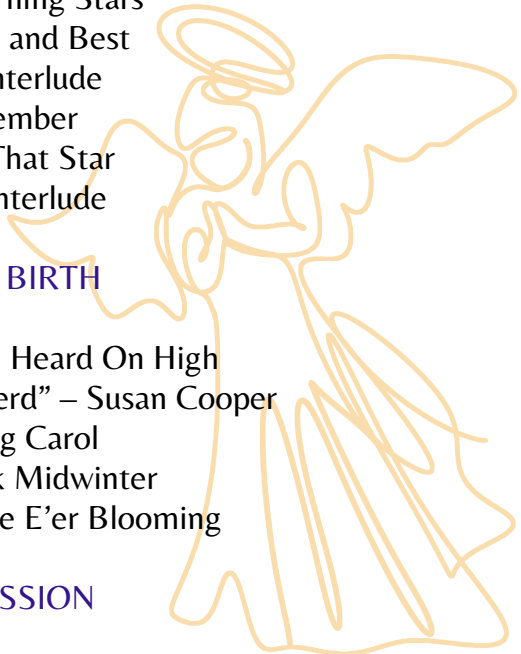
~Reading: "Morning" – Judith Corday

3. Bright Morning Stars
4. Brightest and Best
- 4.5 Midwinterlude
5. Remember
6. Behold That Star
- 6.5 Midwinterlude

III AT THE BIRTH

7. Angels We Have Heard On High
- ~Reading: "The Shepherd" – Susan Cooper
8. Rocking Carol
 9. In the Bleak Midwinter
 10. Lo, How a Rose E'er Blooming

INTERMISSION

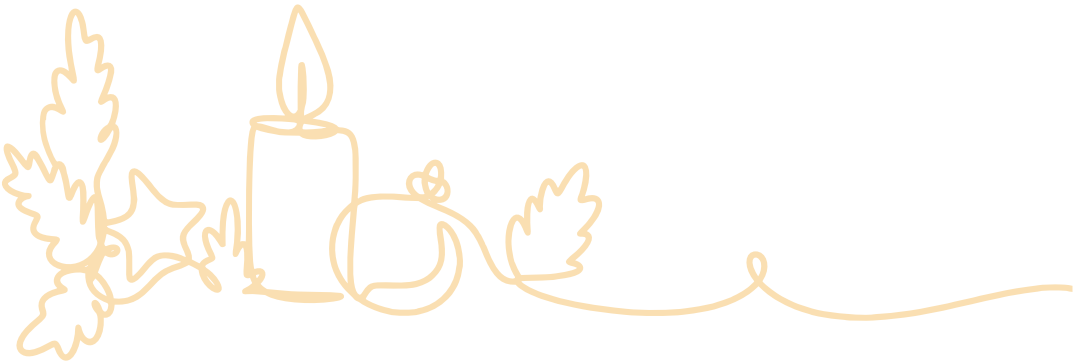


IV A SIGN OPPOSED

11. What Shall Befall You?
 12. Little Rose
13. Green Grows the Holly
14. Coventry Carol 1591
 - 14.5. Anna's Interlude
- ~Reading: "Anna" – SLK
15. A Coventry Carol
16. The Tyrant's Rage
- ~Reading "Revelations of Divine Love" – Julian of Norwich
- 17: Holy World
- ~Reading (reprise): "Morning" – Judith Corday
18. Reprise: Bright Morning Stars

V Parting

19. Fare Ye Well, Come What May / Reprise: The Light of Hope Returning
20. (Encore) Children, Go Where I Send Thee



PROGRAM NOTES FOR THE LIGHT OF HOPE RETURNING

Hope Itself

"Hope" is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words
And never stops - at all -

As in these words of Emily Dickinson, hope is often associated with lightness - the lightness of a hollow-boned bird, able to rise above the realities of earth, and to fly into an imagined future. Or the lightness of bird's call, faint but sure, as night gives way to the dawn.

But the hope we sing of in The Light of Hope Returning is not a hope of airy lightness; it has the light and heat and cheer of a crackling, blazing fire in a communal hearth. It has the powerful, heart-lifting light of a distant star that is actually, up close, an unimaginable furnace of fire. It is allied with the basic driving force in the universe that turns the galaxies, forms the planets, and spurs the countless generations as Life finds an ever-forward way. This hope is our Life-force, the fire that burns at our core, our DNA-level birthright, the momentum of God within us: our unstoppable will to survive, thrive, and create.

The Meaning

The Light of Hope Returning could be described as a Solstice "Lessons and Carols" or a Christmas "folk oratorio." But in a broader way, it is simply part of a centuries-old midwinter tradition of festive concerts, pageants, parties, services, and caroling that we somehow need to mark our year, raise our spirits, renew our bonds, and re-center our priorities. What sets The Light of Hope Returning apart,

perhaps, is the intentionality with which it invites us to place our own personal "temporal" journeys into the larger "eternal" cycles marked by our midwinter festivals: the cycle of seasons (Solstice), the cycle of the year (New Year's), and the cycle of birth and renewal (Christmas).

Thematically, the Light of Hope also explores the eternal "oppositions" that - whether we like it or not- coexist in an essential dynamic without which the "wheels of the world" would not turn: light and dark, life and death, heat and cold, old and new. One aspect of this oppositional dynamic comes to life in the work's two central, contrasting archetypes: the destructive Tyrant King, an embodiment of cruel-hearted Winter, and the welcoming Wise Woman, in tune with the "eternal" rhythms of the world, who knows full well that light will come again out of darkness, and life from death, and spring from winter.

Constructed in the form of a cathartic ritual in five parts, The Light of Hope Returning invites us to witness the rebirth of light at the hour of greatest darkness, and to find our hope again. First we are welcomed unconditionally to "sit awhile" and given a place near the blazing fire. Then, in section 2, carols of The Morning Star raise an image of hope, but a hope that is as yet out of reach - or perhaps forgotten, faint as a memory, and far away as a distant star. But the star draws near, and in section 3, carols of the Birth invite us to join the shepherds' journey to greet the newborn Child.

After intermission, in section 4, The Sign Opposed, we feel the force of "opposition" to this new life and light, as the powers of winter and darkness wax to the full. The archetypal Tyrant king responds with wrath to the threat posed by Child -the sign of the New Order - and all must flee to escape harm. But at the hour of greatest darkness, the light returns. At the hour of great destruction, a deeper hope is found. Life absorbs the greatest blow...and goes on. Cathartic journey complete, we come to section 5, the Parting, where we are sent on our way with power and purpose into the New Year, and with the invitation to meet again at the next "turning of the year."



The Music

The Light of Hope Returning is modelled after Folkjul: A Swedish Folk Christmas, in which traditional Scandinavian carols for choir and folk soloists are inventively combined with folk fiddling and brilliant organ improvisations by Gunnar Idenstam. Our project aims to reflect the American folk heritage, and as such brings together strands of Appalachian and Shape Note traditions with Gospel and Spiritual traditions, along with faint echoes of the folk roots of the British Isles.

The fiddle and string bass get toes tapping on "Brightest and Best" and bluegrass banjo-like rhythms sparkle on "Angels We Have Heard on High." Gospel-style piano undergirds "Behold That Star," and "Holy World," and saxophone solos soar above gospel grooves in "Lo, how a Rose" and "Children, Go Where I Send Thee". Folk-style fiddling is heard on the violin and cello as a "midwinter motif" leads us through the work's many transitions. And the hammered dulcimer lends its unique ring and shimmer at special moments.

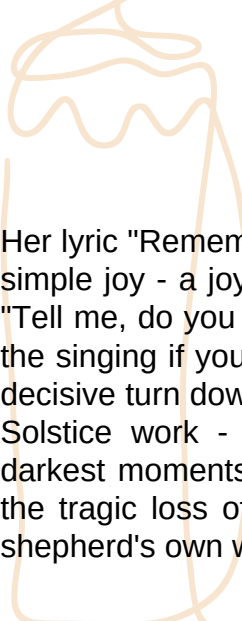
Settings of traditional carols and songs appear alongside an equal number of original carols and songs. One "hybrid" addition is a new modal melody for the beloved Christmas text "In the Bleak Midwinter". Another unusual element is a song for an archetypal "Tyrant King" actually sourced by a tyrant king; King Henry VIII's own carol "Green Grow 'th the Holly" is the basis for the new, rousing winter carol that opens the concert's second half.



The Words

The writer Susan Cooper, vibrantly creative at age eighty-four, has become a sort of "matriarch" for The Light of Hope Returning project, providing it with an anchoring inspiration. She is uniquely qualified to supply Solstice texts; her acclaimed young adult series *The Dark is Rising* tells the story of eleven-year-old Will Stanton, who on his December 21st birthday "awakens" to find himself at the centre of the great, age-old struggle of Light and Dark. Cooper was also a long-time collaborator with the late John Langstaff, whose Christmas Revels have become an enduring American tradition of Winter Solstice festivities.

Cooper's lyric "*The Light of Hope Returning*" has a special role in the work, opening and closing it with a strong dose of cheer, and aptly capturing the work's essence. Its refrain reads:



For here is the bright fire burning,
And here is the old year turning,
So shall we stay to greet the day,
And the light of hope returning.

Her lyric "Remember" is a touching, nostalgic reflection on an earlier time of simple joy - a joy that has perhaps been lost, but may yet be found again: "Tell me, do you remember? It was many years ago, but you still may hear the singing if you try." But it is Cooper's third text contribution that marks a decisive turn down a deeper path, and distinguishes *The Light of Hope* as a Solstice work - broaching the subject of life's greatest challenges and darkest moments. In the "The Shepherd" she weaves a realistic thread of the tragic loss of a lamb into the timeless tale of the Nativity, told in the shepherd's own words.

Symmetrically balancing "The Shepherd" in the concert's second half is a newly-written dramatic reading for another character from the Nativity narrative: Anna the Prophetess (In a lovely coincidence, the Biblical account includes Anna's age, the same as Cooper's this year: eighty-four.) Anna recounts the story of her long life, crowned by her greeting of the Holy Child, and her warning to flee the backlash of the Tyrant's threat.

In an archetypal way, perhaps Anna is the figure of Hope itself - that part of us that never leaves "the Temple," that never gives up. Or as in Dickinson's words, the part of us that "sings the tune without the words / and never stops at all". This steadfastness is equally echoed in words at the work's climax by the English anchoress, Julian of Norwich, and in the words from the American poet Judith Cordary that bring the work full circle, in a perfect Solstice phrase:

Each day now,
the world darkening toward zero,
I rise more early,
just to know that first uncertain blue.
Moving toward night,
I grow more morning

~Shawn Kirchner, 11/26/19



Composer

Shawn Kirchner (b.1970) is a composer and songwriter active in the musical circles of Los Angeles. His choral compositions are performed throughout the United States and abroad. In addition to composing, songwriting has become a career focus for Kirchner in recent years. His songs combine emotional warmth with carefully crafted lyrics, and are written in a range of styles including bluegrass, folk, country, gospel and jazz. Kirchner's bluegrass and country songs can be heard on the CD Meet Me on the Mountain, and his original jazz tunes are featured in club and concert performances of the Shawn Kirchner Quartet.

Kirchner also maintains an active performing career as a singer and pianist. A tenor with the Los Angeles Master Chorale, he sings regularly with the Chorale and the Los Angeles Philharmonic at Disney Hall and at the Hollywood Bowl in collaborations with the world's leading conductors and composers. His solo appearances with the Master Chorale include work with Meredith Monk, Ariel Ramirez' Missa Criolla, and Arvo Part's Miserere. Kirchner's work as a pianist includes performances with the Master Chorale at Disney Hall and on tour as well as free-lance work in recitals, concerts, and studio sessions. Before moving to the Los Angeles area, he was a vocal coach/pianist in Chicago, and played for Neil Rosenshein's studio at the Lyric Opera's Center for American Artists. Initially trained in classical music, his improvisational skills now encompass many styles.

Kirchner's growing list of TV/Film credits includes his work as music director/arranger for the 2004 CBS Christmas Eve special Enter the Light of Life, and his singing on such feature film soundtracks as Avatar, X- Men Origins: Wolverine, Horton Hears a Who, National Treasure II: Book of Secrets, Lady in the Water, License to Wed, Race to Witch Mountain, Sex in the City II, The Rite, and X-Men: First Class. Visit shawnkirchner.com to learn more.

Artist/Video Animator: Kevork Mourad

Born in Qamishli, Syria, Mourad now lives and works in New York City. He received his Master of Fine Arts from the Yerevan Institute of Fine Arts in Armenia. Mourad employs his technique of live drawing and animation in concert with musicians – developing a collaboration in which art and music harmonize with one another. Mourad has been a resident teaching artist at Brandeis University, Harvard University, and Holy Cross (Worcester). He is the only visual artist member in Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble and is featured in the film "Music of Strangers" (2016). <https://www.kevorkmourad.com>

Local, Live to Music Artist Karen Santos is a versatile soprano known for her rich tone and passion for the stage. Born and raised in Mexico City, Karen has been living in Canada for fifteen years. Karen's most recent performance included the one-act, one-woman opera, 'At the Statue of Venus' by Jake Heggie. In this production, Karen worked under renowned director Rob Herriot, with music direction by acclaimed soprano Monica Huisman, and piano by Megan Dufrot. For this opera, Karen also created all of the set's art pieces, using her visual arts' degree to set the stage of an art gallery. Karen is also an accomplished visual artist, having received a Fine Arts Degree from UBC in Visual Arts, and completed her Opera Performance degree at the Vancouver Academy of Music. <http://www.karen-santos.com/music-bio>

Local Actor, Patricia Hunter began her career at Rainbow Stage in the early 1970's. A full circle moment was returning to Rainbow Stage in 2015 in "Sister Act" after a thirty-five-year absence! Another highlight of the 70's was performing with the legendary Confidential Exchange. Patricia has worked at every theatre in Winnipeg (and a few across the country), been part of several independent productions, two hit Fringe shows, and has participated in numerous new play workshops and readings. Her resume also includes film and television work. Patricia has been involved with Women of Note since its inception as a founding member and a choreography director for several concerts. The choir and its Founding Artistic Director hold a special place in her heart.

WOMEN of NOTE is an auditioned community choir for women who aspire to musical excellence and are inspired to sing to their greatest potential.

More than 400 women, between the ages of 20 and 80, have sung in the choir since its inception in September 1994. More than half of the current singers have been members for at least 10 years and several have been with the choir since the beginning. All members share a passion for creating beautiful music together with other women in a spirit of sisterhood and camaraderie.

Members of the Choir

WoN Chorale: Krista Boryskavich, Mélanie Boudrault-Dykes, Suzanne Budlong, Amanda Burke, Anne Burns, Meghan Capner, Brenda Chapman, Diane Clare, Linda Connor, Kristel Coldwell, Tamara Coombs, Marilyn Cozzuol, Doreen Craddock, Eileen Ewanchuk, Jody Hecht, Stephanie Hildebrandt, Liz Kircher, Agnes Leung, Patricia Malanchuk, Alison Mayes, Christine Milberg, Kim Misko, Diane Ramsay, Terry Secombe, Teresa Sztaba, Allie Turnock, Suzanne Ulyot, Pat Walker, Trish Wood, Misuk Yun

WoN Chamber Singers: Coleen Anderson, Natalie Chartier, Diane Cullen, Jennifer Dumore, Lori Flood, Janine Guinn, Lindsay Hoffman, Meghan Jensen, Elena Mallin, Mary Melnychuk, Shelley Petaski, Lillea Pineda-Di Biase, Christine Polimeni, Jodi Robillard, Laurel Sherbo, Tracey Silagy, Dorothy Stephens, Laura Stephens, Karen Stuart, Diane Wreford

WoN Board of Directors: Co-Presidents: Marilyn Cozzuol & Christine Polimeni, Past President: Bev Snell, Treasurer Azuma Nkemjika, Secretary: Jennifer Dumore, Members at Large: Christina Nicol, Sheila Ray, Diane Wreford

This year, Women of Note celebrates 30 Years of “Making a Joyful Noise”

WoN thanks everyone who helped to make
this production possible:

Composer: Shawn Kircher
Video Artist: Kevork Mourad
Women Sing (San Francisco) & Elektra (Vancouver)

The United Church in Meadowood AV Team: Dane Dwarka
Sound Engineer: Evan Giesbrecht
Video Manager: Denise Chammartin

Women of Note thanks all its donors.
Your generous support allows us to continue to
‘Make a Joyful Noise’

With Special Thanks to:
Tim Dumore & Team Orthodontists
Dr. & Mrs. William Pope
Sheila Bogoch (in memory of Diane McClellan)
Anderson Family Vision Care

To become a donor go to www.womenofnote.ca
