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REMEMBER

music of

REFLECTION, REPOSE, & RENEWAL

Directed by Christopher Lowrey

11 July 2021 | 8:00 PM

Blessed Sacrament Church, Providence RI

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REFLECTION, REPOSE, & RENEWAL

Directed by Christopher Lowrey

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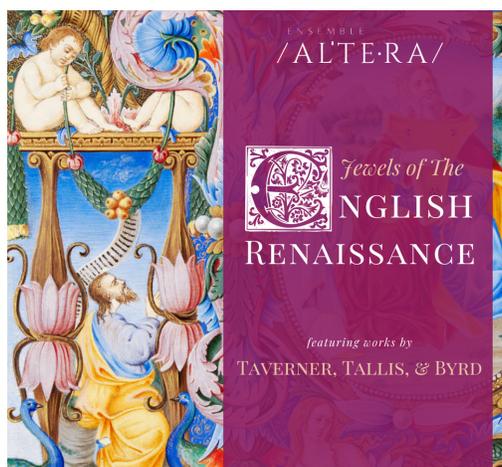
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Thank you!

A Note From The Director

This evening's program was conceived what seems like a lifetime ago now, in the innocent, euphoric (contrastingly so!) days of 2019. It was then-called The Soul's Journey Upward. Over the ensuing two years, I could not have imagined – nor any of us – what would happen to the world and to Ensemble Altera. In the grip of a singular period for artists who had no point of career or personal reference, I knew we had to think outside the box to continue our essential work. I turned to you, our wonderful community of music lovers, for financial and spiritual support. With gale-force fundraising at our back, we were able to produce a treasure trove of digital content, including our Garage and Christmas series, four live-streaming events, a forthcoming concert as part of the SoHIP (Society for Historically Informed Performance) series of Boston, and – even – a music video!

Through it all, I've had a world-class team around me, from my conscience and musical confidante, Michael Garrepy, to the undaunted and attentive Olivia Kleyla in the media room, to her husband Brad Kleyla, our peerless audio engineer, whose patience for that “one-last-edit” is as limitless as his skill. Our intern, Matisse Boor, has poured many glasses of wine and cups of tea. I was also fortunate enough to be able to call upon the infinite talents of Signe Lindberg, who hasn't lived nearly enough lifetimes to know all she does about development, ticket sales, customer management software, seating charts, catering and budgeting. It wouldn't surprise me if she were currently in the parking lot changing someone's tire. Whatever she does, it's done with patience, care and great competence. In addition, we've benefited from a hugely talented and diverse board in a range of domains: Jennifer Hughes' and Trevor Neal's arts management, Charlie Oliver's accounting, Gregory King's and Jared Kornblatt's communications, Camilla de Rochambeau's housing, Mark Meyer's music therapy, and Donna Lowrey's careful note-taking, and the counsel of many other distinguished members. Our board helped nurture us from a passion project into a fully-fledged 501(c)3 arts nonprofit (future contributions gratefully received and fully tax deductible by law, thank you) and ensures that we have the structure in place to continue bringing you artistic ventures of the highest order.

Most of all, I am humbled by my family, both given and chosen. My long-suffering parents housed and fed this geriatric millennial throughout the pandemic. Their love and support gave me the wherewithal to focus on getting Altera to the next level. My amazing family of artists, hardworking and unencumbered by ego, have journeyed with me as we followed a totally uncharted path. And you, my extended family of music lovers, have helped breathe essential new life into Altera. You all have shown true faith in our artistic vision. For that, I'm both honored and privileged. I understand that with your trust comes responsibility, both to raise the standards of what is possible for choral music, and to remember our duty of care to our local and global community. The music on tonight's program exemplifies a net cast wide. I believe to be truly relevant to peoples' lives we must both adhere to the highest technical standards, but also meet people wherever they are in their journey into this sometimes rarefied music. To do that, we ground our offerings in classically represented traditions, but also launch in other, more direct and poignant directions, and offer a taste of the brilliance of music being composed right here and right now.

As we continue our evolution, I'm immensely swelled by the promise and possibility before us. Whether it's the many potential program ideas that wake me in the night, the excitement of planning a debut commercial album, or opening our doors wide to the next generation of talent through our outreach and – fingers crossed – summer music camp next season, I know that we are limited only by our imagination. Thank you, all of you, who gave me the courage to trust and follow my imagination wherever it led me. Because of you, the future is ours.

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Opening Remarks, Reverend Janet Cooper Nelson, Brown University Chaplain

program

Hear My Prayer, O Lord

Henry Purcell (1659-1695)

Fürchte dich nicht

Johann Christoph Bach (1642-1703)

Selig sind die Toten

Heinrich Schütz (1585-1672)

Like as the Hart

Herbert Howells (1892-1983)

*Three Shakespeare Songs: No. 2,
'The Cloud-Capp'd Towers'*

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)

The Dying Soldier

Traditional, arranged by Nigel Short (b. 1965)

Songs of Farewell: There is an Old Belief

Hubert Parry (1848-1918)

brief pause

Song for Athene

John Tavener (1944-2013)

Requiem, Op. 9: Introit & Kyrie

Maurice Duruflé (1902-1986)

Faire is the Heaven

William Henry Harris (1883-1973)

For the Beauty of the Earth (world-premiere performance)

Daniel Gledhill (b. 1984)

Only in Sleep

Ēriks Ešņvalds (b. 1977)

Amazing Grace (world-premiere performance)

Traditional, arranged by Michael Garrepy (b. 1990)

Program Notes

Tonight's concert was imagined as a journey through time and space, beginning with the thoughts of someone nearing the end of life, departing this mortal coil, and culminating in the perspective of us, the living who remain bound to the earth. The program wanders through roughly four thematic areas that converse, mingle, and heighten each other: Repentance, Repose, Requiem, and Renewal. The musical content also traverses the centuries and different geographies to marry together diffuse strands and distinct voices into one coherent narrative.

The first section might be interpreted as a conversation between a faithful sinner and their Savior, in the 'persons three' of God, Jesus, and Holy Spirit. Henry Purcell's *Hear my prayer* was the rumored first part of a larger work composed for the state funeral of King Charles II, whose deathbed conversion to Catholicism rendered the work on a larger composition moot. Fortunately for us, what survives is this astonishing setting of the penitential Psalm 102. Growing from a single voice, the piece inexorably crescendos and increases in contrapuntal thickness and harmonic tension until it explodes into a stark stillness in its final seconds. It's uncertain which of the four JC Bachs penned this setting of *Fürchte dich nicht*, but it's been attributed to the older cousin of JS Bach from Eisenach. The text, a colloquy between the divine and the contrite sinner, merges two complementary passages, one from the Book of Isaiah ("Fear not, for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine") with one from the Gospel of St. Luke ("Verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise") and is spoken through a quartet of male singers. The fifth vocal line, a soaring soprano cantus firmus, is withheld until the introduction of a new text, halfway through the piece, the sixth strophe of Johann Rist's 'O Traurigkeit' ('O Sorrow'). She beckons God through the person of Jesus ("O Jesus, my help and my rest, I entreat thee with tears: give me strength to follow thee until my life ends"). For me, one of the more touching features of the text setting is the lovingly insistent repetition of the word "du" (the familiar or loving form of "you") by both interlocutors.

Heinrich Schütz, a kind of generational link between JC and JS Bach, remained largely uncelebrated until recently, though his setting of the Requiem text *Selig sind die Toten* from the *Geistliche Chormusik* of 1648, seems never to have gone out of performing fashion. It is a precision-tooled motet, moving away from the polychoral intricacies and extravagances of the Venetian school that marked Schütz's early career, into a universe of baroque concision and economy of means. It retains the *stile antico* features of Renaissance writing in its opening section, but bursts into rococo flourishes in the section at "und ihre Werke folgen ihnen nach" ("and their works do follow them"). In this Requiem text, common in both the Lutheran and Anglican traditions, but not a feature of the Catholic rite, the Holy Spirit consoles the earthbound who "died in the Lord", for "they will rest from the labors". A fitting close to this sinner-Savior dialogue is Herbert Howells' paraphrase setting of Psalm 42, *Like as the Hart*, one of a set of six pieces composed "in time of war". Written in a single day in 1941 during the intense air-raid campaigns over

London, it is redolent of our age of crisis and the despondent voice with which we all sometimes cry out in the face of suffering, danger, and loss. The text contains the impatience of suffering (“Where is now thy God?” and “My tears have been my meat day and night”), but also the surrender to faith and hope (“My soul is athirst for God” and “When shall I come to appear before the living God?”).

The closing three selections of the first half of the program are an encounter with the dying, at the final hour. Their texts are ruminations on life and re-connections to faith. *The Cloud-Capp'd Towers* was composed by Ralph Vaughan Williams as a competition piece for choirs, so dastardly difficult are its angularly enharmonic changes to tune and balance. More remarkable still is the delicate care with which the stark homophony stages Shakespeare’s luminous text. *The Dying Soldier* (also known as ‘Brother Green’, itself a reworking of the old Scots ballad, ‘Barbara Allen’) is the lament of a fighting man (we are left to imagine whether Union or Confederate), laid low during the Civil War. In his last moments, he beckons his friend (real or imagined) to stay by his side and he heartbreakingly dictates his last words to his wife and children, secure in faith that he will, in time, be reunited with them in heaven. Foremost among Hubert Parry’s impressive body of English choral works is his series of motets collectively entitled *Songs of Farewell*. They are superbly crafted for unaccompanied voices, contrapuntally ingenious (recalling the work of Purcell earlier on the program) and harmonically complex (foreshadowing the renaissance of British choral writing of the 20th century). The fourth of the six motets, the six-part *There is an old belief*, is a setting of a poem by John Gibson Lockhart. At the heart of the motet Parry quotes the intonation of the Christian creed (“That creed I fain would keep”) in the hope that, with the eternal sleep to come, the soul might waken to a new, serene life ‘on some solemn shore’.

The next three works embody the journey of the soul to repose and resurrection. John Tavener composed *Song for Athene* in 1993 to commemorate the tragic death of actress Athene Hariades, but perhaps it became best known as the processional hymn at the state funeral of Princess Diana. The many strophes of text interspersed with ‘Alleluia’ are a recognizable feature of Byzantine hymnography, reflecting Tavener’s devotion to the Eastern Orthodox faith and his fascination with its musical traditions. In a kind of rhyme with Vaughan Williams, he also quotes Shakespeare, from the final scene of Hamlet, ‘may flights of angels sing thee to thy rest’. The combined effect of insistent simplicity crescendos into a moment of sublime emotional catharsis. Among the many settings of the Requiem text, what makes Duruflé’s work unique and beloved is the presence of Gregorian Chant. Each of the nine movements of the mass for the dead, including the *Introit & Kyrie*, is inspired and shaped by the appropriate plainsong melody from the traditional Catholic liturgy of the *Missa pro defunctis*. In his youth, Duruflé was a choirboy at Rouen Cathedral, and it was here, amid the grandiose architecture, smells, bells, and vestments that he fell in love with plainsong and the timeless world of the medieval modes. In plainsong, he found ‘a variety of colors and expression which is infinitely seductive. “Truly,” his wife is

known to have said, "he had a Gregorian soul." William Harris's masterpiece *Faire is the Heaven* is one of the most beloved works in the Anglican repertoire. Harris is usually remembered today for the nearly thirty years he spent as Director of Music of St. George's Chapel, Windsor, (site of Megan & Harry's wedding, as well as Prince Philip's recent funeral), when he served as piano teacher to the young princesses, Elizabeth and Margaret. Like his later but equally ravishing, *Bring us, O Lord God, Faire* is set in the sumptuous key of D flat major for double choir. The words come from Edmund Spenser's 'An Hymn of Heavenly Beauty', first published in 1596. The editing is subtle, so much so that a casual reader might not realize lines have been omitted, but a clever ternary structure is devised: Spenser's 'Cherubins' and 'Seraphins' are assigned to a vivacious middle section, and Harris engineers a comforting return to the empyrean warmth of the home key for the final moments.

Our final triptych of works expresses a profound sense of renewal for us, earthbound, who remain and remember the last year. All three works were penned by living composers within the last few years. The winner of our inaugural Composition Competition, Daniel Gledhill, says of his setting of *For the beauty of the Earth*, written in a kind of extended choral jazz vocabulary, that he hopes it will "bring comfort to those in need of it and help spark the flame of courage for those in whom it has dwindled." Professor Peter Child, one of the judging panel, observes that Gledhill "has a very keen ear for harmony, for beautiful and sometimes surprising chords, voicings, and contrasts. The rhythms are elastic, the form is sure-footed, and it's a piece I enjoy coming back to". *Only in Sleep* (2010) was commissioned by the University of Louisville Collegiate Chorale and Cardinal Singers. Sara Teasdale's nostalgic vision of childhood re-experienced through dreams melds with our theme of remembrance perfectly. At first glance the shape is straightforward in rudimentary four-bar phrases. But infinitely nuanced are the chord voicings; a change from humming to vocalise to spotlight a phrase here, or internal doublings to highlight a particular line in the texture there, all serving to sustain the freshness. The soaring descant aches with eloquence. The soprano soloist heard at the opening returns at the close, lost in reverie, as her musing, almost Celtic arabesques float over one last pair of chordal oscillations. Throughout the course of the pandemic, during which time Altera has taken on a new life, I've asked Michael Garrepy, longtime collaborator, artistic advisor, and friend to arrange a series of pieces, ranging from West Side Story's *Somewhere* to *Edelweiss* from 'The Sound of Music' to *Colors of the Wind* from Disney's 'Pocahantas', so it was only fitting that when I thought about who I'd like to arrange *Amazing Grace* - a classic American hymn that tells the story of triumph over adversity and faith in the face of trials - Michael came to mind. Traversing from basso profundo low C to soprano high C, his arrangement is masterful, borrowing from the best traditions of the American school of open, pastoral chord spellings, inflected by the richness of Catholic polyphony, accented by the clarity of Anglican text setting, and refined specifically for Altera's singers, with whom he is intimately familiar. It's an instant classic, truly worthy among the great arrangements of our day, and the best note on which to close out our journey.

Texts and Translations

1.

Hear my prayer, O Lord,
and let my crying come unto thee.

2.

Fürchte dich nicht,
Denn ich hab dich erlöst,
Ich habe dich bei deinem Namen gerufen:
Du bist mein.
Wahrlich, wahrlich ich sage dir:
Heute, heute wirst du mir im Paradies sein.

O Jesu, du mein Hilf und Ruh,
Ich bitte dich mit Tränen:
Hilf, hilf daß ich mich bis ins Grab
Nach dir möge sehnen.

*Fear not,
For I have redeemed you,
I have called you by your name:
You are mine.
Truly, truly I say to you:
This day will you be with Me in Paradise.*

*O Jesus, You my aid and rest,
I beseech you with tears:
Help me, that even unto the grave
I might yearn for You.*

3.

Selig sind die Toten,
die in dem Herren sterben,
von nun an.
Ja, der Geist spricht:
Sie ruhen von ihrer Arbeit,
und ihre Werke folgen ihnen nach.

*Blessed are the dead
which die in the Lord,
from henceforth:
Yea, saith the Spirit,
that they may rest from their labours;
and their works do follow after them.*

4.

Like as the hart desireth the waterbrooks,
so longeth my soul after thee, O God.
My soul is athirst for God,
yea, even for the living God.
When shall I come to appear before the
presence of God?
My tears have been my meat day and night,
while they daily say unto me,
“Where is now thy God?”

5.

The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces
The solemn temples, the great globe itself
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded
Leave not a rack behind: We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

6.

Oh, Brother Green, oh, come to me,
For I am shot and bleeding.
Now I must die, no more to see
My wife and my dear children.

The fighting foe has laid me low,
On this cold ground to suffer.
Stay, brother, stay and lay me away,
And write my wife a letter.

Oh, brother, I am dying now.
Oh, see I die so easy!
Oh, surely death has lost its sting
Because I love my Jesus.

Go tell my wife she must not grieve.
Oh, kiss my dear little children,
For they will call for me in vain,
When I am gone to heaven.

7.

There is an old belief,
That on some solemn shore,
Beyond the sphere of grief
Dear friends shall meet once more.

Beyond the sphere of Time
And Sin and Fate's control,
Serene in changeless prime
Of body and of soul.

That creed I fain would keep
That hope I'll ne'er forgo,
Eternal be the sleep,
If not to waken so.

8.

Alleluia, Alleluia
May flights of angels sing thee to thy rest
Alleluia, Alleluia
Remember me O Lord,
when you come into your kingdom
Alleluia, Alleluia
Give rest O Lord to your handmaid,
who has fallen asleep
Alleluia, Alleluia
The Choir of Saints have found
the well-spring of life and door of paradise
Alleluia, Alleluia
Life a shadow and a dream
Alleluia, Alleluia
Weeping at the grave creates the song
Alleluia
Come, enjoy rewards and crowns
I have prepared for you
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia

9.

Requiem aeternam
dona eis, Domine,
et lux perpetua luceat eis.
Te decet hymnus, Deus in Sion,
et tibi reddetur
votum in Jerusalem;
exaudi orationem meam,
ad te omnis caro veniet.

Requiem aeternam
dona eis, Domine,
et lux perpetua luceat eis.

Kyrie eleison.
Christe eleison.
Kyrie eleison.

*Eternal rest
grant them, O Lord,
and let eternal light shine upon them.
A hymn to you is fitting, O God in Zion,
and a vow made to you
in Jerusalem;
hear my prayer,
all flesh comes to you.*

*Eternal rest
grant them, O Lord,
and let eternal light shine upon them.*

*Lord have mercy.
Christ have mercy,
Lord have mercy.*

10.

Faire is the heav'n, where happy souls have place,
In full enjoyment of felicitie,
Whence they doe still behold the glorious face
Of the divine, eternall Majestie...

Yet farre more faire be those bright Cherubins
Which all with golden wings are oversight,
And those eternall burning Seraphins,
Which from their faces dart out fierie light;
Yer fairer than they both, and much more bright,
Be th' Angels and Archangels which attend
On God's owne person, without rest or end.

These then is faire each other farre excelling
As to the Highest they approach more neare,
Yet is that Highest farre beyond all telling
Fairer than all the rest which there appeare,
Though all their beauties joynd together were:
How then can mortall tongue hope to expresse
The image of such endlesse perfectnesse?

11.

For the beauty of the earth
 For the beauty of the skies
 For the love
 Wich from our birth
 Over and around us lies
 Over and around us lies

Lord of all to thee we raise
 This our joyful hymn of praise

For the beauty of the hour
 Of the day and of the night
 Hill and vale
 And tree and flower
 Sun and moon and stars of light

Lord of all to thee we raise
 This our joyful hymn of praise

For the joy of human love
 Brother, sister, parent, child
 Friends on earth
 And friends above
 For a gentle
 Thoughts and mild
 For a gentle
 Thoughts and mild

Lord of all to thee we raise
 This our sacrifice of praise.

12.

Only in sleep I see their faces
 Children I played with when I was a child
 Louise comes back with her brown hair
 braided
 Annie with ringlets warm and wild

Only in sleep Time is forgotten—
 What may have come to them, who can know?
 Yet we played last night as long ago
 And the doll-house stood at the turn of the
 stair

The years had not sharpened their smooth
 round faces
 I met their eyes and found them mild—
 Do they, too, dream of me, I wonder
 And for them am I too a child?

13.

Amazing grace
 How sweet the sound
 That saved a wretch like me
 I once was lost, but now I'm found
 Was blind, but now I see

'Twas grace first taught my heart to fear
 And grace my fears relieved
 How precious did that grace appear
 The hour I first believed

The Lord has promised good to me
 His word my hope secures
 He will my shield and portion be
 As long as life endures

Through many dangers, toils, and snares,
 I have already come;
 'Tis grace has brought me safe this far,
 And grace will lead me home.

When we've been there ten thousand years,
 Bright shining as the sun
 We've no less days to sing God's praise
 Than when we first begun

ENSEMBLE ALTERA is fast becoming a leading American chamber choir dedicated to bringing thoughtful, engaging, and relevant programs of choral music to in-person and digital audiences at home and around the world. The group is versatile, working on multiple scales, in a wide range of idioms, across the full gamut of medieval to modern



to minimalist music. Led by internationally acclaimed countertenor Christopher Lowrey, Altera comes from the Italian word for change, and the ensemble prides itself in its truly transformative approach to music-making. Recent projects undertaken by the group include an innovative series of digital concerts recorded in empty parking garages during the Covid pandemic, as well as a virtual series of Christmas concerts produced for viewers around the world.

Altera has developed a reputation with audiences for bold programming that invites listeners to imagine connections between works from many different historical perspectives to tell one unified and edifying story. Some of these projects include 'illumine', centering on the myriad representations of light across the repertoire, 'Hail Mary', a concert based on Marian themes, and 'Music For Elizabeth', a program devoted to music heard in Elizabeth I's court. This summer, Altera will mount a Covid Memorial Project entitled 'We Remember', featuring music to uplift, heal, and bring together the community in the wake of the ongoing Covid crisis. As part of this project, the ensemble is sponsoring a Composition Competition for new choral works. Details can be found on the 'Competition' page.



Founder and Artistic Director **Christopher Lowrey** was born and raised in Johnston, RI, and trained at Brown University, the University of Cambridge, where he sang under Stephen Layton with Trinity College Choir, and the Royal College of Music. In addition to conducting, he enjoys a dynamic international solo career as a countertenor, working at some of the world's leading opera houses and concert platforms, including the Royal Opera House, the Philharmonie de Paris, The London Symphony Orchestra. Next season he makes his debut at Teatro Real in Madrid and the Metropolitan Opera in New York.

Peter Sykes is one of the most distinguished and versatile keyboard artists performing today. His live performances on the organ, harpsichord, clavichord or fortepiano have been called "compelling and moving," and "bold, imaginative, and amazingly accurate" - his recordings, most notably the groundbreaking transcription for organ of Holst's "The Planets", have been called "satisfying and persuasive," and "simply stunning." He teaches at The Juilliard School in New York City, and at Boston University, and for thirty-five years has been Music Director of First Church in Cambridge, Congregational. He performs and records with Aston Magna and Boston Baroque, and has received numerous prizes and awards for his achievements.





Composition Competition winner **Daniel Gledhill** began studying the piano at the age of 5 with Dr. Irene Peery-Fox in Provo, Utah. Since then, he has become an accomplished pianist, winning prizes on both national and international stages. He received his degree in Piano Performance from BYU in Utah and continued his education at USC where he received a Graduate Certificate in Scoring for Motion Picture and Film. Daniel currently works for the American Musical and Dramatic Academy in Hollywood and as well as UCLA as a staff pianist, playing for musical theater classes, voice lessons, ballet classes and other musical needs. He also writes music as a freelance composer in a variety of styles.

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Thank You

Deepest thanks to Father Charles Grondin, Brother Roger Chingas, and the entire staff and community of Blessed Sacrament Church for welcoming us into their space. It is always an honor and privilege to be servants of this music in such a space. A kind thank you to Dr. Peter Child, Professor of Music at MIT, for his crucial help in adjudicating the winner of our Composition Competition. Lastly, a special thank you to all of our hosts for graciously providing accommodation to our visiting artists.

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If you enjoyed this evening's event and would like to re-live it virtually, or invite those who were unable to attend to watch it online, please be sure to sign up for our newsletter at **www.EnsembleAltera.com**, where we will share all the news about the digital edition of this concert, releasing on August 13.

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