

## PROGRAM NOTES

**Second Spring** refers to Cantabile's Silver Jubilee as we return to favorite music we've performed in the past 25 years. The title also introduces tonight's premiere work, a commissioned choral cycle composed by Dr. Eric Ewazen.

The poem by Edna St. Vincent Millay "Song of a Second April," the first movement of this cycle, celebrates spring as the fulfillment of hoped-for beauty but loss of last year's love. This theme runs through our program. We devote our performance to the idea of lost love within the framework of a beautiful new year.

Artist Jack Sarhage has given us a pictorial representation of this view of spring, looking from the border garden around the potting shed. We see through the window, the winter plants struggling to survive ("My heart is what it was before, a house where people come and go, But it is winter with your love"), and we watch with the woodpecker, as spring unfolds before us. The possibilities are open - the fields are yet barren ("Going over the Arirang hills, my darling is leaving me behind...a bountiful year is coming throughout the land"). There is much work to do before the crops emerge from the ground, before the heart can heal and creative living can emerge again. The animals wait to be fed, plants to be watered ... the Mariposa flower is in the lower left corner. Mariposa is the Spanish word for butterfly and we find two of them to the right. They represent death referred to in the songs. Our butterflies are not beautiful but are tattered and torn after mating. The butterflies have lived their short lives ("Butterflies are white and blue...death comes in a day or two") and survive by hanging onto the hepaticas and mullein.

But in death, there is life. Life grows in little eggs clinging to the plant stalk, the plowed field offers hope for a good harvest. All seems rich and fulfilling. But there is an empty space in our hearts, because the one we care the most about is missing. ("only you, only you are gone"). How melancholy is the beauty of spring! ("Puisque tout passe.") Winter is past and gone, but "memories...still bring us the magic of wonderful springs with you." Mr. Sarhage has used many images presented in the poetry but he has left lots of open space which he uses to remind us of the open hope that is deep within each of us. — RS

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We celebrate the first signs of spring by beginning with the most famous Japanese folk song, **Sakura, Sakura** (Cherry Blossoms). Chinese American composer Chen Yi has set this well-known melody for the sopranos, accompanied by humming with divided alto, tenor and bass voices using the Dorian mode. A calm pentatonic melody is underlaid by soft five note chords with subtly moving triplets and eighth notes to give it motion. It is thought that this melody was composed during the Edo period (1603 – 1867) for children to learn to play the koto, a 13 string Japanese zither. In this arrangement, one can hear the the voices underneath the melody imitating the sound of the koto.

Chen Yi was born in Guangzhou, China and attended the Beijing Central Conservatory before coming to New York to get a DMA from Columbia University. Her difficult journey is fascinating to read ([www.presser.com/chen.html](http://www.presser.com/chen.html)). She has received commissions from dozens of musical organizations and her music has been recorded on six record labels.

Chen's arrangement of the Korean folk song **Arirang** ("Arirang, Arirang hills, going over the Arirang hills, My darling is leaving me behind.") moves the melody from the tenor part to soprano and alto part, harmonized in tone clusters, then to the bass in 4/4 with soprano, alto and tenor tones falling like soft raindrops and finally to a more Western-style of melody harmonized in four choral parts, with a middle phrase sung "ad lib." by the tenors going to a soft Bb and returning down (the hill...) to the dominant.

Ruth Scott Clark's **Spring Rhapsody** continues our metaphor (Second Spring) of spring as the renewal of life but not without the reminiscence of past love and difficulties. ("Spring, the Queen of Seasons, still gives us our reasons for finding a love that's true, And memories, though they be tragic, still bring me the magic of wonderful, wonderful Spring with you.") Mrs. Clark was a poet, pianist, composer and fine artist. She first composed this song as a soprano solo and performed it many times with her daughter, Rebecca Scott, later arranging it for four part chorus a cappella. She uses chromaticism and changes of tempi to express her poetry, emphasizing the turns and twist of the spring weather and sudden



appearances of flowers and birds. A soft slower phrase portrays dreaming of past love and imagining a different ending to the affair. This is our second performance of this piece.

The 2009 translation of Rachmaninoff's second song ("**Night**") from Opus 15, for two part women's voices, gives us the opportunity to hear in our own language the meaning of the melancholy melody switching between major and minor key, slow and animated tempi. As night falls, sadness comes, and we long to chase it away, hoping to be renewed by daylight. Beautiful long melodies are punctuated by syncopated piano chords which alternate between keys and modes.

The third of Hindemith's six challenging chansons (**Puisque tout passe**) features a fast ("vivo") homophonic four part setting of the Rilke poem, expressing the briefness and difficulty of life. "Let us sing...our love and art," stops for a fraction of a moment, followed by a swift run to the end ("Let us the sooner depart").

Debussy's *Trois Chansons* are a tour de force for a cappella vocal quartet. The first song, **Dieu! qu'il la fait bon regarder!** features graceful triplet figures which swirl against two note figures in the soprano mixolydian melody. Several key centers express the nearness, yet untouchable quality of the desired beautiful woman, praised and envied by all. Listen for the repetition of the opening phrase, expressing awe of human beauty in many aspects.

Schickele's **dominic** from his *Three Choruses from e.e.cummings* features tone painting extraordinaire! Rhythmically challenging, every note has a separate syllable which the voices must sing in perfect time. Starting off together at a fast tempo in homophonic style, they quickly separate into counterpoint giving the impression that one voice is agreeing with the other and all are talking at once. Reunited into homophony, they continue the story of the little doll found in a trash barrel. Returning to counterpoint, we hear (if we can discern the words when everyone is "talking" at once!) that the story is being told by the doll himself, as "we & worlds are less alive than dolls and dream."

**The Archer**, movement III from *Meditations on "The Prophet"* by Les Leathem, is set in minimalist style with repeated melodic lines in minor mode, creating a dreamy mystical atmosphere. Tension is

built through the gradual addition of new voices in augmentation: each 6-note grouping of the original soprano melody is first played against 4 notes by the altos, then 3 by the tenors and finally 2 by the basses. The rhythm “bends” itself in the compound meter, swaying as if pulled like the arrow towards the infinite, culminating on an Eb major chord at “the hand of God!” Sounds die away, leaving us still moving as if in a trance.

Ron Jeffers has arranged two Civil War songs into one plea for peace: **Waitin’ for the Dawn of Peace**. “Mornin’” becomes “mournin’” in the second piece (Tentin’ Tonight) in a moving and lovely setting for four part men’s voices. Choral aficionados owe composer Ron Jeffers great respect and thanks, for through his publishing company ([www.earthsongschoralmusic.com](http://www.earthsongschoralmusic.com)) he has introduced thousands of choral singers and conductors to international music, folk and otherwise, that has entered the mainstream of choral music.

**Give Us This Day** was part of an entirely commissioned program written for the Vasari Singers, London, England, to celebrate their 25th Anniversary on May 15, 2005. Ward Swingle’s setting is homophonic, its recurring refrain a prayer for insight to cherish the gift of our beautiful earth. It has become one of our favorite choral pieces and is very appropriate for the eve of Earth Day, April 22.

Any anniversary is a look backward at what has been accomplished and a look forward. “We’ll do the best we know” is Candide’s story. **Make Our Garden Grow** is the finale of Leonard Bernstein’s *Candide*, in a choral arrangement by Robert Page, a fine and well known choral conductor. The lyrics by Richard Wilbur give us all a philosophical view of our past and encouragement for the next years of our service to music!

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We are honored and grateful to premiere Eric Ewazen’s four movement choral suite **Second April** setting poetry by Edna St. Vincent Millay.

The first movement, *Song of a Second April*, begins with a churning eighth note pattern and bird calls announcing “April this



year, not otherwise than April of a year ago.” Soon all the voices are imitating bird song as the piano figures leap and hop up and down. Hepaticas and butterflies are introduced with strong melodies comprised of eight-note chords as the scale reaches higher and the excitement of the spring breaks into the noises of building repairs, woodpecker taps, children playing, streams running deep, and finally arpeggios up, up, up the hillside in the sun. We pause a moment as the figures slow and begin again. At the recapitulation, the words change: the loved one is absent. There can be no return of the “April of a year ago!”

The second movement contrasts starkly with the excitement of the first breath of spring. *Mariposa* (Butterfly) floats in 3/4 time over a running sixteenth note figure in the bass of the piano, which stops suddenly as soft chords announce that “Death comes in a day or two.” As the butterflies continue their short flight (most live only a month!) with the return of the running left hand figure, we are encouraged to enjoy and appreciate the moment. The music starts and stops again, reminding us of our short life span.

Movement three, *Alms*, rolls on in 6/8 time as the heart suffers with unrequited love. The rollicking piano figure changes to chords, 12-note arpeggios and back again, as we attend “our” love – watering it, caring for it – while watching “your” love wither. We give alms to the beggar and to the birds, but receive none in return.

Movement four, *Into the Golden Vessel*, begins with a broad piano melody in 3/4 followed by sopranos and altos announcing the theme of great song. Tenors and basses soon join, and all pour out their passion in great chords. The second theme, syncopated in changing meters, leads to another piano solo section. The third theme alternates 3 men’s voices with 3 women’s voices, adding triplet figures to the 7 note bass figure in the piano. After a series of homophonic key changes, a truncated recapitulation ends quietly in honor of “great song.”

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