Commissioned by Choral Spectrum and the Oberlin Choristers, Oberlin, Ohio, for their anniversary seasons: Choral Spectrum (50th season), Choristers (25th season)

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Sing Evermore! Songs in Celebration of Singing

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Duration: 30 minutes



PROGRAM NOTES

The texts for these songs span many centuries—from Richard Barnfield's "In Praise of Music and Poetry" (published in 1598) to the uplifting "Everyone Sang," written by Siegfried Sassoon at the end of World War I. There is even a reference to Merlin, of King Arthur's court, in Emerson's opening poem "Merlin's Song."

From early to recent, the poems have the common thread of praising music for its power, its magic, its solace and its liberation. And it is this universal message which has inspired *Sing Evermore!*

Emerson was captivated with Welsh Bardic poetry, thus "Merlin's Song" has archaic references (the bow, the warrior, Merlin himself). Music is mystery, it restores good health, it brings eternal youth...if one travels lightly (to live well with those who have few possessions). Live in the sunshine, swim the sea...

"In Praise of Music and Poetry" is a charming duet (or duel!) between a woman (who loves music) and a man (who loves poetry). Ah, the battle between Dowland and Spencer, the rivalry between the lute and the couplets! They both survive...

"The Lost Chord" gives occasion to explore complex harmonies as an expression of the mystery of chords. These are added-tone sonorities—clusters. The author searches for that perfect peace, the one lost chord divine, which, perhaps may only be heard in Heaven. It is a grand Amen.

Sara Teasdale's poem "Refuge" is a testament to the strength of human spirit. For despite adversity, one can still sing, and in the singing find a refuge, a house of shining words. [The shining image led to a shimmering accompaniment.] And when I sing, I am free.

"The Caged Bird Sings" is based on a poem by African American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872–1906). The bird, a prisoner in his cage, *beats*

his wing till the blood is red on the cruel bars. He sings a plea, to Heaven, for he would be free.

The message of "The Gift to Sing" is that, even in the darkest of times, music can lift the soul. I have a magic way to turn the gloom to brightest day—I softly sing. One can sing softly, one can sing forcefully (with determination) and one must always sing with passion!

Walt Whitman's poem "I Hear America Singing" (excerpted from *Leaves of Grass*), with its many references to men singing at their work, seems best suited to the direct and forceful character of unaccompanied men's chorus. *I hear America in song*.

A short flute introduction of music floating across the sky opens "Sky-Born Music." The poet (Emerson) writes that music is heard not only in places of beauty, but also in the mud, the dark, in the *daily flow of things*. For there, always, something sings.

The concluding song, "Everyone Sang," is supremely uplifting. No other song could follow in this set. The image of the bird (the spirit in flight, freedom) reappears. Perhaps this bird, which is free and wings wildly across the white orchards, is the liberation of the caged bird from the Dunbar poem. Much of the accompaniment for this song is upward arpeggios, as celebration, as the soul rising. For this poem was written at the close of World War I. Lines like My heart was shaken with tears, and horror drifted away can only begin to capture the spirit of the times.

The majestic bird imagery in this poem brought to mind "The Windhover" of Gerard Manley Hopkins (published in 1918). And thus the familiar *My heart in hiding stirred for this bird* is woven into this vision of ecstasy. Then, returning to the Sassoon text, the song closes with *O but everyone was a bird, the song was wordless, the singing will never be done!*

THOUGHTS ABOUT THE MUSICAL SETTING

These are separate songs, which can be performed individually, yet are ordered in this set for a cohesive flow. This work is scored for flute and string quartet, or flute and string orchestra, but can be performed with piano, adding flute where written. The flute represents the *bird* (imagery in many of the songs), the *soul in flight*, the *voice of freedom*.

POEMS

1. Merlin's Song

I know a song which, though sung ever so softly, a few can hear—only six or seven or eight can hear; yet they who hear it become young again. When it is sung, the stars twinkle gladly, and the moon bends nearer the earth.

Of Merlin wise I learned a song,—
Sing it soft or sing it loud,
This song is mightier than the strong,
And punishes the very, very proud.
I sing it to the surging crowd,—
Good men it will calm and cheer,
Bad men it will chain and cage—
In the heart of music rings a strain
Which only angels hear;
Whether it waken joy or rage
Hushed crowds listen in vain,
Yet they who hear it shed their age,
And take their youth again.

Hear what British Merlin sung,
Of keenest eye and truest tongue.
As thou treads upon thy road,
See thou lift the lightest load.
And thou, O warrior son, beware!
Ponderous gold and stuffs to bear,
To falter ere thou task fulfill,—
Only the light-armed climb the hill.
The richest of all lords is Use,
And vibrant Health the loftiest Muse.

Live in the sunshine, swim the sea,
Drink the wild air's salubrity—good health!
When the star of evening shines in June,
Shepherds are thankful and nations swoon.
The music that can deepest reach,
And cure all ill, is cordial speech:
Mask thy wisdom with delight,
Toy with the bow, yet hit the white.
Of all wit's uses, the highest one
Is to live well... with who has none.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (G. Walker, alt.) from The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1904)

2. In Praise of Music and Poetry

(a reconciliation)

If music and sweet poetry agree, as well they must (the sister and the brother), then must the love be great 'twixt thee and me, because thou lov'st the one, and I the other.

If music and sweet poetry agree, as well they must (the sister and the brother), then must the love be great 'twixt thee and me, because thou lov'st the one, and I the other. Shall music and sweet poetry agree? I low the one, and I the other.

I love to hear the sweet melodious sound that Phoebus' lute, the queen of music, makes. And I in deep delight am chiefly drown'd when singing heav'nly couplets he betakes.

Sweet music! Sweet poetry! Ah! Ah!

Dowland to me is dear. Spencer needs no defense. The lute is the queen of music! The couplets are divine!

One god is god of both (as poets say).

One knight loves both, and both in beauty stay.

Richard Barnfield from Poems in Divers Humors (1598)

3. The Lost Chord

Seated one day at the organ, I was weary and ill at ease, And my fingers wandered idly Over the noisy keys.

I do not know what I was playing, Or what I was dreaming then; But I struck one chord of music, Like the sound of a great Amen.

It flooded the crimson twilight, Like the close of an angel's psalm, And it lay on my fevered spirit With a touch of infinite calm.

It quieted pain and sorrow, Like love overcoming strife; It seemed the harmonious echo From our discordant life.

It linked all perpléxed meanings Into one perfect peace, And trembled away into silence, As if it were loth to cease.

I struck a chord, a lost chord.

For I have sought it vainly,
That one lost chord divine,
Which came from the soul of the organ,
And entered into mine.

It may be that Death's bright angel Will speak in that chord again, It may be that only in Heaven I shall hear that grand Amen.

Adelaide Anne Procter (1858)

4. Refuge

From my spirit's gray defeat,
From my pulse's flagging beat,
From my hopes that turned to sand
Sifting through my close-clenched hand,
From my own fault's slavery,
If I can sing, I still am free.
For with my singing I can make
A refuge for my spirit's sake,
A house of shining words, to be
My fragile immortality.

If I can sing... and when I sing, I sing, and I am free. For in my singing I can hear the words of healing, soft and clear, the melding of the parts to whole, the very language of the soul.

If I can sing... and when I sing... and then I sing, I sing, and I am free

Sara Teasdale (Additional words by G. Walker) from Love Songs (1917)

5. The Caged Bird Sings

I know what the caged bird feels, alas!
When the sun is bright on the upland slope;
When the wind stirs soft through
the springing grass,
And the river flows like a stream of glass;
When the first bird sings
and the first bud opens,
And the faint perfume from its chalice steals—
I know what the caged bird feels.

I know why the caged bird beats his wing Till its blood is red on the cruel bars; For he must fly back to his perch and cling When he ride on the bough a-swing; And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars, And they pulse again with a keener sting—I know why he beats his wing!

I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,
When his wing is bruised
and his heart is sore,—
When he beats his bars and he would be free;
It is not a carol of joy or glee,
But a prayer he sends
from his heart's deep core,
But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings—
I know why the caged bird sings.

A prayer, a plea, he sings, And would be free!

Paul Laurence Dunbar based on the poem "Sympathy" (1899)

6. The Gift to Sing

Sometimes the mist overhangs my path, And blackening clouds about me cling. But, oh, I have a magic way
To turn the gloom to brightest day—
I softly sing.
And if the way grows darker still,
Shadowed beneath a somber wing,
With glad defiance in my throat,
I pierce the darkness with a note,
And sing, and I can sing.

[Sing with joy and with delight. Sing with conviction, and sing it right! Sing from the heart, and let it soar. Sing with passion, evermore!]*

I brood not over the broken past, Nor dread whatever time may bring. No nights are dark, no days are long, But in my heart there lives a song, And I can sing.

James Weldon Johnson from Fifty Years and Other Poems (1917) (Altered and with additional words by G. Walker)

 ${}^{\star}\mathrm{This}$ stanza was added by the composer.

7. I Hear America Singing

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear;

Those of mechanics—each one singing his, as it should be, blithe and strong;

The carpenter singing his, as he measures his plank or beam,

The mason singing his, as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work;

The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat—the deckhand singing on the steamboat deck;

The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench—the blacksmith singing as he stands;

The wood-cutter's song—the farmer on his way in the morning, or at noon, or at sundown,

The gentle singing of the mother—or of the wife at home with her work—or of the young girl studying her lessons; or dreaming... Each singing what belongs to her, and to none else;

The day sings what belongs to the day—The night—the party of young fellows, robust, and friendly, Singing, with open mouths, their strong melodious songs. I hear America, I hear America, in song.

Walt Whitman (G. Walker, alt.) from Leaves of Grass (1900)

8. Sky-Born Music

Let me go where I will,
I hear a sky-born music still:
It sounds from all things old,
It sounds from all things young,
From all that's fair, from all that's foul,
rings out a cheerful song.

Let me go, let me go where I will..

It is not only in the rose,
It is not only in the bird,
Not only where the rainbow glows,
Nor in the song of voices heard,
But in the darkest, coldest things,
There always, always, something sings.

It is not in the stars alone,
Nor in the budding flower,
Nor in sweet nature's mellow tone,
Nor in the rainbow shower,
But in the mud and dirt of things,
And in the daily flow of things,
In the deepest, darkest, coldest things,
There always, always, something sings.

Hour by hour, day by day,
The stream of life bears me away.
Though I shall travel where'er I will,
Yet I will hear this music still.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (G. Walker, alt.) from The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson (1904)

9. Everyone Sang

Ev'ryone suddenly burst out singing, And I was filled with such delight As prisoned birds must find in freedom Winging wildly across the white orchards and dark green fields On, on, and out of sight.

Ev'ryone's voice was suddenly lifted, And beauty came like the setting sun. My heart was shaken with tears And horror drifted away. O but ev'ryone was a bird And the song was wordless, The singing will never be done.

Siegfried Sassoon published in Picture Show (1919)

and excerpt from

"The Windhover"

My heart in hiding stirred for this bird—the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!

Gerard Manley Hopkins (G. Walker, alt.) published in Poems (1918)

Sing Evermore!

Songs in Celebration of Singing

for Soprano and Baritone Soloists, SATB Chorus (divisi), and Piano, with opt. Flute



^{*}If a Flute is not available, the part may be covered by the Piano.





2. In Praise of Music and Poetry

(a reconciliation)
Soprano and Baritone Soloists

Richard Barnfield (1574–1620)



^{*}This charming duet may be enhanced with props relating to the dichotomy of music and poetry. Women in the chorus may hold up posters displaying lutes and musical scores. Men in the chorus may display large volumes of poetry, or a poster of Spencer's bust! Props are raised and lowered to cheer on one's "team." [For example, women raise/display props when Soprano sings, Men raise/display props when Baritone sings. This "cheering on" will be especially active during the "duel" section at letter I.]



Walker | Sing Evermore! | 2. In Praise of Music and Poetry



Walker | Sing Evermore! | 2. In Praise of Music and Poetry

3. The Lost Chord *SATB Chorus*

Adelaide Anne Procter (1825–1864)







4. Refuge SATB Chorus

Sara Teasdale (1884–1933), first published 1917 Additional words by G. Walker







5. The Caged Bird Sings SATB Chorus

Based on the poem "Sympathy" by Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872–1906)



^{*}If a Flute is not available, the part may be covered by the Piano. Cue-sized notes have also been added in the Piano to aid in this. Walker | Sing Evermore! | 5. The Caged Bird Sings



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Jointly commissioned by Choral Spectrum and the Oberlin Choristers, Oberlin, Ohio, for their anniversary seasons: Choral Spectrum (50th season), Choristers (25th season), and the Williamsburg (VA) Women's Chorus, in celebration of their 50th season (1965–2015)

6. The Gift to Sing

Women's Chorus (SSA)

James Weldon Johnson (1871–1938) Altered and with additional words by G. Walker



with much pedal





7. I Hear America Singing

Men's Chorus (TTBB) unaccompanied

from *Leaves of Grass*Walt Whitman (1819–1892)
G. Walker, alt.







8. Sky-Born Music SATB Chorus

from the poem "Music" Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1883) G. Walker, alt.



^{*}Piano may cover the Flute part if no Flute is available. Walker | *Sing Evermore!* | 8. Sky-Born Music





9. Everyone Sang *SATB Chorus*

Siegfried Sassoon (1886–1967) *published 1919*





Walker | Sing Evermore! | 9. Everyone Sang

