



SKYLARK

# CLEAR VOICES IN THE DARK

SUNDAY, MAY 28, 2023

3:00PM | Bedford Presbyterian Church | Bedford NY

MONDAY, MAY 29, 2023

3:00PM | Lawrence School | Falmouth MA

SATURDAY, JUNE 3, 2023

7:00PM | St. Paul's Episcopal Church | Newburyport MA

SUNDAY, JUNE 4, 2023

3:00PM | Church of the Redeemer | Chestnut Hill MA

## Poulenc and Éluard on *Figure Humaine*

"After a pilgrimage to Rocamadour I had the idea of composing a clandestine work which could be prepared in secret and then performed on the long-awaited day of liberation. With great enthusiasm I began *Figure Humaine* and completed it by the end of the summer. I composed the work for unaccompanied choir because I wanted this act of faith to be performed without instrumental aid, by sole means of the human voice."

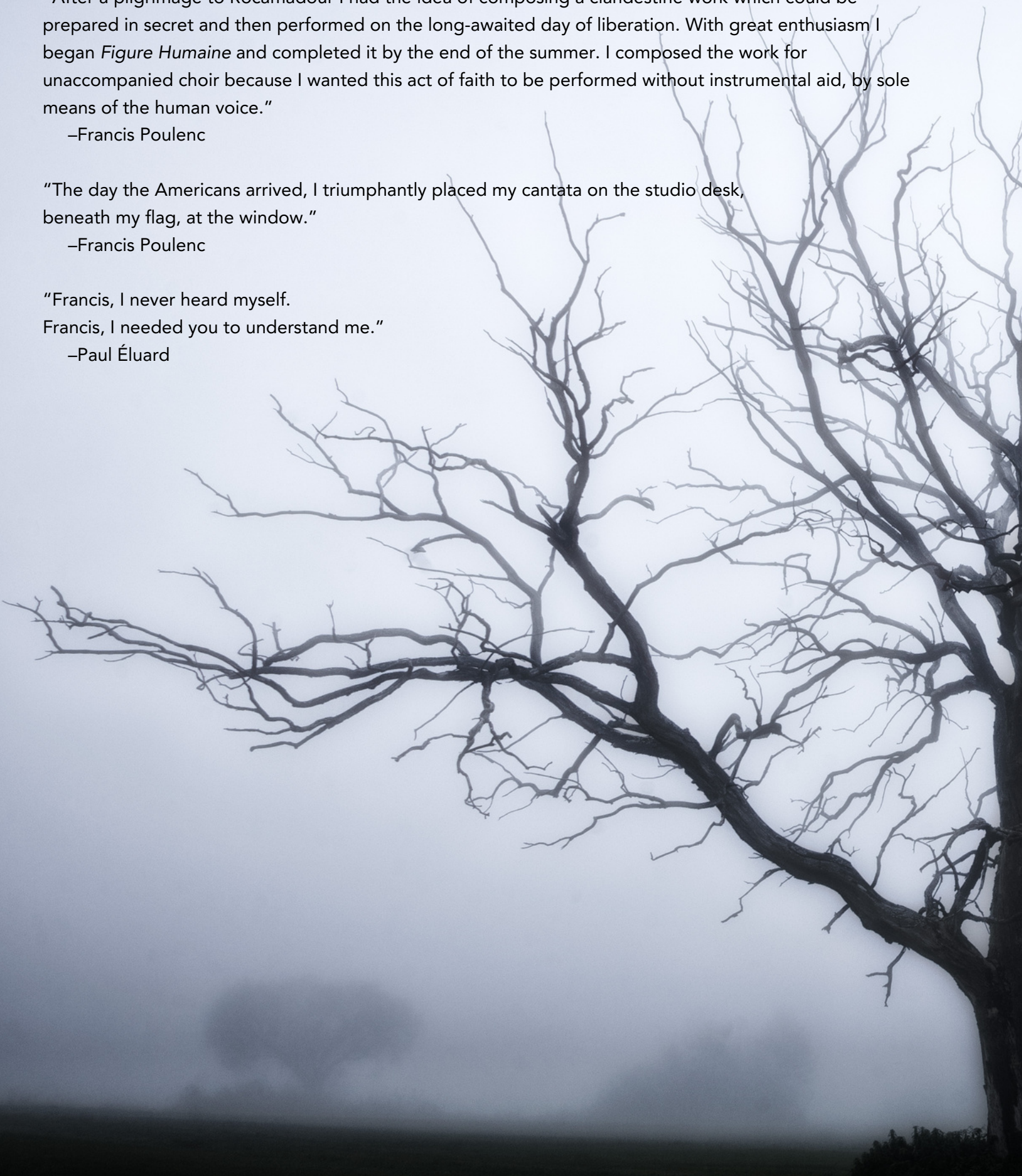
–Francis Poulenc

"The day the Americans arrived, I triumphantly placed my cantata on the studio desk, beneath my flag, at the window."

–Francis Poulenc

"Francis, I never heard myself.  
Francis, I needed you to understand me."

–Paul Éluard



# CLEAR VOICES IN THE DARK

## PRELUDE

When this Cruel War is over – Weeping, Sad and Lonely  
Arr. Guard

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## FIGURE HUMAINE

Francis Poulenc (1943)

Poetry by Paul Éluard (1895-1952)

## CIVIL WAR SOUNDSCAPES

1861-1865

I. De tous les printemps du monde...

Johnny has gone for a soldier  
Traditional, Arr. Jeffers

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II. En chantant les servantes s'élancent...

Break it Gently to my Mother  
Griffith/Buckley, Ed. Guard

III. Aussi bas que le silence...

Johnny, I hardly knew ye  
Traditional, Arr. Parker

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IV. Toi ma patiente...

Soldier's Memorial Day  
Perkins/Slade, Ed. Guard

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V. Riant du ciel et des planètes...

Working for the dawn of peace  
Gordon/Kittredge, Arr. Ron Jeffers

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VI. Le jour m'étonne et la nuit me fait peur...

Abide with me  
Monk/Lyte, Ed. Guard

VII. La menace sous le ciel rouge...

The Battle Hymn of the Republic  
Howe, Arr. Guard

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VIII. LIBERTÉ

# ABOUT CLEAR VOICES IN THE DARK

I believe that great art is often the product of great difficulty and tribulation, in many cases for the artist themselves. I also think art borne out of a time of societal turmoil can be even more profound, and can shed light today on what it was like to live and endure through tragedies of the past.

*Figure Humaine* is one of the ultimate artistic achievements from a time of turmoil. Composed by Francis Poulenc in 1943 in occupied France, it was composed in secret, inspired by the resistance poems of the surrealist poet Paul Éluard (poems that were distributed under plain cover during the occupation). It is one of the most profound pieces in the a cappella choral repertoire, if also one of the most difficult. Scored for double choir in six parts each, it is a vocal gauntlet which requires unmatched concentration and musicianship from every singer involved to mount a successful performance. Given that the piece was written at a time when victory was by no means assured, I believe that the difficulty of the work was intentional; to be worthy of the expressive task of communicating Éluard's wartime thoughts, I think Poulenc believed that a choir must possess outstanding commitment, dedication, and skill.

Because of its challenges, *Figure Humaine* is rarely performed. Soon after founding Skylark, I began to feel that this was a piece we simply had to share. But at only 20 minutes in length, I struggled to find the appropriate way to present it to allow people to truly engage with the work. While on a walk in 2014, I realized that we were approaching the 150th anniversary of the end of the Civil War, as well as the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II, occasions that presented a unique opportunity to share music of both time periods.

I set out on a journey to find the appropriate Civil War-era songs to pair with the Poulenc movements. *Figure Humaine* sets forth an intense emotional progression, cycling between despair and optimism against a backdrop of gathering madness. It was critical to find pieces that would make sense musically and textually in the context of Poulenc's work.

It was a fascinating journey. Through exploring my own musical heritage, I soon discovered that Alice Parker arranged *Johnny I Hardly Knew Ye* for the Robert Shaw Chorale in the late 1960s. Consultation with other Skylarks revealed several brilliant arrangements from Ron Jeffers, and a search through the Duke University Historical Sheet Music Archives uncovered several pieces that I never knew existed. The discovery that *Abide with me* (one of my favorite hymns) was written during 1861 was particularly poignant. Where no appropriate arrangement existed, I filled in myself with very simple editions. In all cases, the goal was to create as simple and honest an expression of the songs as possible. Against the foil of Poulenc's monumental achievement of the choral art, we aim to juxtapose the simple, the familiar, the universal.

Through sharing this program, we hope to take you on an emotional and historical journey, a journey that we hope will illuminate the struggles of people who endured these two great wars, a journey that can shed light on nightmares of the past through the art that emerged from them, and most importantly, a journey that will affirm the incredible power of the human spirit to endure in times of tragedy.

—Matthew Guard, Artistic Director

## When this Cruel War is over – Weeping, Sad and Lonely

Dearest Love, do you remember, when we last did meet,  
How you told me that you loved me, kneeling at my feet?  
Oh! How proud you stood before me, in your suit of blue,  
When you vow'd to me and country, ever to be true.

*Weeping, sad and lonely, hopes and fears how vain!  
When this cruel war is over, praying that we meet again.*

When the summer breeze is sighing, mournfully along,  
Or when autumn leaves are falling, sadly breathes the song.  
Oft in dreams I see thee lying on the battle plain,  
Lonely, wounded, even dying, calling but in vain. *Weeping, sad and lonely...*

If amid the din of battle, nobly you should fall,  
Far away from those who love you, none to hear you call –  
Who would whisper words of comfort, who would soothe your pain?  
Ah! The many cruel fancies, ever in my brain. *Weeping, sad and lonely...*

But our Country called you, Darling, angels cheer your way;  
While our nation's sons are fighting, we can only pray.  
With our hopes in God and Liberty, let all nations see  
How we loved the starry banner, emblem of the free. *Weeping, sad and lonely...*

### I. De tous les printemps du monde...

De tous les printemps du monde,  
Celui-ci est le plus laid  
Entre toutes mes façons d'être  
La confiante est la meilleure

L'herbe soulève la neige  
Comme la pierre d'un tombeau  
Moi je dors dans la tempête  
Et je m'éveille les yeux clairs

Le lent le petit temps s'achève  
Où toute rue devait passer  
Par mes plus intimes retraites  
Pour que je rencontre quelqu'un

Je n'entends pas parler les monstres  
Je les connais ils ont tout dit  
Je ne vois que les beaux visages  
Les bons visages sûrs d'eux-mêmes

Sûrs de ruiner bientôt leurs maîtres

Of all the springtimes of the world  
Never was there one so vile  
I may have many ways of being  
but the best is the most trusting

See how the grass lifts the snow  
As if it were a graveyard stone  
I myself sleep through the tempest  
And awake with undimmed eyes

Slow moving time comes to an end  
Where all streets had to pass  
traversing all my most secret places  
So that I could meet someone

I do not hear the monsters talking  
I know them well, and all they have said before  
I see only lovely faces  
Good faces of those self-assured

Certain soon to ruin their masters

### Johnny has gone for a soldier

There I sat on Butternut Hill, who could blame me, cry my fill,  
And every tear would turn a mill, Johnny has gone for a soldier.  
Me, oh my I loved him so, broke my heart to see him go,  
and only time will heal my woe, O Johnny has gone for a soldier.  
O I will sell my flax, I'll sell my wheel, buy my love a sword of steel,  
so it in battle he may wield, Johnny has gone for a soldier.

We open tonight's concert with a single female voice, who will give life to one of the most popular songs of the Civil War in both the Union and the Confederacy. The simple, yet hauntingly melancholic melody perfectly captures one of the central themes of all wars: departure from a loved one with the fervent hope to one day see him or her again.

*Figure Humaine's* opening movement introduces the deep conflict between the reality of the present and hope for the future that plays out through the entire piece. Each stanza of Éluard's poem alternates between two poles of grim reality and glimmers of hope, and Poulenc's antiphonal setting elegantly uses alternation between the two choirs to dramatize this internal struggle. The movement ends with a dissonant and unconventional cadence back into the opening key of B minor, on the text "sure to ruin their masters." This may represent Poulenc's hope that France would overcome its occupation, but with the knowledge that the painful struggle would never fully banish the destruction already underway.

Many songs popular during the Civil War had origins elsewhere. Our next piece is believed to have originated as an Irish folk song in the early 18th century. It soon migrated to the United States, and was paired with these words by John Allison during the American Revolutionary War. *Johnny has gone for a soldier* became popular again during the Civil War, as a timeless expression of the universal feelings of loss and anxiety when loved ones leave home. Many of you may be familiar with the melody because of Jacqueline Schwab's haunting piano improvisation featured in the Ken Burns documentary *The Civil War*.

In this movement, Poulenc thrusts us into an explicit horror film that unapologetically reveals the realities of combat through the eyes of young women attempting to clean up the battlefield. Poulenc's frantic tempo begins the movement in chaotic fashion, and his angular Phrygian melodies suddenly modulate by half step, creating the unsettling feeling that the ground is shifting beneath our feet. Soon, the ground does move, as the poem shifts to images of the apocalypse, potentially a commentary on how war pulls all involved into the depravity of violence. Of particular note is the vivid sonic imagery as the walls crumble and the stones sink into the waters: one can almost see the ripples in the primordial ocean as the altos slowly finish their phrase. After the chaos, the movement ends with a pessimistic commentary on the nature of humanity in times of bloodshed. When the full choir stunningly resolves into E major on the text "surrendering...to the spell of human weakness," it feels like an artificial high: an unstable moment of seeming relief or escape that cannot overcome the true calamities at hand.

The historic sheet music of our next piece, composed in 1863, bears the following inscription: This ballad was suggested by the following incident. On the battle-field of Gettysburg, among many wounded soldiers was a young man the only son of an aged mother. Hearing the surgeon tell his companions that he could not survive the ensuing night, he placed his hand upon his forehead, talking continually of his mother and sister, and said to his comrades assembled around him, "Break it gently to my mother."

Poulenc's third movement paints a dim picture of a country that has been laid low by an occupation. He begins the piece in E-flat minor, a dismal and disoriented key in the context of the overall work. Two long opening phrases illustrate cold images of inactivity and desolation. Notably, Poulenc never allows all voices in either choir to sing together, perhaps an illustration of the absence of loved ones who might be away or lost in battle. One can almost see the burned out buildings of a village razed by combat, with survivors quietly huddled around a flickering hearth. Shortly before the end, the movement suddenly becomes active, with a chilling harmonization of Éluard's words that personify the occupation as "poison" itself. Poulenc's setting of the final two words, which translate to "all humanity," are particularly poignant. He places the upper voices of the first choir at the extreme top of their range, and provides a glimmer of a major sonority in E-flat, before resolving to a weak unison. In a piece where the key of E major ultimately represents redemption for humanity, a high and weak cadence in E-flat illustrates the image of an occupied people who are only a shadow of their true selves.

## II. En chantant les servantes s'élancent...

En chantant les servantes s'élancent Pour rafraîchir la place où l'on tuait Petites filles en poudre vite agenouillées Leurs mains aux soupiraux de la fraîcheur Sont bleues comme une expérience Un grand matin joyeux	Singing, the maidens rush forward to tidy up the place where blood has flowed, and little powdered girls kneel, their hands held out towards fresher air colored like a new sensation Of some great joyous day
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Faites face à leurs mains les morts Faites face à leurs yeux liquides C'est la toilette des éphémères La dernière toilette de la vie Les pierres descendent disparaissent Dans l'eau vaste essentielle	Face their hands, o ye dead, And their eyes that are liquefying This is the ritual of mayflies, The final ritual of this mortal life The stones descend, disappearing Into the vast, primal waters
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La dernière toilette des heures A peine un souvenir ému Aux puits taris de la vertu Aux longues absences encombrantes Et l'on s'abandonne à la chair très tendre Aux prestiges de la faiblesse.	For the ultimate ritual of time No poignant memory remains At those dry wells devoid of virtue At long uncomfortable absences And the surrendering of tender flesh To the spell of human weakness.
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## Break it gently to my mother

See! ere the sun sinks behind those hills, Ere darkness the earth doth cover,  
You will lay me low, in the cold, damp ground, Break it gently to my mother!  
I see her sweet sad face on me now, And a smile doth o'er it hover;  
Oh God! I would spare the tears that will flow;  
Break it gently to my mother.

Good bye, my mother ever dear; sister, you loved your brother;  
Comrades, I take a last farewell; Break it gently to my mother.

Oh, say that in battle I've nobly died, For Right and our Country's honor;  
Like the reaper's grain fell the leaden rain, Yet God saved our starry banner!  
My sister, playmate of boyhood's years, Will lament her fallen brother;  
She must try to soothe our parent's woe;  
Break it gently to my mother.

Good bye, my mother ever dear; sister, you loved your brother;  
Comrades, I take a last farewell; Break it gently to my mother.

Break it gently to my mother

## III. Aussi bas que le silence...

Aussi bas que le silence D'un mort planté dans la terre Rien que ténèbres en tête Aussi monotone et sourd Que l'automne dans la mare Couverte de honte mate Le poison veuf de sa fleur Et de ses bêtes dorées Crache sa nuit sur les hommes.	Hushed and still in silence wrapt Like a corpse that lies in the earth Head full of darkness and shadows As deaf and monotonous As autumn in the pond Covered with dull shame Poison bereft of its flower And of its golden monsters Spits out its night over all men.
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## Johnny, I hardly knew ye

While goin' the road to sweet Athy, hurroo, hurroo  
While goin' the road to sweet Athy,  
A stick in me hand and a drop in me eye,  
A doleful damsel I heard cry:  
Johnny, I hardly knew ye.

*With your drums and guns and guns and drums, hurroo, hurroo*  
*With your drums and guns and guns and drums,*  
*The enemy nearly slew ye*  
*Oh my darling dear, Ye look so queer*  
*Faith Johnny, I hardly knew ye.*

Where are the eyes that looked so mild, hurroo, hurroo  
Where are the eyes that looked so mild  
When my poor heart you first beguiled  
Why did ye skeddaddle from me and the child  
Why Johnny, I hardly knew ye. *With your drums...*

Where are the legs with which you run, hurroo, hurroo  
Where are the legs with which you run  
When you went for to carry a gun  
Indeed, your dancin' days are done  
Why Johnny, I hardly knew ye. *With your drums...*

I'm happy for to see ye home, hurroo, hurroo  
I'm happy for to see ye home  
All from the island of Ceylon  
So low in the flesh, so high in the bone  
Oh Johnny, I hardly knew ye. *With your drums...*

## IV. Toi ma patiente...

Toi ma patiente  
ma patience ma parente  
Gorge haut suspendue  
orgue de la nuit lente  
Révérence cachant  
tous les ciels dans sa grâce  
Prépare à la vengeance  
un lit d'où je naîtrai.

You, my patient one,  
my patience, my guardian  
Throat held high,  
organ of the calm night  
Reverence cloaking  
all of heaven in its grace  
Prepare, for vengeance,  
a bed where I may be born

## Soldier's Memorial Day

When flow'ry Summer is at hand,  
And Spring has gemm'd the earth with bloom, We hither bring, with loving hand,  
Bright flow'rs to deck our soldier's tomb.

With snowy hawthorn, clusters white, Fair violets of heav'nly blue,  
And early roses, fresh and bright,  
We wreath the red, and white, and blue.

*Gentle birds above are sweetly singing*  
*O'er the graves of heroes brave and true; While the sweetest flow'rs we are bringing,*  
*Wreath'd in garlands of red, white and blue.*

But purer than the fairest flowers, We strew above the honored dead, The tender  
changeless love of ours, That decks the soldier's lowly bed. *Gentle birds...*

While many American Civil War songs repurposed music from elsewhere, in some cases the situation worked in reverse. Johnny I hardly knew ye, published in London in 1867, is a re-purposing of the American Civil War Song When Johnny Came Marching Home (1863). While the original American version was decidedly pro-war, this version from only a few years later takes a definite anti-war stance, transporting the melody and the central story line to Ireland. This evening we perform an arrangement by Alice Parker that was first recorded by the Robert Shaw Chorale in 1969 during another time of powerful anti-war sentiment.

By this point in *Figure Humaine*, it is clear that the first choir often plays the role of the optimistic protagonist, in stark contrast to the second choir's harsh reality. This movement continues that trend, featuring the first choir in the bright, optimistic key of A Major. However, Poulenc's harmonization morphs into jarring dissonance each time the disturbing final line of the text is repeated "Prepare for vengeance, a bed where I will be born." Perhaps the bed represents a deathbed of a people who can only be born into freedom through the ultimate sacrifice. It is likely that this movement had a deeper, personal meaning to Poulenc. Harmonically, this movement bears a striking resemblance to *Une Barque sur l'Océan*, a piece composed in 1905 by Maurice Ravel and premiered by pianist Ricardo Viñes. Viñes was Poulenc's music teacher, mentor, and became a father-like figure to him after Poulenc's parents died. Poulenc later wrote: "I owe him everything ... In reality it is to Viñes that I owe my fledgling efforts in music and everything I know about the piano." Viñes passed away in April, 1943, just three months before Poulenc composed *Figure Humaine*. It seems likely that when he composed the optimistic harmonic repetitions of *Toi ma patiente* (which includes the word "parent"), Poulenc was imagining his spiritual and musical mentor playing the rich harmonies of Ravel.

The first Memorial Day holiday in the United States was declared in 1868, three years after the end of the Civil War. Originally called Decoration Day, General John Logan's order declared "The 30th of May, 1868, is designated for the purpose of strewing with flowers, or otherwise decorating the graves of comrades who died in defense of their country." Our next piece was written for the occasion in 1870, and was performed at remembrances on the third Memorial Day.

Poulenc's next movement plunges us into the chaos of battle. He pits the two choirs in virtual combat for the entire movement, desperately firing the same biting text at each other at breakneck speed. The two choirs switch textual roles for the final repeat, illustrating Éluard's allusion to implicit guilt on any side of a conflict. Most significantly, the choirs never sing at the same time except on the crucial last line of text. This short, jarring movement leaves one feeling disturbed, tense, and unsatisfied – a masterful musical expression of Éluard's statement on the futility of violence.

Our next piece, set for men's voices alone, combines two civil war songs from different eras. Two Brothers, a well-known ballad that tells the tragic story of a family divided between North and South, was written in 1951 by American songwriter Irving Gordon. Ron Jeffers poignantly juxtaposes this 20th century piece with Tenting on the Old Camp Ground, written in 1863 by Walter Kittridge. After the retrospective Two Brothers, Tenting on the Old Camp Ground perfectly captures the weariness and hope that must have been so common on late nights in a camp of exhausted soldiers.

This movement features the second choir alone, playing their role as the more pessimistic voice. Set in the somber key of A minor (in contrast to the first choir's solo movement in A major), Éluard's text speaks of being pursued by an invisible animal (a wolf, in the original poem's title). Poulenc's setting is simple and lyrical, but somehow also unrelenting and bleak. For much of the movement, Poulenc only has a few voices sing together, which gives the feeling that our singers are wandering alone in the woods, being pursued by a monster in the shadows. When all the voices do join together for the final repetition of "winter pursues me," Poulenc notes "Surtout sans ralentir" ("above all without slowing down"), a brilliant musical gesture that expresses the inescapable fear of the text.

The text for Abide with me was written by Scottish Anglican Henry Francis Lyte in 1847. It was not until 1861 that British composer William Henry Monk paired Lyte's words with his own hymn tune, Eventide. The hymn migrated across the Atlantic, becoming a hymn of particular poignancy for Americans enduring the Civil War.

## V. Riant du ciel et des planètes...

Riant du ciel et des planètes  
La bouche imbibée de confiance  
Les sages Veulent des fils  
Et des fils de leurs fils  
Jusqu'à périr d'usure  
Le temps ne pèse que les fous  
L'abîme est seul à verdoyer  
Et les sages sont ridicules.

Laughing at the sky and planets  
Mouths dripping with arrogance  
The wise men wish for sons  
And for sons for their sons  
Until they die in vain  
The march of time burdens not only the foolish  
Hell alone flourishes  
And the wise men are made foolish.

## Working for the Dawn of Peace

Two brothers on their way, One wore blue and one wore gray.  
One wore blue and one wore gray, as they marched along their way,  
the fife and drum began to play, all on a beautiful mornin'.  
One was gentle, one was kind, One came home, one stayed behind.  
One wore blue and one wore gray, as they marched along their way,  
the fife and drum began to play, all on a beautiful mornin'.

Mournin', mournin'...

Many are the hearts that are weary tonight,  
waitin' for the war to cease, many are the hopes,  
the hopes once high and bright that sleep with those at peace.  
Waitin' tonight, workin' tonight, workin' that the war might cease!  
O many are the hearts that are working for the right,  
Waitin' for the dawn of peace.

VI. Le jour m'étonne et la nuit me fait peur...

Le jour m'étonne  
et la nuit me fait peur  
L'été me hante  
et l'hiver me poursuit  
Un animal sur la neige a posé  
Ses pattes sur le sable ou dans la boue  
Ses pattes venues de plus loin  
que mes pas  
Sur une piste où la mort  
A les empreintes de la vie.

The day shocks me  
and the night terrifies me  
Summer haunts me  
and winter pursues me  
An animal has imprinted its paws  
In the snow, in the sand or in the mud  
Its pawprints have come further  
than my own steps  
On a path where death  
Bears the imprint of life.

## Abide with me

Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;  
The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide.  
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,  
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.  
Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;  
Earth's joys grow dim; its glories pass away;  
Change and decay in all around I see;  
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.  
I need Thy presence every passing hour.  
What but Thy grace can foil the tempter's power?  
Who, like Thyself, my guide and stay can be?  
Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.  
I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless;  
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness.  
Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory?  
I triumph still, if Thou abide with me.  
Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes;  
Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies.  
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;  
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.



## VII. La menace sous le ciel rouge...

La menace sous le ciel rouge  
Venait d'en bas des mâchoires  
Des écailles des anneaux  
D'une chaîne glissante et lourde  
La vie était distribuée  
Largement pour que la mort  
Prît au sérieux le tribut  
Qu'on lui payait sans compter  
La mort était le dieu d'amour  
Et les vainqueurs dans un baiser  
S'évanouissaient sur leurs victimes  
La pourriture avait du cœur  
Et pourtant sous le ciel rouge  
Sous les appétits de sang  
Sous la famine lugubre  
La caverne se ferma  
La terre utile effaçà  
Les tombes creusées d'avance  
Les enfants n'eurent plus peur  
Des profondeurs maternelles  
Et la bêtise et la démence  
Et la bassesse firent place  
A des hommes frères des hommes  
Ne luttant plus contre la vie  
A des hommes indestructibles.

The menace under the red sky  
Came from under the jaws  
The scales and links  
Of a slippery and heavy chain  
Life was dispersed  
Widely so that death  
Could gravely take the dues  
Which were paid without a thought  
Death was the God of love  
And the victors with a kiss  
Swoon over their victims  
Decay held the heart  
And yet under the red sky  
Beneath the lust for blood  
Beneath the dismal hunger  
The cavern closed up  
The useful earth covered over  
The graves dug in advance  
The children no longer fearing  
The maternal depths  
And stupidity, dementia  
And vulgarity gave way  
To humanity and brotherhood  
No longer set against life  
But to an indestructible human race.

## The Battle Hymn of the Republic

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;  
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;  
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword:  
His truth is marching on.

*Glory, glory, hallelujah! His truth is marching on.*

I have seen Him in the watch-fires of a hundred circling camps,  
They have builded Him an altar in the evening dews and damps;  
I can read His righteous sentence by the dim and flaring lamps:  
His day is marching on. *Glory, glory...*

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat;  
He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment-seat:  
Oh, be swift, my soul, to answer Him! Be jubilant, my feet!  
Our God is marching on. *Glory, glory...*

In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,  
With a glory in His bosom that transfigures you and me.  
As He died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,  
While God is marching on. *Glory, glory...*

After the introspective fear of the sixth movement, *Figure Humaine's* penultimate movement opens in outwardly terrifying fashion as Éluard's predatory wolf transforms into an even more horrifying vision, and Poulenc's music undergoes a similarly horrible metamorphosis. As an agitated fugue cycles through a bizarre spiral of downward fifths and tritones, it feels as if the choir is being pulled into the underworld. Soon after, hell itself seems to be rising to earth, as the choir slowly ascends through a wild series of minor chords. Eventually the tempest slows, and seems to reach an unsatisfying end on the grim text "Decay held the heart." At this point in *Figure Humaine*, a glimmer of true hope begins to emerge for the first time. In a haunting passage, altos from both choirs sing a duet that transforms the original fugue subject into something less terrifying. The second choir, typically the bearer of bleak news, then offers the phrase "beneath the dismal hunger, the cavern closed up." On this text, Poulenc ends his downward cycle, bringing the second choir into a single chord that rises through several inversions. You can almost hear the cave close and see the horrifying dragon disappear. For the final passage of the movement, Poulenc brings all twelve voices together for an extended period, ending with a call for solidarity and determination. As Éluard's text turns outwardly hopeful, Poulenc's music captures the spirit of a people joining together to overcome their fears in the face of oppression.

The tune we now associate with The Battle Hymn of the Republic and its "Glory, Glory, Hallelujah" refrain had its origins in a traditional American camp meeting song say, Brothers, Will You Meet Us. By May 1861, the tune had been appropriated for the song John Brown's Body, a favorite of Union soldiers during their marches. That fall, prominent abolitionist Julia Ward Howe attended a public review of soldiers in Washington. After hearing the brigades sing the tune that day, one of Howe's friends suggested that she write new lyrics for the song. Years later, Howe described her night at the Willard Hotel on November 18, 1861: I went to bed that night as usual, and slept, according to my wont, quite soundly. I awoke in the gray of the morning twilight; and as I lay waiting for the dawn, the long lines of the desired poem began to twine themselves in my mind. Having thought out all the stanzas, I said to myself, 'I must get up and write these verses down, lest I fall asleep again and forget them.' So, with a sudden effort, I sprang out of bed, and found in the dimness an old stump of a pen which I remembered to have used the day before. I scrawled the verses almost without looking at the paper.

Poulenc's final movement is the only one in his manuscript that bears a true title, emblazoned in all capital letters in the score (the rest of the movements simply quote the opening of the respective poem as a shorthand title). This is fitting, as this poem (dropped into occupied France via airlift) was the inspiration for the piece, and is the ultimate destination of the work as a whole.

Éluard's spectacular 21 stanza poem is a cry for freedom, expressed through an inexhaustible list of things and ideas that would be meaningless without it. As Éluard bounces from item to item, from concrete to abstract, from the trivial to the sublime, Poulenc's constantly morphing harmonic language masterfully conveys the text. Poulenc incredibly cycles through some form of every key, major and minor, with the notable exception of E-flat minor (the key of "occupation" throughout the work).

After being at odds for much of the work, the two choirs work together brilliantly in this movement, seemingly part of a single mind that flits from idea to idea, always pausing to write the name of "Liberty" on everything. As the two choirs approach the thrilling end of the piece, their exhortations amplify each other, culminating in a shocking and embattled cry that stretches the human voice to the extremes of its range.

## VIII. LIBERTÉ

Sur mes cahiers d'écolier  
Sur mon pupitre et les arbres  
Sur le sable sur la neige  
J'écris ton nom

On my school books  
On my desk and on the trees  
On the sand and in the snow  
I write your name

Sur toutes les pages lues  
Sur toutes les pages blanches  
Pierre sang papier ou cendre  
J'écris ton nom

On every page that is read  
On all blank pages  
Stone blood paper or ashes  
I write your name

Sur les images dorées  
Sur les armes des guerriers  
Sur la couronne des rois  
J'écris ton nom

On gilded pictures  
On the weapons of warriors  
On the crown of kings  
I write your name

Sur la jungle et le désert  
Sur les nids sur les genêts  
Sur l'écho de mon enfance  
J'écris ton nom

Over the jungle and the desert  
On the nests on the brooms  
On the echo of my infancy  
I write your name

Sur les merveilles des nuits  
Sur le pain blanc des journées  
Sur les saisons fiancées  
J'écris ton nom

On the wonders of the night  
On the daily bread  
On the conjoined seasons  
I write your name

Sur tous mes chiffons d'azur  
Sur l'étang soleil moisi  
Sur le lac lune vivante  
J'écris ton nom

On all my blue scarves  
On the pond grown moldy in the sun  
On the lake alive in the moonlight  
I write your name

Sur les champs sur l'horizon  
Sur les ailes des oiseaux  
Et sur le moulin des ombres  
J'écris ton nom

On fields on the horizon  
On the wings of birds  
And on the mill of shadows  
I write your name

Sur chaque bouffée d'aurore  
Sur la mer sur les bateaux  
Sur la montagne démente  
J'écris ton nom

On each rising dawn  
On the sea on the boats  
On the wild mountain  
I write your name

Sur la mousse des nuages  
Sur les sueurs de l'orage  
Sur la pluie épaisse et fade  
J'écris ton nom

On the foamy clouds  
In the sweat-filled storm  
On the rain heavy and relentless  
I write your name

Sur les formes scintillantes  
Sur les cloches des couleurs  
Sur la vérité physique  
J'écris ton nom

On shimmering figures  
On bells of many colours  
On undeniable truth  
I write your name

Sur les sentiers éveillés  
Sur les routes déployées  
Sur les places qui débordent  
J'écris ton nom

On the living pathways  
On the roads stretched out  
On the bustling places  
I write your name

Sur la lampe qui s'allume  
Sur la lampe qui s'éteint  
Sur mes maisons réunies  
J'écris ton nom

On the lamp which is ignited  
On the lamp which is extinguished  
My reunited households  
I write your name

Sur le fruit coupé en deux  
Du miroir et de ma chambre  
Sur mon lit coquille vide  
J'écris ton nom

On the fruit cut in two  
The mirror and my bedroom  
On my bed an empty shell  
I write your name

Sur mon chien gourmand et tendre  
Sur ses oreilles dressées  
Sur sa patte maladroite  
J'écris ton nom

On my dog greedy and loving  
On his alert ears  
On his clumsy paw  
I write your name

Sur le tremplin de ma porte  
Sur les objets familiers  
Sur le flot du feu béni  
J'écris ton nom

On the springboard of my door  
On the familiar objects  
On the stream of the sacred flame  
I write your name

Sur toute chair accordée  
Sur le front de mes amis  
Sur chaque main qui se tend  
J'écris ton nom

On all united flesh  
On the faces of my friends  
On each hand held out  
I write your name

Sur la vitre des surprises  
Sur les lèvres attentives  
Bien au-dessus du silence  
J'écris ton nom

On the window of surprises  
On the attentive lips  
Well above silence  
I write your name

Sur mes refuges détruits  
Sur mes phares écroulés  
Sur les murs de mon ennui  
J'écris ton nom

On my destroyed safehouses  
On my collapsed beacons  
On the walls of my boredom  
I write your name

Sur l'absence sans désir  
Sur la solitude nue  
Sur les marches de la mort  
J'écris ton nom

On absence without desire  
On naked solitude  
On the death marches  
I write your name

Sur la santé revenue  
Sur le risque disparu  
Sur l'espoir sans souvenirs  
J'écris ton nom

On health restored  
On risk disappeared  
On hope without memory  
I write your name

Et par le pouvoir d'un mot  
Je recommence ma vie  
Je suis né pour te connaître  
Pour te nommer

And through the power of one word  
I recommence my life  
I was born to know you  
To give a name to you

Liberté

Liberty

## The Clocktower of Beaulieu-sur-Dordogne

Poulenc composed *Figure Humaine* in an apartment in the village of Beaulieu-sur-Dordogne in the summer of 1943. In a letter to a friend that August, he described the view from his room, which looked directly out on the bell tower in the center of the village. He wrote:

"While beholding this [tower], so strong and so very French, I composed the music of LIBERTÉ."

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### Acknowledgements

This concert is dedicated in memoriam to Kathleen A. Van Demark, a lover of choral music and long-time supporter of Skylark.

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Interested in becoming a volunteer?  
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Soprano **Sarah Moyer's** recent and upcoming solo work includes performances with the Colorado Bach Ensemble, Aspen Chamber Symphony, Bourbon Baroque, Lost Dog New Music Ensemble, Emmanuel Music, and Boston Modern Orchestra Project, with American premieres by Melani and Nørgård, and world premieres by Harbison, Kallembach, Theofanidis, and Runestad, among others. She regularly appears with GRAMMY® nominated groups Skylark, Seraphic Fire, Conspirare, Clarion, True Concord, as well as Santa Fe Desert Chorale, Variant 6, and Artefact. She loves being a mom, plays the ukulele, races triathlons, and enjoys hiking with her husband and their beautiful catahoula leopard.  
www.sopranosarahmoyer.com.



**Fotina Naumenko**, soprano, has been praised for her "radiant voice" (Boston Globe), described as "angelic" (MusicWeb International) and "capable of spectacular virtuosic hi-jinks" (Boston Musical Intelligencer). Fotina's singing encompasses a wide variety of genres including oratorio, opera, art song, choral and contemporary music, both as a soloist and ensemble musician. Ensemble credits include Conspirare, Artefact, the Experiential Chorus, Clarion, Cappella Romana, among many others. Fotina is a Fulbright scholar specializing in Russian/Slavonic diction and teaches at Shenandoah Conservatory. She lives in the Washington, DC area with her husband Steve, their son Gabriel, and their two cats, Pumpkin and Noodle.



Currently based in Fort Worth, Texas, **Alissa Ruth Suver** can be heard with a variety of professional choral ensembles around the country, including the Santa Fe Desert Chorale, Orpheus Chamber Singers, Conspirare, The Crossing, and True Concord. She has also appeared as a soloist with Bourbon Baroque and American Baroque Opera Co. in both opera and oratorio performances. In addition to her performance work, Alissa is an active teacher and conductor, currently serving as the Assistant Director at Timber Creek High School. When she isn't singing, Alissa loves running and cooking, and she lives with her husband Brent and their two black cats, Chip and Frankie.



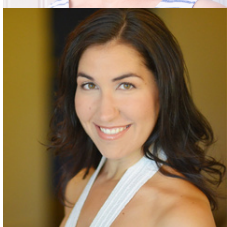
Soprano **Janet Stone's** first musical exploration was at age four, when she would sing "Row, row, row your boat" repetitively, at increasingly higher keys, to her parents' chagrin. Located in Boston, Janet sings with multiple professional ensembles, including Skylark Ensemble, Ensemble Altera, and The Bach Project. She enjoys working with composers, and has premiered works by Patricia Van Ness, Elena Ruehr, and others. She served as section leader and featured soloist at Trinity Church, Boston for seven years. In her free time, Janet is training to be a professional cat lady. You can follow her feline friend on Instagram @obiewancatnobi.



Praised for having "the voice of an angel," mezzo-soprano and contemporary vocalist **Carrie Cheron** defies the definition of genre. She has performed as a soloist with and as an ensemble member of such groups as the Boston Baroque, the Handel + Haydn Society, the American Classical Orchestra, Arcadia Players, Yale Choral Artists, and Atlanta's New Trinity Baroque. Carrie is also a nationally recognized, award-winning, performing singer/songwriter and has shared the stage with such acclaimed artists as Sweet Honey In The Rock, The Barra MacNeils, David Jacobs-Strain, Anais Mitchell, and Edie Carey. She is on the voice faculty at Berklee College of Music. www.carriecheron.com



Mezzo-soprano **Carolyn Guard** is a founding member of Skylark. A life-long Episcopal church musician, she began her musical studies with the Royal School of Church Music at age 6. After attending the Eton Choral courses in the UK, Carolyn was a founding member of the Choral Fellow program in the Memorial Church at Harvard University, and was a staff singer at The Cathedral of St. Philip in Atlanta. Carolyn's decidedly non-musical degrees are from Harvard College and Emory University. When not singing or working on Babiatours, you'll find her at home with her four boys (Matthew, Harry, Arthur and Baxter the dog).



Mezzo-soprano **Helen Karloski** has been praised for her "genuine mezzo timbre" (Opera News) and a voice "beautifully suited for oratorio" (Santa Fe New Mexican). Ms. Karloski made her Lincoln Center debut in Mozart's Solemn Vespers with the Mostly Mozart Festival and her Carnegie Hall debut performing Mozart's Mass in C Minor with the Oratorio Society of New York. Recent appearances include Pergolesi's Stabat Mater, (Harry Bicket), Dvořák's Stabat Mater (Omaha Symphony), Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (American Classical Orchestra), Handel's Messiah (TENET), and Mendelssohn's A Midsummer Night's Dream (New York City Ballet). Helen enjoys exploring the world with her husband Paul.



Hailed as "astonishing" (Gramophone) and "as good as they come" (MusicWeb International), mezzo-soprano **Clare McNamara** brings her versatility to a wide variety of early and new repertoire throughout the United States and abroad. One of Skylark's longest-standing members, she has maintained affiliations as a soloist and ensemble member with groups such as Handel+Haydn Society, Cut Circle, Lorelei Ensemble, The Boston Camerata, the Staunton Music Festival, and the Washington Bach Consort. Clare's pandemic time has included getting married over Zoom, learning to appreciate weeding, and teaching herself how to nap.



Mezzo-soprano **Megan Roth** enjoys a varied career performing opera, oratorio, art song, and chamber music. Recently she performed the roles of Tisbe in La Cenerentola and Rosina in Il barbiere di Siviglia, and regularly performs as the alto soloist in Messiah. As an ensemble artist, she performs regularly with renowned national ensembles including Skylark Vocal Ensemble, True Concord, Yale Choral Artists, and Cincinnati Vocal Arts Ensemble. Megan is also the artistic director of Calliope's Call, which presents unique and culturally relevant programs of art song. She enjoys swimming and hiking with her husband Adam and their two totally spoiled Boston Terriers, Bronx and Brooklyn.

**John K. Cox** is Visiting Professor of Music at Lewis & Clark College, where he directs two choirs and teaches courses in music theory and history. A specialist in Renaissance and Baroque performance practice and advocate for forgotten repertoires, Dr. Cox's recent scholarship focuses on Italian sacred music from the late-seventeenth century. In its 2024-25 season, Portland Baroque Orchestra will give the modern debut of five of his editions, written for performance in Roman convents during the Anno Santo of 1675. He has presented research at meetings of the International Musicological Society, North American Renaissance Society, Society for 17th Century Music, and International Conference in Historic Performance.



**Paul D'Arcy** is in demand nationally as a soloist and chamber musician. Recent solo appearances include Handel's Messiah and Mozart's Requiem with the Austin Symphony, as well as Mendelssohn's Elijah, Bach's Christmas Oratorio, and Mozart Requiem Undead. Concert work in NYC includes Musica Sacra, St. John the Divine, Trinity Wall Street, Musica Viva, American Classical Orchestra, and Orchestra of St. Luke's. National ensembles include Seraphic Fire, San Diego Bach Collegium, True Concord, Ensemble Origo, and Spire. Discography includes Harmonia Mundi, Reference, Naxos, and PBS, including Conspirare's 2015 Grammy winning CD. Paul also enjoys making barrel-aged cocktails, cooking, and traveling.



Tenor **Erik Gustafson** is nationally active as an oratorio soloist and choral artist, and teaches voice at University of the South in Sewanee, TN. Erik has collaborated on two GRAMMY® Award-winning recordings with the Phoenix Chorale, and albums with Skylark, Bach Collegium San Diego, Conspirare, True Concord, Spire Chamber Ensemble, and Sounding Light. He performs regularly with Seraphic Fire and Santa Fe Desert Chorale, and is a founder of Quadrivium. Past solo highlights include Bach's St. John Passion with Arizona Bach Festival, Handel's Messiah with Tucson Symphony Orchestra, and Bach's Christmas Oratorio with Oregon Bach Festival. Erik is a connoisseur of craft beer.



**Nathan Hodgson** is a New York based tenor specializing in early music, chamber music, and choral singing. He sings with the Schola Cantorum at The Church of Saint Vincent Ferrer in New York City and performs with ensembles across the nation. A native of DFW, Nathan studied at the University of North Texas and, after receiving a Bachelor of Music in Music Education, sang regularly in the Dallas area with ensembles including the Orpheus Chamber Singers, Dallas Bach Society, and Denton Bach Society before moving to New York City in 2015. Nathan's extramusical pursuits include baking, hiking, and kickboxing.



**Eric Alatorre** is the Bass best associated with Chanticleer, where he was a member for nearly 30 years, and is well known for his deep and rich voice. During his tenure with Chanticleer he saw the ensemble grow from a group known best in the United States to an internationally acclaimed ensemble. He has performed in many of the world's major concert venues on 6 continents, and made nearly 60 recordings which have garnered 3 Grammy awards. Since then he continues to be engaged with many exceptional groups such as Seraphic Fire, Skylark, and Conspirare.



**Nathan Halbur**, baritone, performs in solo and choral capacities throughout Boston and its environs. In addition to singing with Cantata Singers since September 2019, he has worked with ensembles including Emmanuel Music and the Metropolitan Chorale (with whom he is Artist in Residence) and has appeared with the Boston Pops in their Holiday Pops Tour. Before moving to New England, he lived in California, acting as Musical Director of the Davis Chamber Choir and studying Physics at the University of California, Davis. He is Artistic Director of Causeway Chamber Soloists (an organization dedicated to producing recitals and recordings of vocal chamber music) and is an active composer and arranger of vocal music. He is half of the jazz/neo-soul duo Dreamglow as vocalist, keyboardist, and producer



Dr. **Christopher Jackson** is the Artistic Director and Conductor of The Bach Choir of Bethlehem - America's oldest Bach choir, founded in 1898. He has worked for 15 years as a conductor, educator, and scholar, and remains an active professional choral singer and soloist. He also serves as Skylark's Director of Education. In that position, he helped design free materials for music educators across the country to use for virtual music-making. He has performed with GRAMMY Award-Winning ensemble, Roomful of Teeth, the Santa Fe Desert Chorale, Artefact Ensemble, Les Canards Chantants, and Bach Vespers at Holy Trinity Lutheran, in New York City. He believes his homemade chicken noodle soup is better than yours.



Baritone **Sam Kreidenweis** sings extensively throughout the country and abroad. He has appeared on the Final Night of the BBC Proms, performed for the Japanese Imperial Family, and continues to perform and record with the Irish ensemble Anuna. He has sung with the GRAMMY® Award-winning Phoenix Chorale, Conspirare, and Cantus Vocal Ensemble. This season Sam premiered the title role in a new oratorio, James: the book of Ruth, and collaborated with the Kronos String Quartet for the premiere of At War With Ourselves by Michael Abels. Sam is an avid sourdough enthusiast and frequently bakes with his starter, Precious.



Bass-baritone **Andrew Padgett** is an accomplished interpreter of early music from medieval to baroque repertoire, and has appeared as a soloist in concert venues worldwide, including NYC's Lincoln Center and the Esplanade Concert Hall in his hometown, Singapore. He regularly sings with Emmanuel Music on their long-running Bach Cantata Series. Andrew holds a B.S. in physics, an M.M. in voice from UC Santa Barbara, and an M.M. in Early Music from Yale University's Institute of Sacred Music. He lives in Boston with his wife and son, and is an avid comic book reader, miniature painter, and homebrewer.





## About Skylark

Three-time GRAMMY®-nominee Skylark, “the cream of the American crop” (BBC Radio 3), is a premier chamber choir comprised of leading American vocal soloists, chamber musicians, and music educators. Skylark’s dramatic performances have been described as “gripping” (The Times of London), “exquisite...thrilling” (Gramophone Magazine), and “awe-inspiring” (Boston Music Intelligencer). Skylark’s mission is to be the most exciting and innovative vocal ensemble for audiences and artists alike, and to provide inspiring educational activities that positively impact students’ lives. Skylark sets the standard for innovative and engaging programs that re-define the choral experience for audiences and singers alike – three of its most recent albums have received GRAMMY® nominations, and Artistic Director Matthew Guard’s well-researched and creative programs have been described as “engrossing” (WQXR-NY) and “original, stimulating, and beautiful” (BBC Radio 3).



## Matthew Guard, Artistic Director

Three-time GRAMMY®-nominee MATTHEW GUARD is widely regarded as one of the most innovative and thoughtful programmers in American choral music. Praised for his “catalyzing leadership” (Q2/WQXR-NY) and “musically creative and intellectually rich” programming (Opera Obsession), Matthew is passionate about communicating something unique in each concert and recording. He scours the world of available repertoire for each program, exhaustively researches each piece, and crafts concerts and printed programs that captivate audiences with their hidden connections and seamless artistry. Matthew lives in Bedford, NY, with his wife Carolyn and sons Harry and Arthur.

## Staff

Matthew Guard, Artistic Director  
Carolyn Guard, Executive Director

Sarah Moyer, Ensemble Manager  
Janet Stone, Operations Manager & Marketing

## Support Our Mission

Skylark's mission is to be the most exciting and innovative vocal ensemble for audiences and artists alike, and to provide inspiring educational activities that positively impact students' lives.

Even the best musical groups in America can only count on ticket sales to cover 50% of operating costs. We rely on your generous donations to help us with the balance of our operating budget.

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## ON CHRISTMAS NIGHT

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Celebrate your holiday season with a new signature Skylark Christmas concert. Skylark voices featuring seasonal favorites and evocative choral settings will shepherd you into the magic and mystery of Christmas.



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March 14-17, 2024

Set sail with Skylark and GRAMMY®-nominated storyteller Sarah Walker for an exciting adventure on the high seas! Featuring sea shanties, siren songs, and other folk music about life on the water. This thrilling new storytelling concert is sure to make you long for the open ocean.



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The connection and love between a parent and child is like no other. Join Skylark as we reflect on childhood, parenting, and unconditional love. This concert will feature a new commission by celebrated jazz pianist and composer Dan Tepfer, along with Eric Whitacre's sparkling setting of "Goodnight Moon".