Northwest Girlchoir



Draw the Circle Wide

Saturday, November 22, 2025

2:30pm | Everett Civic Auditorium

Draw the Circle Wide

Yǒu Yì

How Can I Keep from Singing? — Robert Lowry (1826-1899); arr. by Denise Bacon
Kristen Orien Wortmann, piano

This traditional hymn has encouraged us to celebrate the joy of singing, and the shared impact music has on all of us. This is the effect that brings us together in community, which has been vital for us to notice and talk about as we start off the year and build our personal community within our choir.

O How Lovely Is the Evening — Anonymous
Kristen Orien Wortmann, piano

O How Lovely Is the Evening is an anonymously composed traditional canon (round), originally in German, but popular throughout Europe and the United States as early as the beginning of the 19th century.

As young singers, we spend a good amount of time singing in circles. This allows us to hear each other better and keep our focus inward. We use a circle dance movement with this song to help reinforce the phrasing of the piece, and it also serves as our first experience singing in a round! Notice the sound effect of the chiming bells, providing a steady grounding point in the music.

Raku

Rainbow Connection — Paul Williams (b. 1940) and Kenneth L. Ascher (b. 1944)
Youngjin Joo, piano

No matter who you are or where you're from, there is rich shared experience in curiosity and imagination. This timeless song, written for *The Muppet Movie* in 1979, captures the wonder of the world around us. Raku students shared their own interpretations of these questions in the piece; why *are* there so many songs about rainbows, anyway? Why do people keep coming back to this belief in the intangible? And *who or what* is this voice that we hear as children, that stays with us as we grow if we allow it to? Students had a wide variety of answers for who this voice is for them – nature, magic, spirits – but wonder, love, and curiosity for the intangible things we just can't explain connected every one of them. People keep on believing, from childhood through adulthood, because we hope for – and end up creating ourselves – magic in the world.

Raku and Tarab

E Nānā Kākou I Nā Manu (Look at the Birds in the Sky) — Herb Mahelona (b. 1967)
Sara Jolivet, piccolo; Youngjin Joo, piano

Hawaiian	***English Translation***
E nānā kākou i nā manu ka lani	Look at the birds in the sky
Maluna loa o ka honua lele wale lākou	High above the earth they fly freely
E nānā kākou i kō lākou kīkaha ʻana	Look at their soaring
Maluna loa o ka honua lele wale lākou	High above the earth, they fly freely
E mālie, e wailana	Be still, be calm (as water)
A e hoʻolohe ana iā lākou	And we will hear them

Hawaiian Continued	***English Translation***
E ho'olohe kākou i ke mele o nā manu	Listen to the song of the birds
E mālie, e wailana. Kani le'a lākou	Be still, be calm. They are chirping joyously
E ho'olohe kākou i ke kanu o nā manu	Listen to the chirping of the birds
E mālie, e wailana. Kani le'a lākou	Be still, be calm. They are chirping joyously

This piece was inspired by the quiet, serene island of Moloka'i, where the sounds of Ironwood trees rustling in the wind and the birdsongs of native Hawaiian birds fill the air. At the beginning of the piece, listen as the singers and piccolo create that soundscape. In Raku, we got to take time to admire the lush nature of this Hawaiian island and learn about some of the birds whose songs are embedded in the piece; we discovered that many of these birds are endangered due to their natural homes and resources diminishing. As a choir, we reflected on nature in our own lives that we hold dear, and in what ways we can and are taking care of our shared planet, as well as its inhabitants. This piece is not only a call to care for our environment, but also a reminder that native cultures, traditions, and languages, such as Hawaiian, need people's awareness and care in order to continue to persevere.

Tarab

Path to the Moon — Eric Thiman (1900-1975)

Youngjin Joo, piano

Eric Thiman's "Path to the Moon" is an imaginative work that paints an image of wonder and adventure. Its swaying melody mirrors the gentle rocking of a boat making its way through the sea. The piece offered our singers an opportunity to explore our breath, singing voices and singing bodies. In rehearsal, we focused on listening beyond our own voices by learning to "listen louder than we sing" and discovering how balance and tone unify a choir into one. Through this piece, we also reflected on the power of curiosity and imagination, and how these qualities connect us to something larger than ourselves, inviting us to reach for new ideas beyond what we can see.

Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around — African American Spiritual

Youngjin Joo, piano

"Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around" is a powerful spiritual that was often sung during the Civil Rights Movement, where marchers used it to sustain courage and solidarity. Protesters sang this song as they faced opposition - its steady rhythm and repeated refrain serve as both resistance and reassurance. Through singing together, individuals found strength in community and transformed protest into an act of unity and hope.

In our rehearsals, students were struck by how determined and strong the piece feels. They used their ears and voices to experiment with layered harmonies. Commonly with songs like this, words or phrases would be swapped out to fit the situation or difficulties being faced. Singers practiced this as well by writing their own lyrics reflecting their own challenges. They explored how listening closely to one another helps the harmonies lock in, and how their collective sound mirrors the very message of the song: that standing together and lifting our voices as one can create real power and change.

CorAzón

O Virgo Splendens — Anon., 14th c. Spain; Llibre Vermell de Montserrat

Inscription: Antiphon in sweet harmony for the Virgin Mary from Montserrat. Canon in two or three voices.

Latin	***English Translation***
O virgo splendens hic	O virgin, shining brightly here
in monte celso	On this high mountain
miraculis serrato,	That has been serrated
fulgentibus ubique,	All over by radiant wonders
quem fidelis	And that all of
conscendunt universi.	The faithful climb.
Eya, pietatis	O, with the gentle
occulo placato,	Eye of love,
cerne ligatos	Behold those caught
fune peccatorum,	in the bonds of sin
ne infernorum	So that they will not
ictibus graventur,	have to endure the blows of hell
sed cum beatis tua	But rather be called among the blessed
prece vocentur.	Through your intercession.

Medieval Spain had two famous places of pilgrimage, one of which was Santa Maria de Montserrat. The monastery there was founded in 1025 after being inhabited by hermits as early as the end of the ninth century. Legend has it that the Virgin Mary performed miracles on this spot. A black statue of the Virgin Mary was erected around 1200, giving pilgrims a specific site where they could gather. The Llibre Vermell, or "Red Book," so named due to the manuscript's red cover, is the most precious book from the library of Montserrat and dates to the late fourteenth century. Of 172 sheets of manuscript, only 35 of the original are lost today. While the book was used primarily for liturgy, it also contained "pilgrim songs," the first of which is "O Virgo Splendens," notated by an anonymous scribe.

Of the pilgrim songs' function, the scribe writes: "As it happens that the pilgrims, while holding night vigil in the church of the Blessed Virgin from Montserrat, sometimes desire to sing and to dance and even so during the day, in the Church Square, where only virtuous and pious songs may be sung, some suitable songs have been written down here for this need. These should be used in a respectful and moderate manner, so as not to disturb those who wish to continue their prayers and religious contemplations."

Á Chloris (To Chloris) — Reynaldo Hahn (1874-1947); arr. by Adam Burnette

Kristen Orien Wortmann, piano

French	***English Translation***
S'il est vrai, Chloris, que tu m'aimes,	If it be true, Chloris, that you love me,
Mais j'entends, que tu m'aimes bien,	(And I'm told you love me dearly),
Je ne crois point que les rois mêmes	I do not believe that even kings
Aient un bonheur pareil au mien.	Can match the happiness I know.
Que la mort serait importune	Even death would be powerless
De venir changer ma fortune	To alter my fortune
A la félicité des cieux!	With the promise of heavenly bliss!
Tout ce qu'on dit de l'ambroisie	All that they say of ambrosia
Ne touche point ma fantaisie	Does not stir my imagination
Au prix des grâces de tes yeux.	Like the favour of your eyes!

The composer Reynaldo Hahn is remembered today as the composer of many art songs, but he also wrote for piano, opera, and incidental music for plays. Born in Caracas, Venezuela to a Jewish German father and Catholic Basque mother, he was one of ten children. The family moved to Paris when he was young; Hahn got his musical start in a Boychoir and eventually attended Conservatory with Maurice Ravel.

As an adult, Hahn was quietly partnered for many years with Marcel Proust and insisted, although he was in his 40's, in fighting in the trenches in World War I. After the war, he settled into life as a composer, teacher, lecturer, conductor, and singer and was eventually appointed director of the Paris Opera. In the 1940s, the Nazi party began to ban his music because of his Jewish descent; he then left Paris to get away from Nazi party members and sympathizers. He died in 1947 of a brain tumor.

This gorgeous song reminds us of love's universality, its beauty, and its power. CorAzón members fell in love with the piano accompaniment as well, wondering what Hahn may have been trying to indicate with the ornaments we hear. Perhaps they are heartbeat flutters? Exploring this song and learning about this queer composer's life were powerful reminders that we can experience companionship with musicians across time and place.

Noriteo 놀이터 (Playground) GiUng Lee

Korean	***English Translation***
무궁화 꽃이 피었습니다	The Rose of Sharon has bloomed
나와라!	Got ya!
살금살금!	Walk quietly! *(onomatopoeia)*
걸렸다!	I'm caught!
조심조심!	Careful!
도망가!	Run!

You may recognize the initial melody from the Netflix show "Squid Game," which, unfortunately, takes a Korean children's game and song to a very dark place. The song's imagery is beautiful and strong; known in English as "The Rose of Sharon," it references Korea's national flower, Mugunghwa, which symbolizes the resilience and enduring spirit of the Korean people and survival through hardship. The composer of "Noriteo" writes:

> "This piece is an exploration of the traditional Korean children's game 무궁화 꽃이 피었습니다 (mugunghwa kkotchi pieotsseupnida) juxtaposed with its English/Canadian counterpart Red Light, Green Light. The Korean game comes with its own melody, which the player at the wall ('it') sings with their back turned while the rest of the players try to gain ground. The two games vary slightly in how they are played, but it shows the common experiences that we share from one culture to another.
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> "From a personal perspective, this is a snapshot of my experience of moving to Canada from South Korea at the age of 9. It explores emotions such as joy, loneliness, conflict, confusion, and acceptance, which are shared emotions to those that have lived the immigrant experience. I hope this piece shows the duality of excitement for the new, and the yearning for belonging as an immigrant child navigates the world of having to live a life with two parallel identities."

We are reminded, with this composition, that the playground is one of the first places children learn to draw wider circles as they include one another in their games.

Sangat

To the Ploughboy — Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958)
from the Cantata *Folk Songs of the Four Seasons*
Kay Yeh, piano

Written in 1949 as the prologue to *Folk Songs of the Four Seasons,* "To the Ploughboy" is a rollicking call to sing and be merry! The lyrics describe agrarian laborers as they work at their annual cycle of growing, tending, and harvesting their crops. Beyond the connections the Sangat choristers drew to the community aspect of this text, we found connections to our concert theme in the elements of changing seasons, time passing, and the comfort and predictability of good work and the reward therein.

El Barquito (The Little Boat) — Popular Venezuelan Song; arr. by Alberto Grau (b. 1937)
Kay Yeh, piano
Ellie Olson, soloist

Spanish	***English Translation***
Había una vez un barquito chiquitico que no sabía navegar.	Once upon a time there was a very little boat which did not know how to navigate.
Pasaron una dos tres cuatro Semanas y no podía navegar.	One, two, three, four weeks went by – and it could not find its way.
Pasaron sole tormentas y huracanes y no podía navegar.	The usual storms and hurricanes occurred, and still it could not sail.
Y si la historia no le parece mala se la volvemos a contar.	And if the story doesn't seem too boring, we will tell it to you once more.

El Barquito is a counting song popular in Spanish-speaking cultures that teaches children to count to seven (though in this arrangement, we hear numbers only up to four). The "tormentas" the little boat faces are literal storms but also speak metaphorically to the need for children to develop patience and persistence in "weathering the storm" as they're learning and growing. Grau's playful nod to the lyrics includes multiple meter changes that challenge singers to feel divisions of two, three, and four.

The Garton Mother's Lullaby — Traditional County Donegal Melody; arr. by Ruth Boshkoff; text by Seosamh Mac Cathmhaoil (1879-1944)
Kay Yeh, piano

Lullabies can serve to pass stories, community values, and folklore down through generations. The lyrics of this tune introduce us to figures from Celtic mythology: The Green Man, a traditional Irish nature symbol; Sheevra, a mischievous prankster fairy; and Eeval (also spelled Aiobheal), the queen of a class of woodland fairies who guards the grey rock. Irish poet Seosamh Mac Cathmhaoil (also known by his Anglicized name Joseph Campbell) was a frequent collaborator with Irish composer Herbert Hughes. In 1904, the same year Cathmhaoil wrote the lyrics for "The Garton Mother's Lullaby," the two men began collecting traditional airs from remote parts of County Donegal, including Gartán.

Amore

Harps of Welcome — Mt. Lebanon Shaker Society; arr. by Jordan Sramek; ed. by Daniel Mahraun
Youngjin Joo, piano

This simple song comes from a religious group known as the Shakers, originally from England, who eventually settled throughout New England. You may recognize the tune "Simple Gifts," which is also a Shaker song. Music was an important part of Shaker communities, and singing (and singing instruction!) was highly valued. Hymn books from the 19th century still exist, with information about the origin of each hymn. "Harps of Welcome" comes from one of these surviving hymnals and was written by members of the Mt. Lebanon Shaker Society in upstate New York. At present, there are three remaining members of that community.

Nigra Sum — Pau Casals (1876-1973); text from Song of Solomon
Youngjin Joo, piano

Latin	***English Translation***
Nigra sum sed formosa	I am very dark, but comely,
filiae Jerusalem	O daughters of Jerusalem.
	*like the tents of Kedar,
	*like the curtains of Solomon.
	*Do not gaze upon me because I am swarthy,
	*because the sun has discolored me.
	*The sons of my mother have fought against me,
	*They have made me the keeper of the vineyards.
ideo dilexit me Rex	Therefore the King loved me
et introduxit me	and brought me
in culbiculum suum.	into his chamber.
Et dixit mihi:	And he said to me:
surge et veni amica mea,	Arise, my love, and come
jam hiems transit	for now the winter is past,
imber abiit et recessit	rain is over and gone.
flores apparuerunt in terra nostra	Flowers have appeared in our land!
Alleluia!	Alleluia!

**omitted original text in this piece*

The composer Pau Casals was a cellist; one can imagine the vocal and piano lines being played with very long bow strokes. The compositional devices he used to set this text to music have given us a lot to discuss – and to fall in love with. The text is Biblical and found in the Song of Solomon, which is typically understood as a message of love from God ("the King") to God's people ("me"). This passage shows God inviting a perceived outcast or outsider into wealth, riches, abundance and, most importantly, a place of honor – not just acceptance.

As we learned this piece, we noted several lines that Casals chose to omit (see above) when he set the text to music. The omitted passage explains the young woman's role in her family and society. She is "dark" because she is doing heavy labor in the fields so is doubly outcast – once from inside her family due to her gender (as the daughter, she is forced to do menial labor) and once from society (her skin is "discolored" from the sun – a marker of poverty rather than wealth).

Why would Casals omit these sections of text? Was he intentionally trying to draw our attention to the issue of skin color (this was written in the mid-20th century)? Does leaving out the context of why her skin is dark matter? Is he trying to give us permission to push back against other societal beauty "norms"? These are some of the questions we pondered in rehearsal. Ultimately, Nigra Sum is about hope, resilience, and celebration of the "underdog" or outsider… and it is musically stunning. We hope you enjoy the performance as much as we have enjoyed learning the piece.

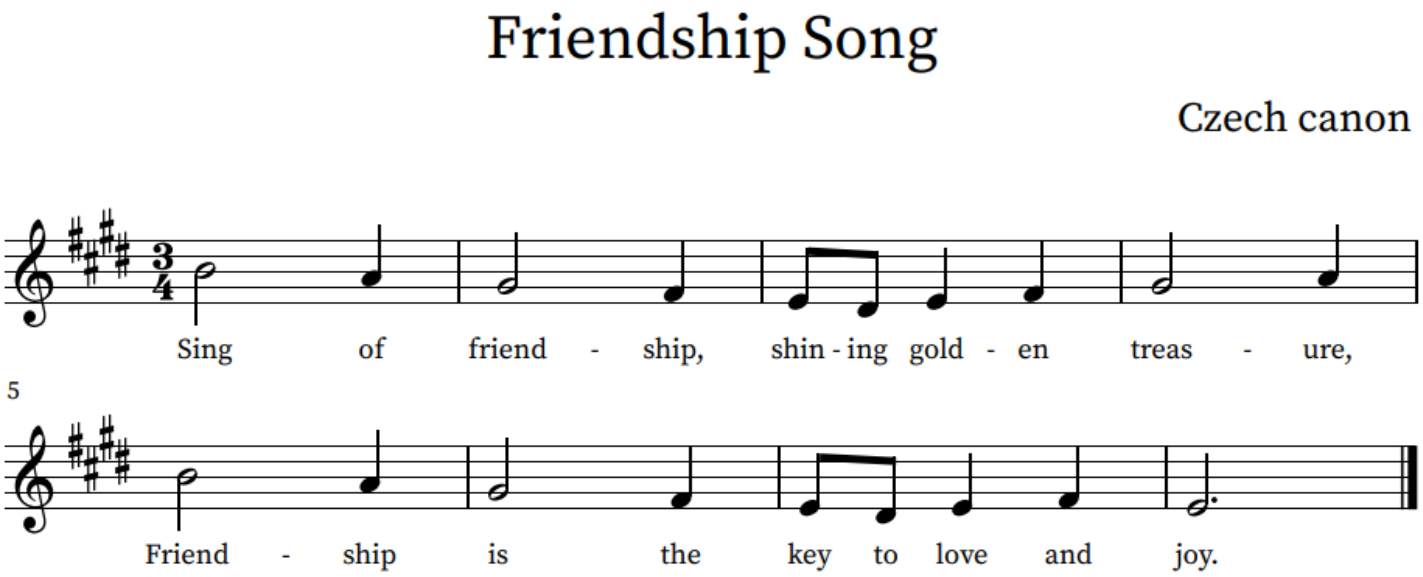
Igraj Kolo (Come and Dance in a Ring)

Slovenian Folk Song;
arr. by Jakob Jež (b. 1928)

Croatian	***English Translation***
Igraj kolo/kolce Ne postavaj!	Come and dance in a ring, Don't stand apart!
Nisam došal kola igrat Neg sam došal divoyk zbirat.	I haven't come to dance in a ring, I've come to meet a girl.
Ni devojka nakičena, Nit' veselce polzačeno.	Not a girl bedecked with jewelry, Nor even a little bit cheerful.

You'll notice that this piece is a Slovenian circle song and dance but is in Croatian; we learned a lot about the history of Slovenia, the many people who inhabited the land and left behind bits of culture, and the fact that it gained independence only recently in 1991. The song's arranger, Jakob Jež, was the founder of a group of composers who, over the course of the 20th century, dedicated themselves to collecting, notating, and sharing Slovenian music and cultural traditions. "Igraj Kolo" is perhaps the most performed of these collected songs and has been sung by choirs around the world.

Combined Choirs and Audience



Combined Choirs

Draw the Circle Wide

Mark A. Miller

Youngjin Joo, piano

Mark Miller, a composer, teacher, choral conductor, and church musician, lives with his husband in New Jersey and adheres to Cornel West's belief that "justice is what love looks like in public." He presents concerts focused on creating community and advocating for social justice for all people, especially the LGBTQIA+ community. Northwest Girlchoir is proud to sing this gospel-style tune that inspires us to support and care for one another through the joy of singing.