



PROGRAM NOTES

Chanticleer: Music of a Silent World

September 24, 2024 – 7:30 p.m.

The Cultural Arts Center at Disciples Christian

A river gurgles. Wind rushes. Branches creak. Snowflakes faintly fall. Every piece of the world has a sound. But if you listen *really* closely, you might also find that each of these pieces has a voice. In *Music of a Silent World*, Chanticleer sings the songs of the natural world and gives a voice to the otherwise voiceless rocks and stones and trees and rivers that share this planet with us. While inhabiting those voices, we also explore what the world might be like without them.

The program centers around a new arrangement of Majel Connery's song cycle, *The Rivers are our Brothers*, which was written in, around, and about the Sierra Nevada mountains. Each movement inhabits a different part of the Sierra's natural beauty: from its high peaks to its forests, rocks, rivers, and snowbanks. "The goal," she says, "is to give nature a voice. I wanted to allow these vibrant things to speak on their own behalf." By giving agency to these inanimate parts of our world, we are compelled to empathize with otherwise silent beings, uncovering their unique characters, personalities, and motivations. Majel describes herself as a "vocalist, composer and roving musicologist making electro-art-dream-pop with repressed classical influences." She tours frequently with her art-rock band Sky Creature and is the host and producer of *A Music of Their Own* – a podcast exploring female experiences in the music industry (CapRadio/NPR).

Woven around her song cycle and in dialogue with those vibrant parts of the natural world are works from across the choral spectrum, including selections from Max Reger's *Zehn Gesänge für Männerchor* (Opus 83). Written in 1904 for the Vienna Men's Choral Society, much of this collection features early German Romantic poetry about nature, which Reger sets with his typically dense, late Romantic harmony, where chromatic voice leading is the standard instead of the exception ("**Abendständchen**," "**Abschied**," and "**Hochsommernacht**"). Paired with these harmonically complex movements are simple songs in four-part harmony that hearken back to the early days of German Männerchor singing. "**Lieulich hat sich gesellet**" is a lilting love song, and "**Eine ganz neue Schelmweys**" is a lively drinking song. Admittedly, these two movements also have their fair share of 20th-century harmonic twists and turns, but their sentiment is one of nostalgia.

The concert begins by placing us and our natural world in a larger context. Kurt Weill's "**Lost in the Stars**" comes from his musical adaptation of Alan Paton's novel, *Cry, the Beloved Country*. Set in the years immediately before apartheid in South Africa, Paton's Black protagonist, Stephen Kumalo, sings "Lost in the Stars" when confronting a crisis of faith in the face of an unjust society. His feelings of helplessness resonate today, as we continue to grapple with our

respect for each other and for the natural world. Gene Puerling arranged “Lost in the Stars” for Chanticleer in 1995.

Our own bass-baritone, Jared Graveley, arranged the Hoagy Carmichael tune, “**Stardust.**” Its nostalgic tone sets the stage for the second set of the program, which explores feelings and sentiments that might exist if we were to lose our connection with the natural world.

“**Innsbruck, ich muss dich lassen,**” by the Netherlandish Renaissance composer Heinrich Isaac, is a lament on leaving the city of Innsbruck, Austria. Nestled among the Alps and overlooking the powerful Inn river, Innsbruck was for Isaac a symbol of stability and a beautiful home. In this program, Innsbruck represents an idyllic former world untouched by concerns of a changing climate. Due to his talent and popularity, Isaac was one of the first musicians in history to be called a “composer” by his contemporaries. His music remained popular into the 20th century, with many German Romantics considering him a kind of national and musical ancestor of J.S. Bach. Isaac wrote prolifically in many languages, genres, and styles, but his largest undertaking by far was the *Choralis Constantinus*, a collection of over 375 settings of Mass propers in three volumes. “**Cibavit eos,**” an introit for the Feast of Corpus Christi, comes from this collection.

Stephen Sondheim wrote “**I remember**” for the 1966 made-for-TV musical, *Evening Primrose*, which tells the story of a small community hiding from the outside world and living in a department store. “I remember” is sung by a young woman, Ella, who has not seen the sky for 13 years. Ella’s aching text, “I remember sky, it was blue as ink, or at least I think...” takes on new meaning for those of us around the country who are all-too-familiar with smoke and haze and orange skies, or who find themselves spending most of their time indoors because of extreme heat.

The third set begins our exploration of Connery’s song cycle and features a new work by our composer-in-residence, Ayanna Woods. “**I miss you like I miss the trees**” takes its text from Franny Choi’s 2019 poem, “How to Let Go of the World.” It is an intense exploration of climate grief, and wrestles with feelings of helplessness in the face of powers beyond our control. Ayanna Woods is a GRAMMY-nominated performer, composer and bandleader from Chicago. Her music explores the spaces between acoustic and electronic, traditional and esoteric, wildly improvisational and mathematically rigorous. “I miss you like I miss the trees” is her third composition for Chanticleer.

The remainder of the program contains some favorite arrangements from our library, including Vince Peterson’s version of “**Both Sides Now**” by Joni Mitchell, which we recorded on our most recent album, *On a Clear Day*. New for this season are three arrangements by current members of the group: “**Little April Shower,**” from *Bambi*, arranged by alto Adam Brett Ward, “**The Weather,**” by Lawrence, arranged by tenor Vineel Garisa Mahal, and “**Wildflowers,**” by Tom Petty, arranged by music director Tim Keeler.

- Program notes by Dr. Tim Keeler

Tim Keeler, Music Director, sang as a countertenor in Chanticleer for their 2017-18 season. Prior to moving to San Francisco, he forged a career as an active conductor, singer, and educator. Dr. Keeler holds a BA in music from Princeton University with certificates in vocal performance and computer science, an MPhil in music and science from Cambridge University, an MM in choral conducting from the University of Michigan, and a DMA in choral conducting at the University of Maryland.