

## Program Notes by Ed Wight

**ALLELUIA** British and American composer Tarik O'Regan remains active on both sides of the Atlantic. Born in London in 1978, he attended Pembroke College, Oxford. O'Regan became composer-in-residence for Corpus Christi College, Oxford in 2000, which launched his professional career as a composer. He also served on the music faculty of Trinity College, Cambridge.

Moving to the United States, O'Regan won a Fulbright Fellowship to Columbia University in 2004, another Fellowship at Harvard, and in 2010 was subsequently appointed to the faculty of the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton. His compositions won the British Composer Award in for vocal composition in 2005 and liturgical composition in 2007, and have been nominated for two Grammy Awards in the United States. While writing a handful of orchestral and chamber works, O'Regan is primarily a vocal composer - with several operas, cantatas, and over sixty works for choir.

The Pro Musica Girl's Chorus of Hungary commissioned this lively 2004 composition. After the brief introduction, the alto voices begin a light, jazz-like syncopated *ostinato* pattern which lasts throughout the piece. O'Regan soon casts a high-flying soprano melody over it. Listen as the *ostinato* expands from two to three voices, and the soprano line divides near the end for a wonderful five-voiced climax.

**PRAYER TO A GAURDIAN ANGEL** Born in Lincolnshire in 1958, British composer Patrick Hawes taught at Pangbourne College and Charterhouse School until the age of 40, when he turned to composition full time. Acclaimed in both instrumental and vocal music, he currently lives near the Norfolk coast, and says he is inspired "by the beauty of nature, English literature, and his Christian faith." His brother Andrew Hawes, an Anglican priest, wrote the lyrics for *Prayer to a Guardian Angel*.

His catalogue already includes fifty works for full choir and one accompanying instrument (either piano, organ, harp, violin, cello, or saxophone), and that is the scoring for today's composition as well. Originally written for soprano solo and accompaniment, *Voces8* approached him for a choral arrangement, resulting in the version heard today. One of the most beautiful compositions on today's program, *Prayer* offers Hawes' special penchant for the harmonic warmth of full, eight-voice choral textures, enriching the cello counterpoint and the melodious themes of the soprano soloist.

**O PULSE OF MY HEART** American singer-songwriter Karen Marrolli earned a Doctorate in Choral Conducting from Louisiana State University in 2010. She served as Director of Musical Ministries at Methodist churches in Trussville, Alabama and Santa Fe, and currently holds that same position at the United Methodist Church in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Marrolli also

serves as Artistic Director of the Men's Camerata, the Cantus Spiritus Chamber Choir and the Zia Singers, all in Santa Fe, and often performs her own solo songs as well.

Her compositions draw on Americana folk songs styles and Irish traditional music – and part of the text for *O Pulse* is in Irish. The solo at the opening provides the melodic material for the solo line throughout the piece, as well as some traditional Irish ornaments. But notice the rich and varied choral harmonizations of its multiple appearances, as well as its melodic variants of the opening material in both the vocal and violin solos. Her folk-like modal harmonies enhance the tender mood of the opening and closing sections of this lovely piece, framing some more dramatic passages in the middle.

**STABAT MATER** The *Stabat Mater* comprises perhaps the most sorrowful text in all the Latin Christian heritage. It is traditionally attributed to the 13<sup>th</sup> century friar Jacopone da Todi. After the accidental death of his wife, he gave away all his possessions and lived as a wandering ascetic in Italy, joining the Third Order St. Francis. He was one of the earliest scholars to dramatize Gospel subjects – in this case the sorrows of Mary at Christ's crucifixion.

The Welsh composer Paul Mealor provides an extensive, four-movement musical setting. He wrote a motet, *Ubi Caritas et Amor*, for the wedding of Prince William and Catherine Middleton in 2011. During the Christmas season later that year, his song *Wherever you are* briefly became the number song on the UK charts. In 2012, for a poll for on Britain's Classic FM Hall of Fame, voters named him "the nation's favorite living composer." He currently teaches music on the faculty of the University of Aberdeen in Scotland.

Mealor sets the first movement of this harrowing text *a cappella* in a low-range, hushed setting. Reflecting the medieval era of the text, Mealor sets the slow block chords - "strikingly beautiful" (William Hedley) - in the free-flowing rhythm of Gregorian chant. For the second movement, Mealor writes a heartbreakingly sweet, deeply felt soprano solo, and the orchestra joins for the remainder of the work. Mealor's third movement is a vigorous and striking *passacaglia*, occasionally punctuated by dramatic accents. The finale, which borrows partly from the opening movement, features a remarkable musical depiction of His soul rising to paradise.

### **INTERMISSION**

**THE LAKE ISLE** The Norwegian composer Ola Gjeilo studied at the Norwegian Academy of Music and the Royal College of Music in London. He currently lives in Manhattan, and earned his Master's Degree in Composition from Juilliard. Born into a household that loved all styles of music – classical, folk, jazz, and pop, Gjeilo draws on all that heritage. One critic wrote of this poem Yeats published in 1893: "*The Lake Isle of Innisfree* is one of his first great poems, and one of his most enduring."

This light-hearted and gentle setting of Yeats's pastoral poem features an *ostinato* guitar accompaniment in the opening and closing sections. Gjeilo sets the middle section, reflecting Yeats's actual depiction of rural country life, in a slower tempo, with full choral counterpoint and the richest harmony of the piece.

**A TRIPTYCH FOR SPRING** Craig Kingsbury was for years the composer-in-residence for the Repertory Singers. In 2007, the choir devoted an entire concert to his works, and later recorded a CD of Kingsbury commissions as well. Settling in the Northwest, Craig also wrote a piece, *Soft Stillness and the Night*, for last year's inaugural 'First Light' concert.

This year's piece offers three different perspectives on the most beloved annual season: Spring. The anonymous 19<sup>th</sup>-century text of "Now Spring in all Her Glory" features Kingsbury's special penchant for light, harmonically rich dialogue between piano and chorus. For English novelist and poet D. H. Lawrence's "The Enkindled Spring," Kingsbury turns to a piano *ostinato* figure in the opening and closing sections, framing a gentle soprano solo in the middle. For the closing section, based on Scottish poet, essayist, and novelist Robert Louis Stevenson's "Spring Carol," Kingsbury writes an appropriate and lively setting in Scottish folk style, complete with his love of metric complexity (10/8 meter) and plenty of Scotch-snap rhythms.

**SONGS FOR THE JOURNEY** This program of all 21<sup>st</sup>-century choral pieces closes with a four-movement work from our current composer-in-residence, collaborative pianist, and singer Jodi French. It also provides the title for today's concert, and continues the Scottish flavor of some of the earlier pieces.

What implies Scottish folksong more effectively than a lively melody (full of lively ornamentation and scotch-snap rhythms) with harp accompaniment? French writes an arrangement for violin, harp, piano and women's voices of *God With Me Lying Down*, set on the Isle of Harris in the Western Hebrides by English poet Mary MacRae. Its central section features the free-flowing meter changes reflective of much folk music. *I arise*, a wonderfully atmospheric setting of a Celtic blessing of the elements, also opens with hushed women's voices and more Scottish folksong style. It soon blossoms into full eight-voice choral polyphony and quicker, more dynamic melodies, however, fashioning a stirring end to today's concert.