



Love! Murder! Passion! Grief! Opera!

Sunday, October 18th, 2026, 4:00 PM
Calvary Presbyterian Church, San Francisco

NOTES FROM THE ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Dear friends, old and new, of the SF Bach Choir,

Welcome to the first concert of our 91st season! We were honored that so many of you were able to join us in celebrating our Big Birthday last year and we hope you're as excited as we are about what's ahead! More about that later.

Despite the many challenges in today's world, we're escaping briefly to the wonderful, magical world of opera where the thrill of grand emotions truly takes center stage. Of the many glorious musical moments for chorus and soloists, we've chosen a few of our favorites and are honored to have as our collaborators not only four amazing opera singers, but also a talented guest at the keyboard to fill out our "orchestra." (Biographies are found in the program.)

As you can see, we have arranged the program by theme, resulting in interesting contrasts and juxtapositions. "Dreams of Home" matches Mozart with our own local David Conte. "Grief" links Purcell from the theaters of Restoration England, with Verdi, who dominated Italian grand opera throughout the last half of the 19th century. If nothing else, we recognize the universality – across time and culture – of these elemental emotions. The language of opera is the language of music and words, and therein also lies its astonishing power to move and to delight. Since many of our operas were written in languages other than English, we encourage you to read along in the translations to get the full story.

Looking ahead to December, we're thrilled to be collaborating, once again, with the brilliant Velocity Handbell Choir. Those who witnessed their dazzling performance two years ago – when they brought four handbell virtuosos – will be further astonished to hear – and see – all eleven of them! (For a taste of their talent, see www.velocitybells.org.) Our traditional-with-a-twist holiday concert will also include music from many centuries and lands, as well as the beloved traditions of the boisterous Boar's Head (with special verses), singalong carols, and the peace of candlelight.

In May we will visit Vienna. In collaboration with the Oakland Civic Orchestra (Martha Stoddard, conductor), we'll present Brahms' grand *Song of the Fates*, a Mendelssohn overture and motet, and Beethoven's beloved *Mass in C*. Joining hands across the Bay, we will offer this concert in both San Francisco and Berkeley. As always, we're welcoming new singers, so contact us if you're interested in joining!

I have the deepest gratitude for our wonderful singers, staff, and Board without whom none of this would be possible. I'm grateful also to you, our audience and community, who share our love of this great art, and who work so hard to keep the music flowing! In these challenging times I continue to hope that a love of music and community will inspire us to keep working to bridge divisions and pain.

Thank you for joining us this afternoon for a voyage into the world of opera, a dramatic world but one not entirely unlike our own – one filled with Love! Grief! and Passion!



Magen

☞ Love! Murder! Passion! Grief! Opera! ☞

SAN FRANCISCO BACH CHOIR

Magen Solomon, *Artistic Director*

Christopher Wemp, *Assistant Conductor*

Dara Phung & Yongyu Gao, *collaborative pianists*

Cara Gabrielson, *soprano* · Sara Couden, *contralto*

Elliott JG Encarnación, *tenor* · Curtis Streetman, *bass*

No cameras or recording devices, and please turn off your phones and pagers.

Please hold your applause until the end of each set.

☞ LOVE! ☞

Brindisi (*La Traviata*)

Giuseppe Verdi (1813 – 1901)

Cara Gabrielson, *soprano*; Elliott JG Encarnación, *tenor*

Traviata is the story of an impossible love, doomed by social forces and by the heroine's tuberculosis. The opera opens on a luxurious and grand party at Violetta's house. The guests join in a rousing toast while Violetta and Alfredo start falling in love.

Cruda sorte (*L'italiana in Algeri*)

Gioachino Rossini (1792 – 1868)

Sara Couden, *contralto*

Isabella, an Italian woman shipwrecked in Algiers, is captured by pirates after she set out to rescue her lover Lindoro. She laments her fate but resolves to stay strong.

Two Excerpts from the Overture (*Orphée aux Enfers*)

Jacques Offenbach (1819-1880)

Dara Phung & Yongyu Gao, *piano*

Habanera (*Carmen*)

Georges Bizet (1838 – 1875)

Sara Couden, *contralto*

Carmen is trying to seduce Don José who is eyeing her, surrounded by all her friends. Carmen explains her philosophy of life and love, saying: watch out! I will love you if and when I please! I am free and will remain so!

Couplets du Toréador (*Carmen*)

Curtis Streetman, *bass*

Escamillo, the Toreador, sings of the glories of bull-fighting, describing the chorus of onlookers' raucous reactions and the triumph of the Toreador.

☞ DREAMS OF HOME! ☞

Placido è il mar (*Idomeneo*)

Wolfgang Amadé Mozart (1756 – 1791)

Cara Gabrielson, *soprano*

Christopher Wemp, *conductor*

In Placido è il mar the chorus bids farewell to Idamante. Elettra and the townspeople note that the sea is calm, in contrast with the characters' souls...

Fuor del mar (*Idomeneo*)

Elliott JG Encarnación, *tenor*

Idomeneo, King of Crete, is distressed: if Neptune saves him from shipwreck, he promises to sacrifice the first person he encounters upon return. Alas, that person is his son, Idamante!

Candles in the Wilderness (*The Dreamers*)

David Conte (b. 1955)

Mid-19th-century pioneers, in the new community of Sonoma, sing of starlight and candlelight, describing "the lights of human habitation lit and extinguished..."

☿ GRIEF! ☿

Dido's Lament & Final Chorus (*Dido and Aeneas*)

Henry Purcell (1659 – 1695)

Sara Couden, *contralto*

Dido, the Queen of Carthage, is distraught at the departure of her lover, the Trojan Prince Aeneas. She laments that she must now die. She begs her friend Belinda to remember her life, not her fate. Note the repeating descending bass line of her lament. The chorus sings a dirge in her memory.

So, When the Glitt'ring Queen of Night (*Yorkshire Feast Song*)

Elliott JG Encarnación, *tenor*

Although not strictly from an opera, this aria paints a picture of the beautiful night sky, the moon in eclipse.

Va, Pensiero (*Nabucco*)

Giuseppe Verdi

Va, Pensiero, the unofficial Italian national anthem, is the heartbroken plea of the Israelites. They long for their homeland, from which they have been exiled by the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar II. The King will eventually come out of his madness, save them, and convert to Judaism.

☿ GRATITUDE! ☿

Blow Ye the Trumpet (*John Brown*)

Kirke Mechem (b. 1925)

This opera centers around the passionate abolitionist John Brown's abortive attempt to end American slavery. Blow Ye the Trumpet was John Brown's favorite hymn and it prophesies the events which would hasten the end of slavery.

Dan-u-el (*John Brown*)

Curtis Streetman, *bass*

In Dan-u-el, a former slave tells how Brown and his men led his escape from Missouri, to freedom in Canada. The slave named his child John Brown in his honor. Danuel is invoked through the spiritual Didn't my Lord deliver Danuel.

☿ OPERA! ☿

Ave Signor (*Mefistofele*), prologue

Arrigo Boito (1842 – 1918)

Boito's Mefistofele is based on the Faust story. We begin with angels and cherubs praising the Creator with joy.

L'altra notte fondo al mare (*Mefistofele*)

Cara Gabrielson, *soprano*

In the middle of the opera, Margherita, a peasant girl who has been seduced by Faust, sings to herself of her insanity and pending death. She is in jail awaiting execution for killing her baby.

Psalmody Finale (*Mefistofele*)

In the Psalmody Finale, the angels return with penitents, cherubs, and celestial hosts, praising God as they spiral rapturously into the sky.



BIOGRAPHIES

The San Francisco Bach Choir is an auditioned choir offering dedicated singers the opportunity to study and perform both Early Music and the diverse repertoire of great works from other eras and genres. Founded in 1936, it is one of the oldest continuously performing community choirs in the western United States. The Choir uses historically informed performance practice and performs with world-class professional instrumentalists and soloists, both period and modern.

Now in her thirteenth season with the SF Bach Choir, Artistic Director **Magen Solomon** has been active in early music as a conductor, singer, scholar, and editor for over four decades. She has been the Artistic Director of the San Francisco Choral Artists since 1995; together, they have premiered

over 300 choral works, performed at major choral conferences, released three CDs, and have twice won the Chorus America/ASCAP Award for Adventurous Programming. She has served as Artistic Director of the Oakland Symphony Chorus, Stockton Chorale, and California Bach Society, and has taught and conducted at the University of Southern California, UC Berkeley, Santa Clara University, and Smith and Mount Holyoke colleges. Active across the US and abroad as a clinician, teacher, and guest conductor, Dr. Solomon has directed Pro Coro Canada, the UC Santa Cruz Chamber Singers, and other ensembles, and has collaborated on performances of major choral works with Michael Morgan, Michael Tilson Thomas, Nicolas McGegan, Helmuth Rilling, Kent Nagano, and Christoph von Dohnányi, among others. For 14 years she edited the “New Voices in Research” column in the ACDA Choral Journal and has published an edition of Johannes Eccard’s *Neue deutsche Lieder* (1578) with A-R Editions.

Christopher Wemp strives to create inclusive singing environments that explore how choral music inspires us to thrive. He has led international music collaborations across four continents, directs local community and school ensembles, and manages the publishing platform adscensio.org. He holds three degrees from Santa Clara University.

Dara Phung is a San Francisco-based pianist and music director. She is collaborative pianist for the San Francisco Bach Choir and the Young Women’s Choral Projects of San Francisco, and has accompanied YWCP’s premiere ensemble on tours to Canada, New Zealand, and Puerto Rico. Dara is the music director at Noe Valley Church, where she leads the adult choir and youth choral scholars program. When she’s not working with choirs, Dara enjoys playing ragtime, accompanying classes at the San Francisco Ballet School, and performing with Teatro Mistral’s Opera Cocktales at Martuni’s. Dara holds a music degree from the University of Southern California, where she studied with Kevin Fitz-Gerald.

Yongyu Gao serves as an organist and pianist at Burlingame United Methodist Church, and as a collaborative pianist at Ragazzi and PGC. In addition, she tours with different groups domestically and internationally for concerts and music festivals, including Argentina, Austria, Australia, Canada, Chile, Czechia, Germany, and Italy. She has also accompanied at ACDA (Western and National), Chorus America, CMEA Bay Honor Choir, and CMEA State Festival.

Soprano **Cara Gabrielson** was recently seen as the soprano soloist with the San Francisco Symphony in *Carmina Burana* and Bach’s *Magnificat*, Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni* (Livermore Valley Opera), and Lucy in *Fellow Travelers* (Opera Parallèle). She joined The Metropolitan Opera roster for *Idomeneo* after being a National Semifinalist in their Laffont Competition.

Curtis Streetman, bass, performs a rich and excitingly varied repertoire. Mr. Streetman’s artistry has been presented in some of the world’s major concert halls and opera houses, and he has performed lead roles in Verdi, Handel, and Rossini operas, among others. Operatic performances include appearances at The Salzburg Festival, as well as opera houses in Vienna, Bilbao, Dortmund, Halle, and Victoria. Mr. Streetman was recently appointed Director of Voice and Opera at the University of the Bahamas in Nassau, where he makes his home. Live recordings of Mr. Streetman’s artistry are available at: <https://soundcloud.com/user-26394210>

American contralto **Sara Couden** is a premiere interpreter of opera, oratorio, chamber music, and art song. Praised by Opera News for her “unusually rich and resonant” voice, Sara has thrilled audiences worldwide on stages including the Metropolitan Opera, Carnegie Hall, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Cincinnati Symphony, the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Charleston Symphony, Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, and St. Pete Opera. Sara is a graduate of the Lindemann Young Artist Program at the Metropolitan Opera and earned a master’s degree with Honors in Opera from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. She is also an early music enthusiast and holds an A.D. in Early Music, Chamber Music, and Oratorio from the Yale Institute of Sacred Music.

Elliott JG Encarnación is a composer and conductor of choral and operatic repertoire. As a self-taught tenor, he has appeared as a soloist with the San Francisco Symphony, the California Bach Society, the Dessooff Choirs, the Long Island Symphony Choral Association, and Musica Sacra. He can be heard in premiere choral ensembles around the country, including the Santa Fe Desert Chorale, Voices of Ascension, and the Byrd Ensemble, and he has recorded under the Delos and Decca labels. He has served as Artistic Director for the Opera Theater Unlimited, Prodigal Opera Theatre, and Composer in Residence for the International Orange Chorale. Elliott is proud to serve as the Assistant Regional Director for the American Guild of Musical Artists in San Francisco.



SAN FRANCISCO
BACH CHOIR 

OUR
2026–2027
SEASON

December 5-6: *Ring in the Holidays*
with Velocity Handbell Choir

May 15-16: *Glorious Vienna: Beethoven, Brahms,
& Mendelssohn*
in collaboration with Oakland Civic Orchestra

Sing with us – auditions this month!

Rehearsals Tuesdays 7–10 PM (beginning October 20th) at Calvary Presbyterian, SF

Audition info and sign-up: sfbach.org/join



We want to hear from you!

What you enjoyed, what you want to hear in the future, what we could do better.

[Please fill out our audience survey.](#)

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Anonymous, in honor of Kate Allen

Judy Goldstein, in loving memory of David Babbitt and Kathy Clement

Anonymous, in honor of Tammi Brown

John R. Miller, in honor of Hardy Burl, who made St. Nick seem sedate.

Marianne D'Emidio Caston, in memory of Kathy Clement, Kathy's beautiful art graced the program for years!

Laurie Olsen, in loving memory of Kathy Clement, her rich alto voice, infectious laugh, beautiful graphics, friendship, and years of dedicated contribution to our choir.

Susan Sherk, in memory of Kathy Clement, dear friend and longtime member of the choir.

David Hammer, in memory of Eleanor Hammer

Elisabeth Lowry, in memory of Ludwig Janzow

K.E. Brown, in honor of Sarah Jelley and Jack Miller – with sincere gratitude for generous and talented cousins!

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Judy Stone, in honor of Laurie Olsen, in celebration of 50 years of friendship and singing together in the SF Bach Choir

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Judy Stone, in honor of Magen Solomon, thank you for bringing all the beautiful music to us.

Arthur Baxter, in honor of Judy Stone

David Israel, in memory of Madeline Ettin

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THE SAN FRANCISCO EARLY MUSIC SOCIETY PRESENTS



ENSEMBLE CORRESPONDANCES CHARPENTIER'S MESSE DE MINUIT & MORE

Under the direction of the harpsichordist and organist Sébastien Daucé, the singers and instrumentalists of Ensemble Correspondances have become a benchmark ensemble for seventeenth-century French repertory.

The ensemble will usher in a joyful holiday season in a one-night-only special event in Berkeley with a French Baroque program featuring Marc-Antoine Charpentier's *Messe de minuit pour Noël* (Midnight mass for Christmas).

DEC 6, 4 PM, BERKELEY

MORE INFORMATION AT
SFEMS.ORG



Join us around the fire as we "roast" again the texts and melodies so beloved of the holiday season. Over the centuries, composers have been inspired, again and again, by the texts of "Ave Maria" and "There is No Rose," and by the melodies of "The Coventry Carol" and even "Jingle Bells!" We'll share a few of these settings—from across the centuries and across cultures—pairing beloved old chestnuts with newly discovered voices, including those of our *Composers-in- and Not-in-Residence*.

TICKETS & DETAILS - **WWW.SFCA.ORG**

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SAN FRANCISCO
CHORAL ARTISTS
MAGEN SOLOMON, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



DECEMBER 2026

SUN **13** SAN FRANCISCO
NOE VALLEY MINISTRY
1021 SANCHEZ ST • 4PM

SAT **19** PALO ALTO
ALL SAINTS' EPISCOPAL CHURCH
555 WAVERLEY ST • 7:30PM

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114 MONTECITO AVE • 4PM



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≈TEXT AND TRANSLATIONS≈

Love! Murder! Passion! Grief! Opera!

BRINDISI (Verdi)

Alfredo

Libiamo nei lieti calici, che la bellezza infiora;
E la fuggevol ora s'innebrii a voluttà.
Libiam nei dolci fremiti che suscita l'amore,
Poichè quell'occhio al core onnipotente va.

Let us drink from these joyful goblets, for beauty is blooming;
And let the fleeting hour become intoxicated with pleasure.
Drink of the sweet thrills that love inspires,
As those omnipotent eyes (indicates Violetta) go to the heart.

Libiamo amore, amor fra i calici più caldi baci avrà.

Drink, oh love, for with drink, love will have hotter kisses.

Chorus

Libiamo amore, amor fra i calici più caldi baci avrà.

Drink, oh love, for with drink, love will have hotter kisses.

Violetta

Tra voi saprò dividere il tempo mio giocondo;
Tutto è follia nel mondo ciò che non è piacer.
Godiam, fugace e rapido è il gaudio dell'amore;
È un fior che nasce e muore, nè più si può godier.
Godiam! c'invita un fervido accento lusinghier.

I'll be able to share my joyful time among you;
All that in the world is not pleasure is folly.
Let us enjoy, the joy of love is fleeting and short-lived;
It is a flower that is born and dies, no more to be enjoyed.
Let's enjoy! A passionate caressing voice invites us.

Chorus

Ah, godiam, la tazza e il cantico
la notte abbell e il riso;
In questo paradiso, ne scopra il nuovo dì.

Ah, let's enjoy, the cup and the song;
make the night beautiful as well as the laughter
In this paradise, let the new day find us.

Violetta

La vita è nel tripudio.

Life is only pleasure.

Alfredo

Quando non s'ami ancora.

For those who don't yet love.

Violetta

Nol dite a chi l'ignora

Don't say it to who does not know it [love]

Alfredo

È il mio destin così.

Such is my fate.

Chorus

Ah, godiam, la tazza e il cantico
la notte abbell e il riso;
In questo paradiso, ne scopra il nuovo dì.

Ah, let's enjoy, the cup and the song;
make the night beautiful as well as the laughter
In this paradise, let the new day find us.

(translation – Alexandra Amati)

CRUDA SORTE! (Rossini)

Cruda sorte! Amor tiranno!
Questo è il premio di mia fé.
Non v'è orror, terror, n'affanno
Pari a quel ch'io provo in me.
Per te solo, o mio Lindoro,
Io mi trovo in tal periglio.
Da chi spero, oh Dio, consiglio?

Cruel fate! Tyrannical love!
This is the reward for my fidelity.
There is no horror, terror, or anguish
Equal to what I feel inside.
For you alone, my Lindoro,
Do I find myself in such peril.
From whom can I hope for counsel, oh God?

Chi conforto mi darà?
Qua ci vuol disinvoltura,
Non più smanie, nè paura:
Di coraggio è tempo adesso,
Or chi sono si vedrà.

HABANERA (Bizet)

L'amour est un oiseau rebelle
Que nul ne peut apprivoiser,
Et c'est bien en vain qu'on l'appelle
S'il lui convient de refuser.
Rien n'y fait, menace ou prière,
L'un parle bien, l'autre se tait;
Et c'est l'autre que je préfère,
Il n'a rien dit mais il me plaît.

L'amour est enfant de bohème,
Il n'a jamais jamais connu de loi,
Si tu ne m'aimes pas, je t'aime,
Si je t'aime, prends garde à toi!

L'oiseau que tu croyais surprendre
Battit de l'aile et s'envola;
L'amour est loin, tu peux l'attendre,
Tu ne l'attends pas, il est là.
Tout autour de toi, vite, vite,
Il vient, s'en va, puis il revient;
Tu crois le tenir, il t'évite,
Tu crois l'éviter, il te tient.

L'amour est enfant de bohème...

COUPLETS DU TOREADOR (Bizet)

Escamillo

Votre toast... je peux vous le rendre,
Señors, Señors, car avec les soldats
Oui, les toreros peuvent s'entendre,
Pour plaisirs ils ont les combats.
Le cirque est plein, c'est jour de fête,
Le cirque est plein du haut en bas.
Les spectateurs perdant la tête,
Les spectateurs s'interpellent à grands fracas:
Apostrophes, cris et tapage
Poussés jusques à la fureur.
Car c'est la fête du courage,
C'est la fête des gens de cœur.
Allons! En garde! Allons! Allons! Ah!

Toréador, en garde! Toréador! Toréador!
Et songe bien, oui songe en combattant
Qu'un œil noir te regarde
Et que l'amour t'attend.
Toréador, l'amour, l'amour t'attend!

Who will give me comfort?
Here we need confidence,
No more anxiety or fear:
Now is the time for courage,
Now we will see who we are.

Love is a rebellious bird
Which no one can tame
And calling it is in vain
If it suits it to refuse!
Nothing works, neither threat nor prayer.
One man speaks well, the other stays silent,
And it is the other that I prefer.
He has said nothing, but I like him.

Love is a child of Bohemia –
It has never known any laws.
If you don't love me, I love you;
If I love you, watch yourself!

The bird you thought you caught unawares,
Flapped its wings and flew away.
Love is far away, you can be ready for it,
You're not ready for it, and it is there
All around you quickly, quickly it comes,
Leaves then comes back again
You think you've caught it, it avoids you.
You think you've avoided it, it has caught you.

Love is a child of Bohemia...

(translation –Éamonn McManus)

Your toast... I can return it to you
Señors, Señors, because with soldiers,
Yes, toreros can see eye to eye,
Their pleasure is fighting.
The circus is full, it's a holiday,
The circus is full from top to bottom.
The spectators are losing their heads,
The spectators are calling out loudly:
Rebukes, shouting and noise,
Pushed to fury
Because it's the celebration of courage,
It's the celebration of the big-hearted.
Let's go! On guard! Come on! Come on! Ah!

Toreador, on guard! Toreador! Toreador!
And think well, yes think while fighting
That a dark eye is watching you
And that love is waiting for you.
Toreador, love, love is waiting for you!

Chorus

Toréador, en garde! Toréador! Toréador!
 En combattant songe qu'un œil noir te regarde
 Et que l'amour t'attend,
 Toréador, l'amour, l'amour t'attend!

Toreador, on guard! Toreador! Toreador!
 While fighting, think that a dark eye is watching you
 And that love is waiting for you,
 Toreador, love, love is waiting for you!

Escamillo

Tout d'un coup on fait silence;
 On fait silence. Ah que se passe-t-il?
 Plus de cris; c'est l'instant
 Le taureau s'élance en bondissant hors du toril...
 Il s'élance, il entre, il frappe, un cheval roule
 Entraînant un picador.
 Ah bravo toro! hurle la foule.
 Le taureau va... il vient... il vient et frappe encore!
 En secouant ses banderilles,
 Plein de fureur, il court!
 Le cirque est plein de sang;
 On se sauve, on franchit les grilles;
 C'est ton tour maintenant.
 Allons! En garde! Allons! Allons! Ah!

All at once there is silence;
 The people are silent. Ah, what's going on?
 No more screams; it's the moment
 The bull springs by leaping out of the bullpen...
 He rushes, he enters, he strikes, a horse rolls over
 Bringing a picador with it.
 Ah bravo toro! yells the crowd.
 The bull goes... he comes... he comes and strikes again!
 Shaking his banderillas,
 Full of fury, he runs!
 The ring is full of blood;
 People escape, they jump over the barriers;
 It's your turn now.
 Let's go! On guard! Come on! Come on! Ah!

Chorus & Escamillo

Toréador, en garde! Toréador! Toréador!...
 L'amour! L'amour t'attend!

Toreador, on guard! Toreador! Toreador!...
 Love! Love is waiting for you!

PLACIDO E IL MAR (Mozart)**Chorus**

Placido è il mar, andiamo;
 Tutto ci rassicura.
 Felice avrem ventura,
 Su su, partiamo or or.

The sea is calm; let us go;
 everything reassures us;
 we will have good fortune;
 come, let us leave at once!

Electra

Soavi zeffiri soli spirate,
 Del freddo borea lira calmate.
 D'aura piacevole crtesi siate,
 Se da voi spargesi per tutto amor.

Gentle breezes, you alone blow,
 Of the cold north wind; calm the anger
 with your pleasing breath be generous,
 If from you spreads love everywhere.

Chorus

Placido è il mar, andiamo, ecc.

The sea is calm; let us go, etc.

(translation – Alexandra Amati)

FUOR DEL MAR (Mozart)

Fuor del mar ho un mar in seno,
 Che del primo è più funesto.
 E Nettuno ancor in questo
 Mai non cessa minacciar.

Saved from the sea, I have a raging sea
 more fearsome than before within my bosom,
 and Neptune does not cease
 his threats even in this.

Fiero Nume! dimmi almeno:
 Se al naufragio è sì vicino
 Il mio cor, qual rio destino
 Or gli vieta il naufragar?

Stern god! Tell me at least,
 if my body was so close to shipwreck,
 for what cruel purpose
 was that wreck withheld?

CANDLES IN THE WILDERNESS (Conte)

Candles in the wilderness, stars in the sky, what a night!
Near or far, candle light or star light, both are bright.
Light my way, star and candle. Candle burn.
Set the candle in the window, home and heaven both are sure.

New neighbor, Light your lamp!
More light, new houses, lights on earth:
Camp-fires, towns and cities, what a sight!
As many as the stars in heaven, here on earth as heaven... What a sight tonight!
– Philip Littell

DIDO'S LAMENT & FINAL CHORUS (Purcell)

Dido

Thy hand, Belinda; darkness shades me:
On thy bosom let me rest:
More I would, but Death invades me:
Death is now a welcome guest.

When I am laid in earth, may my wrongs create
No trouble in thy breast;
Remember me, but ah! forget my fate.

Chorus

With drooping wings, ye Cupids come,
And scatter roses on her tomb,
Soft and gentle as her heart,
Keep here your watch and never part.

SO WHEN THE GLITT'RING QUEEN OF NIGHT (Purcell)

So when the glitt'ring Queen of Night
With black eclipse is shadow'd o'er,
The globe that swells with sullen pride,
Her dazzling charms to hide,
Does but a little time abide,
And then each ray is brighter than before.

VA, PENSIERO (Verdi)

Va, pensiero sull'ali dorate
Va, ti posa sui clivi, sui colli,
Ove olezzano tepide e molli
L'aure dolci del suolo natal!
Del Giordano le rive saluta,
Di Sione le torri atterrate...
O, mia patria sì bella e perduta!
O membranza sì cara e fatal!

Arpa d'or dei fatidici vati,
Perchè muta dal salice pendi?
Le memorie nel petto raccendi
Ci favella del tempo che fu!
O simile di Solima ai fati
Traggi un suono di crudo lamento,
O t'ispiri il Signore un concerto
Che ne infonda al patire virtù.

Go, thought, on golden wings
Go, alight on the cliffs, on the hills,
Where there are wafting the warm and gentle
Sweet breezes of our native land.
Greet the Jordan's banks,
The fallen towers of Zion...
Oh, my fatherland – so beautiful and lost!
Oh, remembrance so dear, and fatal.

Harp of gold of the prophet bards,
Why do you hang silent from the willow?
Rekindle the memories in our breast
That speak to us of the time that was.
O [harp], like Jerusalem to the fates,
Draw a sound of harsh lamentation;
May the Lord inspire in thee an accord
To infuse our suffering with virtue.

(translation – Alexandra Amati)

BLOW YE THE TRUMPET (Mechem)

Blow ye the trumpet, blow.
Sweet is Thy work, my God, my King.
I'll praise my Maker with all my breath.
O happy the man who hears.
Why should we start, and fear to die,
With songs and honors sounding loud.
Blow ye the trumpet, blow.
Ah, lovely appearance of death.

Traditional text as quoted in Stephen B. Oates, To Purge This Land: A Biography of John Brown, New York, 1970.

DAN-U-EL (Mechem)

Dan-u-el

I'm free! I'm free!
John Brown delivered me.
Come on, you people,
Sing with me!

Chorus

He's free! He's free!

Dan-u-el & Chorus

Didn't my Lord deliver Dan-u-el, Dan-u-el, Dan-u-el,
Didn't my Lord deliver Dan-u-el,
And why not every man? And why not everyone?

He delivered Daniel from the lion's den,
And Jonah from the belly of the whale,
And the Hebrew children from the fiery furnace,
So why not every man? So why not everyone?

Didn't my Lord deliver Dan-u-el?
Yes, Oh thank you, my Lord.
So if my Lord delivered Dan-u-el,
Why not everyone?

Dan-u-el & Choral Response

Now here's a verse, one more verse,
Come along and sing it with me.
You all know it's the gospel truth
'Bout how John Brown set me free.

Don't you know the man who delivered me
And saved me from the devil's livin' hell?
So I named my baby Little John Brown,
And changed my name to Dan-u-el.

Dan-u-el & Chorus

Didn't John Brown deliver Dan-u-el,
Yes, O thank you, John Brown
So if John Brown delivered Dan-u-el,
Why not everyone?

PROLOGUE (Boito)

The Celestial Hosts

Ave Signor
Degli angeli e dei santi,

Hail Lord
Of the angels and of the saints,

Ave Signor, Signor degli angeli,
 O Signor degli angeli
 E dei volanti cherubini d'or...
 Ave, ave Signor.
 Dall'eterna armonia dell'Universo
 Nel glauco spazio immerso
 Emana un verso
 Di supremo amor.
 E s'erge a Te
 Per l'aure azzurre e cave
 In un suon soave.
 Ave, ave, ave, ave!

Hail Lord, Lord of the angels,
 O Lord of the angels
 And of the flying cherubim of gold...
 Hail, hail Lord.
 From the eternal harmony of the Universe
 Immersed in blue space
 Arises a verse
 Of supreme love.
 And it rises to Thee
 Through the blue and empty breezes
 In a sweet sound.
 Hail, hail, hail, hail!

L'ALTRA NOTTE (Boito)

Margherita

L'altra notte in fondo al mare
 Il mio bimbo hanno gittato,
 Or per farmi delirare dicon ch'io
 L'abbia affogato.
 L'aura è fredda,
 Il carcer fosco,
 E la mesta anima mia
 Come il passero del bosco
 Vola, vola, vola via.
 Ah! Pietà di me!
 In letargico sopore
 E' mia madre addormentata,
 E per colmo dell'orrore dicon ch'io
 L'abbia attoscata.
 L'aura è fredda,
 Il carcer fosco...

The other night at the bottom of the ocean
 my little boy was lying
 or, in order to drive me mad, they told me
 he has drowned.
 Dawn is fresh,
 the cell gloomy,
 and my spirit,
 such a sparrow in the woods,
 flies, flies, flies away.
 Ah! Pity me!
 Into a lethargic sleep
 I lulled my mother,
 and, crowning horror, they say
 that I poisoned her.
 Dawn is fresh,
 the cell gloomy...

PSALMODIA FINALE (Boito)

Penitents

Salve Regina!
 S'innalzi un eco
 Dal mondo cieco
 Alla divina reggia del ciel.
 Col nostro canto
 Col nostro pianto,
 Domiam l'intenso
 Foco del senso,
 Col nostro canto mite e fedel.

Hail Queen!
 An echo arises
 From the blind world
 To the divine throne of heaven.
 With our song,
 With our crying,
 We conquer the intense
 Fire of the senses,
 With our meek and faithful song.

Cherubim (simultaneous)

Sugli astri, sui venti, sui mondi,
 Sui limpidi azzurri profondi,
 Sui raggi del sol,
 La danza in angelica spira
 Si gira, si gira, si gira, ecc.
 Ave Maria, gratia plena.

On the stars, on the winds, on the worlds,
 On the clear blue depths,
 On the rays of the sun,
 In an angelic spiral dance
 We turn, turn, turn, etc.
 Hail Mary, full of grace.

Penitents (simultaneous)

Odi la pia,
 La pia prece serena.
 Ave Maria, gratia plena,

Hear the pious,
 The pious, serene prayer.
 Hail Mary, full of grace,

Odi la pia prece serena.
Ave Maria, gratia plena.

Hear the pious, serene prayer.
Hail Mary, full of grace.

Celestial Hosts (simultaneous)

Oriam, oriam.
Oriam per quei morienti,
Per quei morienti oriam, ecc.
Ave Maria, gratia plena.

We pray, we pray.
We pray for the dying,
For the dying we pray, etc.
Hail Mary, full of grace.

Penitents (simultaneous)

Il pentimento lagrime spande.
Di queste blande
Turbe il lamento
Accolga il ciel.

Repentance causes tears to flow.
Of these gentle multitudes
May heaven
Receive the lament.

Celestial Hosts (simultaneous)

Oriam per quelle
Di morienti ignave
Anime schiave,
Sì per quell'anime
Schiave preghiam.

We pray for the
Cowardly enslaved
Souls of the dying,
Yes, for those enslaved
Souls we pray.

Cherubim (simultaneous)

Siam nimbi volanti dai limbi,
Nei santi splendori vaganti,
Siam cori di bimbi, d'amori
Siam nimbi, volanti dai limbi.

We are clouds flying from Limbo,
Wandering in the holy splendors,
We are choirs of adoring cherubim,
We are clouds, flying from Limbo.

Penitents, Cherubim, Celestial Hosts

Odi la pia,
La pia prece serena.
Ave, ave, ave, ecc.
Ah! ah! ah! ecc.
Ave Signor,
Signor degli angeli e dei santi
E delle sfere erranti,
E dei volanti cherubini d'or.

Hear the pious,
The pious serene prayer.
Hail, hail, hail, etc.
Alas! alas! alas! etc.
Hail Lord,
Lord of the angels and of the saints
And of the wandering spheres,
And of the flying cherubim of gold.

Penitents, Celestial Hosts

Dall'eterna armonia dell'Universo
Nel glauco spazio immerso
Emana un verso di supremo amor.

From the eternal harmony of the Universe
Immersed in blue space
Arises a verse of supreme love.

Penitents, Cherubim, Celestial Hosts

E s'erge a Te
Per l'aure azzurre e cave
In suon soave.
Ave, ave!

It rises to Thee
Through the blue and empty breezes
In sweet sound.
Hail, hail!

(translation – Harriet Smith)



PROGRAM NOTES

This program features some of the most famous opera choruses, as well as a few lesser-known ones, some with and some without participation of soloists, as well as a few solo pieces from the same repertoire. The chorus, since the time of Greek tragedies, has fulfilled essentially two roles – that of a commentator on the action, and that of a participant (nymphs and shepherds, soldiers, crowds, angels, etc.). Except for 18th-century Italian *opera seria*, the chorus has always been a welcome and essential presence in opera and has contributed some of the most famous tunes, familiar even to those who have never attended an opera. We're sure you will recognize at least one or two (but it's probably better not to sing along)!

Giuseppe Verdi (1813-1901) was the foremost Italian composer of opera in the 19th century, bringing the genre he inherited from the “bel canto” school of Rossini, Donizetti, and Bellini to new heights of realism, emotional depth, characterization, pathos, and drama. His greatest achievement was probably his ability (and determination) to portray every character and emotion in the most fitting way. For example, he insisted that Tadolini, a wonderful soprano who had already premiered his *Alzira*, could not sing the role of Lady Macbeth because her voice was too lovely for the role of the rough and devilish character. Another hallmark of Verdi's works for the stage is a fondness for the chorus, often cast as a participant in the action, creating rousing choral scenes. His operas were quintessentially “human,” portraying people in all their complex personalities but also within their environment (hence the frequent presence of people—the chorus). “Libiamo” is the famous *brindisi* (“toast”) from the initial scene of *Traviata*, where Violetta and Alfredo meet during a party and fall in love. Of very different fabric is “Va pensiero,” the song of the Hebrew slaves in *Nabucco*. Both pieces feature one of Verdi's favorite techniques, which consists in having all choral voices sing soaring memorable melodies in unison before splitting into glorious harmonies. However, the *Nabucco* chorus has taken on a life of its own as the unofficial Italian national anthem, used as a patriotic hymn. Most Italians prefer it to the official anthem and people will stand when it is sung.

Georges Bizet (1838-75) was a gifted Parisian composer. His *Carmen*, one of the most famous operas in any opera house's repertoire, was composed in his last year. The Habanera “L'amour est un oiseau rebelle” is Carmen's entrance song. Bizet adapted it from a song called “El arreglito,” believing it to be a folk song; it was in fact composed by Spanish composer Sebastián Yradier (1809-65). The descending chromatic melody is an indicator of “otherness” and sexuality. The mezzo-soprano and the chorus engage in a typical call-and-response. *Carmen* showcases Bizet's peculiar amalgam of memorable melodies, piquant harmonies, and vivid character delineation. His passion for portraying real people, and often violent situations, brought him to Prosper Mérimée's 1847 novel, on which Henri Meilhac and Ludovic Halévy based their libretto. The opera masterfully portrays local color, with *seguidillas* (Castilian folksongs and dances), flamenco, etc., as well as seduction and romance. The central theme of the opera, revolving around the gypsy Carmen, a strong woman who would rather die than submit to someone else's wishes, is the progressive disintegration of the personality of her suitor Don José, who stabs her to death when she refuses his request to get back together. The opera is in the French tradition of *opéra lyrique*, which includes arias and spoken dialogue, unlike Italian opera, which is sung throughout. After Bizet's untimely death (when he still believed his new opera to have been a failure), someone else (a composer called Guiraud) turned the spoken text into recitative, believing the work would thus fit better into the mold of Italian opera, as audiences expected.

Wolfgang Amadé Mozart (1756-91), the most famous of all child prodigies, was a versatile and extraordinarily gifted composer who wrote music of all genres and at all levels, from party music (like the famous *Eine kleine Nachtmusik*) to the most serious church music, and everything in-between. He had an unmatched gift for producing perfect melodies and writing expressive, colorful, and exquisitely crafted music. The most famous of his operas are certainly the three he wrote on Lorenzo Da Ponte's libretti (*Le nozze di Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, and *Così fan tutte*), as well as his very last one, *Die Zauberflöte* (strictly speaking, not an opera but a *Singspiel*—a German comic opera). The

three Da Ponte operas broke new ground by uniting elements of all operatic traditions, comic as well as serious, on one stage, and bringing the plots into contemporary life. *Idomeneo*, however, is one of the operas in the older, somewhat stale mold of *opera seria*, and was written in 1780 on a commission from Munich, as an allegory of enlightened monarchy. Most serious operas had little or no chorus, but in this work, Mozart wrote great choral scenes, having been influenced in his travels to Paris by French opera, which always favored choral scenes.

David Conte (b. 1955) is a local composer and a professor at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. He is one of the youngest composers to have studied in Paris with famed professor Nadia Boulanger. His opera *The Dreamers*, with a libretto by Philip Littell, was commissioned by the Sonoma City Opera and is set in Sonoma in 1848, two years after the creation of the California Republic. It seeks to depict the mood and the dreams of those early settlers.

Henry Purcell (1659-95), born at Westminster (London) into a family of musicians, showed early signs of musical gifts, serving as a boy chorister in the Royal Chapel where his father and uncle sang. After his voice broke in 1673, he first became keeper of the king's wind and keyboard instruments, and then composer for the court violins in 1677. He studied under Westminster Abbey's organist John Blow, who in 1679 handed this post to his gifted pupil Purcell, who retained it until his death. His funeral took place in Westminster Abbey, where he was interred next to the organ. *Dido and Aeneas* was written in 1689 for a performance by "Young Gentlemen" at Josias Priest's boarding school at Chelsea. Even so, the piece contains parts for men, which require singing technique at the professional level. The libretto, from Virgil's *Aeneid*, is by Nahum Tate. This miniature opera features a wide range of emotional expression and unprecedented pathos: from Dido's soliloquies to Aeneas's passionate regret to the somber utterances of the sorceress and the breezy heartiness of the sailor. The most famous piece, "Dido's Lament," shows a favorite technique of Purcell's: the ground bass, where the melody and accompaniment unfold over a repeated bass line. In the case of the lament, the bass line is a descending set of notes (here a set of 10 pitches repeated 11 times).

Kirke Mechem (b. 1925, turned 100 years old last year) grew up in Kansas and has lived in San Francisco since 1963. He attended Stanford University (beginning as an English major and switching to music in his junior year) and later Harvard. His opera *John Brown* is based on the life of the controversial abolitionist by the same name (1800-59), who believed that slavery could be abolished only by violence and rebellion. Instrumental in the start of the Civil War, Brown led various insurrections, including an attack on the federal armory at Harpers Ferry, for which he was executed by hanging. The chorus "Blow ye the Trumpet" is a setting of John Brown's favorite hymn, although the melody was newly composed. "Dan-u-el" is an original spiritual. In it the solo baritone, a former slave, tells John Brown's family and friends how Brown and his men led his escape from Missouri, a slave state, into Kansas and on to freedom in Canada.

Arrigo Boito (1842-1918), a leading figure in the *Scapigliatura*, an Italian branch of the bohemian movement, composed *Mefistofele* (a dramatic condensation of Goethe's *Faust*) over several years. The 1868 premiere at Milan's La Scala was a fiasco—the opera, accused of Wagnerism, ran a mere two evenings. Boito revised it dramatically (including re-casting Faust as a tenor rather than a baritone) and when it was performed in Bologna in 1875, it received the success it deserved. Boito was both a composer and a librettist, having pulled Verdi out of retirement and provided him with the libretti for his last two operas, *Otello* and *Falstaff*. Boito belonged to a younger generation, which meant he and the older man often butted heads. To Verdi's credit, he did see the younger man's point of view and with him crossed the "intangible divide" between opera as a juxtaposition of active and reflective moments, and opera as continuous action.

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Alexandra Amati, Tricia Bell and the Covid Advisory Group, Mahala Bundy, Calvary Presbyterian Church (and their wonderful staff), David Conant, Sara Couden, Rena David, Elliott JG Encarnación, Cara Gabrielson, Yongyu Gao, Carol Henri, Hallie Holtzmann, Michael Kaulkin, Cara Keller, Louis Lao, Casey Leones, Éamonn McManus, Yi Liu-Polczynski, Sally Nielsen, Peter Nissen, Michael Ogrinc, Barbara Paschke, Dara Phung, Curtis Streetman, Dan Priven-Troncoso, SFBC's Board of Directors, James Thomassen, Ruth Tringham, Bert Vander Meeren, Chris Wemp, the rehearsal recording and set up crew, all the ushers, AND the entire, wonderful SF Bach Choir!

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Katherine McStravick
Sally Nielsen
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Rena David
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