

Director's Note

Today's concert marks the end of our year-long 20th anniversary celebration. We are so happy that you have been able to join us in a look back at some of our favorite repertoire, and also to hear encore performances of four of our commissioned works — ones that I feel particularly embody Seraphim's mission to "open a window on the divine."

Last November, in our performance of the Duruflé *Requiem*, we paid homage to the great treasure of Gregorian chant, which is arguably the foundation of the sacred choral tradition. In his work *Christe qui lux es et dies*, Richard Clark has preserved the hallowed atmosphere of the chant in a naturally unfolding progression of verses. The work was premiered on February 2, 2014 (fittingly, the feast of Candlemas.)

James Woodman's setting of Mary Sidney Herbert's translation of *Psalms 96* was commissioned in celebration of Seraphim's tenth anniversary, and was premiered on May 5, 2007. His setting bursts with wonder of the presence of God, and the exuberant joy in God's worship.

Sacred Places, Eric Sawyer's triptych of sacred poetry, was premiered in May of 2005. His choice of two of Denise Levertov's poems to frame John Donne's well-known *At the round earth's imagined corners* is particularly striking. As reviewer Diane Wakoski noted, Levertov's poetry "like most American mysticism, is grounded in Christianity, but like Whitman and other American mystics her discovery of God is the discovery of God in herself, and an attempt to understand how that self is a 'natural' part of the world, intermingling with everything. . . ." Eric's setting of these works, and the genius of setting them together in a unified composition, remarkably reflects Seraphim's own mission to find the timeless and transcendent within and beyond all sacred music.

I first met Avner Dorman at Tanglewood in 2002, when he was a Composition Fellow there. That season, one of the projects for the Fellows was to write a piece for a choral ensemble—something I don't think the Tanglewood Music Center has done since—and I was tipped off by Eliot Gyger (who has also written for Seraphim) that the concert of the resulting works would be a great opportunity for "composer shopping." I felt Avner had the best understanding of the choral idiom, so I approached him afterwards and asked him to write a piece for us. He immediately said yes, and we premiered his work *Psalms 67* in 2003. I contacted him again in 2014 when we were preparing our *Jerusalem* program and asked him for another work. The marvelous piece *The Seventy Names of Jerusalem* was the result, premiered in May of 2015.

The remainder of the program showcases works from other great periods for the genre of sacred choral music. Rheinberger's Mass in E-flat has its roots in the polyphony of 16th century Italy, while the harmony is classic German Romantic, closely related to the works of Mendelssohn and Brahms (some of which we performed in February.)

English church music has had a long and illustrious history, and today we pick up where we left off in our November concert—repeating Tallis' *With All Our Hearts And Mouths*, continuing with Byrd's famous *Sing Joyfully*, then jumping to the 20th century, with works of Parry, Finzi, and Leighton.

As we conclude our anniversary celebration, I want to express my deepest gratitude to all the people who have helped make The Seraphim Singers the unique and wonderful ensemble it has been for these twenty years: the composers who have enriched us with new works, the performers (several of whom have been with us since the beginning!) and board members, but also *you*, our donors and audience members. You have supported us on this journey, inspiring us to mine the many rich veins in sacred choral music, new and old. It has been challenging and

rewarding—and fun! I hope Seraphim will continue to “open a window on the divine” for all of us for another twenty years.

—Jennifer Lester

Program Notes

The English Anthem

King Henry VIII led the English Reformation, dissolving over eight hundred monasteries and most of the choirs of men and boys in the 1530s. Although daily church services continued to be said and sung in Latin, lessons at Matins and Evensong were read in English from 1537 and the *First Book of Common Prayer*, introduced in 1549, created an urgent demand for sacred music in English. Cathedral choirs (including the Chapel Royal), theatrical troupes, and organists thrived, while the first public concert of classical music in England would not be held until 1672. In 1559, Elizabeth specified that all Anglican services should include a “hymn or song of praise,” which encouraged the development of the English anthem. The form, in both *a cappella* and organ-supported styles, flourished again in the early 20th century, with Oxford and Cambridge educating a new generation of cathedral choristers and English parish churches establishing commissioning programs.

Kenneth Leighton (1929-1988)

Let all the World in Every Corner Sing (1965)

Kenneth Leighton was a chorister at Wakefield Cathedral in Yorkshire, attended Queens College, Oxford, and was awarded a Mendelssohn scholarship to study with Goffredo Petrassi in Rome. He spent most of his adult life at the University of Edinburgh, where his notable students included conductor Donald Runnicles and composer Nigel Osborne. Many of his best compositions were written for his former Oxford students Nicholas Cleobury (director of Oxford's Schola Cantorum and the Britten Sinfonia) and his brother Stephen Cleobury (director at King's College, Cambridge).

This lively anthem sets a well-known text by lutenist, parish priest, and poet George Herbert (1593-1633): many choristers will be familiar with Ralph Vaughan Williams' setting from his *Five Mystical Songs* and Basil Harwood' hymn tune. Written in Leighton's typical rhythmic and syncopated style, *Let all the World in Every Corner Sing* shows off the upper tessitura of the typical men-and-boys Anglican cathedral choir sound through a series of building fanfares. It recalls Parry's choral style and Britten's organ works, with playful, dissonant punctuations of the soaring vocal phrases.

Thomas Tallis (c1505-1585)

With All Our Hearts And Mouths

Thomas Tallis was distinguished among English composers for his versatility (motets for as many as forty parts), beautiful melodies, and intensity of expression in miniature forms. He evolved from

a parish church musician at Waltham Abbey, Essex (the last monastic foundation to surrender to the Crown) into a member of the royal court. Tallis served four different monarchs in the Chapel Royal, taught William Byrd, and was granted a monopoly to publish polyphonic music by Elizabeth I. His later motets were transposed down for private chapels (without boy sopranos) and up for home use (including women's voices).

This dense contrapuntal work was very popular in the early seventeenth century. It is one of two existing *contrafacta* (later re-textings) of Tallis' superb Christmas motet *Salvator mundi*, which was the first selection in the joint Tallis-Byrd publication *Cantiones sacrae* (1575). It is an ideal synthesis of Catholic music (an imitative canon that becomes freely expressive) and confessional Trinity Sunday (Protestant) text.

William Byrd (c1540-1623) ***Sing Joyfully***

Byrd was the most distinguished musician of his generation, publishing virtuosic canons, motets, and anthems in popular anthologies. Trained as a Catholic boy soprano at Westminster Abbey, he lived most of his life under Protestant monarchs, rising to a position at the Chapel Royal under Elizabeth I. Verse anthems, interspersing solo and choral sections, flourished where choirs of boys and men were preserved, and survived in the Chapel Royal even after the restoration of Charles II. While organs provided accompaniment in liturgical settings, consorts of viols were used outside of church.

Byrd's anthem for six voices, *Sing Joyfully unto God Our Strength*, was one of his most popular works: over one hundred manuscript copies and prints survive from the seventeenth century. It presents four verses of Psalm 81 in complex, ingenious counterpoint (especially in the finale) that echoes the vivid English madrigal settings so popular in Elizabeth's court. "Sing joyfully" cascades over us through a series of ascending fourths and fifths, followed by sonorous hymn-like singing a "sing loud unto the God of Jacob." This textual reference may allow us to date the work as late as 1603, in celebration of the ascendancy of King James I. One of the most typical "Chapel Royal" effects can be heard in Byrd's antiphonal fanfares between the two sides of the choir (trumpets blown "in the new moon"). Psalm 81 is full of references to dance, so Byrd embroiders his sacred style with strumming motives, syncopation, and the sounds of instrumental consort music ("at our feast day").

Richard J. Clark (b. 1969) ***Christe qui lux es et dies* (2014)**

Richard J. Clark was born in Greenwich Village, NYC, and grew up in Long Island, NY. He currently lives in Milton with his wife and four children. He has served Saint Cecilia Parish as organist since 1989 and as Director of Music since 1992. He oversees all liturgical music in the parish and the Saint Cecilia Concert Series. As a composer, his liturgical, choral, and organ works have been performed on four continents and are published by World Library Publications, Lorenz/The Sacred Press, CanticaNOVA Publications, RJC Cecilia Music, and Corpus Christi Watershed. His eclectic appearances include St. Patrick's Cathedral (NY), Saint-Eustache (Paris), the Basilica of the National

Shrine of the Immaculate Conception (D. C.), the Celebrity Series of Boston, Fenway Park, and the New York Songwriters Circle at NYC's historic "The Bitter End." Richard also currently serves Boston College and the Jesuit Community as Chapel Organist and Cantor at Saint Mary's Chapel. Furthermore, he has served the Archdiocese of Boston in numerous liturgical projects, conferences, and liturgies.

Christe qui lux es et dies is based on the ancient Compline hymn for Lent, likely dating back to the 4th century C.E. Although it was not retained in the Roman Breviary, its continued widespread use is perhaps attributed to its exquisite poetry and simple beauty, glorifying Christ as the world's light. This setting utilizes two major themes, the opening choral statement and the ancient chant melody, both in naturally progressing keys. The opening theme provides an axis of symmetry, setting verses one, four, and seven, while the chant is the basis of verses two, three, five and six. The "Amen" recapitulates the chant theme inside a variation of the opening exposition.

Josef Gabriel Rheinberger (1839-1901) ***Mass in E-flat (Op. 109)***

Josef Gabriel Rheinberger (1839-1901) was born in the tiny principality of Lichtenstein, where his father was treasurer to the Prince. An organist and teacher discovered the young Rheinberger's remarkable talent and began teaching the boy when he was five. Such was his progress that at seven Josef became organist at the Chapel of St. Florian in Vaduz which was adjacent to the family home. Rheinberger's first Latin mass was composed for the Chapel in 1847 when he was a mere eight years of age. (It is reported that he interrupted a performance of this mass to admonish the officiating bishop that he was singing out of tune!) Such precocious talent assured his admission to the Munich Conservatory at the age of twelve. During the next ten years he studied, composed, taught privately, and performed as pianist and organist. In 1867, he was appointed Professor of Composition in Munich, a post which he held until his death on November 25, 1901. Among his pupils were William Furtwängler, Engelbert Humperdinck, Ermanno Wolf-Ferrari, and the Americans Horatio Parker and George Chadwick.

By temperament and training Rheinberger favored the classical tradition of Mozart and middle Beethoven, and the polyphonic mastery of Bach, over the new German music of Wagner and Liszt. Though long admired by organists for the splendid sonatas, concertos and miscellaneous works he composed for that instrument, it has only been in recent years that Rheinberger's choral music (a corpus including eighteen Mass settings) has come into prominence. Tonal variety, graceful vocal writing, effortless polyphony, and expressive chromaticism are some of the descriptive phrases which come to mind on hearing the mature works. In style, the choral music of Brahms and Mendelssohn is never far away.

His *Mass in E-flat, Opus 109* for double choir was composed in 1878 and comes from a period when Rheinberger was emerging from the influence of the Cecilian movement. Cecilians vigorously pressed for the restoration in church music of the historically validated *a cappella* style associated with Palestrina, and a rejection of the 18th-century church music for choir and instruments, represented by the classical masses of Haydn and Mozart. Op. 109 is surely one of his greatest choral compositions, invoking the grandeur of the Venetian polychoral style, while maintaining the melodic and harmonic freedom of his own time. The Mass presents special mo-

ments, such as the halo effect of the *et incarnatus est* in the Creed and the *sepultus est* that follows. The intertwining of the voices in the *Agnus Dei* is also wonderfully engaging. The *Gloria* and *Credo* follow the Cecilian tenets, however, with clear and straightforward setting of the text and little in the way of word-painting.

James Woodman (b. 1957)
Psalm 96 (2007)

James Woodman was born in Portland, Maine, in 1957, and educated at Phillips Exeter Academy (Classical Diploma), Princeton University (A.B., Composition), and New England Conservatory (M.M., Organ Performance). He was appointed the first Composer-in-Residence at the Cathedral Church of St. Paul, Boston, and is currently in his 20th year of service as Monastery Organist for the Society of St. John the Evangelist, Cambridge. James Woodman's organ and choral works are published by E. C. Schirmer, Theodore Presser, Boosey & Hawkes, and Thorpe. His compositions have been widely programmed, including performances at Magdalen College (Oxford), Église de la Sainte-Trinité (Paris), Festival Internationale de l'Orgue Ancien (Sion, Switzerland), Minato Mirae Concert Hall (Yokohama), Kaiser-Wilhelm-Gedächtnis-Kirche (Berlin), Langholtskirkja (Reykjavik), St. Mary's Cathedral (San Francisco), United States Air Force Academy (Colorado Springs), St. Thomas Episcopal Church (New York), as well as on the nationally syndicated radio broadcast "Pipe Dreams," and on recordings by Mark Brombaugh, Nancy Granert, Christa Rakich, Erik Simons, Peter Sykes, Victoria Wagner, the Boston Boy Choir, the Harvard University Choir, and the Schola of the Society of St. John the Evangelist.

Psalm 96 was commissioned in 2006 by The Seraphim Singers in celebration of their tenth anniversary and premiered in September 2007 at Boston College. Besides this piece, Seraphim Singers have commissioned Woodman's *Ave Maris stella* (2008), and *Annunciation* (2017), and have performed his *The Midwife's Tale*, *At the Round Earth's Imagined Corners* and *Arise, Shine*.

Woodman's setting of the psalm is based on a translation of Mary Sidney Herbert (1561-1621), whose psalm translations influenced such great 17th century poets as George Herbert and John Donne. Herbert, also known as the Countess of Pembroke (from age fifteen), found favor from Queen Elizabeth I, as the niece of the queen's favorite (Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester), and was given a classical education. Although she only published four works during her lifetime, she became the first English woman to establish a literary reputation, among which are her metrical paraphrases of Psalms 44-150.

Psalm 96 begins with an upward flourish ("Sing") and explores a variety of paired voices, layering tripartite-infused duets into a complex quilt of cascading phrases in the mixolydian mode—these motives return in the heart of the work ("Give") and in the finale "Lo, Jehovah cometh"). The opening harmony settles from a tonal center of C to B-flat as the duets become more canonic ("Make each country know his worth"). Like Britten's choral anthems, cadences are often extended by mixed meters, and interior sections are made mysterious by the exploration of chromaticism and tertian harmonies ("Idols, what are they"). Two remarkable sections marked "tranquil, suspended," stacks open fourths and fifths ("Starry roof" and "Leafy infants") introduce contrapuntal phrases that develop and fragment the same intervals ("Now rejoice" and "Dance"). Though conservative in his musical language, Woodman's harmonic invention (as in the passage "Now rejoice and leap and roar"), and his steady migration of key, meter and mood, impart an

endearing freshness.

Eric Sawyer (b. 1962)
***Sacred Places* (2005)**

Following four years as Chair of Composition and Theory at the Longy School of Music, Eric Sawyer joined the composition faculty of Amherst College in the fall of 2002. Previously, he has taught composition and theory at the University of California, Santa Cruz, Wellesley College, and MIT. Mr. Sawyer received his undergraduate musical training at Harvard College, and completed his graduate studies at Columbia University and the University of California, Davis. His teachers have included Leon Kirchner, Ross Bauer, Tison Street, Andrew Imbrie, Thomas Benjamin, and George Edwards. The music of Eric Sawyer receives frequent performances on both coasts, including at New York's Weill and Merkin concert halls and at Tanglewood, as well as in England, France, Germany, and most recently in Romania and Bulgaria. His opera, *The Garden of Martyrs*, received its premiere performance in 2013 and was named a finalist for The American Prize, a national prize in opera composition. Mr. Sawyer has received the Joseph Bearn Prize, a First Music commission from the New York Youth Symphony, and awards from the Tanglewood Music Center and the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He appears frequently as a solo and chamber pianist, and is founding director of the critically acclaimed contemporary ensemble Longitude. Besides *Sacred Places*, The Seraphim Singers commissioned *Donne Secours* from him (March 2009) and also performed his *Three choruses from Ecclesiastes* (for Composers in Red Sneakers in 2003).

Sawyer's *Sacred Places*, premiered by the Seraphim Singers in 2005, frames John Donne's "At the round earth's imagined corners," with two contemporary poems by Denise Levertov. The contemplative character of the Levertov settings, juxtaposed with the more declarative nature of Donne's sonnet provides, in the composer's words "an opportunity for a narrative evolution, from uncertainty of mood to certainty, then drawing back to a patient sense of expectation."

Poet Denise Levertov (1923-1997) was raised in England by a father who had converted from Hasidic Judaism to Anglicanism, becoming a priest before she was born. Her family was actively involved with humanitarian causes in the 1930s, and she emigrated to the United States in 1947, becoming a citizen in the 1950s and remaining politically active. Her hesitant, elusive poem, "Flickering Mind," set in the first movement, describes the mystic in a moment of estrangement from God, distracted and scattered ("it is I who am absent") seeking the grace to be able to focus on God's presence ("the sapphire I know is there"). It builds as it progresses, gathering intensity from its pulsing metaphors of streams, fish, and light. The second Levertov poem "...That passeth all understanding," set in the third movement, is suffused with harmony and quiet awe.

In the central movement of *Sacred Places*, Sawyer set the seventh of John Donne's *Holy Sonnets* (1633) circulated by handwritten copies during the writer's lifetime and published posthumously. This poem reflects on the need for repentance and forgiveness before the Day of Judgment. Sawyer observes the rhythm of Donne's poem by emphasizing certain rests (in the place of a caesura at "for me mourn a space"), flinging out strident parallel fourths and sixths ("blow your trumpets"), inserting triplets into longer lines ("numberless infinities"), and dividing the movement into sections matching the form of the Petrarchan sonnet Donne prefers (with the rhyme scheme abbaabba cdcdde). Donne was in the process of converting from Catholicism to Anglicanism when he wrote this text. It depicts the author's mind as a contrastingly turbulent

and penitential “sacred place”: Sawyer’s musical setting is Ivesian both in its practice of stacking fourths and dissonances and in its juxtaposition of simple unison song and modern harmonizations.

Avner Dorman (b. 1975)
The Seventy Names of Jerusalem (2015)

Avner Dorman writes music of intricate craftsmanship and rigorous technique, expressed with a soulful and singular voice. A native of Israel now living in the United States, Dorman draws on a variety of cultural and historical influences in composing, resulting in music that affects an emotional impact while exploring new territories. His works utilize an exciting and complex rhythmic vocabulary, as well as unique timbres and colors in orchestral, chamber, and solo settings. The world’s finest orchestras, conductors, and soloists regularly perform Dorman’s music, and many of his compositions have become contemporary staples in the repertoire. Dorman’s music is championed by conductors including Zubin Mehta, Ricardo Chailly, and Andris Nelsons, and by soloists Gil Shaham, Martin Grubinger, and Hilary Hahn. Avner Dorman’s music has garnered numerous awards and prizes. Most recently, he won the 2018 Azrieli Prize for Jewish Music and his opera *Wahnfried* was named a finalist for the International Opera Awards. At the age of 25, Dorman became the youngest composer to win Israel’s prestigious Prime Minister’s Award for his *Ellef Symphony*. He has earned several international awards from ASCAP, ACUM, and the Asian Composers League.

Dorman is an active conductor, and he is the current music director of CityMusic Cleveland Chamber Orchestra. He holds a doctorate in composition from the Juilliard School and serves as Associate Professor of Music Theory and Composition at the Sunderman Conservatory of Music at Gettysburg College.

The Seventy Names of Jerusalem, the second commission from Dorman by The Seraphim Singers (the first, a setting of *Psalm 67* in 2003) was premiered at a concert on the theme of the holy city of Jerusalem. Jerusalem has been home to a polyglot Jewish, Christian, and Muslim community for over three centuries, with invasions and war (interspersed with centuries of harmonious coexistence) leaving their marks. Jewish tradition teaches that just as there are seventy names for G-d and seventy names for the *Torah*, so are there seventy names for Jerusalem. In describing the Creation, the Midrash Tehillim (2:68:6) states, “When the Holy One, blessed be He, gave forth the divine word, the voice divided itself into seven voices, and from the seven voices passed into the seventy languages of the seventy nations.”

Of the work, Dorman writes, “When Jennifer Lester approached me to write a new piece inspired by the city of Jerusalem, I knew I wanted a piece that could speak to the unique diversity of the city. Whenever I visit Jerusalem, I am struck by the variety of its population and the contrast of old and new that pervades it. After trying different texts, I remembered an old mythology that claims Jerusalem has seventy names. I decided to try to find as many names for the city as I could and use those names as my text — from old Hebrew and Arabic names to ones in languages from around the world, in English, Japanese, and Turkish.”

In this five-minute SAATTB anthem, each “name” for the holy city is paired with musical material that the composer may extend or elide to create phrases evoking Biblical cantillation. Since it is built from tiny fragments, the city’s “names” may be combined and overlapped to gen-

erate larger formal elements. In this work, as in Dorman's many concertos for unusual instruments (mandolin, piccolo, saxophone, violin and rock band, etc.), small particles are layered while the "orchestration" remains light and transparent: this shows the influence of Anton Webern's music on Dorman, and allows us to hear very dissonant particles as elements of surface exuberance, rather than dissonance. Dorman's *Seventy Names* is at once multi-lingual and multi-cultural, painting a resilient, diverse musical portrait of the ancient city of Jerusalem.

Sir Charles Hubert Hastings Parry (1848-1918)
There is an Old Belief (from Songs of Farewell)

As a chorister and student organist at Eton and Oxford, Parry's choral music is of central importance to his compositional output. Most of his choral works were commissions, including the magnificent *I Was Glad* for Edward VII's coronation in Westminster Abbey with 430 choristers. At the time of his *Songs of Farewell*, he was still director of the Royal College of Music, a post which he had held since 1894, and was president of the 'Music in Wartime' committee which he had helped found in 1914 to provide opportunities for professional musicians to serve the war effort by giving concerts in hospitals, camps, and the like. Nevertheless, Parry found the war profoundly depressing; it was, in Herbert Howells' words, "a scourge that cast a devastating shadow over Parry's mind and heart."

The six *Songs of Farewell* represent his choral masterpiece and give us a glimpse of this private man who sensed that his own life was drawing to a close: of his seventieth birthday he wrote, "I have reached the last milestone." The texts are personal, with the only truly sacred one being "Lord, let me know mine end" from Psalm 39. The writing throughout is rich with varied sonorities, contrapuntal techniques, and virtuoso vocal lines that test the mettle of any choral ensemble. *There is an Old Belief*, for six voices, requires tight dynamic control, and its beautiful text by Scottish literary critic John Gibson Lockhart (1794-1854) spins a vision of life "beyond the sphere of grief." The work's ethereal close depicting "eternal" sleep shows why Parry was the most influential choral composer of his generation.

Gerard Finzi (1901-1956)
God is Gone Up, op. 27, no. 2 (1951)

Gerald Finzi studied at York Minster with Edward Bairstow after the death of his first music teacher and three brothers in World War I. Ralph Vaughan Williams hired him at the Royal Academy of Music in the early 1930s and he became a favorite composer for the Three Choirs Festival. Most of his nine song cycles and dramatic choral anthems were written at the same home in Hampshire where he had hosted German and Czech war refugees in the 1940s.

Finzi composed *God is Gone Up* for a St. Cecilia's Day Service (November 22, 1951) drawing his ebullient text from Massachusetts minister Edward Taylor's *Sacramental Meditations*. Taylor (c1642-1729) refused to sign the 1662 Act of Uniformity, requiring adherence to the rites and ceremonies in the *Book of Common Prayer*, and was prevented from teaching school and worshipping as a Puritan. He emigrated to the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1668. Taylor studied at Harvard College and for fifty years, he served as minister of the Congregational Church in frontier Westfield,

Massachusetts, becoming one of America's first major poets. *God is Gone Up* is based on one of his Westfield sermons, exhorting his "farmer saints" to salvation. It highlights his place as the last important representative of the metaphysical school founded by John Donne (and continued by George Herbert and Henry Vaughan). Finzi's vivid setting of this text contrasts a sweeping, elated prayer, primed by the organ's reed stops "sounding trumpets" with a swirling, celestial middle section evoking "heaven's sparkling courtiers" attending the ascended Christ. For the finale, the opening march-like music returns, climaxing in resplendent six-part harmony on the word "glory."