

The theme of this concert, “Reflections,” finds its way into every crevice of the program: reflections in the water, reflections on love and loss, on death, and on the transcendent affirmation of life. Both featured composers--John Rutter and Gwyneth Walker—write unabashedly tonal and accessible, audience-pleasing music. Both are prolific by modern standards, their music widely performed. (Rutter may be the most frequently performed and highly cherished composer of church anthems in the English-speaking world). And both draw special inspiration from spirituality, though in ecumenical ways that transcend denomination and religious doctrine. Despite his upbringing in the Church of England, Rutter has described himself (in a 2003 interview on *60 Minutes*) as not particularly religious, yet inspired by the spirituality of sacred verses and prayers. For her part, Walker has credited her Quaker upbringing for the direct expression, pragmatism, and studied simplicity of her works, yet likewise distances herself from specific doctrine. As with Rutter, her generalized spiritual vision is the well-spring of her inspiration: “If your eye is on something a little higher, a general feeling that you might be in touch with something large, you do have incoming energy and inspiration.”

John Rutter-*Requiem* (1985)

Born in 1945, John Rutter’s musical education was as a chorister, his future interests as a composer shaped by singing as a choirboy. At 17, he participated in the world premiere of Britten’s *War Requiem*, by 18 he had published one of his most popular Christmas carols, the ear-worm “Shepherd’s Pipe Carol,” and, while singing in the choir as a music major at Clare College, he encountered many of the leading figures of the British compositional and choral singing worlds that would influence his professional and compositional life. In the mid-70s, he became music director at Clare, molding that choir for the first time into an ensemble of international standing, while meanwhile working with David Willcocks at King’s College to compile editions of carols and anthems used around the world today. In the 1980s, he founded the Cambridge Singers, with whom he launched a series of recordings, of the great choral masterpieces of the Western tradition as well as his own music.

First performed complete on October 13, 1985 at Lovers’ Lane United Methodist Church in Dallas, Texas, Rutter’s *Requiem* has become one of the most popular large-scale choral works of the twentieth century. Its seven movements drawing freely from the texts of the Latin Requiem Mass and the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. As Rutter wrote in his notes to a 1997 recording of the work by Polyphony (Hyperion 66947), “The seven sections of the work form an arch-like meditation on themes of life and death. The first and last movements are prayers to God the Father on behalf of all humanity, movements two and six are psalms, movements three and five are personal prayers to Christ, and the center Sanctus is an affirmation of divine glory, accompanied by bells as is traditional at this point in the Mass. Gregorian chant is used, in fragmentary or disguised form, at several points in the work. Each of the two psalm settings has an instrumental obbligato, a feature inherited from Bach.” Although Rutter signals these resonances to Gregorian chant and Bach, they are masked to the listener by the richness of harmonic textures and a lyricism more suggestive of modern popular song than the German Baroque.

The tone of the work is one of consolation, intimacy, contemplation, and approachability rather than the grand and grim ominousness of the famous dramatic requiems of Mozart or Verdi. It thus more closely follows the model of Brahms, and especially Fauré and Duruflé; the total absence of a “*Dies Irae*” movement is telling. This consoling tone is reflected in stylistic

references that can be heard throughout this eclectic work. The first movement opens darkly, in a hushed but jagged and dissonant intervals, a texture recalling Benjamin Britten, winding mysteriously into a passage redolent of Faure's setting of the words "*exaudi*" and "*luceat eis*." Suddenly, the sky clears, and the texture eases into a lilting melody for "5" that might be at home in one of Leonard Bernstein's musicals. The second movement, "Out of the Deep," suggests the music of Herbert Howells, one of Rutter's most important early influences, with its winding lyric intensity and exposed unisons, wrapped in a haze of dense harmony. It opens and closes with a hushed, almost chant-like statement of the psalm's opening line, accompanied by a brooding solo cello. These subdued episodes frame the central, triumphant proclamations of "trust in the Lord."

The song-like third movement, "*Pie Jesu*," will remind listeners of the eponymous movement in Fauré's Requiem, through both the featured soprano solo and the symmetry of the melody. However, it is not a stand-alone piece, but ties itself to the opening movement through a shifting, syncopated chromatic figure introduced there. The center movement, the *Sanctus*, is brief, dance-like, and often finds the sopranos and tenors rocketing skyward trumpeting, bell-like, often overlapping echoes.

With the "*Agnus Dei*," the uneasy, off-beat figures that link the first and third movements return with greater intensity and density, layering against each other in canon, and broadening into metrically shifting but unified chordal utterances.

The sixth movement, "The Lord is My Shepherd," was originally written in 1976 as a separate anthem, and is often performed separately by churches today. Its relaxed lyricism and free pulse evoke a pastoral mood suited to the words. Like "Out of the Deep," a subdued beginning and ending, featuring a solo obbligato instrument (here, oboe) frame a cresting, triumphant climax.

The gently floating melody of the final "*Lux Aeterna*" will, like the third movement, remind people of the Fauré Requiem, and like that earlier work brings back the peaceful lyric theme and final cadence from the first movement, now stripped of the turbulent interludes heard then, imparting a satisfying cyclic balance to the whole work..

=== [INTERMISSION]===

Born in 1947, Vermont-based composer Gwyneth Van Anden Walker began composing at age 2. As she related in an extended 2012 interview for Vermont public television, her father was an inventor whose constant tinkering inspired her to invent at the keyboard. Her mother, though she never studied music, was very musical, sang around the house and, in Walker's words, "could harmonize any song, by ear, no matter how chromatic the song was." She arranged for young Gwyneth to take piano lessons. But, her teachers quickly found that she was less interested in practicing scales than inventing new music. The formal lessons were suspended, but her composition encouraged, and she recalls being asked even as a little girl to write music for her friends. In her teen years, before studying music formally in college, she became intensely interested in folk and rock music. Folk music, especially, has formed the bedrock of her composition ever since.

Walker graduated from Brown University in 1968 and received her MM and DMA in the mid-seventies from the University of Hartford's Hartt School of Music. From 1976 to 1980, she taught on the faculty of the Oberlin College Conservatory, then returned to Hartt to teach part-time. In 1982, she retired from teaching in order to pursue composition full-time. She moved to a dairy farm in Braintree, Vermont, where she redirected her compositional efforts to providing

music on commission from local performers, from school and community groups to professional orchestras and soloists. She also wrote for national ensembles, like the Bay Area Women's Philharmonic.

Her main composition teacher at Hartt had been Arnold Franchetti. The son of an opera composer, Franchetti studied composition and orchestration with Richard Strauss and befriended Aaron Copland, whom Walker credits with developing the open harmonies and "American" sound that she also tries to achieve in her own music, often by quoting and arranging American folk music and spirituals. This lineage gives context to Walker's musical style—its bright and clear textures, apt and precise deployment of orchestral colors, crisp rhythms, and ready comprehensibility (to use her word)—that have made it a favorite with musicians and audiences across America. It also gives texture to her stance as a composer: self-effacing, populist, even workmanlike. She has said she "does not aspire to have music performed beyond the proximity of her rural home. "Life happens to me," she has said. "People happen to me." Composing is a practical, day-to-day enterprise. In that 2012 interview, Walker stresses the practical nature of her work. Many of her works are written by request and on commission. She tries to find "A delicate balance between being inspired to write something from my imagination and to get the job done on time." Indeed, she has been commissioned to write a piece commemorating the Toledo Choral Society's centenary next year.

Beside the Still Waters for organ solo (2014)

Gwyneth Walker completed this short work for organ in Sarasota, Florida on February 15, 2014, in fulfillment of a commission by Abbot/Andover (Massachusetts) Academies Class of 1964, dedicated to their departed classmates and in celebration of their fiftieth reunion. She describes it as "a brief organ prelude of a lyric character... based upon the folk-prayer, 'Beside the Still Waters,' inspired by the 23rd Psalm." This prayer is printed as a preface to the music.

The piece opens with a calm, flowing ripple over a relaxed E pedal, animated by the composer's trademark arpeggiated figurations over static slow-moving tonal harmonies. In so doing, it sets an aquatic mood consistent with the featured work on this half of the program, *To an Isle in the Water*. Indeed, water is a persistent theme throughout Walker's output; her 2012 piano concerto is titled "Across the Water: Songs of the Water for Piano and Orchestra."

After several measures, an undulating, lyrical melody enters on the clarinet stop, flowing into a gentle climax, interrupted by a faster, aggressive processional in the minor mode. This in turn builds to a climactic return of the opening triplet cascades, then subsides back into the original rippling texture and key, the melody now agitated and intensified by a surging two-against-three pattern. The texture builds into a flowing torrent, cresting into the work's second loud moment just before the end, before collapsing quickly into silence and stillness.

If Ever Two Were One for SATB chorus (2006)

Although *If Ever Two Were One* has become one of Gwyneth Walker's most frequently performed compositions around the country, its provenance is the most local of any work on the program. It was commissioned by Stace Stegman as a thirtieth wedding anniversary gift to his wife, long-time northwest Ohio and Bowling Green State University choral conductor, Sandra Frey Stegman. But it also serves as a poignant memorial, as Stegman, owner of a choral sheet music store in Toledo, died of cancer before their anniversary on July 28, 2003. The first

performance was given in 2006 by the Bowling Green Chorale under Sandra Stegman's direction.

The texts are drawn from two poems by Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672): "to My Dear and Loving Husband" and "A Letter to Her Husband, Absent Upon Public Employment." As the composer relates, "The musical setting unfolds in three sections. The first poem is presented in phrases which open as the lines diverge. A listener might imagine a flower opening. Or, the reading of the poem with a sign of ecstasy after each line. The intensity and range of the phrases increases until the words: "Then while we live, to love let us so persevere, that when we live no more, we may live ever." The middle section laments the absence of the husband. As the Sopranos and Altos sing the new words, the Tenors and Basses quietly repeat a pattern of "we may live ever" as a background. Finally, the voices join together to sing the passionate lines: "Flesh of the flesh, bone of thy none, I here, thou there, yet both are one." And then the opening section returns, more powerfully than before, concluding with a triumphant: "When we live no more, we may live ever!" Attentive listeners will notice the composer's use of paired vocal lines and echoes and sudden unisons to reflect the poetic interplay of "two" and "one" in the text.

To an Isle in the Water for SATB Chorus and Chamber Orchestra (2006)

Commissioned by the Saginaw Choral Society in Saginaw, Michigan, and first performed on February 25, 2006, *To an Isle in the Water* is one of Gwyneth Walker's larger-scale choral works. It takes the words of Irish poet William Butler Yeats and arranges them in four movements (or "songs," as the composer calls them). As Walker writes in her preface, "one might hear the "lake water lapping" through arpeggiated accompaniment patterns. Or, one might feel the gentle, slow melodic descent when 'peace comes dropping slow.' As with the organ piece, rippling figures unify the whole, and listeners will certainly hear an echo of "Beside the Still Waters" in the flowing choral melody here. The second movement deploys light-hearted word-painting and delicate shifts in texture to highlight the colorful animal imagery of the text, underscored by similarly aquatic rippling effects to the opening movement. The third movement can be felt as the pulsing heart of the work, a melancholy waltz that unfolds into a richly harmonized arc of sounds, and a cascading stream into the final cadence. The final movement brings the textural effects of the previous three together into a summary statement and powerful climax.

The composer summarizes the spiritual progress of the work as follows: "The four songs in this set progress through time, from the initial setting forth on a journey (The Lake Isle of Innisfree) to the newness of young love (Shy One), to a reflection on the passing of years (When You Are Old) and lastly, to the eternal, transcendent beauty of love (The Song of Wandering Aengus). One senses the poet seeking that which is always beyond the limits of the finite world."

--Notes by Christopher A. Williams.

Dr. Williams holds a Ph.D. in musicology from the University of California at Berkeley; has taught at the Cleveland Institute of Music, Bowling Green State University, and the University of Toledo; and sings in the bass section of the Toledo Choral Society)