20TH ANNIVERSARY
AURORA CHORUS
JOAN SZYMKO, DIRECTOR
SHE RISES
SUNDAY, MAY 20TH
4:00 PM & 7:30 PM
FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
PORTLAND, OREGON
As you listen to Aurora’s opening song, She Speaks, imagine that “She” is Source—Wisdom, Higher Self, Mystery. “She” speaks from the wildness in nature and, at times, in the wilderness of our own hearts. In the next song, composer David Brunner uses the words, Radiant Sister of the Day as a joyful refrain calling us to come away to the wild, to nature—to the place “Where earth and ocean meet /And all things seem only one / in the universal sun.” Inspired by our own Sun—the physics of light and the power of the human voice, She Rises is a jubilant celebration of energy and a “reminder of the light that resides without and within all of us.” (read more about the composer and the piece She Rises below). Beginning with “sun sounds,” lyrics lauding the Celtic sun goddess Brigid are sung on a driving Celtic-style melody. Brigid is the goddess of the hearth fire, the forge, illumination, and of poetry. Bengali writer Rabindranath Tagore was first and foremost a poet. The texts for A Burst of Song are primarily from his most famous volume: Gitanjali: Song Offerings (1912). This setting illuminates the poet’s heartfelt beliefs about the divine grace and power of song. Originally scored for men’s chorus, Aurora premieres the SSAA setting of this 3 movement work.

A foundational value of Aurora Chorus is: women matter; that women’s voices are powerful and must be heard if there is ever to be justice and peace in this world; there is no peace without justice. Our next set of music is about the audacity and boldness of women speaking out loud—speaking the truth. Julia Ward Howe (who penned our National Anthem) is bluntly anti-war in Arise! (Mother’s Day 1879). Holly Near is Fired Up and imagines how 1000 Grandmothers could change everything. In Connie Kaldor’s Mother’s Prayer, we sing of feeling “tied to every mother” who fears for the health and safety of her children. In the buoyant, Thulele mama ya, inspired by African rhythms and the Zulu phrase, “cry mama — don’t cry mama” we have a clear reminder that mothers don’t really have time for tears.

Much of Aurora Chorus’ appeal for singers is our open recognition of the life force that connects us all, in claiming that divine spirit for ourselves as women, and in celebrating it in all things and all people. Singing is enlivening! The very act of breathing in consciously and exhaling on sound in a creative way with others enables one to feel that which we all yearn for: connection. We open our second half with Mbuti Chant, originally a call to the great spirit of the Ituri Rainforest of Central Africa. Indigenous peoples are often seen as being closer to nature — to the forces of creation. In her poem, In Dreams, Native American poet (and Aurora’s guest artist in 2003) Gail Tremblay writes: “creation wakes the wit; I am alive.” We Wake the Day is from Oregon composer Ron Jeffers’ brilliant settings of Tremblay’s poetry, Indian Singing. “Woman Singing” is the name mystical poet Catherine DeVinck gives the narrator of her poem, The Womanly Song of God which I set for Aurora’s 10th Anniversary. The driving, predominant 5/8 rhythm of I AM dances, leaps and pushes with the text; images of circling, roundness and wildness give way to grounded birth.

Women have always turned to each other in times of birth and celebration, death and hardship. In Mae Francis, Bernice Reagon asks: “Who do I turn to when my legs get shaky... woman hold my hand.” Of course, many turn to prayer in times of need; Psalm 23 endures as a prayer of faith and trust in divine grace. By simply changing pronouns from “he” to “she” Bobby McFerrin’s The 23rd Psalm challenges notions of attaching gender to an all-providing godhead.

There are times in life when prayer may seem useless; a cancer diagnosis could be such a time. Where I Live (A Breast Cancer Oratorio) was presented by Aurora Chorus in 2001 in Singing for Our Lives, a fund raiser for the
local Susan B Komen foundation. We present two movements from this memorable work: **Somebody** and **Peace**. Members of our Aurora community have been touched by cancer. Our scholarship fund is named after Eileen Spencer, who fought a recurring cancer over much of the decade she sang with the chorus.

We often do not pause enough to give thanks for life itself. Violeta Parra, a founder of the *Nuevo Cancion* (new song) movement in Chile, does that brilliantly with her **Gracias a la Vida (Thanks to Life)**, penned before she died in 1967. Still popular today, it has become one of the most covered songs in Latin America. A good life is filled with good friends; **Good Friends Are the Best,** (written by another songwriter who left this life too soon: Therese Edell) was first presented (complete with tap dancing!) at the first concert I directed for Aurora Chorus, *Rhythms We Harvest from Our Souls.* Aurora Chorus continues to sow the seeds of connection and of woman’s power to affect change in the world. With you our audience, friends, life partners, co-workers and children, we harvest so very much! Thank you for joining us today as we celebrate Aurora Chorus’ past and present and we look to the future in our final song, **We Rise Again.**

**SHE RISES - A WORLD PREMIERE PERFORMANCE**

Aurora Chorus is pleased and honored to present the first performance of composer Catherine Dalton’s **She Rises.** Catherine explains: “**She Rises** was written in part by a desire to explore the physics of light and the mystery of illumination through the power of the human voice. I began by imagining the sounds of electrons falling from higher to lower levels, emitting light in the process. For a few weeks, I walked around making ‘sun sounds’ and asking other people what they thought

the sun ‘sounded’ like. I was surprised, at one point, to hear a Celtic-style melody find its way into the composition. This melody inspired the lyrics for **She Rises** which speak of the Celtic sun goddess Brigid and of Saint Brigid of Kildare, the Irish saint of, among other things, poetry, the hearth, the forge and illumination.”

Ms. Dalton’s compositions are inspired by classical, jazz, folk, world music and chant. She is the winner of the McPhail Center for Music’s Composition Scholarship and has been selected to participate in Nautilus Music Theater’s nationally recognized Composer-Librettist Studio. Her music has been performed across North America and in Europe. She lives in Minnesota.

**She Rises**  
*Catherine Dalton*

She rises up from the heather  
Her flame in hand, she crosses the sky  
When she’s tired she lays down her head  
In the sweet heather she makes her bed

All night we tend to her flame,  
hersacred light, eternal and bright  
When she wakes she’ll open her eyes  
Then up from the heather she’ll again rise

She flames the poet’s pen,  
fires the forge and hearth,  
lights the fire within
MY SONG WILL BE LIKE A PAIR OF WINGS TO YOUR DREAMS

She Speaks
Radiant Sister of the Day
She Rises World Premiere
A Burst of Song Premiere treble version
1. A Shower of Mercy
2. A Kiss of Blessing
3. Thee and Me

I FEEL TIED TO EVERY MOTHER THAT I SEE

The Day The Mountains Move
reader: Marlena Maestas

Arise! (Mothers’ Day 1870)

1000 Grandmothers
Fired Up
Mother’s Prayer
Soloist: Constance LaGue 4 pm
Harmony Griffith 7:30 pm

Thulele mama ya
(Don’t worry, mama)
Soloist: Cathryn Heron

INTERMISSION

CREATION WAKES THE WIT; I AM ALIVE

Mbuti Chant
In Dreams
reader: Nanette Niski
We Wake the Day
from Indian Singing
I Am

Susan Osborn, arr. Joan Szymko
David L Brunner, text: Percy Bysshe Shelley
Catherine Dalton
Joan Szymko, text: Rabindranath Tagore

Poem by Yosano Akiko

The Righteous Mothers
text: Julia Ward Howe
Holly Near, arr. J. David Moore
Connie Kaldor, arr. Willi Zwozdesky

Lisa Young

Trad., Ituri Rainforest (Congo region of Africa)
Poem by Gail Tremblay
Ron Jeffers, text: Gail Tremblay
Joan Szymko, text: Catherine DeVincck
WOMAN, HOLD MY HAND

Mae Francis
Soloists: Stephanie Colantino
Jenna Scott

The 23rd Psalm
Where I Live
(please hold your applause)

#1 Somebody
Soloist: Chelsea Harper 4pm
Terri Grayum 7:30pm

Excerpt from Refuge
reader: Jayme Armstrong

#5 Peace

Spirit to Spirit
reader: Elaine Ball

THANKS BE TO LIFE THAT HAS GIVEN ME SO MUCH!

Gracias a la Vida
Soloist: Kirsten Hays 4pm
Alaina Robertson 7:30pm

Good Friends Are the Best
We Rise Again
Soloist: Judi Ranton 4pm
Joni Hartmann 7:30pm

INSTRUMENTALISTS

Violin: Denise Ayres
Cello: Valdine Mishkin
Bass: Ryc Williamson
Flute: Mary McCarty
Percussion: Joan Szymko,
Roberta Jortner, Marylyn
John, Betsy Claassen, Gayle
Lovejoy, Judi Ranton

Bernice Johnson Reagon

Bobby McFerrin

Diane Benjamin

by Terry Tempest Williams

Diane Benjamin, text: Carol Barth
Irene Young

Violeta Parra, arr. Willi Zwozdesky

Therese Edell
Leon Dubinsky, arr. Lydia Adams