Winter Sky
guest soloist: Claudia Schmidt

Billy Ed Wheeler

The Winter Women
by L.E. Noel

Everything She Touches
Joan Szymko
text: traditional Wiccan

Ave Maria
David MacIntyre

Tundra (West Coast Premiere)
Ola Gjeillo
text: Charles A. Silvestri
soprano soloist: Saturday, Miryam B’Shalom; Sunday, Jan Saul

In the Winter
Judy Fjell
arr. Joan Szymko

Rock that Sucker
Claudia Schmidt
arr. Joan Szymko
guest soloist: Claudia Schmidt

Claudia Schmidt

Eternal Winter
Joan Szymko
text: “Holy Thursday”
by William Blake
soprano soloist: Saturday, Ann Mia Haning; Sunday, Lydia Dewey

On the Turning Away
Gilmour and Moore (Pink Floyd)
arr. Joan Szymko
alto soloist: Saturday, Joey B’Shalom; Sunday, Cyd Cannizzaro

How Could Anyone
Libby Roderick
arr. Joan Szymko
Coming Out Christmas
arr. Dean X Johnson
text: Craig Sturgis
music: Felix Mendelssohn

Baby it’s Cold Outside
Frank Loesser
arr. Kirby Shaw

Fire Burn Bright
Joan Szymko
text: Traditional Old English

Common Cold
Ogden Nash
sound design: Szymko
“choralography” by Robin Lane

A Solstice Blessing
by Chris Heeter

The Winter Solstice Song
Lisa Theil
arr. Joan Szymko

Merrily On High
(Ding-a ding-a ding)
Greg Gilpin

INSTRUMENTALISTS
Corey Averill, Cello
Julie Earnest, Flute
Denise Fugikawa, Harp
Sylvia Hackathorn, Frame Drum
Gayle Lovejoy, Dumbek

RUMBANISTAS
Annie Herring
Bunny Marechal
Nancy Otis
Michele Stemler
Program Notes

“And I feel like somethings being born; tells my soul not to mourn.” These lyrics from Billy Ed Wheeler’s Winter Sky capture the essence of this season of darkness and light. People have marked the “return of the light” throughout the ages with rites and festivities. The birth of the Christ child to the Virgin Mary, the winter feast most widely observed and celebrated, is not the most ancient. And Mary is but one of the iconic Mothers revered through the ages. The divine feminine is known by many names; Aurora honors these Winter Women in our next two selections. I set the chant, “she changes Everything She Touches and everything she touches changes” for the women of Aurora as an acknowledgement of the positive impact that Aurora can have on the lives of the women she touches. The “web” is a Wicca symbol, as is the Spider Creatrix, who weaves the world into being. Our wonderful accompanist Signe Lusk is featured as “web goddess.” David MacIntyre wrote Ave Maria in 1994 while researching paranormal spiritual events occurring in war-torn Bosnia-Hercegovina, particularly the daily visitations of the Virgin Mary to a small group of children and adults in Medjugorje. He noted: “During my research, I was struck by the celebratory nature of these visitations and the necessity of connecting with the feminine, maternal nature of the divine.”

Last year Aurora joined with the ACDA Women’s R&S Consortium in commissioning composer, Ola Gjeillo. Gjeillo asked poet Tony Silvestri to write the text. We are pleased to present the West Coast premiere of Tundra. When I first read through this piece, I was thrilled not only by the music, but also that it fits so wonderfully with our winter program. Ola: “I asked Tony to write a text based on the title, Tundra, and some photos of a part of my native Norway that is very dear to me; the Hardangervidda...is Europe’s largest mountain plateau, and a large part of it is tundra. This area is quite barren, and intensely beautiful. It is easy to feel that you are treading on sacred land, which Tony so wonderfully expresses in his text.”

Wide, worn and weathered,  
Sacred expanse  
Of green and white and granite grey;  
Snowy patches strewn,  
Anchored to the craggy earth,  
Unmoving;  
While clouds dance  
Across the vast, eternal sky.

From the permafrost of Norway, we travel next to the deep, frozen stillness of Judy Fjell’s Big Sky country. In Montana, In the Winter when it’s dark and bitterly cold there is time to go inward to listen and reflect on the promise of spring. Many of us in Aurora hail from the Midwest, as does our special guest, Claudia Schmidt who will instruct us on the key to surviving that snowy clime— how to Rock That Sucker. We’re thrilled to have Claudia sing lead on her song! A returning guest, we welcome back her inimitable artistry.

Eternal Winter is a setting of “Holy Thursday” from William Blake’s “Songs of Innocence and Experience” (1789). The original context is the annual Holy Thursday service at St Paul’s Cathedral, held for the poor children of London’s charity schools— schools which for a cold profit, produced child laborers to fuel the Industrial Revolution and England’s status as the world’s wealthiest super power. The poem casts Britain not as “rich and fruitful” but as a “land of poverty.” There can be no other season but winter as long as the children go hungry. Today in America, one in six of children under age six live in poverty. The child poverty rate in America is two to three times higher than that of other major industrial nations.

Websters Online Dictionary gives the following as synonyms for “giving the cold shoulder” : refuse, reject, discourage, avert, avoid, disallow, disapprove, resist, withhold. Getting the cold shoulder from society is difficult; getting it from those who “love you” is particularly painful. Coming Out Christmas makes light of the tension many GLBT folk feel visiting with family at the holidays. However, sitting in a concert hall at a progressive city university campus while listening to Aurora Chorus’ “voices for peace” it can be easy to forget that the gay community continues to be “left out in the cold” in regard to equal rights and protection in this country. “Love makes a family,” but not in the eyes of the law.

Baby It’s Cold Outside, a classic “boy/girl” duet, is an interesting look at seemingly quaint sexual mores. A great Frank Loesser holiday standard, in our version, the chorus will be wooing Claudia to linger awhile: “Beautiful, what’s your hurry... Listen to the fire replace roar.” For many, a wood fire is “cozy” but for eons it was the primary source for heating and cooking. So, it was important to know your logs! Fire, Burn Bright is based on a traditional mnemonic poem from the British Isles to keep you from “getting burned.” The poem dates to the last couple of centuries, but it’s origins are very likely from the collective wisdom of ancient, tree worshipping Celts.

Poet/humorist Ogden Nash once said, “A family is a unit composed not only of children but of men, women, an occasional animal, and the common cold.” While researching “cold” themes for this concert, I came upon his complaining verse on the Common Cold which immediately struck me as a rap! I created a back up mix and asked friend and collaborator, Robin Lane (Do Jump! Director) to do some “choreo.” Brace yourselves!

In just a few days, the days will start getting longer (Blessed Be!) and so we bring our time together to a close with a Solsstice Blessing and a lovely Winter Solstice Song. We send you on your way home with a chorus of bells, Merrily On High. Good night, Good Solstice, Merry Christmas and a Happy, Peaceful New Year!

—Joan Szymko