Simple Gifts

AURORA CHORUS
Joan Szymko, Director
In concert with special guests
MADRONA VIOLA DUO

First Congregational Church
1126 SW Park Avenue
Portland, Oregon

December 14 and 15, 2013
As we begin our concert celebrating the simple gifts in our lives, Aurora greets you with an invocation. Eastern Christian orthodoxy has had a profound influence on contemporary British composer John Taverner. He wrote Out of the Night to be sung to greet the dawn outside of Saint Catherine’s monastery on Mount Sinai. It is a simple “alleluia”—and so we begin our musical journey.

Bogoroditse Devo (“Rejoice, O Virgin”) is a motet from Rachmaninov’s All-Night Vigil, thought by many to be the composer’s finest achievement. It is based either directly on traditional Russian Orthodox chants or, as with “Bogoroditse Devo,” on the style and influence of these chants. The piece was written in 1915, shortly before Rachmaninov fled Russia for the United States. The beauty, power, and reverence Rachmaninov has wrought from such simple rhythms and harmonies are truly astonishing. This Eastern Orthodox version is widely viewed as quintessentially “American.” The song may well be dance instructions.) The tune received by Patsy Williamson, an ex-slave whose freedom was purchased by the Pleasant Hill Shaker community in the early 1800s.

There are gifted performers in our own Aurora community, among them singer-songwriter Terri Grayum. With Terri’s Everyday Graces, we turn our attention toward the many gifts that are with us if we open our eyes to see. In Coat of Many Colors, Dolly Parton tells the story of a childhood lacking in material things but rich in love and faith, explaining that “one is only poor only if they choose to be.” This theme continues in Irving Berlin’s catchy and cheerful I Got the Sun in the Morning from Annie Get Your Gun. Family, shelter, food, forgiveness: gifts such as these are the subject of Mary Chapin Carpenter’s warm and folksy Thanksgiving Song. So many gifts, and yet the most basic of these is life itself. And now we invite you to join us in singing Blessing, a simple setting of these words by Rabbi Abraham Heschel: “Just to be is a blessing; just to live is holy.”

We begin our final set with Hal Hopson’s The Gift of Love, which combines one of the most beautiful and simple English folksong melodies (“The Water Is Wide”) with excerpts from Corinthians 1:13, which contains some of the most inspiring passages on love in Christian scripture. Mother Teresa said that “all works of love are works of peace,” and further, that “if we have no peace it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.” Ife Mwe, Mwe Efie is a traditional phrase from Uganda that encourages us to remember our connection to one another. It means “they are us and we are them.” The drumbeat at the beginning of the song is the rhythm of the Bantu words gwangwa mwaig, literally “come to my rescue.” It is a rhythm that, when sounded by drums in certain Ugandan communities, is a call for the community to be ready to spring into action to help in times of need.

Further along in Corinthians 1:13, the disciple Paul writes, “Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.” The Ubi Caritas liturgical anthem (“where there is charity and love, there is God”) is sung to a chant that was likely composed in France during the 10th century. This medieval melody is the inspiration and compositional core of our final piece, David Conte’s 20th-century anthem The Great Spirit of Love. The lyrics by Tony Jones are a fitting end to our program: “When the Great Spirit of Love / Finds its way into your mind / You will know from that day forward / It is love that rules the world.”

— Joan Szymko
Lauda, Praise

Out of the Night
John Tavener

Bogoroditse Devo
Sergei Rachmaninov

all that God asks...
Meister Eckhart, reader: Michele Stemler

Laudamus Te
Antonio Vivaldi, duet: Nancy Otis and Melia Wagner (Sat.), Trish Curry and Harmony Griffith (Sun.)

Beauty, Hope, and Peace

Twilight’s Ease
Laurie Miller Vischer, arr. Joan Szymko, trio: Teresa Boyle, Patti Harelkin, Margaret Blake

For the Beauty of the Earth
Joan Szymko, hymn text: F. S. Pierpoint

Hope is the thing with feathers
Emily Dickinson, reader: Barbara Cervantes-Gautschi

Hope
Marjan Helms, text: Emily Dickinson

... a peaceful heart
Meister Eckhart, reader: Michele Stemler

Deep Peace
Bill Douglas, text: trad. Celtic blessing, flute: Julie Earnest

MADRONA VIOLA DUO
Sharon Eng & Shelley Mathewson

Sonata in G minor, Op. 2 No. 8
G.F. Handel

I Wonder as I Wander
Trad. Appalachian folk song

Greensleeves
Trad. English folk song

These Three Remain: Faith, Hope, Love
The American Virtuosi: Elizabeth, Emmanuel & Frances Borowsky

world premiere

SIMPLE GIFTS
Shaker song received by Elder Joseph Brackett, adapted by Aaron Copland, transcribed for chorus by Irving Fine

Simple Gifts
Shaker song received by Addah Z. Potter, arr. Joan Szymko

Grace and Thanksgiving

Everyday Graces
Terri Grayum, soloist: Terri Grayum

Coat of Many Colors
Dolly Parton, arr. J. David Moore, soloist: Judi Ranton

I Got the Sun in the Morning
Irving Berlin, arr. Kirby Shaw, soloists: Megan McGladrey (Sat.) and Melia Wagner (Sun.)

if the only prayer
Meister Eckhart, reader: Michele Stemler

Thanksgiving Song
Mary Chapin Carpenter, arr. John Purifoy

Blessing
Joan Szymko, text: Rabbi Abraham Heschel

Let us be united as one, rejoice in it and be glad

The Gift of Love
English folk tune adapted and arr. by Hal Hopson, text based on I Corinthians, verse 13

Fie Mwe, Mwe Ffe
Joan Szymko, text sources: trad. Buganda saying, Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, soloist: Beth Noelle

Every time it’s a miracle
from “The Elegance of the Hedgehog” by Muriel Barbery, readers: Tracy Harrison (Sat.) and Sara Wagner (Sun.)

Ubi Caritas
Antiphon for Maundy Thursday; Gregorian melody, arr. Joan Szymko

The Great Spirit of Love
David Conte, text: Tony Jones

translations

Bogoroditse Devo (transliteration of Old Church Slavonic)

Bogoroditse Devo, raduysia
Rejoice, virgin, God-bearer
Blagodatnaya Mariye, Ghospod s’Toboyu
Mary, full of grace, the Lord be with you
Blagoslovenna Ti v’zhenakh
Blessed are you among women
i Blagosloven Plod chreva Tvoyego
and blessed is the fruit of your womb
yako Spasa rodila esi dush nashikh
for you have borne the savior of our souls

Laudatus Te
Laudamus te. Benedicimus te.
We praise thee. We bless thee.
Adoramus te. Glorificamus te.
We worship thee. We glorify thee.

Ubi Caritas
Ubi caritas et amor Deus ibi est
Where there is charity and love, God is there.
Simul ergo cum in unum congregamus
Therefore, when we come together, let us be united as one.
Exultemus et in ipso jucundemur
Let us rejoice in it and be glad,
Et ex corde diligamus nos sincer
And from a sincere heart, let us love one another.