



auroraCHORUS

What a Wonderful World Program Notes

We are all born with a sense of wonder for the world and for the people around us. Our concert today invites us all to nurture our sense of wonder, to see ourselves as belonging to the world and to each other. I am inspired by those who, like poet Mary Oliver, make it their life's work to "love the world." I am inspired by composers and songwriters who with a simple lyric or soaring melody can awaken an indifferent heart, soothe a most troubled soul or inspire the body to celebrate.

We begin with the vibrant **Yo le Canto Todo el Dia** (I Sing to You All Day Long). Composer David Brunner was influenced by Venezuelan music in creating this rhythmically exciting song of affection and joy for you, the listener. This opening song is sure to get your attention, and our next song is about paying attention—specifically, paying attention as a form of prayer, of feeling blessed. "Tell me, what else should I have done?" Mary Oliver asks in **The Summer Day**. "Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?" Fans of Mary Oliver may know that she named her beloved dog, Percy, after the poet Shelley. And so it is fitting that her poem *Messenger* introduce a beautiful setting of an excerpt of Shelley's poem *To Jane: The Invitation* in Brunner's **Radiant Sister of the Day**. This piece ends in a triumphant gesture on the words: "Where the earth and the ocean meet / and all things seem only one / In the universal sun." That very sun stirs a girl named Millicent, in William Stafford's poem *The Day Millicent Found the World*, to "...realize / That she was part of the world and that it would follow / Wherever she went. She was part of its breath." Catherine Dalton's **Fly With Me** is an invitation to be like Millicent and feel "caught up and breathing in a great powerful embrace," that "embrace" being a deep experience of feeling *at one* with the world. Dalton notes: "In the spring of 2005 I dreamt I was peacefully sleeping, my cheek resting upon the deep neck folds of a giant grey whale. Later that summer, I found myself floating in a boat in the waters just east of San Juan Island, mesmerized as I watched a young grey whale feeding." This experience precipitated her composing this soaring song, and Aurora Chorus is pleased to give its West Coast premiere. Dalton shares her experience and assures us that if we accept the invitation to nurture our sense of wonderment at our world, singing an eternal song of oneness, that "your eyes will see / your ears will hear / your heart will know all that my heart knows."

But one must resist all of the noise and distraction and, yes, ugliness that is also of the world. In the words of our next song, **Do You Hear**: "Through the roar, through the rush, through the throng, through the crush, do you hear in the hush of your soul—the cry fear won't still...?" It seems to me that there is much to fear these days. As poet Wendell Berry wrote, "When despair for the world grows in me ... I come into the peace of wild things. . . ." Trees, plants, animals, water and weather gather in the joyful confluence that is our next song, **Sky Dances**. Whether or not one believes in a god it is still fitting to sing a **Hymn of Grateful Praise**, to feel gratitude for the beauty of the world and to sing the praises of the everyday miracle of our senses that bring "joy of ear and eye" and "heart and mind's delight." Jane Kenyon's imagery in **Let Evening Come** illustrates the beauty of acute observation of ordinary things, and of the everyday, inevitable arrival of sunset. **Chindia** is a Romanian word of Turkish origin meaning either the time before sunset, or a place in the sky where the sun is about to set. *Chindia* is also a kind of *sârba* dance (20th c. Romanian folk music) with characteristic binary rhythm, fast tempo, small steps and stunts. It would be danced by villagers, both men and women, upon returning to town at sunset after the day's work in the fields. Composer Pașcanu translated a dance piece typically played by a *taraf*, a small instrumental ensemble, into a choral piece by using nonsense syllables and solfège. He adds a lovely contrasting slow section before returning to the whirling dance. Sunset gives way to dusk and to dark of night. Carl Sandberg's poem *Dreams in the Dusk* sets the stage for **In stiller Nacht** (In the Quiet Night). A beautiful lament, the singer's only solace is that the natural world mourns with him. The text, thought to be the last reflections of someone to be executed at daybreak, is one of over one hundred folk song settings by Johannes Brahms (1833-1897). It is interesting to note that many of Brahms' folk songs were original songs composed in *volksthumlich*, an artistic idealization of the folk song style: simple, singable melodies in rhythmic unison with predominantly diatonic bass lines. With *In stiller Nacht*, Brahms used an authentic folk melody for the first few bars, but then composed the rest of the melody himself. The song was originally scored for a *cappella* SATB chorus. Brahms later created an art song setting with piano accompaniment, which you hear in today's performance.

We hear a bit more from Brahms as we turn the spotlight on Signe Lusk, Aurora Chorus' distinguished piano accompanist. Sig plays a favorite Brahms **Intermezzo** and a movement from the Allegro of Bach's **Italian Concerto**. In the hauntingly beautiful **Bist du bei mir**, the words of an anonymous poet address the "beloved" saying in effect, "as long as you are with me, I can face my death with ease." There is a joy in the devoted presence of the beloved in the face of death. In the face of imminent disaster, the presence of that love or even just hearing the voice of the love of your life saying your name can lift you up and give you courage. "Oh the sky had been falling when I heard your voice calling me by my name," writes songwriter Cris Williamson in **Shooting Star**. Shooting stars (meteors) are, of course, symbols of wishes come true, of magic and of hope. We turn again to the optimism of William Stafford's poetry.

His "For People with Problems about How to Believe" leads us into the irrepressibly hopeful **You Are the New Day**—"love of life means hope for me, borne on a new day."

Love of life brings us to our closing song, **I Love You/What a Wonderful World**. In this masterful arrangement by Craig Johnson one feels the bliss in recognizing that the beauty of the earth, "bright blessed day and dark sacred night," is inseparable from the beauty we see in each other: "the colors of the rainbow, so pretty in the sky, are also on the faces of the people going by / people all over the world, they're opening up, they're coming around and they're saying, 'I love you'...and I think to myself, 'what a wonderful world.'" Indeed. What a wonderful world.

—Joan Szymko

Translations

Yo le Canto Todo el Día

Now off I go with all my heart
I'm going now with a drum
I'll sing to you all day long
I'll sing to you all day long with affection and joy.

Bist du bei mir

If you are with me, then I will go gladly
unto [my] death and to my rest.
Ah, what a pleasant end for me,
if your dear hands be the last I see,
closing shut my faithful eyes to rest!

In stiller Nacht

In the quiet night, at the first watch,
a voice began to lament;
sweetly and gently, the night wind
carried to me its sound.
And from such bitter sorrow and grief
my heart has melted.
The little flowers – with my pure tears
I have watered them all.
The beautiful moon wishes to set
out of pain, and never shine again;
the stars will let fade their gleam
for they wish to weep with me.
Neither bird-song nor sound of joy
can one hear in the air;
the wild animals grieve with me as well,
upon the rocks and in the ravine



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