

Elegiac/ ECSTATIC

Sunday, June 14
2 p.m.

Emmanuel Episcopal Church
La Grange, IL



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Elegiac/ ECSTATIC

This afternoon's Program

Howard Eckdahl, Conductor

Kindly hold applause until the conclusion.

I. being human

where you go

David Lang
(b. 1955)

Verleih uns Frieden

Felix Mendelssohn
(1809-1843)

Urlicht

Gustav Mahler
(1860-1911)

II. of the earth

Take Him, Earth, For Cherishing

Herbert Howells
(1892-1983)

Epitaph of a Romantic Woman

Marybeth Kurnat
(b. 1987)

Smile, O Voluptuous Cool-Breathed Earth

Stacy Garrop
(b. 1969)

Ian Murrell, Baritone

At the Round Earth's Imagined Corners

Williametta Spencer
(1927-2026)

III. in the universe

A Blade of Grass

Stacy Garrop
(b. 1969)

Choir Students of Hampshire Middle and High Schools

Denn alles Fleisch, es ist wie Gras I | So seid nun geduldig

Johannes Brahms
(1833-1897)

Faire is the Heaven

William Henry Harris
(1883-1973)

Denn alles Fleisch, es ist wie Gras II | Aber, des Herrn Wort bleibet
in Ewigkeit

Johannes Brahms
(1833-1897)

Elizabeth Waldon, organ; Ke Wang, piano

Program Notes

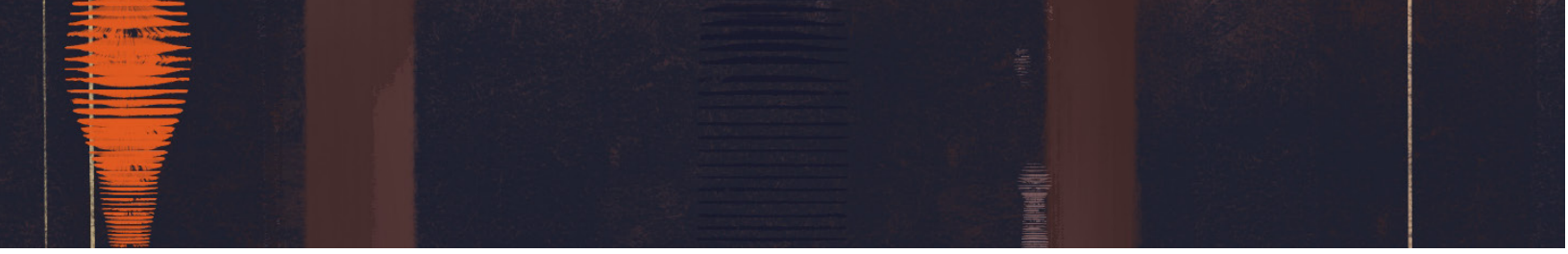


There are events in life that induce a change in perspective: interruptions of our normal procedures, cycles, rhythms and rituals – times that bring a sharp change in priorities through our inordinate emotional response to them. While they are disparate points on our spectrum of emotions, both elegy and ecstasy are central to us when we must navigate events that change our perspective about life, and to how we respond to our perceptions of existence: the joy of being alive made even more precious by the certainty of death, and grappling with

the unknown while retaining hope there is something greater that we do not (or cannot) perceive. It is a great challenge to our minds: being human (this we know), of the earth (this we can understand), in the universe (this we may not fathom) – all while experiencing the individual and collective emotions orbiting our identities as finite beings. We know this human life. We can understand our physical existence and how we are elementally connected to our world. What about that which we cannot fathom? Grappling with each of these levels of perception and the accompanying emotions is a gift itself, and we relish the creative imaginations of the composers whose music is on the program. We present their art with themes, pairings, interruptions, segues, and tropes; please hold applause until the conclusion.

Why are we here

Music is a phenomenon, a science, a medium, a world – it is art capable of conveying massive troves of information, emotion, and influence to our intellect, sensibilities, and spirit. Poetry, books, and writings can form and reform our thoughts, concepts, feelings and motivations. The human voice can convey organic truths and express visceral accord and discord with a biologic intimacy unique to humankind. Today, we celebrate the fusion of music, words, and human voices that render the fruit of intellect and inspiration to bring emotions to vivid life in choral artistry: a microcosm of human expression that sings fire into the burning questions, searing pains, and blazing aspirations woven into our very existence.



Program Notes

being human

Part I centers on the human perspective with David Lang's *where you go*, based on Ruth and Naomi's deep connection and commitment (which ends abruptly), Mendelssohn's *Verleih uns Frieden* and its repeated petition for peace and divine protection, and Mahler's *Urlicht*, which longs for returning to our maker and being relieved of worldly pain and suffering. These three pieces explore interconnectedness between people, reaching out to the divine, and seeking the root of all things in the universe (primeval light – “urlicht” – both as a beacon to God and as a source of hope for transcendence). All three pieces are focused on human and personal concerns:

where you live, I will live.

grant us peace in our time.

mankind lies in direst need and pain, I would rather be in heaven.

The pieces are musically connected through the chorale/homophony texture used to emphasize important aspects of the texts – just how it has been done for centuries – a very human and personal way to communicate with music; and each is also in three sections.

of the earth

Part II considers the broader perspective of our relationship to earth as a physical, mortal beings, and the intangible portions of our existence: spirit, soul, dreams, legacy, passion, love, grace. What are we, truly – what about us is permanent? Each piece progresses from elegiac to ecstatic as the constituents of personal identity are explored.

Take Him, Earth, for Cherishing ponders the custody the earth has over our body (or ‘spirit’s dwelling’) amid the larger journey mankind has undertaken on earth (Eden lost and the ‘shining road’ to ‘ample paradise’). The theme of impermanence of our body (‘bones to sand’ and ‘dust was nerve and sinew’) makes plain our elemental connection to our world, while referencing the greater struggle of the soul’s triumph. **Epitaph of a Romantic Woman** considers the legacy of one who is returned to earth, and how identity and self are valued. **Smile, O Voluptuous Cool-Breathed Earth** extolls majesty and beauty in intimate ways, describing a fervent love of dwelling therein. **At the Round Earth’s Imagined Corners** excitedly describes the end of the world and the associated raising of the dead until the volta ‘but let them sleep’ – the author is not ready to depart ‘this lowly ground’ – for fear of judgement (or love of their earthly life)?

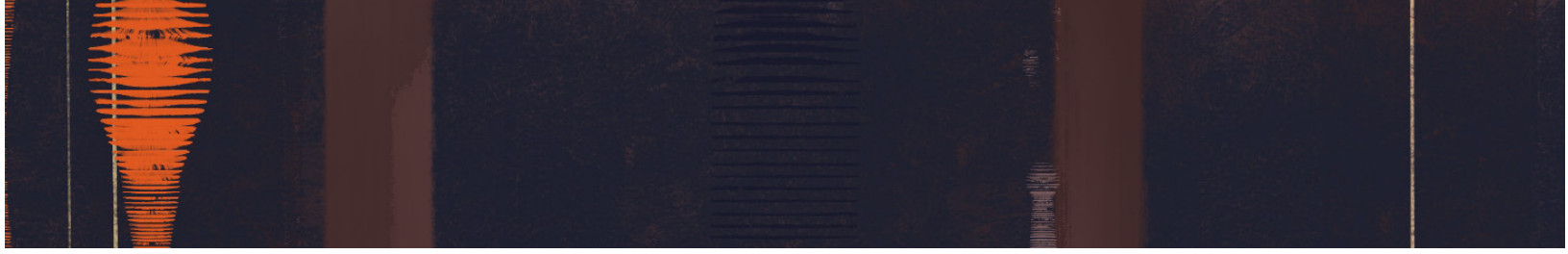
Program Notes

in the universe

Part III wonders of that which is beyond our world, of things much greater than us.

A Blade of Grass exhibits levels of what we can perceive through cyclic imagery of earth, sky, and world; more importantly, it alludes to the limitations of our perceptions of time and scale. In **All Flesh is Like the Grass**, Peter truly humbles the impermanent human and the 'glory of mankind' – made akin to withering grass and a flower to fall. The second part of this movement (**So Now Be Patient**) compounds the element of rain mentioned in the Garrop piece and introduces the awaited future brought by it (yet unknown but for its goodness) in the context of a farmer cultivating the earth, assured that help will come from above. **Faire is the Heaven**, added to explicate a human conception of the 'future of the Lord,' strives to depict the hosts of heavenly beings dwelling in the eternal realm of paradise. The author knowingly asks: "How, then, can mortal tongue hope to express the image of such endless perfectness?" Following the ecstatic descriptions of places and figures we cannot truly fathom, a funeral dirge returns us to the **Grass** trope from Brahms's *Requiem* – we are back in our impermanent reality. **But, the Lord's Word Remains in Eternity**, and the redeemed will go to Zion with **Eternal Joy**: ecstatic hope for something greater than us, to gain the perspective that has no end, no limit. An existence with no pain, no death – regaining what was lost: our loved ones, our place in the Garden of Eden, utopia, paradise – a new, eternal world. **Hope**.





Lyrics and Translations

where you go exhibits a post-minimalist style and is constructed of dynamic ostinati that are imposed on static ostinati, creating different nuances of sonority each time they cycle on the variations of the text. The expressive effect of Lang's music prevails over the mechanics of its construction, and what we receive in that vein comes in three distinct sections: an unison opening; a heterophonic array of patterns that build to a full texture with each of the twelve parts rotating through material before the texture breaks down – perhaps suggesting the familiarity and discord in a relationship; and a homophonic pitch ostinato that contrasts with solo lines blooming out of the texture, gently expressing the love and dedication of a companion before abruptly stopping. Lang writes:

where you go is a rewriting of what I remember as my favorite part of the biblical Book of Ruth, the famous lines where Ruth tells Naomi that she will stay with her forever. I say 'what I remember' because in my memory the book is a beautiful statement of love, friendship and devotion, from one person to another. I always forget that the book is mostly a series of legal arguments, about how someone claims land, or an inheritance, or a wife, or a family. Ruth's simple desire to follow her heart sets in motion an examination of a complicated chain of interlocking obligations and overlapping responsibilities. That pretty much describes my piece as well.

*where you go
where you stay
where you live
where you die
don't make me leave you
don't make me turn away from you*

*where you go i will go
where you stay i will stay
where you live i will live
where you die i will die*

*don't make me leave you;
i will never leave you
don't make me turn away from you;
i will never turn away from you
don't make me go;
i will never go*

text by David Lang, after the Book of Ruth

Lyrics and Translations

Verleih uns Frieden | Felix Mendelssohn was a Romantic-era composer known for his prodigious talent in music and several compelling achievements including his symphonic works and his role in reigniting interest in the music of J.S. Bach. The latter especially falls in line with Mendelssohn's association with neo-classicism (embracing forms, procedures, and techniques established by composers in the classical and preceding eras), and *Verleih uns Frieden* does as well; he went on to write many choral pieces that exhibit his deep study of and reverence for Bach's music. Mendelssohn composed the melody for the chorale tune that anchors the tripartite structure, which begins with the basses singing the tune in unison. The second iteration places the melody in the alto with the basses singing a counterpoint. Lastly, the full texture of the choir sings the chorale homophonically until the music proceeds to bloom into a more Romantically-styled addendum reiterating the final line of the text. Between the addendum and the accompaniment, which features canonic gestures in flowing eighth-notes contrasting the quarter-note driven chorale, we can hear the Romantic era's heightened emotional and dramatic energy through the structure of established form.

*Graciously grant us peace,
Lord God, in our time;
There is surely no other
Who could fight thus for us
Than you alone, God our Lord.*

text by Martin Luther, after *Da Pacem Domine*, sung three times

Urlicht is the fourth movement of Mahler's Second Symphony and in its original form features an alto soloist with orchestra. Today, we are premiering a new version for chorus, piano and organ. Chorale textures feature prominently in Mahler's Second, particularly in the famous brass chorale of the final movement, introducing the triumphant conclusion to a story arc that spans both his first and second symphonies. In this arrangement of *Urlicht*, I placed the chorale textures found in the orchestra into the voices of the choir. What results is a different emphasis on the text, which is the ultimate point of the piece in both forms, and a new palette of colors to express the words in the absence of Mahler's brilliant and colorful orchestration.

*O red rose,
Man lies in direst need,
Man lies in direst pain,
I would rather be in heaven.*

*I then came upon a broad path,
An angel came
and sought to turn me back,
Ah no! I refused to be turned away.
I am from God, to God I will return,*

*Dear God will give me a light,
Will light my way
to eternal blessed life.*

text from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn: Alte Deutsche Lieder*

Lyrics and Translations

5 *The sun also rises,*

*and the sun goeth down,
and hasteth to his place where he arose.*

6 *The wind goeth toward the south,*

*and turneth about unto the north;
it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits.*

7 *All the rivers run into the sea;*

*yet the sea is not full;
unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.*

4 *One generation passeth away,*

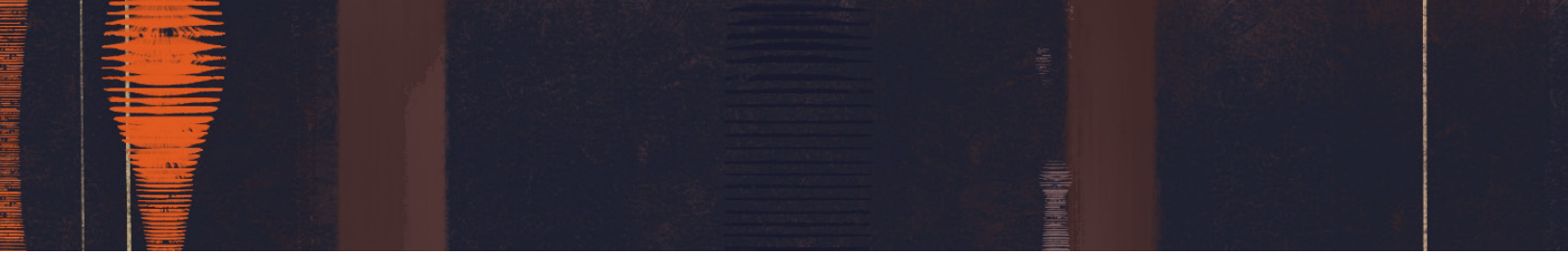
*and another generation cometh:
but the earth abideth forever.*

Herbert Howells: **Take Him, Earth, For Cherishing**

Text by *Prudentius*, trans. Helen Waddell

Herbert Howells was the composer I had in mind when designing this program, as his music and biography oscillate between elegy and ecstasy. With regard to his music, he has composed to the peaks of elation and the valleys of sadness time and again. As for his biography, he was struck by tragedy several times and was also purported to have enjoyed his life and virility more than some might have condoned. **Take Him, Earth, For Cherishing** falls squarely on the elegiac side, and in this piece the mournfulness alternates with rumination and upset more than ecstasy.

Take Him, Earth was dedicated and premiered in relation to JFK's assassination, but this text was known to Howells and in his sketches of previous pieces well before 1963 when he completed this setting. Indeed, the fervency, sincerity, and authenticity of the emotional turmoil in *Take Him, Earth* are somewhat curious in a piece for an American President by a thoroughly British composer who did not travel outside of Britain much at all and, even then, usually within the British Empire (the piece was commissioned for a combined Canadian/American memorial service – Canada being much more linked to Britain in the Imperial sense). The curiosity is explained by putting together a few pieces of Howells life: the sudden death of his nine-year-old son, Michael, while on holiday in Gloucestershire in 1935; the fact that Howells's *Requiem* was written before Michael died in 1932



Lyrics and Translations

(the Requiem is sometimes erroneously linked to Michael, but it is the basis for much of Hymnus Paradisi, which is actually connected to Michael but filled with music that predates Michael's death); and that Howells was sketching music with this text for Hymnus that ended up being excluded. In light of the text's relation to Hymnus and therefore Michael, it is not much of a stretch to recognize that this piece contains within it – alongside mournfulness for JFK – a distillation of anguish, disturbance, and despondence that stems from losing a child. These are depicted vividly by the chromatic harmony, tonal shifts, key relationships and, especially, the recurring ruminations on the words “take him, oh take him,” which appear throughout the piece and signal the formal shifts related to the progressions and returns of text. Take him – who could be more cherished than a child? Further, the essence of this realm of Howells's style is expounded and escalated in his Stabat Mater (text depicting Mary at the foot of the cross), which is also connected to Michael's death, and contrasts markedly with the contemplative style of Hymnus and his Requiem.

Take him, earth, for cherishing,
to thy tender breast receive him.
Body of a man I bring thee,
noble even in its ruin.

Once was this a spirit's dwelling,
by the breath of God created.
High the heart that here was beating,
Christ the prince of all its living.

Guard him well, the dead I give thee,
not unmindful of his creature
shall he ask it: he who made it
symbol of his mystery.

Comes the hour God hath appointed
to fulfil the hope of men,
then must thou, in very fashion,
what I give, return again.

Not though ancient time decaying
wear away these bones to sand,
ashes that a man might measure
in the hollow of his hand:

Not though wandering winds and idle,
drifting through the empty sky,
scatter dust was nerve and sinew,
is it given to man to die.

Once again the shining road
leads to ample Paradise;
open are the woods again,
that the serpent lost for men.

Take, O take him, mighty leader,
take again thy servant's soul.
Grave his name, and pour the fragrant
balm upon the icy stone.

Lyrics and Translations

Marybeth Kurnat: **Epitaph for a Romantic Woman**

Text by Louise Bogan

I was introduced to the American poet Louise Bogan through the great jazz pianist Brad Mehldau's settings of her poetry, and found her texts to be particularly moving. I began **Epitaph for a Romantic Woman** shortly after as an art song for soprano and harp, which remained unfinished for a number of years before I re-set it for mixed voices and piano.

This work is dedicated to my voice teacher, Diane Ragains, with whom I studied before, during and after my college years. Like me, Diane began as an instrumental musician, but was later drawn to singing. She taught for over 30 years at Northern Illinois University, and as a performer, was widely recognized for her unyielding command of new music. She was unbelievably talented, funny, and steadfast in her support for her students. Though I completed a degree in instrumental music, she always held me to the same standard of her primary voice students, and supported all of my musical interests and motivations wherever they led me. Prior to its completion, Diane was the only person I had shared this work with. I had just begun to revisit and rearrange it for mixed voices and piano when she passed away in 2017. As I grieved her passing, I felt a need to make one final gesture of gratitude. – MB.K.

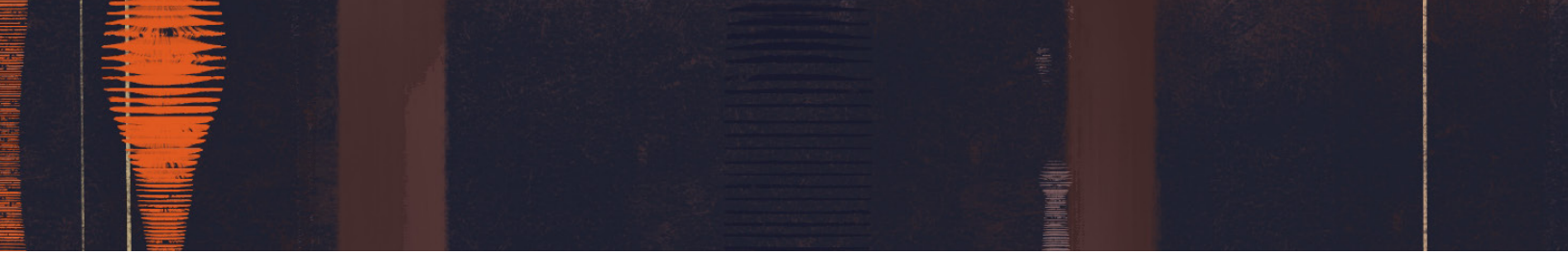
Stacy Garrop: **Smile, O voluptuous cool-breathed earth!** from *Terra Nostra*

Text by Walt Whitman (Leaves of Grass, Song of Myself)

Ian Murrell, baritone

Smile, O voluptuous cool-breathed earth!
Earth of the slumbering and liquid trees!
Earth of departed sunsets—earth of the mountains misty top!
Earth of the vitreous pour of the full moon just tinged with blue!
Earth of shine and dark mottling the tide of the river!
Earth of the limpid gray of clouds brighter and clearer for my sake!
Far-swooping elbowed earth—rich apple-blossomed earth!
Smile, for your lover comes.

Prodigal, you have given me love—therefore I, to you, give love.
O unspeakable passionate love!



Lyrics and Translations

Wiliametta Spencer: At the Round Earth's Imagined Corners

Text by John Donne

At the round earth's imagin'd corners, blow
Your trumpets, angels, and arise, arise
From death, you numberless infinities
Of souls, and to your scatter'd bodies go;
All whom the flood did, and fire shall o'erthrow,
All whom war, dearth, age, agues, tyrannies,
Despair, law, chance hath slain, and you whose eyes
Shall behold God and never taste death's woe.

But let them sleep, Lord, and me mourn a space,
For if above all these my sins abound,
'Tis late to ask abundance of thy grace
When we are there; here on this lowly ground
Teach me how to repent; for that's as good
As if thou'hadst seal'd my pardon with thy blood.

Stacy Garrop: A Blade of Grass from *Terra Nostra*

Text by Walt Whitman (Leaves of Grass, Song of Myself)

Featuring Hampshire Choir Students, Erin Truesdell, director

A blade of grass is the journeywork of the stars. (Leaves of Grass, Song of Myself)
Long and long has the grass been growing,
Long and long has the rain been falling,
Long has the globe been rolling round. (Leaves of Grass, Song of the Exposition)

Lyrics and Translations

Johannes Brahms: Denn alles Fleisch, es ist wie Gras

Texts from 1 Peter 1:24, James 5:7, and Isaiah 35:10

For all flesh, it is like grass

And all glory of mankind is like the grass' flowers:

The grass is withered, and the flower fell off.

So now be patient, dear brothers, for the **future of the Lord**.

See, a farmer **patiently waits on the delicious fruit**

Until he receives the morning rain and the evening rain.

William Henry Harris: Faire is the Heaven

Text by Edmund Spenser

Faire is the heaven where happy soules have place

In full enjoyment of felicitie;

Whence they do still behold the glorious face

Of the Divine, **Eternall Majestie**;

Yet farre more faire be those bright Cherubins

Which all with golden wings are overdight.

And those eternall burning Seraphins

Which from their faces dart out fiery light;

Yet fairer than they both and much more bright

Be the Angels and Archangels

Which attend on God's owne person without rest or end.

These then in faire each other farre excelling

As to the Highest they approach more neare,

Yet is that Highest farre beyond all telling

Fairer than all the rest which there appeare

Though all their beauties joynd together were;

How then can mortal tongue hope to expresse

The image of such endlesse perfectnesse?

Johannes Brahms: Denn alles Fleisch, es ist wie Gras

For all flesh, it is like grass

And all glory of mankind is like the grass' flowers:

The grass is withered, and the flower fell off.

But the Lord's word remains in eternity.

The redeemed of the Lord shall again come,

And go to **Zion** with rejoicing;

Eternal joy shall be on their heads

Joy and bliss shall they possess

And pain and sighing must go away.

Singers

Sopranos

JoEllyn Caulfield
Kerry Fritz
Elizabeth Plemmons
JeniLyn Roether
Abria Shaw
Erin Truesdell

Altos

Kelley Calpin
Julie Dee
Adrianne Gallagher-Beetstra
Emily Paulson
Melissa Raub
Amy Schwartz

Tenors

Mark Baglione
Daniel Beetstra
Cameron Carrara
Devin Johnsoton
Matt Skirmont

Basses

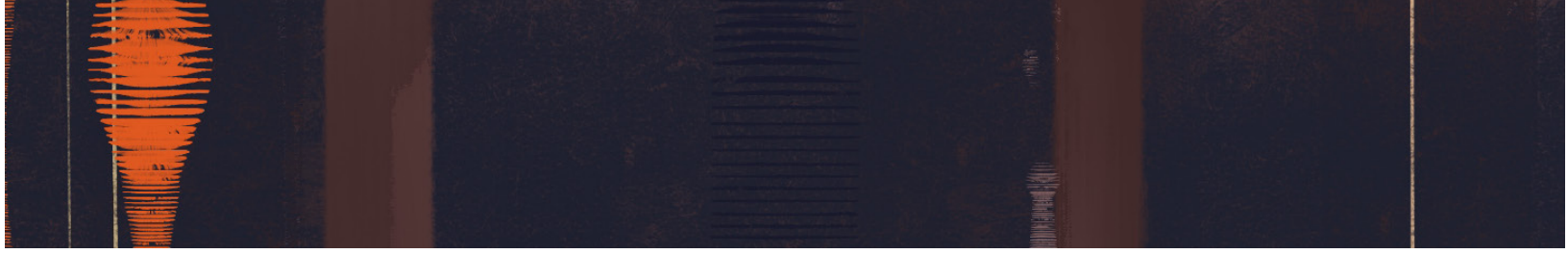
Matt Alfrey
Chris Cvengros
Ian Murrel
Jordan Pedigo
Tom Reusz

Hampshire Choir Students

Jayden Anderson
Brylee Currie
Haley Hagendorn
Bridget MacDonald
Makayla Magsombol

Abigail McKinney
Verina Perez
Cherish Scott
Abigail Slipke
Madison Wiebe





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