# FRESH INK

VANCOUVER
CHAMBER CHOIR

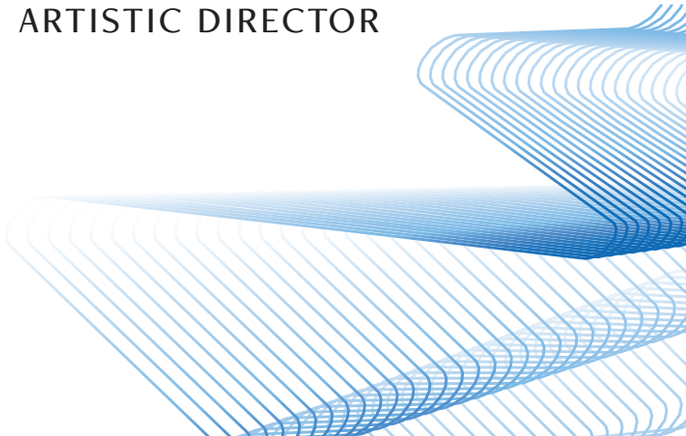
The 20th century created a unique phenomenon in the history of Western classical music: most of the music performed in concert was historical. Before that, each generation felt that its own music was the norm and that earlier music was outdated. Even works 50 years old were seen to be obsolete, however revered they were by younger composers. Why this changed so radically after WWII is surely thanks to many factors. The institutions that dominate classical music - the symphony orchestra and the opera - are best at ease with the Romantic repertoire they were built around. Recordings made the whole plethora of historical music available in a way that was inconceivable before, and at the same time, the stylistic developments of the newest music in the latter half of the 20th century were not necessarily focused on audience reception. As a result, when it came to programming, new music became almost the exception.

Choral music naturally followed suit, but perhaps not to the same extent. There is no lack of historical repertoire for choirs, but new music remained more firmly entrenched in choral programs than on the orchestral side. One major reason for this is that the stylistic breadth of new music for choirs has always been more diverse than in the upper echelon of classical music. This kept the music written for choir more grounded in public reception, and a major part was undoubtedly played by the fact that most choirs are not professional. This means that the composers had to scale down the technical demands, and often write in a way that was more approachable than their instrumental music.

When someone looks back at the development of choral repertoire in the early 21st century, I believe it will appear that social relevance was more than a trend, perhaps more like a framework for much of the new music written for choirs. Composers and choirs have clearly attempted to address the world around them through the music they compose and perform. This is visible in the subject matter, the texts chosen, and the emphasis on the diversity of creators and styles. With this movement, historical music has become the exception, and the music of our time, the norm. It remains to be seen whether this is a swing of the pendulum or a circle closing.

Fresh Ink contains choral works from the last decade. Most of them have either been commissioned or premiered by the Vancouver Chamber Choir, in many cases both. This collection of works is a wonderful reminder of how approachable the choral music of our time is, even when it is written in a technically challenging and highly ambitious manner. And while the ink is still fresh, the music will document the world we inhabited in 2025.

— Kari Turunen ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



# 1 | laura hawley

## Your Name is Water

2025; Jeni Couzyn, Psalm 130

*Your Name is Water* was written by our 2024-25 composer-in-residence, laura hawley, as the commissioned work of the residency, and premiered in May 2025. This work for eight voices is set to a poem by Jeni Couzyn with fragments of Psalm 130 (Out of the Depths) broadening the scope of the work. The composer writes: “I have always felt a deep and immediate connection to Jeni Couzyn’s poetry, and am grateful she has granted me permission to set so many of her texts. She shared this poem with me in 2023, and as I often do with her poetry, I had a visceral experience reading it for the first time. This text, as I interpret it, expresses a duality: the smallness of our existence, in a moment, in the grand history and future of the earth, paired with the idea that we are one with everything, always; and both of these things are sustaining. The addressee of this poem could be a person, but to me is more likely a greater power we might call “God” or “The Source” or even “The Trickster”; something we glimpse in moments of transcendence when the veil lifts, something we have all experienced in one way or another - and yearn for always - that we are also part of.”

Your name is water trickling through earth.
It waters my flesh. I wait for you at this door of glass
balanced like an angel on a pin

on the earthquake rift. Uneasily earth sleeps. She smiles
in her sleep. Her smile is not what we think. When she sighs and stretches
in her dream of peace our world will crack open

seas will rise up engulfing our mountains
thunder will bellow across our heavens, the forest will topple
into the ocean. For now though all is quiet.

I wait for the click of the wooden gate, for your footstep on the path
for the creak of the deck.
I wait and wait.

| | |
|---|---|
| De Profundis clamavi ad te | From the depths I call you |
| quis sustinebit | who can stand |
| speravit anima mea | My soul hopes |
| a custodia matutina | like watchmen for the morning |

**Featuring:** **Kiyomi Hori, Abby Boggs, Emily M Cheung, Christina Cichos, soprano**
**Dinah Ayre, alto**
**Nick Sommer, Eric Schwarzhoff, tenor**
**Kip Johnson, Steven Bélanger, baritone**

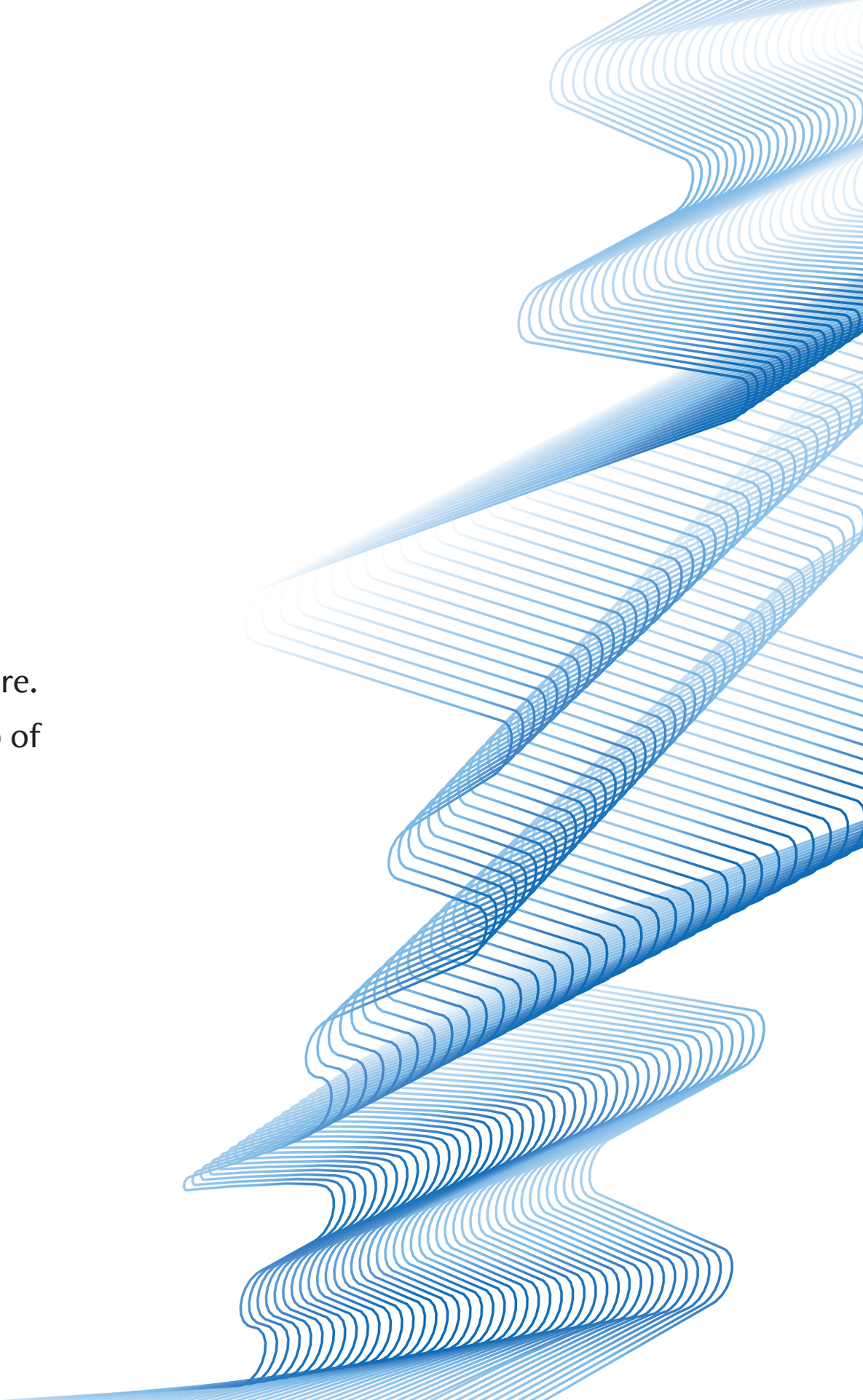
# 2 | Katharine Petkovski

## Bawaajigan

2025, Colleen Coco Collins

"*Bawaajigan* is a musical setting of a poem by Canadian poet and artist Colleen Coco Collins. Named after the Anishinaabe word for dreams, the poem explores themes of transformation and awakening, reflecting the deep connection between dreams and waking life. It emphasizes the cyclical nature of growth and change, focusing on interconnectedness and the beauty of the natural world. Characterized by fluid, expansive harmonies and subtle shifts in dynamics, the piece mirrors the poem's exploration of nature's movements, drawing on timeless imagery of the earth, the flow of water, and the harmony that arises from our relationship with nature. The choir's interwoven voices reflect the interconnectedness in the text, while the varying textures capture the contrasting images of stillness and awakening. With simplicity and grace, *Bawaajigan* meditates on both personal and universal growth, evoking a deeper sense of harmony and the quiet power of change."

Find me in the future:
the hill is steeper,
the dream is deeper.
The water has risen
and is blue.
The way is terraced,
feet are bare,
rushes grasses everywhere.
The people are the throb of
the earth.
Their byre is my
basement.
I am suddenly there too
and then in front
full sun
fully woken into.

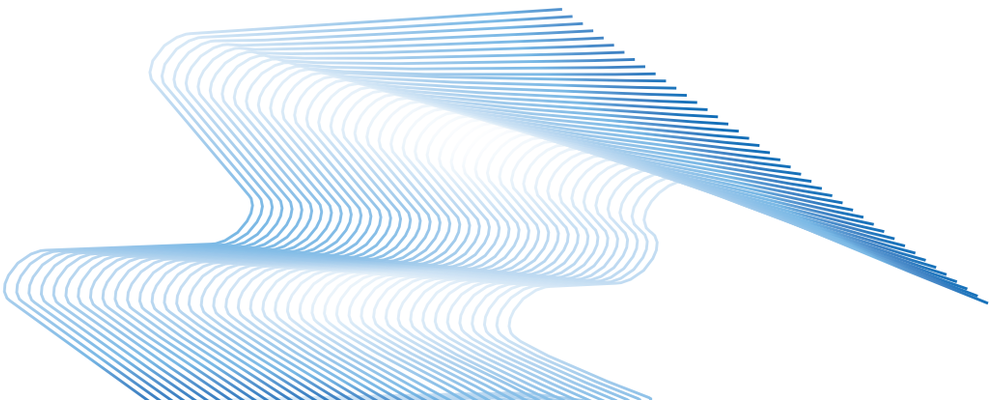


# 3 | Chris Sivak

## Alouette Meets Her Maker

2018, Traditional Folksong

*Alouette Meets Her Maker* was first performed by the Vancouver Chamber Choir in Kari Turunen's first concert as the Artistic Director of the choir in September 2019, and the little satellite has reappeared in our programs regularly ever since. Chris Sivak writes: "*Alouette 1* was the first Canadian satellite and was launched on September 26th, 1962. The launch made Canada the third nation, after the USSR and the United States, to design and construct its own satellite and cemented Canada's reputation as a space-faring nation. *Alouette's* mission lasted for 10 years, and she was deliberately switched off on September 30th, 1972. She remains in orbit - as a derelict - to this day.



"In this piece, *Alouette's* circuits inexplicably come alive after remaining dormant for over 30 years. As she becomes aware once again of her orbit and proximity to earth she hears an inexplicable voice from deep space. The voice calls to her soothingly until its intentions are revealed to be malicious once it threatens to literally pluck her from the sky (ie. "Je te plumerai"). Alouette panics and sends out desperate pleas for help but she can't fight the forces pulling her to her doom. She careens to the ground below, exploding in a fiery heap. The piece closes with the last gasp of life from her circuits before they are silenced forever."

Alouette, gentille Alouette,

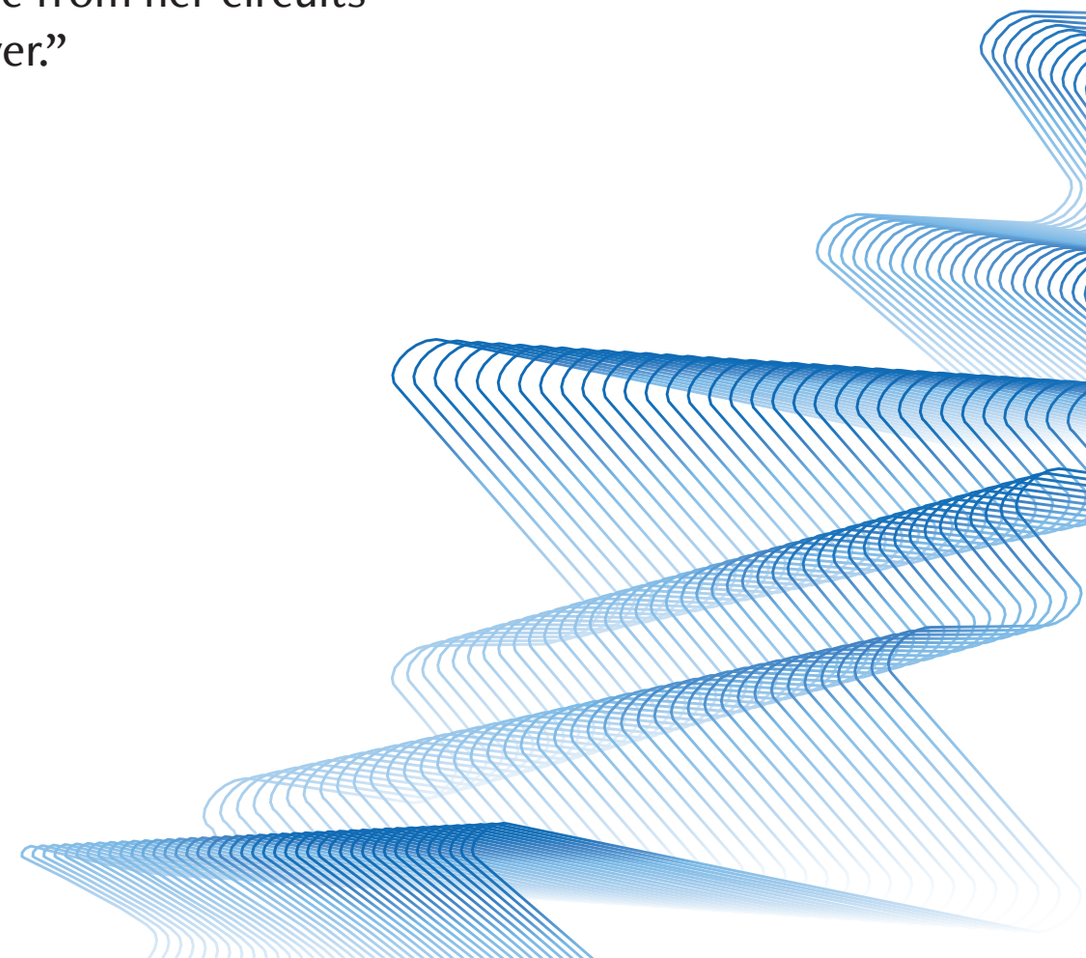
Alouette, je te plumerai.

Lark, nice lark,

Lark, I will pluck you.

**Featuring:**

**Christina Cichos, soprano**
**Eric Schwarzhoff, tenor**



# 4 - 6 | Andrew Balfour

## Kiyam

2024, Andrew Balfour

*Kiyam* by Andrew Balfour, our 2023-24 composer-in-residence, was commissioned by the Vancouver Chamber Choir and composed and premiered in the spring of 2024. Balfour, who is of Cree descent, wrote of the work: "*Kiyam* is a three-movement choral poem, with texts based on three words: Kiyam is the Cree word for 'let it be', Bizaan is the Ojibway word for 'be still, and Wenen is the Ojibway word for 'who?'. Of course, the complexities of these languages - and the wonderful nature of how many perspectives are in just one word - is wonderful to explore musically. It is a personal choral reflection written at a time of healing and reflection on my Ispiciwin ('journey') through life, sometimes through great happiness and great loss." The first movement begins tentatively and grows to a climax before fading away. The second, scored for ATTBB, begins in much the same vein but shortly opens into a section that reveals the composer's love of Renaissance polyphony. The last movement is the liveliest of the three, built around the intertwining lines of two soloists and repeated gestures in the lower voices.

## i Kiyam

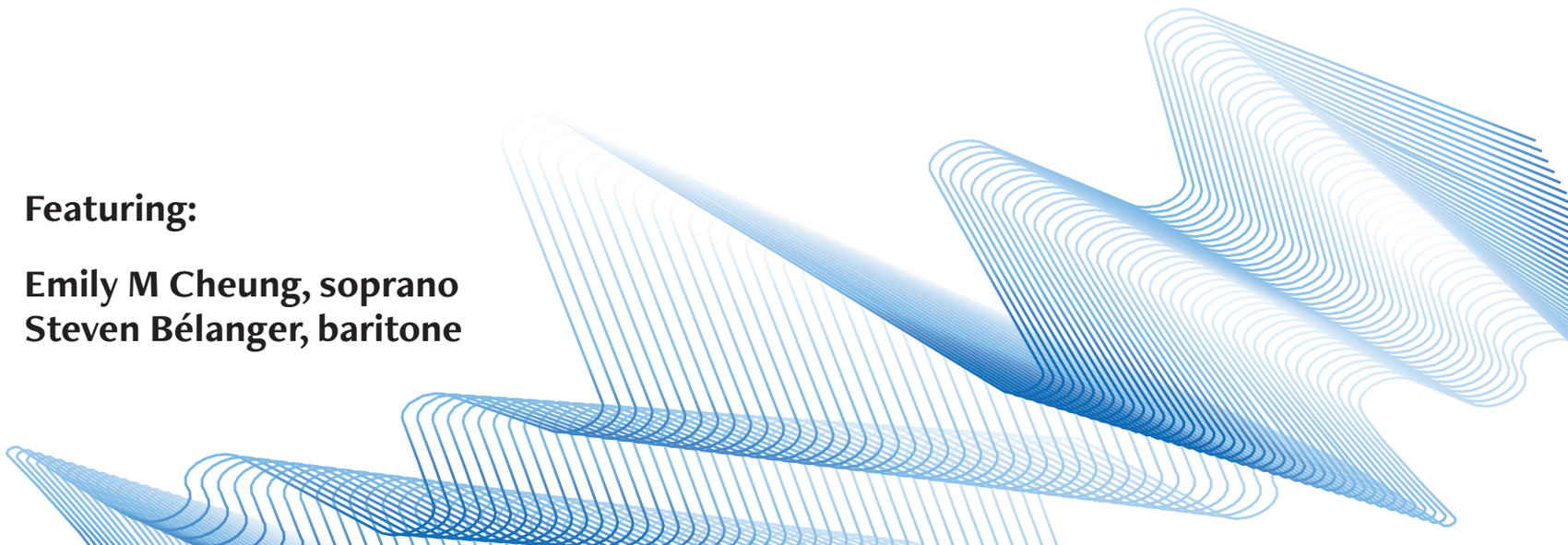
| | |
|---|---|
| Kiyam | Let it be / happen |

## ii Bizaan

| | |
|---|---|
| Te lucis ante terminum | Before the ending of the day |
| Dibikan | it is night time |
| Rerum Creator | Creator of the World |
| Anama'aa Poscimus | pray we pray |
| Bizaan | be still, quiet, be reflective |

## iii Wenen

| | |
|---|---|
| Wenen | Who? |
| Macimanito | Trickster? |



**Featuring:**

**Emily M Cheung, soprano**
**Steven Bélanger, baritone**

# 7 - 11 | Tawnie Olson

## Beloved of the Sky

2020, rev. 2022; Emily Carr

Tawnie Olson's *Beloved of the Sky* is a set of five songs to texts by Emily Carr, written in 2020 (revised in 2022). The first develops its opening to a climactic ending, the second is almost visually colouristic, and the third is a succinct aphorism. The last two movements are considerably larger in form. The fourth movement initially juxtaposes the upper and lower voices, and later stops to listen to every breath and heartbeat of the text. The last movement feels like the emotional center of the suite. From fragmented short phrases it gradually grows in warmth and breadth before a beautiful closing section. The musical material consists mainly of two intervals (the major second and a fourth, or its inversion, a fifth) and this disciplined approach renders elegant unity to the suite.

Tawnie Olson writes of the work: "A few years ago, when I had the opportunity to create a new multi-movement composition for three American choirs, I couldn't resist the opportunity to introduce them and their audiences to a little Canadian culture, and decided to set texts by Emily Carr. Despite my initial intentions, however, the piece isn't really about Carr. Instead it is an exploration of, and love song to the creative process, and so it is about all of us, because we are all creative in different ways."

**i.** I went down deep into myself and dug up. (June 24, 1937)

**ii.** I woke up with this idea. Try using positive and negative colours in juxtaposition. Complementary are negative to positive. Try working in complementaries: run some reds into your greens, some yellow into your purples. Red-green, blue-orange, yellow-purple. (Feb 7, 1934)

**iii.** Oh, that lazy, stodgy, lumpy feeling when you want to work and you're dead! Is it liver, I wonder, or is it old age, or just inertia, or something from which the life has gone forever, that just belongs to youth? (Jan 11, 1931)

**iv.** The subject means little. The arrangement, the design, colour, shape, depth, light, space, mood, movement, balance, not one or all of these fills the bill. There is something additional, a breath that draws your breath into its breathing, a heartbeat that pounds on yours, a recognition of the oneness of all things. (Jan 17, 1936)

God, God, God! Oh, to realize so completely that you could utterly let go and passionately throw your soul upon the canvas. (Jan 29, 1934)

**v.** I made a small sketch and then worked a larger paper sketch from it. The woods were in quiet mood, dreamy and sweet. No great contrasts of light and dark but full of quiet glowing light and fresh from the recent rain, and the growth full, steady and ascending. [...] "This is thine hour, O soul, thy free flight into the wordless." (Sept 7, 1933)

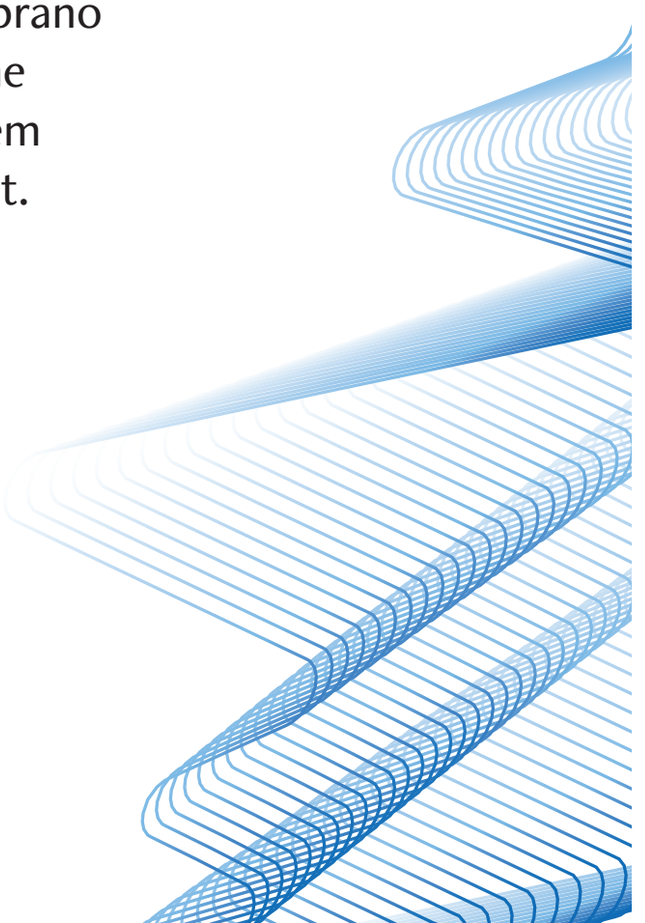
**Featuring:** **Kiyomi Hori, soprano**
**Maria Golas, alto**

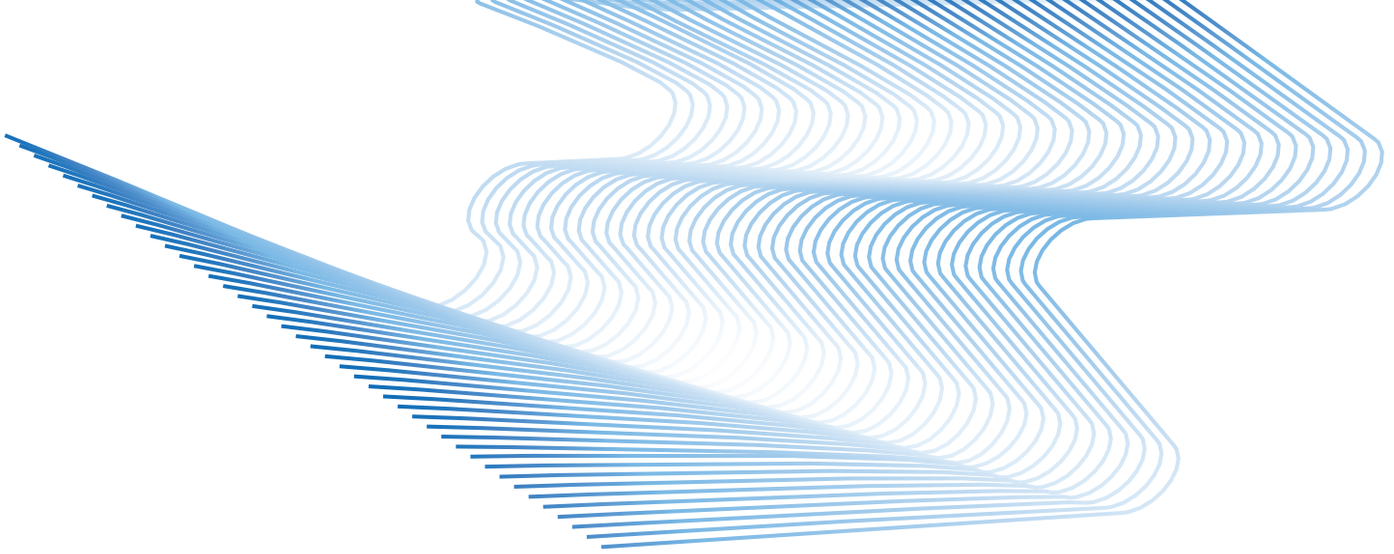
# 12 | Stephen Chatman

## Lie still, lie still, my breaking heart

2019, Christina Rossetti

*Lie still, lie still, my breaking heart* by Stephen Chatman was premiered by the Vancouver Chamber Choir in September 2020. The work encapsulates many qualities often present in Chatman's choral language: slow and sustained movement with melodic beauty, softly enhanced chords and subtle variation. The second verse features a soprano solo that adds further life to the piece. The text is the third stanza of Rossetti's "Mirage" from 1879, a poem that encompasses lost love and deep disappointment.





Lie still, lie still, my breaking heart;

My silent heart, lie still and break:

Life, and the world, and mine own self, are changed

For a dream's sake.

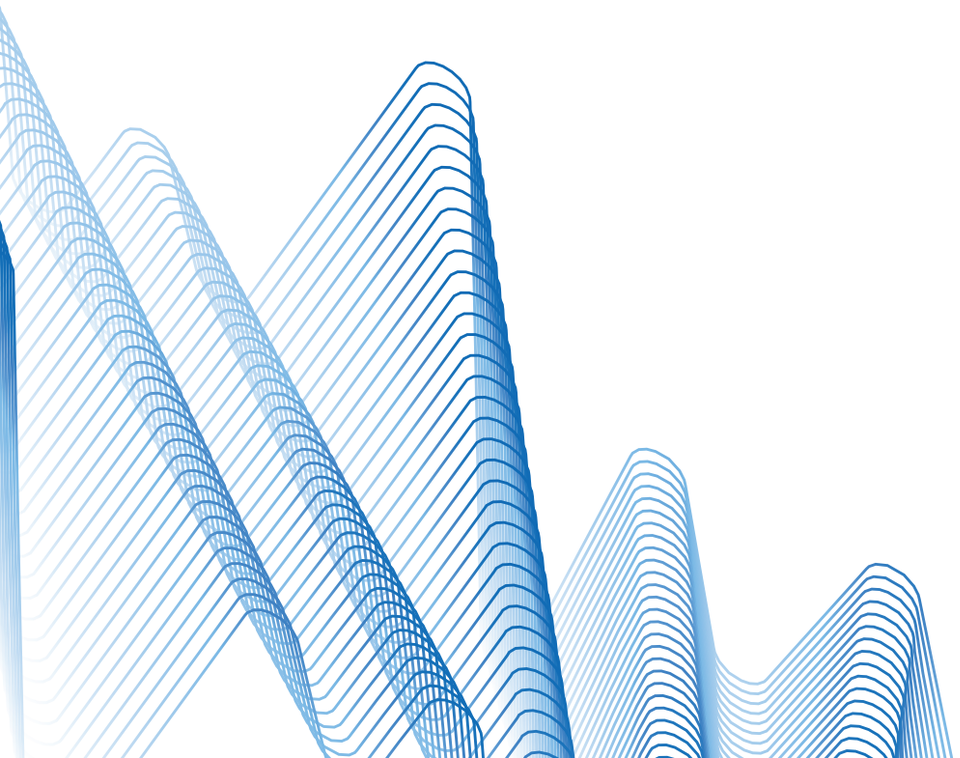
**Featuring: Emily M Cheung, soprano**

# 13 | Alex Freeman

## Northern April

2023, Edna St. Vincent Millay

Alex Freeman is a US composer who has been living in Finland since 2001. Freeman has a unique voice of his own and his choral works are often layered, rhythmically complex, flowing and instilled with light. *Northern April* from 2023 is set to a poem by Edna St. Vincent Millay. Freeman writes: “In my reading of [the poem], I attempted to give the words room to breathe within a musical setting that is equally ambiguous in its affect [...]. It could be a merely sonorous exploration of the poetry, itself, or the natural world it so beautifully describes.”



O mind, beset by music never for a moment quiet, -
The wind at the flue, the wind strumming the shutter;
The soft, antiphonal speech of the doubled brook, never for a moment quiet;
The rush of the rain against the glass, his voice in the eaves-gutter!

Where shall I lay you to sleep, and the robins be quiet?
Lay you to sleep - and the frogs be silent in the marsh?
Crashes the sleet from the bough and the bough sighs upward, never for a moment quiet.
April is upon us, pitiless and young and harsh.

O April, full of blood, full of breath, have pity upon us!
Pale, where the winter like a stone has been lifted away, we emerge like yellow grass.
Be for a moment quiet, buffet us not, have pity upon us,
Till the green comes back into the vein, till the giddiness pass.

# 14 | laura hawley

## Warrior

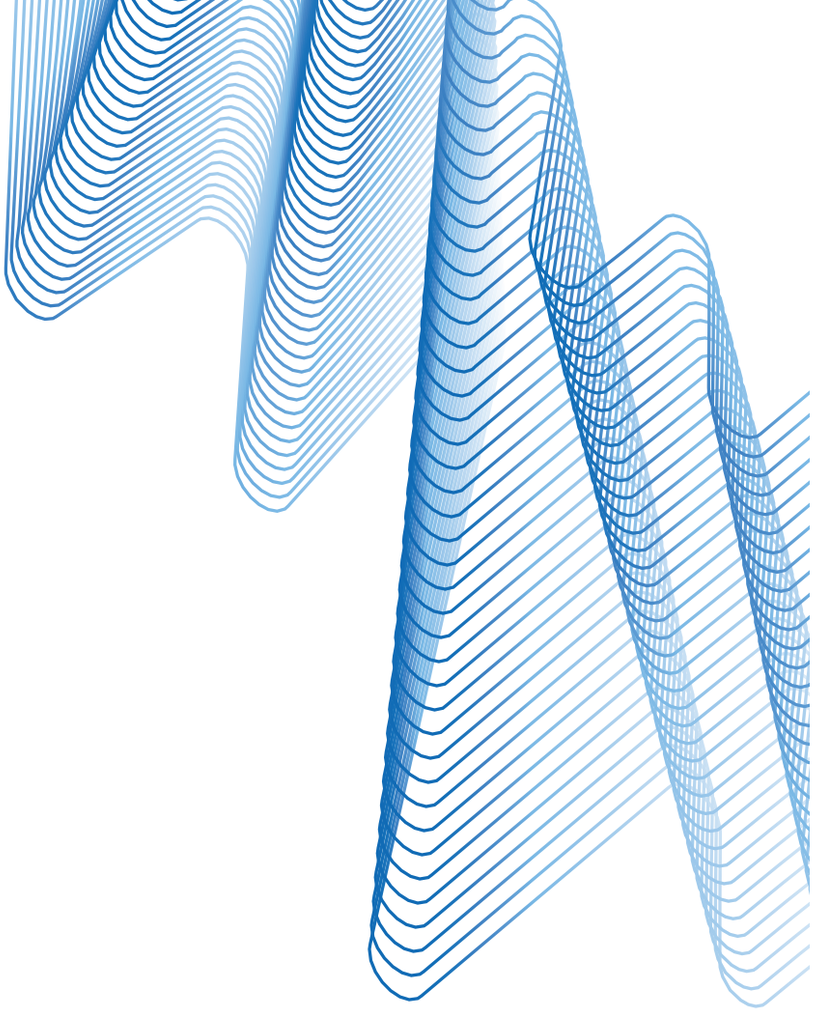
from *Tapestry*

2021, Jeni Couzyn

*Warrior* is the third movement of a suite that is based on poems by Canadian poet Jeni Couzyn. laura hawley has described the trajectory of the whole cycle as moving from seeking and searching through struggle, and affirmation to arrival. The third movement, *Warrior*, is where the turn to strength and love happens. The strong poem has elicited an inspired musical response from the composer, and *Warrior* is a movement that I think will attract many choirs in the coming years.

I stand by my life.
I stand in darkness, like on a rock
in the middle of a churning river.
I stand by the choices I made, my actions
wholehearted, generous, and brave
I stand by my life and I sing, my silence
a drop in the heaving sea
of the singers with slit tongue.
I sing though no echo comes back.
I sing as a warrior into silence.

A serene fish barely moving
opens its mouth to receive
my syllables as they swim
but I will not stop.



I'm witness to the earth and cosmos
this intricate heart of mine
I bring to union with the One,
this wild rider reigned to truth -
that uncontrollable
black bull of sorrow.
If I could hang out my life in sunlight
it would spark, a tapestry of brilliants
in a fine pattern, a web of meaning
each stitch with its meaning like a shadow.

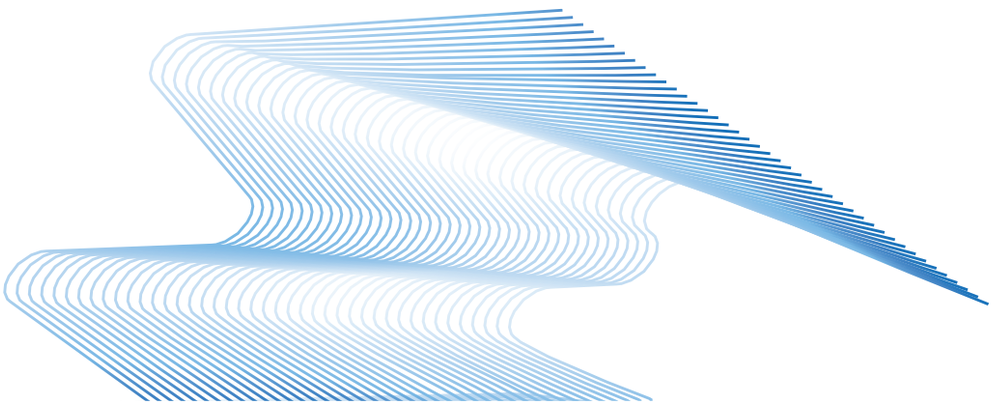
I stand by my life - this vibrating nuclear sun
this wholeness that has been my life.
I pulse with fullness
a bee with wings beating
two hundred times every second
I *hum* with fullness
orchestra in my cells, choir of my mind
singing lighthouse spinning light waves
in a polar sky.

Gazing outward at you from my centre
I see galaxies. The light waves travel
outward through time. The sound waves travel
looping and winding harmonies in
indelible singing.

This life I inhabit
will hold its hieroglyph through eternity
the sword dance of a warrior
brave, present.
The patterns of the dance remain in air
as sounds do, as light does
an energetic transmission for light years.
No-one on earth needs to read this
or agree or endorse it.
I acknowledge my beautiful life.

**Featuring:**

**Christina Cichos, soprano**
**Maria Golas, alto**
**Eric Schwarzhoff, tenor**



## VANCOUVER CHAMBER CHOIR

Kari Turunen, Conductor

Artistic Director Kari Turunen began leading the Vancouver Chamber Choir - one of Canada's premier professional choral ensembles - in September 2019, its 49th concert season.

Jon Washburn founded the choir in 1971 and it has become an amazing success story, ranking with a handful of North America's best professional choruses and noted for its diverse repertoire and performing excellence. Honoured with the Margaret Hillis Award for Choral Excellence by Chorus America, the choir has performed countless concerts and broadcasts, released 36 recordings, and received numerous awards. Foremost supporters of Canadian music, the choir has sung over 4000 performances of works by Canadian composers over the years, in addition to their extensive international repertoire.

| | |
|---|---|
| **SOPRANOS** | Abby Boggs, Emily M Cheung, Christina Cichos, Kiyomi Hori |
| **ALTOS** | Dinah Ayre, Maria Golas, Hilary Ison, Anne Qu |
| **TENORS** | Kilian Benson, Eric Biskupski, Eric Schwarzhoff, Nick Sommer |
| **BASSES** | Steven Bélanger, Kip Johnson, Paul Nash, Philip Wing |

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*laura hawley* **Your Name is Water**
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*Katharine Petkovski* **Bawaajigan**
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*Chris Sivak* **Alouette Meets Her Maker**
Chris Sivak

*Andrew Balfour* **Kiyam**
Cypress Choral Music

*Tawnie Olson* **Beloved of the Sky**
E.C. Schirmer

*Stephen Chatman* **Lie still, lie still, my breaking heart**
E.C. Schirmer

*Alex Freeman* **Northern April**
Fennica Gehrman

*laura hawley* **Warrior**
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