

BERKSHIRE CONCERT CHOIR

Ryan José LaBoy, conductor
Amy Renak, piano

PRESENTS

Hope Unfolding

*Choral Reflections on
Power, Pain, and
Perseverance*

Sat, November 16, 2024 - 3pm
Sun, November 17, 2024 - 3pm

St. Stephen's Episcopal Church
67 East St. Pittsfield, MA



President's Letter

We are delighted to welcome you this afternoon.

Our program, *Hope Unfolding*, is a choral reflection on power, pain, and the indelible human capacity to hope. Lyrics of the opening pieces convey rising above (Olsavsky), leading with integrity (Thompson), non-violent resistance (U2), trust and faith (Miller), and troubled times (Paul Simon). The opening choral movement of J.S. Bach's Cantata 150 represents anguish, pain and longing. The program finishes with songs about peace (Ruth Moody of The Wailin' Jennys), desire for community (Copland), and perseverance (Schneckenberger).

Berkshire Concert Choir, a non-audition chorus, is open to all, high school & up, who want to sing & can do the work. Our mission is to inspire, connect and uplift individuals by creating a welcoming community where people of all backgrounds & abilities can experience the transformative beauty of choral music. In addition to our Fall and Spring concerts, we sing in Zion's Yule for Fuel fundraiser in December, host two Summer Sings, free and open to all, and gather for fall, winter and summer community sings at Hot Plate Brewery in Pittsfield.

We hope this program, with its theme of democracy, empowerment and unity, lifts you up in this Thanksgiving season.

Thank you for your support,

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Hope Unfolding

Choral Reflections on Power, Pain, and Perseverance

I. On Power

What Happens When a Woman? *Alexandria Olsavsky*

Breana Gladu, soloist

The Last Words of David *Randall Thompson*

II. On Pain

MLK *U2 / arr. Bob Chilcott*

Jasper Zahn, soloist

I Believe *Mark A. Miller*

Chelsea Beatty and Hannah DeLisle-Stall, soloists

American Tune *Paul Simon / arr. Scott S. Stewart*

III. On Longing

Nach dir, Herr, verlanget mich (BWV 150) *J.S. Bach*

Rebecca Hoffman, soprano

Rebecca Eldredge, bassoon

Ronald Gorevic, violin I

Sydnee Hinrichsen, violin II

Anne Legêne, cello

Luis Granda, double bass

Mariken Palmboom, harpsichord

IV. On Democracy

America the Beautiful *Samuel Ward / arr. J. David Moore*

One Voice *Ruth Moody / arr. Marcelline Moody*

Zion's Walls *Aaron Copland / arr. Glenn Koponen*

V. On Hope

Hope Lingers On *Lissa Schneckenburger / arr. Andrea Ramsey*

Artistic Director's Note

Dear Guests,

One of the things I appreciate most about Berkshire Concert Choir is our organization's decision to have our fall concerts in November rather than December. Don't get me wrong—I love a good holiday themed program or caroling concert as much as the next person! But, the seemingly innocuous decision to shift our programs back by just a couple weeks affords us a seismic opportunity. Rather than being beholden to the trappings of the holiday season, hosting our concerts in November allows us to sing about *anything*!

As a conductor, this can present a significant challenge. In some ways, it would be much easier to program a template concert about “Winter Wonderlands” or “Stars in the East” or “Silent Nights.” But, what would you choose to sing when you could sing literally anything? Or, to more closely align with our mission, what music might you choose to transform our community?

It has not been lost on me that this year our concert falls precariously close to the US presidential election. Actually, at the time you are reading this letter, Election Day will have come and gone, and I am willing to wager that the feelings we are all feeling right now are every bit as complex as they were just a couple weeks ago. This election cycle has taken on unprecedented emotional power as, together, we have been forced to confront two starkly contrasting visions of what “America will be!” (to quote Langston Hughes). We are all grappling with questions of power and authority. We are all coping with the pain that comes with fracture and ideological division. And we are all desperately clinging to the hope of a brighter tomorrow as time marches ever forward into a future unknown. But here is the good news: regardless of whether or not we agree with one another, we are in this together.

Today's concert sings to the center of this message. Our opening set uses two songs to offer critical commentary on power. Alexandra Olsavsky's *What Happens When a Woman...* is a provocative opener featuring body percussion that shifts focus away from the mere asking of questions about authority and toward a demand for answers. By contrast, Randall Thompson's canonic *The Last Words of David* is performed as a prescient reminder, “He that ruleth over men must be just,” and that peace and balance can be achieved in the presence of true servant-leadership.

Our next set of music grapples with the complex feelings of pain we experience in the face of an unjust world. To begin, we sing U2's *MLK*, a haunting lullaby written to commemorate the assassination of the famed civil rights leader. This is followed by Mark Miller's *I Believe*, poignantly illustrating the power of resilience and the quiet protest hope can offer in adversity. Lastly, we sing a choral arrangement of Paul Simon's *American Tune*. Simon's song, written at the end of the Vietnam War, uses a Bach chorale, “O Sacred Head Now Wounded,” as the musical frame to lament the state of American disenfranchisement at the time. Quite wondrously, its message rings as clear today as it did in 1975.

Next, we come to the centerpiece of our concert: Johann Sebastian Bach's cantata, *Nach dir, Herr, verlanget mich*. This fifteen-minute work in seven movements represents our pleading prayer for intercession. While it may seem strange to program a German Baroque cantata in a concert about American democracy, I would offer that from the very first notes of the *Sinfonia*, Bach's music transports us to a timeless space transcending the troubles of our time. His music provides a liminal sanctuary of repose and contemplation, and it is through this that our feelings of pain and isolation are transformed into a renewed sense of hope and connectedness by the final chorale. We are so fortunate today to be joined by a chamber orchestra of some of the region's best players to help guide our transcendence.

Our final set of music begins with J. David Moore's setting of *America the Beautiful*. Performed in unison, Moore, like Paul Simon, quotes the music of J.S. Bach—this time, his *Prelude in C*. He does so strategically to release the charge of American political division and to bring us back to what Abraham Lincoln called, “the better angels of our nature.” From there, our voices blossom into simple and beautiful harmony in Ruth Moody's *One Voice*, and then into technicolor jubilation in Aaron Copland's *Zion's Walls*.

Finally, as in the beginning, we end our concert with a cappella singing and body percussion in Andrea Ramsey's arrangement of *Hope Lingers On*. However, this time, rather than a demand for answers, our rhythmic drive provides a sense of celebration as we persevere together.

In some ways, this program is an idealized version of democracy and America. However, it is not one that shies away from the hurt of our world today, but rather persists *through* it with grace and the courage to be transformed. When we could choose to sing anything, we chose to sing into this very moment; to meet you, our friends and families, right where we all are today. We offer you this performance as our hope unfolding.

Musically yours,

Ryan LaBoy
Artistic Director

Texts & Translations

What Happens When a Woman?

Original Composition by Aleandra Olsavsky of Artemisia

What happens when a woman takes power?
What happens when she won't back down?
What happens when a woman takes power?
What happens when she wears the crown?

Woah, we rise above.
Woah, we lead with love.
Woah, we have won.
We are one.
We've just begun.

What happens when she rules her own body?
What happens when she sets the beat?
What happens when she bows to nobody?
What happens when she stands on her own two feet?

The Last Words of David

2 Samuel 23, 3-4

He that ruleth over men must be just,
ruling in the fear of God.
And he shall be as the light of the morning
when the sun riseth,
even a morning without clouds,
as the tender grass springing out of the
earth by clear shining after rain.

MLK

Words and Music by U2

Sleep,
Sleep tonight,
And may your dreams,
Be realized.
If the thundercloud,
Passes rain,
So let it rain,
Rain down on him.
So let it be.

I Believe

Anonymous Jewish poem

I believe in the sun, even when it's not shining;
I believe in love, even when I don't feel it;
I believe in God, even when God is silent.

American Tune

Words and Music by Paul Simon

Many's the time I've been mistaken
And many times confused
Yes, and I've often felt forsaken
And certainly misused

Oh, but I'm alright, I'm alright
I'm just weary to my bones
Still, you don't expect to be
bright and bon vivant
So far away from home,
so far away from home

And I don't know a soul
who's not been battered
I don't have a friend who
feels at ease
I don't know a dream
that's not been shattered
Or driven to its knees

But it's alright, it's alright
For we lived so well so long
Still, when I think of the
Road we're traveling on
I wonder what's gone wrong
I can't help it,
I wonder what has gone wrong

And I dreamed I was dying
I dreamed that my soul
rose unexpectedly
And looking back down at me
Smiled reassuringly
And I dreamed I was flying

And high up above my eyes
could clearly see
The Statue of Liberty
Sailing away to sea
And I dreamed I was flying

We come on the ship
they call The Mayflower
We come on the ship
that sailed the moon
We come in the age's
most uncertain hours
And sing an American tune

Oh, and it's alright,
it's alright, it's alright
You can't be forever blessed
Still, tomorrow's going to be
another working day
And I'm trying to get some rest
That's all I'm trying to get some rest

Nach dir, Herr, verlangst mich | To You, O God, I Lift Up My Soul

Psalms 25: 1–2, 5, 15; Poetry by Unknown Author

Translation by Michael Marissen and Daniel R. Melamed

1. Sinfonia

2. Lord, I long after you.
My God, I hope in you.
Let me not be put to shame,
Lest my enemies rejoice over me.

3. Yet I am and remain content,
Even though here in the present life
Cross-bearing, attack,
and other trials rage,
[As do] death, hell,
and what comes along with them.
Though disaster strikes the faithful
servant [of God],
[God's essentially benevolent] justice is,
and remains eternally, justice.

4. Lead me in your truth and teach me;
for you are the God who [eternally]
saves me; daily I await you.

5. From the winds, cedars must
Often experience much disturbance;
[Never] do they get knocked over.

Counsel and action based on
[the word of] God
Pays no heed to what bellows against [it],
For his [God's "sure and instructive"]
word teaches entirely otherwise.

6. My eyes look ever to the Lord;
for he will draw my foot out of the snare.

7. My days of sorrow
God ends, however, in joy;
Christians [walking] on paths of thorns
[Will acquire] heaven's strength and
blessing/salvation.
If God remains my faithful protection;
If I pay no heed to people's blustering
arrogance; Christ, who stands by our side,
Will daily help me to struggle victoriously.

America the Beautiful

Words by Katharine Lee Bates

O beautiful for spacious skies,
For amber waves of grain,
For purple mountain majesties
Above the fruited plain!

America! America!
God shed His grace on thee
And crown thy good with brotherhood
From sea to shining sea!

One Voice

Words and Music by Ruth Moody (The Wailin' Jennys)

This is the sound of one voice,
One spirit, one voice,
The sound of one who makes a choice,
This is the sound of one voice.

This is the sound of voices two,
The sound of me singing with you,
Helping each other to make it through,
This is the sound of voices two.

This is the sound of voices three,
Singing together in harmony,
Surrendering to the mystery,
This is the sound of voices three.

This is the sound of all of us,
Singing with love and the will to trust,
Leave the rest behind, it will turn to dust,
This is the sound of all of us.

This is the sound of one voice,
One people, one voice,
A song for every one of us,
This is the sound of one voice.

Zion's Walls

Revivalist Song Notated and Published by John G. McCurry

Come fathers and mothers,
Come sisters and brothers,
Come join us in singing
the praises of Zion.

O fathers, don't you feel determined
To meet within the walls of Zion?
We'll shout and go round
The walls of Zion.

Hope Lingers On

Words and Music by Lissa Schneckenburger

My mother, when love is gone,
In our darkest hour hope lingers on.
My father, when peace is gone,
In our darkest hour hope lingers.

I will not hate, and I will not fear,
In our darkest hour, hope lingers here.

My sister, when equality's gone,
In our darkest hour hope lingers on.
My brother, with tolerance gone,
In our darkest hour hope lingers on.

My love, when honor is gone,
In our darkest hour hope lingers on.
My country, when justice is gone,
In our darkest hour hope lingers on.

Artist Biographies

Ryan José LaBoy | Artistic Director

Praised for his collaborative spirit and eclectic programming, Ryan José LaBoy is an active singer, conductor, and educator currently serving as Artistic Director of Berkshire Concert Choir, and Artistic Director of Berkshire Children's Chorus. Celebrating the power of singing in community across the lifespan, Ryan has extensive experience teaching and conducting ensembles from elementary school through college and university and beyond.

Prior to living in the Berkshires, Ryan served as Director of Choirs & Voice at North Hennepin Community College where he conducted Concert Choir and Chamber Singers and led the Voice Studio. He also served as Founding Music Director of ComMUSICation in St. Paul, Minnesota—an after-school music program with a focus on social justice and youth empowerment. Such opportunities have led him to work with several Grammy Award-winning musicians, including the Minnesota Orchestra and Leslie Odom, Jr (Super Bowl LI).

Ryan is also a professional singer, having recently presented recitals throughout Berkshire County with collaborator Manon Hutton-DeWys (piano) and singing with ensembles such as The Sound Between, Border CrosSing, MPLS (imPulse), VocalEssence Ensemble Singers, and Ember Choral Artists. He has also served as an American delegate at various music programs abroad in Estonia, Iceland, and Ghana.

Ryan is a doctoral student at Teachers College, Columbia University in New York City, and holds degrees in Choral Conducting and Music Education from the University of Minnesota and Westminster Choir College. He moved to the Berkshires from the Twin Cities in May 2021, with his husband, Joel, who serves as pastor at Zion Lutheran Church of Pittsfield.

Amy Renak | Piano

Amy Renak is a busy pianist and teacher in Berkshire County. She has been teaching piano at the Berkshire Music School for 35 years, and at Miss Hall's School as well, for not quite as long. She is the long-time director of music at Zion Lutheran Church, and the choir director at Hevreh of Southern Berkshire, a Reform Jewish Congregation in Great Barrington. Amy enjoys accompanying singers and instrumentalists, and especially choirs like the one she accompanies today!

Rebecca Hoffman | Soprano Soloist

Rebecca has enjoyed being a choir member and soloist for most of her life. She has sung with community and church choirs including the Berkshire Bach Society, Northern Berkshire Chorale, Cantilena Chamber Choir, and Berkshire Concert Choir. Some of her favorite solo appearances include Bach's *Magnificat*, Mozart's *Vespere Solennes de Confessore*, Verdi's *Requiem* and *Carmina Burana*. Becky received her undergraduate degree in Music Education from Hartwick College and her Master's Degree in Music Education and Orff Schulwerk from West Chester University. She currently teaches middle school Music Technology and high school Choir and Drama in Central Berkshire Regional School District. Becky also directs the Nessacus Drama Club and is the musical director for the spring musicals at Wahconah Regional High School. She credits some of her very talented music teachers and directors with inspiring her love of singing, and thanks her "fan club" of family and friends for lovingly supporting her musical career all these years.

About Berkshire Concert Choir

Berkshire Concert Choir inspires, connects, and uplifts individuals by creating a welcoming community where people of all backgrounds and abilities can experience the transformative beauty of choral music.

Berkshire Concert Choir is an inclusive and joy-filled community chorus open to singers of all ages and skill levels without auditions. The choir offers two concerts per year in the fall and spring and organizes informal "community sings" throughout the year. Highlights from last season include Trust the Seeds— a concert of music by all women composers, a "Beer Choir" community event in partnership with Hot Plate Brewing, and The Sounds of Music— a concert using highlights from the beloved musical to explore the many sounds of global repertoire.

Berkshire Concert Choir is open to all singers of high school age and above and rehearses on Thursday evenings in Pittsfield. Learn more at berkshireconcertchoir.org.

Berkshire Concert Choir Singers

Sopranos

Carol Allman-Morton
Pamela Bachrach
Chelsea Beatty
Taz Bergeson
Rachel Christensen
Ann-Marie Desautelle
Cassie Favrot
Cristina Gandolfo
Breana Gladu
Lesley Herzberg
Rebecca Hoffmann
Anne Jaskot
Linda Johnson
Carolyn Kaufmann
Karen Ketcham
Margaret Kirsis
Allison Lerman-Gluck
Renee Moretti
Monica Palansky
Stephanie Preston
Jane Salata
Anna Stevenson
Ginella Tanner
Lyndsey Wasio
Elizabeth Wedge

Altos

Cameron Allshouse
Rika Alper
Rachel Alves
Christine Brandon
Jody Burrows
Ruth Callahan
Brenda Crane
Debra Cranwell
Gina Davis
Hannah DeLisle-Stall
Susan Donoughe
Heidi Frayer
Christiana Greene
MaryAnn House
Michelle Huddy
Christa MacDonald
Barbara Martin
Suzanne W. Pelton
Ellen Rogers
Eva Sereghy
Kate Staebler
Sierra Stansfield
Erin Wojcicki

Tenors

Joel Bergeland
Daniel Burkhard
Graham Christensen
Robert James
Eugene Kalish
Jason Kittler
Brian Litscher
Erika Ludwig
Richard Riedel
Joe Schorge
Bruce Warren
Jasper Zahn

Basses

Thomas Damrosch
Raymond Ellsworth
Fred Frayer
Sven Leaf
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The Common Room at Zion Lutheran Church, Berkshire Community College, and St. Stephen's Episcopal Church for hosting our rehearsals and performances, and Lenox High School for loaning their choir risers.

The Board of Directors for their dedicated service to the organization.

Berkshire Concert Choir members who have taken on special responsibilities within the organization, including our librarian Renee Moretti; social media and website content manager, Bre Gladu; and Tom and Ellen Rogers who are housing our library.

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