

BERKSHIRE CONCERT CHOIR PRESENTS

Sacred Place

An intimate and immersive journey of self-reflection, connection, and creation, inspired by Jewish heritage.

Saturday, November 15th &
Sunday, November 16th

PERFORMANCE TIMES

3:00pm, 4:30pm & 6:00pm

LOCATION

Zion Lutheran Church
74 First St., Pittsfield, MA

Many thanks to the sponsors of this event.



President's Letter

We are delighted to welcome you this afternoon. Our program, *Sacred Place*, offers you an immersive and meditative experience. May this music move you as deeply as it has moved us.

Eric Whitacre's shimmering musical settings of poetry by his former partner, Israeli soprano Hila Plitmann, are intimate love songs that also express a reverence for nature and the beauty of creation.

Alex Berko's *Sacred Place* bridges the sacred and the secular and seeks to reconnect the individual with their community and with the natural world. Drawing on texts by various writers and thinkers, it reflects on the environment as a place of safety, comfort, and beauty.

Stephen Paulus's ethereal *Hymn to the Eternal Flame* from *To Be Certain of the Dawn*—commissioned by a Catholic priest as a gift from the Christian community to the Jewish community—speaks to the shared humanity within us all.

The labyrinth before you was painted by our singers. You are warmly invited to walk its path during the concert.

Whether you are a longtime supporter or joining us for the first time, your presence sustains the art we cherish. Live choral music is rooted in connection, and we are honored to share this moment with you.

Thank you for your support,

Suzanne W. Pelton

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Sacred Place

November 15 & 16, 2025

Ryan José LaBoy, conductor

Aaron Likness, piano

Five Hebrew Love Songs

Eric Whitacre

I. Temuná

II. Kalá kallá

Cameron Allshouse & Gina Davis, dancers
Michelle Huddy, tambourine

III. Lárov

IV. Éyze shéleg!

Karen Ketcham, soprano
Allison Lerman-Gluck, speaker

V. Rakút

Sacred Place

Alex Berko

Jamecyn Morey, violin
Julian Müller, cello

I. Opening Prayer

James Muller, tenor
(Saturday)

Eli Gold, baritone
(Sunday)

II. Amidah

III. Shema

Claire Lupien, soprano
Chris Vecchia, baritone

IV. Mi Shebeirach

V. Kaddish

Rebecca Hoffmann, soprano
Rachel Alves, alto
Brian Litscher, tenor
James Burden, baritone

VI. Closing Prayer

Hymn to the Eternal Flame

Stephen Paulus

from *To Be Certain of the Dawn*

Serena Johnson, soprano
(Saturday)

Rebecca Hoffmann, soprano
(Sunday)

American Sign Language Interpreter (Saturday): Joan Wattman

Artistic Director's Note

Thank you for joining us today for an intimate and immersive concert experience!

If you're anything like me, there's a good chance you immediately rolled your eyes, or at least *thought* about rolling your eyes, after reading that sentence. I get it. However, I implore you to withhold judgement and allow me to share just a bit more about what exactly you've gotten yourself into by joining Berkshire Concert Choir today!

To start, undoubtedly you have noticed you are sitting in the round, and you may be asking yourself, "Wait... where will the singers be?" The answer is: behind you and all around you, enveloping you in song and singing toward the center of the room, using their voices to create an **intimate** sacred place for you to come and rest a little while. In this arrangement you may hear a few individual voices close by while also hearing the whole of the Choir all around you. Perhaps you'll experience this as delightful. Perhaps you'll find it disorienting. However you experience it, today our singers have worked up the courage to invite you up close to witness the threads that weave together the tapestry of our ensemble. Our hope is that our singing will serve as a balm or a bath, healing your heart in some way or washing clean your spirit as you sit among us wrapped in song.

You've probably also noticed that at the center of the circle stands an empty bowl, and that that bowl is only accessible by following a winding, forest green labyrinth. This labyrinth has been lovingly painted by members of the Choir with the help of Nathan and Christine Wiles from InnateCreations. During our performance, you will be invited to **immerse** yourself in our singing by getting up from your seat, walking the labyrinth, and depositing a strip of poetry into the bowl at the center*. We hope engaging in this way might deepen the musical experience for you. There will be more instruction on how to walk the labyrinth at the top of the show, but before you begin, we encourage you to take your strip of poetry and imbue it with whatever meaning comes up for you as you listen to us sing, no matter how pedestrian or profound, using the labyrinth as a bridge from heartache into healing.

Finally, as you peruse your program, you will notice that all of our music is in some way connected to Jewish heritage. In a world replete with hatred, confusion, and violence, it is understandable that this connection may cause your mind to jump to issues of foreign conflicts and domestic politics. However, today's concert is not about politics. It is about borrowing from the beauty of one tradition in order to **experience** something universal together. If right now you find yourself feeling a sudden, strong, or even uncomfortable feeling in your body, I encourage you to notice it, honor it, and release it, trusting that where words and intellect fail, music speaks.

* If walking the labyrinth is not possible or uncomfortable for you, you are welcome to trace the finger labyrinth on the back of the program. If you are visually impaired, please see the Front of House Team to borrow a raised finger labyrinth made by members of the Choir.

Our performance opens with Eric Whitacre's *Five Hebrew Love Songs* with poetry penned by Israeli soprano Hila Plitmann. Counter to its original intent, we present this collection of songs as a means of world building. We invite you to consider them as letters between Creator and Creation rather than two amorous lovers. This sets the stage for our next piece, Alex Burko's *Sacred Place*. Presented in six movements, the formal structure of the work is modeled after a Jewish prayer service, as indicated by the Hebrew titles of each movement. The texts, however, are mostly secular, penned by environmentalist authors such as Wendell Berry and John Muir. Borrowed from his own background, Burko's compositional structure allows us to experience the music as a *moed*, or an "appointed time" in Jewish tradition set aside to remember and reflect on the divine – in this case, connected back to our stewardship of the Earth. Finally, we sing "Hymn to the Eternal Flame," the closing benediction from a larger work by Stephen Paulus entitled *To Be Certain of the Dawn*. Written as a Holocaust memorial, Paulus's music and Michael Dennis Browne's text use the metaphor of the eternal flame, or *ner tamid*, to draw us closer to one another, through the divine, and to witness both our own vulnerability and connectedness to each other.

So, like a labyrinth, I will conclude my letter to you just as it began with the hope that these words hold different meaning for you as you finish reading here and prepare for our performance:

Thank you for joining us today for an *intimate* and *immersive* concert experience!

Musically yours,

Ryan José LaBoy

Artistic Director



Texts & Translations

Five Hebrew Love Songs

Hila Plitmann

I. **Temuná** (*A picture*)

A picture is engraved in my heart;
Moving between light and darkness:
A sort of silence envelopes your body,
And your hair falls upon your face just so.

II. **Kalá kallá** (*Light bride*)

Light bride
She is all mine,
And lightly
She will kiss me!

III. **Lárov** (*Mostly*)

"Mostly," said the roof to the sky,
"the distance between you and I is endlessness;
But a while ago two came up here,
and only one centimeter was left between us."

IV. **Éyze shéleg!** (*What snow!*)

What snow!
Like little dreams
Falling from the sky.

V. **Rakút** (*Tenderness*)

He was full of tenderness;
She was very hard.
And as much as she tried to stay thus,
Simply, and with no good reason,
He took her into himself,
And set her down
in the softest, softest place.

Sacred Place

I. **Opening Prayer**

Wendell Berry from "The Porch Over the River"

In the dusk of the river, the wind
gone, the leaves grow still—
The beautiful poise of lightness,
The heavy world pushing toward it.

II. Amidah

John Muir to Teddy Roosevelt on preserving Yosemite National Park

“How softly these mountain rocks are adorned, and how fine and reassuring the company they keep—their brows in the sky, their feet set in groves and gay emerald meadows, a thousand flowers leaning confidently against their adamant bosses, while birds bees butterflies help the river and waterfalls to stir all the air into music—things frail and fleeting and types of permanence meeting here and blending as if into this glorious mountain temple Nature had gathered her choicest treasures, whether great or small to draw her lovers into close confiding communion with her.”

III. Shema

William Stafford

The earth says have a place, be what that place
requires; hear the sound the birds imply
and see as deep as ridges go behind
each other.

The earth says every summer have a ranch
that's minimum: one tree, one well, a landscape
that proclaims a universe sermon
of the hills, hallelujah mountain,
highway guided by the way the world is tilted,
reduplication of mirage, flat evening:
a kind of ritual for the wavering.

The earth says where you live wear the kind
of color that your life is
and by listening with the same bowed head that sings
draw all things into one song, join
the sparrow on the lawn, and row that easy
way, the rage without met by the wings
within that guide you anywhere the wind blows.

Listening, I think that's what the earth says.

IV. Mi Shebeirach

Traditional Jewish Prayer (Debbie Friedman & Rabbi Drorah Setel)

May the source of strength
Who blessed the ones before us
Help us find the courage
to make our lives a blessing
And let us say Amen

Bless those in need of healing
with *r 'fuah sh'leimah*
The renewal of the body,
the renewal of the spirit
And let us say Amen

V. Kaddish

Rabindranath Tagore, 1861–1941

“Let my thoughts come to you, when I am gone,
like the afterglow of sunset at the margin of starry silence.”

VI. Closing Prayer

Wendell Berry from “The Porch Over the River”

In the dusk of the river, the wind
gone, the leaves grow still—
The beautiful poise of lightness,
The heavy world pushing toward it.

Hymn to the Eternal Flame

Michael Dennis Browne

Every face is in you, every voice, every sorrow in you,
Every pity, every love, every memory, woven into fire.

Every breath is in you, every cry, every longing in you,
Every singing, every hope, every healing, woven into fire.

Every heart is in you, every tongue, every trembling in you,
Every blessing, every soul, every shining, woven into fire.



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 serving as Artistic Director of Berkshire Concert Choir and 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, he 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 LII).

As a professional singer, Ryan has presented recitals throughout Berkshire County with collaborator Manon Hutton-DeWys (piano) and sung with chamber 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. As a researcher, he was recently honored to present at the First Symposium for Music and Health at Northwestern University and will present at the Social Impact of Music Making (SIMM) Conference in Brussels, Belgium later this fall. He holds degrees in Choral Conducting and Music Education from the University of Minnesota and Westminster Choir College.

Ryan is proud to live in Pittsfield with his husband, Joel, who serves as pastor at Zion Lutheran Church.

Aaron Likness | Piano

Aaron Likness appears regularly on stages throughout New York and New England, including performances in recent seasons at Saint James' Place, the Institute of Contemporary Art/Boston, Goethe-Institut Boston, and Bargemusic. A lifelong advocate of the music of Charles Ives, Aaron has recorded and performed his music widely, including the premiere of an early version of the First Piano Sonata; a concert tour of the Netherlands with violinist Diamanda Damm and folk artist Sam Amidon, concluding with a performance at the legendary Concertgebouw; and in 2024, a special 150th birthday tribute concert at Bard College at Simon's Rock. Aaron works with choruses, ensembles and musical institutions throughout the Berkshires, and currently serves as music director at St. Peter's Church, Lithgow, NY.

Jamecyn Morey | Violin

Jamecyn Morey is an active solo, chamber and orchestral violinist residing in Albany, New York. She is a Faculty Fellow at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and has been a member of the first violin section of the Albany Symphony since 2012, serving as Concertmaster and Assistant Concertmaster from 2020-2024. As a soloist, Jamecyn has appeared with orchestra at Lincoln Center as part of their Distinguished Concerts International New York series. She has also performed as a soloist with the Young Musicians and Artists Festival Orchestra in Oregon, the Glens Falls Symphony Orchestra, and the Saint Rose Symphony Orchestra. She frequently performs and records chamber music as a member of the Cantus Trio and Spira Piano Quartet, and has recently released recordings of contemporary works through Naxos Records (Michael Daugherty's "This Land Sings") and ReverbNation (Mary Simoni's "Piano Quartet").

Julian Müller | Cello

Cellist Müller is passionate about engaging communities through chamber music, recitals, interdisciplinary performance, and collaboration with composers. He soloed with the Louisville Orchestra and was hailed as "haunting and mesmerizing" by USA Today. He has collaborated with Sergei Babayan, Simone Dinnerstein, members of the Cleveland Orchestra and Quartet, and performs with Orchestra of St. Luke's, the Berkshire Symphony, Caroga Arts Ensemble, and Williams Chamber Players. He is the Artist Associate in Cello at Williams College.

Support Choral Music in Our Community

Your support makes our work possible!

Every season, Berkshire Concert Choir prioritizes hiring talented local artists, patronizing small businesses in our community, and offering a space for a thriving, intergenerational community of singers to come together. **The investments of our singers, audiences, and community supporters make this possible.**

If you are moved by what you experience today, please consider making a gift of any size to support this work.

Scan the QR code with your
phone's camera or visit
www.berkshireconcertchoir.org



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 a 100-voice community chorus open to singers ages 16 and up, with no audition required. Founded in 1977, the choir performs two major concerts each season, along with informal "community sings" throughout the year. The Choir uses repertoire spanning centuries of choral music to explore both current issues and the depth of human experience.

Berkshire Concert Choir rehearses in Pittsfield on Thursday evenings September to May, providing singers with a high-quality musical experience in a supportive, collaborative environment. Community connections and accessibility are central to the group's mission, offering a welcoming space for singers of all ages and skill levels. Learn more at **www.berkshireconcertchoir.org**.



Berkshire Concert Choir Singers

Sopranos

Marianne Adams
Carol Allman-Morton
Pamela Bachrach
Chelsea Beatty
Joan Burkhard
Deborah Carleton
Rachel Christensen
Cassie Favrot
Kathleen Ferraro
Bre Gladu
Lesley Herzberg
Rebecca Hoffmann
Rosa Ipuz
Anne Jaskot
Serena Johnson
Linda Johnson
Carolyn Kaufmann
Karen Ketcham
Margot Kirsis
Allison Lerman-Gluck
Carol Grace Link
Claire Lupien
Lucy Malatesta
Renee J. Moretti
Suzanne Newman
Stephanie Preston
Jane Salata
Anna Stevenson
Ginella Tanner
Erin Tate
Lyndsey Wasio
Elizabeth Wedge
Marta Ziemecka-Dragonetti

Altos

Cameron Allshouse
Rika Alper
Rachel Alves
Katie ArmStroud
Michele Krieg Bauer
Chris Brandon
Meghan Burden
Jody Burrows
Brenda Crane
Debbie Cranwell
Gina Davis
Hannah DeLisle-Stall
Susan Donoughe
Simone Epstein-Deming
Heidi Frayer
Christiana Greene
Christine Haley
Mara Hershkowitz
MaryAnn House
Michelle Huddy
Wendy Jennis
Christa MacDonald
Barbara E. Martin
Denise Matthews
Suzanne W. Pelton
Sarah Richards
Ellen Rogers
Ilene Semiatin
Eva Sereghy
Kate Staebler
Sierra Stansfield
Denise Talabach
Colleen Trager
Phyllis Vine
Erin Wojcicki
Lisa Wolf
Jeannie Marlin Woods

Tenors

Dan Burkhard
Amy Chin
Scott Eldridge
John Hansen
Alexander Herrmann
Robert James
Eugene Kalish
Jason M. Kittler
Brian Litscher
Diane Miller
James Muller
Stephen Pepper
Richard Riedel
Samuel T. Vaught
Bruce Warren

Basses

Joshua ArmStroud
James Burden
Fred Frayer
Eli Gold
Brett Greenleaf
Sven Leaf
Rob MacDonald
Dominick Pierro
Tom Rogers
Chris Vecchia
Jonathan Weinstein
Gary Williams
Dan Woods

Inspired to Sing Along?

If you love to sing, this is the place for you!

Membership in Berkshire Concert Choir is open to all —
high school age and up — no audition necessary!

Email info@berkshireconcertchoir.org
to receive information about joining the choir.

Thank You to Our Supporters

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The Labyrinth

Adapted from Nathan and Christine Wiles at InnateCreations

The labyrinth is an ancient spiritual tool, a single meditation path leading to a center and returning back again. Symbolizing our spiritual journey, the inward and outward turns are deliberate in design. Unlike a maze, there are no dead ends or decisions to be made. One can simply trust that the path leads to the center and back out again.

Why Walk the Labyrinth

The world surrounds us. Noise and busyness abound. Finding time to be still to hear your internal wisdom is becoming harder and harder. The labyrinth can help us reconnect to the Spirit within and to feel Presence in the midst of this chaotic and noisy world.

Steps to Walking the Labyrinth

1. Remember (Before you walk)

Remember the people and things in your life for which you are grateful. Or, if there is something troubling you, bring it to mind and try to form a healing question if possible.

2. Release (Walking inward)

As you begin your walk, imagine each step as a chance to release tension, stress, or worry you carry with you, quieting your mind and body along your journey to the center.

3. Receive (In the center)

Arrive with an open heart and mind, free of expectations; this is a time to be open, expectant, empty, and to receive.

4. Return (Walking out)

As you begin your exit, reflect on insights that have been given to you at the center. Imagine each step as a step towards renewal as you return to the world.

The following suggestions may help you gain the most of your experience:

- Walk at your own pace
- Walk with an open heart and an open mind
- Walk without expectations; every walk is different
- Observe (but don't judge) what happens to your body, mind, and/or spirit as you walk
- When you meet others on the path, simply allow them to pass by
- If you wish, you may pass around others ahead of you



On October 25th, members of Berkshire Concert Choir, led by Nathan and Christine Wiles of InnateCreations, created the labyrinth for this performance.



Finger Labyrinth

How to “Walk” This Finger Labyrinth

“Walking” the finger labyrinth offers you another way to pray and meditate wherever you are. Here are some simple instructions:

1. Place your finger labyrinth on a table or on your lap with something hard underneath.
2. Use your index finger on your non-dominant hand to trace the path; using your non-dominant hand helps you slow down.
3. Follow the same steps listed on the previous page (Remember, Release, Receive, Return) to “walk” the finger labyrinth.

