

INDIANAPOLIS SYMPHONIC CHOIR

Sacred MASTERWORKS

Program Notes authored by Joshua Allen Thompson

Overall Programmatic Themes:

- Cultural/Historical/Musical definitions of 'sacred'
- Universal Connectivity/Humanity through music and the Creator
- 'Sacred' Music as a timeless reflection and reiteration of the times

Song 1: "Invocation" by Rollo Dilworth

[Houston Choral Society and Prairie View A&M Present "Invocation" by Rollo Dilworth - YouTube](#)

Bio Info (1970-present)

- American choral composer, arranger, conductor and educator from St. Louis, MO
- Earned B.S. in Music Ed from Case Western Reserve
- Served as North Park University choral director from 1996-2009 before taking a professor of music position at Temple University
- Has over 150 published works to his credit
- Composes with clear roots and influences of A-A folk music, classical, spirituals and Gospel while writing in the contemporary style
- Compositional style inspired by the art song tradition and contributors such as Langston Hughes and Paul Lawrence Dunbar
- Known for being an innovative and adventurous composer/arranger within choral lit

Invocation Themes/Liner Notes:

Drawing upon the Gospel tradition with an 'updated' contemporary feel, Invocation is a musical prayer, summons, and appeal to the Creator to bless and anoint the congregation. It is as much an invitation to dwell in a hallowed place as it is an invitation for individuals to fully embrace and walk in the Creator's omnipresence.

Related Articles:

[Cultural Appropriation: From Culture Stealing to Culture Sharing | Chorus America](#)

Song 2: "Gloria" from Coronation Mass by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

: [Gloria - \(Coronation Mass\) Missa Brevis in C Major - KV 317 - Mozart - YouTube](#)

Bio Info: (1756-1791)

- A prolific and influential composer of the classical period
- Born in Salzburg, in the Holy Roman Empire
- Competent on keyboard and violin, he composed from the age of five and performed before European royalty
- Mozart was engaged as a musician at the Salzburg until 1781 and moved to Vienna
- During his final years in Vienna, he composed many of his best-known symphonies, concertos, and operas
- He composed more than 600 works
- Coronation Mass and Gloria:
 - Composed in 1779, is one of the most popular of Mozarts 's 17 extant settings of the Mass.
 - The mass was almost certainly premiered there on Easter Sunday, 4 April 1779, becoming the preferred music for royal and imperial coronations as well as services of thanksgiving.
 - Gloria (Latin for "Glory to God in the highest") is a Christian hymn known also as the Hymn of the Angels
 - The hymn begins with the words that the angels sang when announcing the birth of Christ

Gloria Themes/Throughlines:

Mozart wrote several commissioned Masses for the royal court—a court steeped heavily in the Roman Catholic tradition dating as far back as the 2nd and 3rd centuries B.C. Mozart and the traditional mass are standard repertoire largely because they are sponsored, commissioned, and programmed by monarchies/nation-states affiliated with the Catholic Church.

Song 3: "Prayer Before Sleep" from Talmud Suite by Sid Robinovitch (sung in Hebrew)

: [Talmud Suite VI. Prayer Before Sleep - Elmer Iseler Singers & Elmer Iseler - YouTube](#)

Bio Info (1942-present)

- A native of Manitoba, Canada, Robinovitch is one of Canada's most versatile and popular composers
- Robinovitch received a Ph.D in Communications from the University of Illinois and taught social sciences at York University in Toronto
- Since 1977 he has devoted himself to musical composition, studying at Indiana University and the Royal Conservatory of Toronto
- Many of Robinovitch's works are rooted in traditional or folk material with a distinctly contemporary flair

- Robinovitch has also composed settings of the Hebrew liturgy
- He successfully explores the collaboration between and across cultures, texts, narratives and mediums in radio, tv and film

Prayer Before Sleep from Talmud Suite was composed in 1984 and first premiered in 1986. "The music is solely a response to an ancient and still very much living tradition through the heart and mind of a modern reader."

Song Analysis/Throughlines:

Part cantor, part chant, part homage to a sacred tradition through the cultural lens of a people well documented for thousands of years. Aligning with Robinovitch's belief that composition is a process of self-revelation, there is a musical, historical, and cultural reverberation in this piece that intersects time, culture, and perhaps, sacred and secular representations of universal connectivity with the Divine.

Song 4: "Hope" by Ysaÿe Barnwell

[Hope - YouTube](#) [Hope \(Words & music by Ysaÿe Barnwell\) - YouTube](#)

Bio Info (1946-present)

- Born in Harlem, then raised in Jamaica Queens
- She is an American singer and composer, classically trained violinist and instrumentalist
- Has a Master of Science in Public Health, from Howard University.
- Barnwell was a member of the African American a cappella ensemble Sweet Honey in the Rock from 1979 to 2013.
- Barnwell has been commissioned to create music for dance, choral, film, and stage productions.

Musical Selection Themes/Throughline:

Hope, with Poem by Birago Diop, was composed in 1980 and is an example of using African chants, Spirituals, Gospel Music, and African history past and present to illustrate the power of communal singing. Musically, this is a simple song, made interesting by the intricate harmonies Ysaÿe knows or makes up on the spot throughout, but they carry great fullness. They are songs of a people, of their courage, hope, heartbreak, and their amazing fortitude and joy amid the brutality of their lives.

"Voice 1: If we want hope to survive in this world today,

Then every day we've got to pray on, pray on (teach on, work on, march on, sing on)

If we want hope to survive in this world today,

Then every day we've got to pray on (teach on, work on, march on, sing on)

Voice 2: If we want hope to survive

We've got to pray on, pray on, pray on (teach on, work on, march on, sing on)

If we want hope to survive

We've got to pray on, pray on, pray on (teach on, work on, march on, sing on)

Voice 3: Pray on (teach on, work on, march on, sing on)

Pray on (teach on, work on, march on, sing on)

Pray on (teach on, work on, march on, sing on)

Pray on (teach on, work on, march on, sing on"

Song 5: "Choose Something Like a Star," arr. Randall Thompson

[Choose Something Like a Star - Randall Thompson - YouTube](#)

Bio Info (1899-1984)

- An American composer, particularly noted for his choral works.
- He then attended Harvard University, became assistant professor of music and choir director at Wellesley College, and received a doctorate in music from the University of Rochester's Eastman School of Music.
- Thompson composed three symphonies and numerous vocal works including *Americana*, *The Testament of Freedom*, *Frostiana*, and *The Peaceable Kingdom*.
- Leonard Bernstein was one of Thompson's students both at Harvard and at Curtis.
- Thompson's style is conservative and Neoclassical, combining traditional forms with 20th-century styles.

Frostiana: Seven Country Songs inspired by Robert Frost:

- A piece for mixed chorus and piano composed in 1959 with its premier in Amherst, MA
- Thompson later scored the piece for chamber orchestra and chorus; this version was first performed on April 23, 1965.
- Thompson was commissioned by the town of Amherst to write a piece commemorating its bicentennial in 1959. The town was known for its association with Robert Frost. the composer selected seven poems, with which he constructed a seven-movement suite of choral art songs:
 - ["The Road Not Taken"](#)
 - "The Pasture"
 - "Come In"
 - "The Telephone"
 - "A Girl's Garden"

- ["Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening"](#)
- "Choose Something Like a Star"

Analysis:

The narrator speaks to a star in the sky and urges it to give him something to believe in. Although he acknowledges that stars are naturally quiet, the narrator still begs the star to say something to him. The star simply replies, "I burn." The narrator is not satisfied with the star's response and urges it to be even more specific. He explains that a few words from the star would be enough to help humanity strive for greater heights and, at the very least, be comforted.

Song Narrative/Throughline:

This selection illuminates the desire we all have for direct communion, conversation, and engagement with the cosmic forces greater than our own being. Being made of stardust ourselves, it stands to reason why we crave, seek out, and create conversation and guidance from the stars.

"O Star (the fairest one in sight),
 We grant your loftiness the right
 To some obscurity of cloud
 It will not do to say of night,
 Since dark is what brings out your light.
 Some mystery becomes the proud.
 But to be wholly taciturn
 In your reserve is not allowed.
 Say something to us we can learn
 By heart and when alone repeat.
 Say something! And it says "I burn."
 But say with what degree of heat.

Talk Fahrenheit, talk Centigrade.
 Use language we can comprehend.
 Tell us what elements you blend.
 It gives us strangely little aid,
 But does tell something in the end.
 And steadfast as Keats' Eremite,
 Not even stooping from its sphere,
 It asks a little of us here.
 It asks of us a certain height,
 So when at times the mob is swayed
 To carry praise or blame too far,
 We may choose something like a star
 To stay our minds on and be staid."

See Also: [Robert Frost: Poems "Choose Something Like a Star" \(1943\) Summary and Analysis | GradeSaver](#)

Song 6: "Bogoroditse Devo" from Music for the All-Night Vigil by Sergei Rachmaninoff

[Bogoroditse Devo - Rachmaninoff - YouTube](#)

Bio Info (1873-1943)

- Russian composer, pianist, and conductor of the late Romantic period.
- The influence of Tchaikovsky, Korsakov and Mussorgsky is seen in his early works.
- Later develops a personal style notable for song-like melodicism, expressiveness and rich orchestral colors.
- Rachmaninoff was born into a family of the Russian aristocracy in the Russian empire and left Russia following the Russian Revolution.
- They settled in NYC in 1918 with his main source of income coming from piano, conducting performances, and demanding tour schedules.
- In 1931, Rachmaninoff signed an article in The New York Times that criticized the cultural policies of the Soviet Union. The composer's music suffered a boycott in Russia as a result from the backlash in the Soviet press, lasting until 1933.

All-Night Vigil (1915):

"Rejoice, O Virgin Mother of God,
Mary full of grace, the Lord is with Thee.
Blessed art Thou among women,
and blessed is the Fruit of Thy womb,
for Thou hast borne the Savior of our souls."

- Disappointed by a performance of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, this large work is his attempt to 'do it better.'
- It was received so warmly at its Moscow premiere in aid of war relief that four subsequent performances were scheduled.
- It has been praised as Rachmaninoff's finest achievement and "the greatest musical achievement of the Russian Orthodox Church."
- It was one of Rachmaninoff's two favorite compositions.
- The *All-Night Vigil* is perhaps notable as one of two liturgical settings by a composer who had stopped attending church services.
- As required by the Russian Orthodox Church, Rachmaninoff based ten of the fifteen sections on chant
- Rachmaninoff's work is a culmination of the preceding two decades of interest in Russian sacred music.
- Mvt 6 ("Rejoice, O Virgin") is considered the most widely known hymn from the cycle.
- Captures both the gentle simplicity of angelic greeting and awe-struck glorification of her response to God.

Analysis/Throughlines:

Rachmaninoff, through his extensive study of traditional Russian liturgy, creates this work revering the structure, completeness reverence for the musical study of the traditional Russian Mass. Although he was reportedly removed from the religious influence of the text, he was no more immune to the restrictive and changing socio-political forces because of the Revolution of 1917 resulting in the condemnation of religious music.

Songs 7 & 8: "Libera Me" & "In Paradisum" from Requiem by Gabriel Fauré

[Requiem Fauré. Libera Me - YouTube](#) | [Gabriel Fauré - Requiem : 'In Paradisum' - YouTube](#)

Bio Info (1845-1924)

- French composer, organist, pianist, and teacher.
- He was one of the foremost French composers of his generation and his musical style influenced many 20th-century composers.
- He later went on to become the director of the [Paris Conservatoire](#).
- Fauré's music has been described as linking the end of Romanticism with the modernism of the second quarter of the 20th century.
- The faculty of the Paris Conservatoire regarded Fauré as dangerously modern.
- "What Fauré developed among his pupils was taste, harmonic sensibility, the love of pure lines, of unexpected and colorful modulations; but he never gave them [recipes] for composing according to his style and that is why they all sought and found their own paths in many different, and often opposed, directions."
- Fauré is regarded as one of the masters of the French art song, or *melodie*.

Analysis/Throughlines of Faure's Requiem and In Paradisum:

The Requiem, Op. 48, (composed between 1887-1890), is the best-known of his large works. Its focus is on eternal rest and consolation. It was not composed to the memory of a specific person but, in Fauré's words, "for the pleasure of it." It has been described as "a lullaby of death" because of its predominantly gentle tone.

The final movement *In Paradisum* is based on a text that is not part of the liturgy of the funeral mass but of the burial. In place of the sombre nature of many requiems that had gone before, Fauré's is noted for its calm, serene and peaceful outlook. Anyone looking for morose themes is searching in the wrong place. Instead, here we find musical solace in a work that focuses not on the morbid, but on the supposedly restful and fear-free nature of death. Faure uses the traditional Requiem as a baseline to evolve the style commonly found in the Catholic Church but reframes it to center the music and not the religiosity. It provides a more comforting and secularly sacred version of how we view and speak to death as a part of life.

Song 9: "Ave Maria" by R. Nathaniel Dett

[Ave Maria - YouTube](#)

Bio Info (1882-1943)

- Born in Niagara Falls, Ontario, Canada.
- Black composer, organist, pianist, choral director, and music professor.
- He moved to the United States with his family at age 9 and in 1907 became the first black American to earn a Bachelor of Music degree at Oberlin.
- Dett was a leading Black composer known for his use of African American folk songs and spirituals as the basis for choral and piano compositions in the 19th century Romantic style of classical music.
- He was heavily influenced and encouraged by Samuel Coleridge Taylor, whose own collaborations and associations with Dvorak and Harry Burleigh.

Analysis/Lyrics/Throughlines of Dett's 1930 Ave Maria:

[Ave Maria \(Dett, Robert Nathaniel\) - IMSLP: Free Sheet Music PDF Download](#) (complete with English 'translation' lyrics by [Frederick Herman Martens](#) (1874-1932))

Dett takes a traditional liturgy and adapts/updates/adds nuance and style indicative of the Romantic era in which he was writing. His chord structure and voicings provide more lush and emotionally evocative and perhaps, memorable arrangement making it a distinct departure from the version most are accustomed to. Reading through the English translation of lyrics, Dett perfectly sets to music (through the vulnerable, fluid timbre of the human voice) a prayer/request/sense of mindfulness from the beginning of life's journey to the 'end' in death. Even in death, Dett channels our desire to be invited to live forevermore in the embrace of a Love that created and maintains the universe.

Song 10: "Let Me Tell You How to Meet the Day" from Images, Shadows, and Dreams: Five Vignettes by David Baker

[5 Vignettes, "Images, Shadows and Dreams": No. 5. Let Me Tell You How to Meet the Day - YouTube](#)

Bio Info (1931-2016)

- An American jazz composer, conductor, and musician from Indianapolis, as well as a professor of jazz studies at the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music.
- From 1991 to 2012, he was conductor and musical and artistic director for the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra.
- He has more than 65 recordings, 70 books, and 400 articles to his credit.
- The Indiana Historical Society named Baker an Indiana Living Legend in 2001
- The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts named him a Living Jazz Legend in 2007.
- Trained as a music educator and trombonist.

Mari Evans, poet (1919-2017)

- An African-American poet, writer, dramatist, and a central figure in the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s and 70s along with Amiri Baraka, Gwendolyn Brooks, Nikki Giovanni, and fellow Hoosier writer, Etheridge Knight.
- Her writing style is known and celebrated for its lyrical simplicity and straightforward thematic ideas.
- Originally went to college for fashion design but never completed her degree. She then moved to the east coast to pursue a career as a musician, working with Wes Montgomery and David Baker.
- She received a lifetime achievement award from the Indianapolis Public Library Foundation.

Analysis/Throughlines:

With the assistance of his frequent collaborator, friend and famed poet Mari Evans, Baker elevates the art song while demonstrating his compositional mastery within and between genres. This textured piece uses traditional choral voices in an improvisational and jazz ensemble manner much like the lush and dexterous instrumental accompaniment to the text itself. Baker uses classical, jazz and early hip-hop echoes to create the morning, noon, and night chronology of the day while quite literally, telling the audience how to embrace growth, awkwardness, and purpose.

Song 11: "Wie lieblich sind deine Wohnungen" from Ein deutsches Requiem by Johannes Brahms

[Brahms - Ein deutsches Requiem - 4. Wie lieblich sind deine Wohnungen - YouTube](#)

Bio Info (1833-1897)

- A German composer, pianist, and conductor of the Romantic period.
- Grouped with J.S. Bach and Beethoven as one of the "Three B's" of music.
- Brahms composed for symphony orchestra, chamber ensembles, piano, organ, voice, and chorus.
- His music is rooted in the structures and compositional techniques of the classical masters.
- Considered overly academic, still admired for his craftsmanship.
- His large choral work A German Requiem is not actual liturgy but a set of texts from the Luther Bible.
- The work was composed in three major periods of his life (suicide attempt in 1854, death of his mother 1865 and after official premier in 1869).
- The work shows symmetry around the fourth movement, which describes the "lovely dwellings" of the Lord.
- Brahms thought of this work as a humanist composition rather than a Christian work.

“How lovely are thy dwellings, Mr. Zebaoth!
My soul asks and looks
After the courts of the Lord;
My body and soul rejoice
In the living God;
How lovely are your dwellings, Lord Zebaoth!
Good for those who live in your house;
They praise you forever.
How sweet are thy dwellings!”

Analysis/Throughlines:

Concise, complete, and comprehensive in structure, Brahms exemplifies the classic tradition while breaking free of it in libretto and intent. Brahms' creation of a humanist Creator is in large part a processing and reflection of his own personal issues with suicide and the broader conceptualization of God. Brahms' Requiem repositions Catholic liturgy and repositions it in a manner that broadens the artform and the audience.