



ROWAN UNIVERSITY CONCERT CHOIR

CHRISTOPHER B. THOMAS
CONDUCTOR

JAMES SPARKS
COLLABORATIVE PIANIST

American Choral Directors Association | Eastern Region Conference

Hochstein School of Music | Rochester, NY

Thursday, March 5, 2020

ROWAN CONCERT



UNIVERSITY CHOIR



PROGRAM

"Kyrie" from *Mass in E-Flat Major*, op. 109

Josef Rheinberger (1839-1901)

Public Domain

Sehnsucht, op. 112, no. 1

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Franz Theodor Kugler, *poet* (1808-1858)

Public Domain

Open Minds

Rob Redei

Forgiven

Deborah Kennedy, *poet*

Now You Know

Unpublished Manuscript | robredei.com

There is that in me

Ivo Antognini

Walt Whitman, *poet* (1819-1892)

Sarah Robbins, soloist

2020 Raymond W. Brock Memorial Commission

Gropen

Traditional Norwegian

arr. Gjermund Larsen

Walton Music WW1619

Juan Yanez, violin

Stomp on the Fire

Andrea Ramsey

MusicSpoke

PROGRAM NOTES

It is an incredible honor to share this time and space with you today. Having attended my first ACDA Conference over twenty years ago, I vividly remember the larger choral world being revealed before my very eyes and ears. In that moment, I knew I had found my purpose. As we all know, the journey is revealing. What used to be a pursuit of the perfect sound has now expanded to become more of a quest to enable a perfectly imperfect community of unified hearts to sing in a safe space, humbly creating something we do not yet grasp. If anything, I hope you can hear or see in these students their zeal for good; something you likely see in your own students each and every encounter.

We begin with Josef Rheinberger's "*Kyrie*" from his *Mass in E-Flat Major*. No stranger (or friend) to the Cecelian movement of his time, he rejected the strict limitations it sought to impose, but seemed to master the essence of its purpose. His counterpoint is beautiful and text declamation clear as he paints with colors and harmonic richness you would expect from the musical palette of his contemporaries. Influences of Palestrina and the Venetian tendency for double choir combine with his own musical vocabulary.

There is incredible power in communal humility, something the *Kyrie* achieves with precision. The impassioned plea for mercy is amplified through the ascending motives passed to and from the various voices of the choir, the gradual elongation of phrases, and only one instance of an entirely synchronized downbeat—the final measure. Stretching its liturgical purpose, perhaps you can hear the cry for mercy aimed to the very core of a world filled with harsh injustice, pain, and uncertainty.

Brahms' setting of Franz Kugler's poem is hauntingly beautiful with his signature chromaticism, rhythmic unease through generous use of hemiola, and brilliant command of emotional contour. The poem, quite possibly a response to the final years of one's life, is challenging (for me) to read. The line that translates "You look out into the morning light and are alone" is true for so many. As our world changes and has become more "connected," we know that one no longer needs to be nearing the end of his or her life to feel alone.

Yearning

The waters run day and night;
your yearning awakes.

You think of times past,
now so far away.

You gaze out into the morning light
and are alone.

The waters run day and night;
your yearning awakes.

Translation: Ron Jeffers, 2000

Open Minds with text by Deborah Kennedy set by Rob Redei was a powerful, lasting, challenging, and exhausting project to both commission and premier. Powerful because of its message, lasting because of its continued timeliness, challenging because of the subject, and exhausting because of its emotional demands. Taken from the published program notes, *Open Minds* "gives voice to people with mental health challenges and the people who love and care about them." The epidemic of unanswered mental health needs is startling and no stranger to any of us. While learning this work, some students excused themselves from rehearsals. Some told me privately they thought others were overreacting. In many ways, we were a microcosm of reality living through a time when we are more aware, more concerned, more connected, and ironically, more isolated from one another. The poet, Deborah Kennedy, is open about her own struggles with bipolar disorder. Her own lived experience is what is vivid, disturbing, and visceral in *Forgiven*. *Now you know* is a musical depiction of a panic attack. It can be a challenge to sing this repertoire, but not as difficult to sing as to confront the lived experience of unanswered mental health challenges day in and day out.

Forgiven

I am the beast
who tore this home
roamed the halls
stalked your children

I shed promise
shattered trust
and played with the pieces
I lied and smiled

I cannot be forgiven

I see you ablaze
raging against hope
a fire-storm, elated
with destruction

this is you
and not you
hear me, hear me
I can see you well

I don't want you
today, but stay
this is our crucible
we are forged

I will forgive you
not today, but stay
I will forgive you

Forgiven, continued

I cannot be forgiven
I will forgive you
we are forged
in forgiving

this is my love
stay



Now You Know

in a panic nothing's
static to stand on hands
or toe a ledge.
toss the thought of legs
and torso or even more so
a sturdy chair from which to fall
and land on knees
which know to beg.

say your prayers in bold
hysterics, laughing past
the point of dread.
shred the truth you gave
or told to, even sold to
lovers dark and manic maimed
with well-worn words
you fear but save.

fall with purpose
be an art form, tragic shades
of standard themes.
break your fall on me
who hides here, even thrives here

now you know, it breaks apart
the settled lie
that we do seem



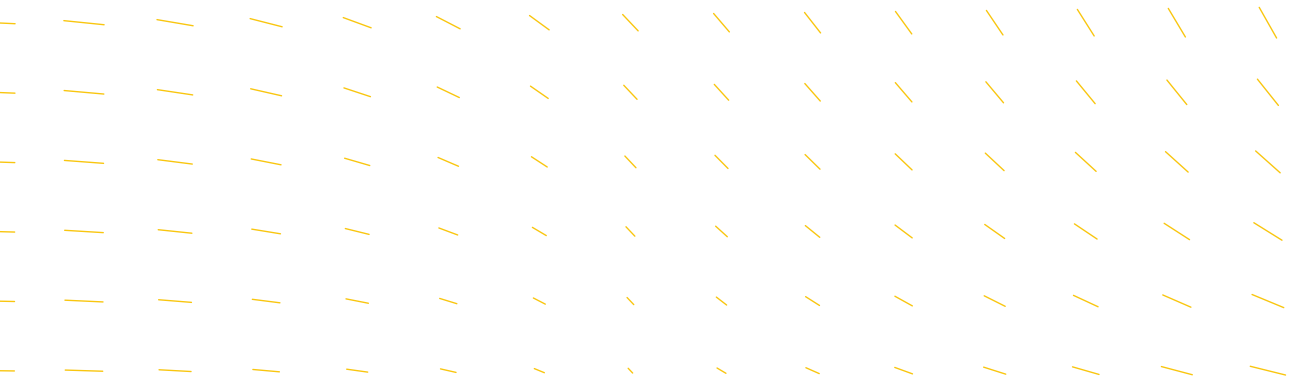
Ivo Antognini writes his own notes for *There is that in me*, a setting of a Walt Whitman poem excerpted from *Song of Myself*. He shares, "As a young boy, during summer vacations I enjoyed going to the forest by myself. I would walk very quickly until I arrived at the top of a hill that I had never seen before. On one of these occasions, upon my arrival I stretched out to take a rest, looking at the sky for a few minutes. In that moment, I had a strange feeling of happiness; not the typical kind of happiness that one might feel when playing with friends, or upon receiving good news; rather the awareness and marvel of being part of something grand and stupendous, but at the same time indescribable; our Mother Earth. It was a truly beautiful experience, a sort of meditation in front of all creation, and I will never forget that day...I like to think that the poet has tried with these verses to describe emotions that I myself also felt as a young boy."

Gropen is just the fun dance, celebration, and joy we need at this point in the program. This traditional Norwegian folk song is arranged by Gjermund Larsen. The text is nonsense, and the spirit of the music is contagious.

We close with Andrea Ramsey's *Stomp on the Fire*. Commissioned by San Jose University and Diablo Valley Chamber Singers, the piece relies upon nonsense syllables to relay its message. Percussive sounds—created with both the body and voice—are expressions of the "collective human journey." With its three sections, the work begins mournfully but then transitions from the "cry for humanity," to an active "struggle against human injustice." By the end, Ramsey writes, "[there becomes a representation of] the beautiful diversity of humanity and the strength present when that diversity comes together in unity."

Thank you for sharing your time with us today. This process has changed all of us, and for that, we will be forever grateful.

Thomas, 2020





ROWAN UNIVERSITY CONCERT CHOIR

Sopranos

Katherine Byrnes
Celine Capriotti
Madison Coleman
Crystal Cosme
Hope Friddell
Sarah Gilfoil
Maddie Herquet
Laura Nolan
*Sarah Robbins
*Isabelle Schelbaum
Kayleigh Scott
Grace Van Cleef
Sarah Vollenbroek

Tenors

Felipe Alonso-Thomas
Noah Avis
Zachary Birnbaum
*Patrick Carpenter
*Blaze Dalio
Michael Gibbins
Sean Glennon
Michael Krasting
Austin Kurbandsade
Ryan McAteer
Jesse Panico
Christopher Scire



Altos

*Kathryn Bove
Elena Castillo
Sabrina Chepigan
Amanda Chiaro
Natalie DeKok
Rayna Fox
*Caela Johnson
*Ciera Scire
Cassandra Shields
Sandra Smith
Carleigh Toogood
Paige Ward

Basses

*Joseph Barton
Alexander Brown
Emmanuel Fotinis
Benjamin Frost
Ian Hachey
Timothy Hurtt
Samuel Minker
Matthew Pawling
Matthew Reingold
Eric Richwine
*Lucas Sheary
*Andrew Van Dongen
Aidan Williams
Robert Wilson

*section leaders

On page 12: Concert Choir
Section Leaders (not
pictured, Caela Johnson and
Andrew Van Dongen)



ROWAN UNIVERSITY CONCERT CHOIR

The Rowan University Concert Choir is Rowan University's flagship choral ensemble dedicated to performing the pillars of historical repertoire in addition to presenting programs that seek to broaden awareness of music's ability to evoke response to an issue, concept, culture, or event.

The 19|20 season includes an invited performance for the Eastern Division ACDA conference in Rochester, NY, and multiple performances of *The Here and Now* (Christopher Theofanidis), a multi-movement setting of Rumi texts, recently orchestrated for choir and wind ensemble. The choir also served as the chorus for the Rowan Opera Company's production of *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, and will collaborate with the University Orchestra in a presentation of Ralph



Vaughan Williams' *Dona Nobis Pacem* and Jake Runestad's *Dreams of the Fallen*, a setting of texts by Iraq War veteran and award-winning poet Brian Turner. In summer 2020, several members of the choir will perform throughout Barcelona, Madrid, and Valencia on a concert tour to Spain.

Past performances of the Concert Choir have included Requiem masses of Verdi, Mozart, Howells, and Duruflé, masses of Mozart, Haydn, and Rheinberger, and significant works by Britten, Finzi, Orff, and Ramírez. In addition to historical repertoire, the choir has also performed contemporary works including *To the Hands* by Caroline Shaw, *Circulo de tiempo* by David Martyniuk, *Song of the Schulamite* by Donald McCullough, and the world premiere of *Open Minds* by Rob Redei. Past conductors of the choir have included Clarence Miller, Eugene Simpson, Robert Page, Lourin Plant, and Z. Randall Stroope.



Christopher B. Thomas

Christopher B. Thomas is Associate Professor and Director of Choral Activities at Rowan University in Glassboro, NJ, Artistic Director of the 136-voice Greater South Jersey Chorus in Haddonfield, NJ, and past-president of the New Jersey chapter of the American Choral Directors Association (NJACDA).

At Rowan University, Dr. Thomas oversees four curricular choirs comprising over two-hundred singers. He conducts the Rowan University Concert Choir, the flagship choral ensemble of the

department of music; *Voces*, a chamber ensemble which performs early, contemporary, and improvisatory projects; and University Chorus, which is open to both music majors and non-music majors. Additionally, Dr. Thomas teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in choral conducting and choral literature. Under his direction, choirs at Rowan University have performed at regional and state conferences of ACDA and NJMEA and internationally on tours throughout Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, and Poland. Dr. Thomas also hosts an annual Tenor|Bass Festival which has grown to include over 1400 high school and middle school participants from over one-hundred school districts throughout a four-state region.

Dr. Thomas has twice been invited to serve as assistant conductor and instructor for the Varna International Music Academy, culminating in performances of *The Creation* by Joseph Haydn and Mozart's *Requiem* in opera houses throughout Bulgaria. He will make his conducting debut at Carnegie Hall in March of 2021. Other guest conducting engagements—including all-state and regional honor choirs—have taken him to Connecticut, Delaware, Illinois, Kentucky, Maryland, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Texas, Vermont, and Washington, D.C. His work as a guest conductor is consistently recognized as energetic, inspiring, enthusiastic, and inclusive of all levels of experience and ability.



In addition to his academic positions, Dr. Thomas is in his fifth season as the Artistic Director of the Greater South Jersey Chorus which frequently collaborates with regional orchestras. Recent performances have included Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, Puccini's *Messa di Gloria*, James Whitbourn's *Annelies*, Handel's *Messiah*, Haydn's *Creation*, Mozart's *Solemn Vespers*, Respighi's *Laud to the Nativity*, Vivaldi's *Gloria*, and Conrad Susa's *Carols and Lullabies*.

Dr. Thomas studied music education at Millikin University with Dr. Brad Holmes and earned the MM and DMA in Choral Conducting at the University of Arizona under the direction of Dr. Bruce Chamberlain. Chris and his wife Jessica live in Glassboro, NJ with their children Greyson and Elandra.



James Sparks

A native of Ashland, Kentucky, James Sparks relocated to Princeton, New Jersey to pursue a Master of Music Degree in Piano Accompanying and Vocal Coaching at Westminster Choir College, studying with Dr. JJ Penna. James is a graduate of Morehead State University, earning a Bachelor of Music in Collaborative Piano Performance. While at Morehead, James studied piano with Dr. Eunbyol Ko and voice with Dr. Roma Prindle.

While at Westminster, James developed a close working relationship with famed collaborative pianist Dalton Baldwin. James received a full scholarship to attend Mr. Baldwin's classes at l'Académie Internationale d'Été de Nice in France, and continued to work with Mr. Baldwin privately until his death.

Sought out among singers and teachers for his colorful, sensitive playing, James coaches many undergraduate and graduate students at Westminster Choir College and Rowan University. The passion James has for singers and this collaborative art form is evident in his devout dedication to the vocal arts.

Conducting and Vocal Music Education Faculty

Pamela Barnes, *conductor & music education*

Christine Bass, *conducting*

Lorraine Lynch, *music education*

Voice Faculty

Marian Stieber, *soprano, Director of the
Rowan Opera Company, & Coordinator
of the Vocal Division*

Lauren Athey-Janka, *soprano*

Barbara Dever, *mezzo-soprano*

Jon Garrison, *tenor*

Karen Huffstodt, *soprano*

Colin Levin, *baritone*

Brian Major, *baritone*

Lourin Plant, *baritone*



Marian Stieber, Coordinator of the Vocal Division



Lourin Plant

ROWAN MUSIC IN THE COMMUNITY

Tenor|Bass Festival

Now in its twelfth year, the Tenor|Bass Festival has grown to attract over 1400 young people from over one-hundred school districts from four states to join in song, break down barriers, celebrate their voices, and leave empowered.

Choral-Vocal Camp

The Choral-Vocal Camp welcomes rising eighth graders through high school seniors to Rowan's campus for a week full of music-making, skill-development, workshops, presentations, and masterclasses replicating the college music-major experience in a supportive, fun, and uplifting environment.





ADDITIONAL OUTREACH OPPORTUNITIES

Conducting Workshop
Summer Music Camps (Band, Choral-Vocal, Jazz,
Composition, Music Industry, & Strings)
High School Shadow Days
Audition Workshops
WindFest Honor Band
Rowan Jazz Festival
Clarinet Day
Double Bass Hang
Violin and Viola Day



The College of Performing Arts at Rowan University provides students with rigorous professional preparation through close mentorship by a world-class faculty of artist scholars.

CPA serves as a cultural center for the campus community, the South Jersey region, and beyond, by providing a diverse range of classical, contemporary, and popular music, dance, and theatre programming year-round.

The Department of Music serves over four hundred music majors in a wide range of programs: music education, music therapy, performance, composition, jazz studies, and music industry. Ensembles include orchestras, choirs, wind ensembles, and a jazz band, as well as an opera company, contemporary music ensemble, percussion ensemble, and many chamber music opportunities. Each academic year, the Department of Music features a series of performances and events that explore a new theme. Recent “Music of Social Justice” and “Untold Stories” seasons have challenged students and audiences to communicate cross-culturally, to experience a stronger sense of empathy, a deeper understanding, and a greater respect for others.



College of Performing Arts Administration

Richard Dammers, Dean

Melanie Stewart, Associate Dean

Debbie Shapiro, Director of Community Engagement and Presenting

Robert Rawlins, Department of Music Chair



RowanUniversity

COLLEGE OF PERFORMING ARTS