

SKYLARK

SEVEN

words from the cross

Prologue

- | | | |
|---|---|------|
| 1 | Were you there? – <i>Traditional African-American spiritual</i>
<i>Soloist: Carrie Cheron</i> | 3:58 |
| 2 | When Jesus Wept – <i>William Billings (1746-1800)</i> | 2:01 |

Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do

- | | | |
|---|--|------|
| 3 | New Britain ('Amazing Grace') – <i>Traditional hymn</i>
<i>Soloists: Sarah Moyer, Margot Rood, Carrie Cheron</i> | 1:51 |
| 4 | Wondrous Love – <i>Traditional hymn, arranged by Robert Shaw and Alice Parker</i> | 3:54 |

Today you will be with me in Paradise

- | | | |
|---|--|------|
| 5 | Jordan ('There is a land of pure delight') – <i>William Billings (1746-1800)</i> | 1:49 |
| 6 | Ich wollt, daß ich daheime wär – <i>Hugo Distler (1908-1942)</i>
<i>Soloist: Sarah Moyer</i> | 3:45 |

Behold your son: behold your mother

- | | | |
|---|--|------|
| 7 | Karitas Abundat – <i>Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179)</i>
<i>Soloist: Clare McNamara</i> | 1:54 |
| 8 | Break it Gently to my Mother – <i>Frederick Buckley (1833-1864)</i>
<i>Soloist: Cory Klose</i> | 3:12 |
| 9 | David's Lamentation – <i>William Billings (1746-1800)</i> | 1:04 |

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

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| 10 | Vinea mea electa – <i>Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)</i> | 3:30 |
| 11 | Plymton ('In deep distress I oft have cried') – <i>William Billings (1746-1800)</i>
<i>Soloist: Douglas Dodson</i> | 2:22 |

I thirst

- | | | |
|----|---|------|
| 12 | Pann heilaga kross – <i>Anna Thorvaldsdottir (b. 1977)</i> | 6:08 |
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It is finished

- | | | |
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| 13 | Death may dissolve (fantasia on a hymn by William Billings) – <i>Jaakko Mäntyjärvi (b. 1963)</i>
<i>Soloists: Alexander Nishibun, Fiona Gillespie Jackson</i> | 4:01 |
|----|---|------|

Into your hands I commend my spirit

- | | | |
|----|--|------|
| 14 | Deep River – <i>Traditional African-American spiritual, arranged by Gerre Hancock</i> | 2:50 |
| 15 | In manus tuas – <i>John Sheppard (1515-1558)</i> | 4:12 |

Epilogue

- | | | |
|----|---|------|
| 16 | Just as I am – <i>Traditional hymn, tune by William Bradbury</i>
<i>Soloist: Dana Whiteside</i> | 2:21 |
|----|---|------|

total time: 48:52

Skylark Vocal Ensemble

Matthew Guard, Artistic Director

SOPRANO

Fiona Gillespie Jackson
Sarah Moyer
Janet Stone
Margot Rood

ALTO

Carrie Cheron
Douglas Dodson
Carolyn Guard
Clare McNamara

TENOR

Jonas Budris
George Case
John Cox
Cory Klose
Alexander Nishibun

BASS

Glenn Billingsley
Samuel Kreidenweis
Christopher Jackson
Peter Walker
Dana Whiteside

About Skylark

Skylark is a premier vocal ensemble of leading American vocal soloists, chamber musicians, and music educators. Skylark's music has been described as "sublimely beautiful" (Opera Obsession), "engrossing...reaches in through the ribs and grips the vitals" (Q2/WQXR NY), and enough to "leave a hardened critic near tears" (Boston Music Intelligencer). With "some of Boston's best singers" (Boston Globe), the voices of Skylark "can sway you softly into calm and then

all but throw you across the room with sheer harmonic force" (Thought Catalog). Skylark strives to set the standard for innovative, engaging, well-researched, and dramatically presented programs that re-define the choral experience for audiences and singers alike. A not-for-profit entity, Skylark performs educational outreach programs with high school and college students across the United States during its concert tours.

skylarkensemble.org

About Our Artistic Director

Skylark Artistic Director Matthew Guard is quickly earning a reputation as one of the most innovative and thoughtful programmers in American choral music. Praised for his "catalyzing leadership" (Q2/WQXR) and "musically creative and intellectually rich" programming (Opera Obsession), Matthew is passionate about communicating something unique in each concert and recording. He scours the world of available repertoire for each program, exhaustively researches each piece, and crafts concerts and printed programs that captivate audiences with their hidden connections and seamless artistry. In addition to his day-to-day leadership of Skylark and role as a conductor in concerts, Matthew is also an active arranger and editor of scores, as he rarely finds programming ideas that will truly sing without at least one piece specifically arranged or composed for the program.

Program Introduction

This is a highly personal album for me and for the singers of Skylark, and I think fully appreciating this musical narrative is difficult without understanding the context for which it was created.

The genesis of this project came from a special invitation. I have long admired the stunning musicality of the UK-based choir Tenebrae, conducted by former King's Singer Nigel Short. Nigel's commitment to performances of choral works with a high degree of both passion and precision has had a strong influence on our approach to making music with Skylark. Through several fortunate twists of fate, Skylark and Tenebrae have had wonderful interactions over recent years. To name a few: I have had the privilege of observing their rehearsals in London on several occasions; we had the joy of borrowing a singer for a key performance in the US; and a fortunately-timed tour allowed for a joint party between our artists.

When Tenebrae launched their Holy Week Festival at St. John's Smith Square in London in 2017, we were incredibly honored to be invited to take part in the inaugural event. Unfortunately, we were unable to organize our schedules and our funding quickly enough to travel to the UK

that year. However, we resolved to make it a top priority to join them for the 2018 festival. Sensing a special opportunity to present Skylark's programming on an international stage, I phoned Collin Rae at Sono Luminus. It seemed that we should try to design a unique program, and that we should once again partner with our friends at Sono Luminus to capture it.

Thematic programming is my passion. I truly believe in the power of the unaccompanied human voice to communicate at a visceral level. Yet, I do think it is a peculiar challenge to weave together a program that can keep someone riveted (or, let's be honest, even actively listening!) for 60-odd minutes. While there are some true masterworks of the *a cappella* repertoire that Skylark has joyfully tackled (like the *All-Night Vigil* of Rachmaninoff and Poulenc's *Figure Humaine*), the substantial body of unaccompanied choral literature consists of small gems —s pieces that last between two and six minutes. It can be hard to find a home for these pieces. What is the right context that can bring a piece to life? How can we provide the emotional impetus to allow a piece to be truly understood? How can we get our singers and our audience to engage fully in a piece in a language that they do not understand?

The context for this particular program is quite specific — the vision for Tenebrae's Holy Week Festival is a week-long series of concerts and semi-liturgical events that offer music appropriate for the final week of Lent leading up to Easter. The setting, St. John's Smith Square, is both a concert hall and a church, affording a unique opportunity to create a program that is appropriate for both settings, without the specific expectations of one or the other. When it became clear that we might be able to perform on the evening of Good Friday, I set about to design a program around the scriptural seven last words of Christ from the cross. A diverse set of scriptures expressing a range of quite human (not necessarily God-ly) emotions, I felt that a musical progression based on these ideas could speak to audiences of all faiths.

When we learned that we were likely to be the only international group performing at a festival featuring some of the UK's top choirs, I felt strongly that we should present a program with a uniquely American character. Being a Boston-based ensemble representing America in the UK, prominently featuring the work of Bostonian William Billings seemed to be highly appropriate. Billings is broadly considered the first unique compositional

voice in American choral music. His music, which some might characterize as simple and somewhat angular (especially relative to the music being composed in Europe at the time), has an honest rawness about it that I find quite compelling. We intersperse four of his settings throughout the album, providing somewhat of a stylistic thread, culminating in the debut recording of Finnish composer Jaakko Mäntyjärvi's *Death may dissolve*, a fantasy on a hymn by Billings that includes the original harmonization.

The heart of the concert (and album) progresses through the seven scriptural passages (or 'words'), with pieces chosen to illustrate the universal human emotions expressed by the biblical texts. Some of the seven 'words' have a single piece of music, others have several pieces of contrasting styles. Our program begins and ends with simple hymns — I think of them as congregational bookends to the scriptural story that unfolds.

For such a significant performance, it was important for the music we offer to have a strong connection to Skylark's identity both as a group and as individuals. At the group level, we have chosen many pieces that are closely connected to our shared musical experiences as Skylarks over

the past six years. At the individual level, the album features an unprecedented (for us) nine of our eighteen singers in significant solo roles. Many of these were chosen because of a specific love by the individuals of a particular style, composer, or piece. To put it plainly, I feel that every piece on this album is a part of us. I invite you to read the notes included throughout the booklet to learn more about the pieces and how they connect to our story.

—Matthew Guard, Artistic Director

Were you there?

Traditional African-American spiritual

Were you there when they crucified my Lord?
Oh, sometimes it causes me to tremble, tremble, tremble.

Were you there when they nailed him to the tree?

Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?

When Jesus Wept

William Billings (1746-1800)

When Jesus wept, the falling tear
in mercy flowed beyond all bound.
When Jesus groaned, a trembling fear
seized all the guilty world around.

Prologue

While I am sensitive to the potential dangers of cultural appropriation, it felt very important to me for Skylark to represent America in the UK by including contributions from one of the greatest musical heritages in our nation, the traditional African-American spiritual. Our opening hymn comes from that tradition, having emerged on plantations in the American south. *Were you there?* was included in the Episcopal Church hymnal in 1940; a meaningful gesture during segregation, this was the first time that a hymn from the African-American tradition was included in the national hymnal of a large American church. We follow this hymn with *When Jesus Wept*, one of the most famous and evocative of William Billings' 'fuguing tunes.' A simple four-line fugue written for the spare acoustical environment of colonial churches, Billings encouraged singers to use fugal entrances as "musical warfare" to create an "ocean of harmony."

Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do

Music for the first scriptural passage draws from the tradition of 'shape note' singing, popularized in the 19th century in books including *The Sacred Harp*. To illustrate the idea of forgiveness and love, *Amazing Grace* is presented in its joyfully simple original harmonization for three voices, first printed in William Walker's 1847 edition of *Southern Harmony*.

We follow this piece with another 'shape note' hymn, first printed in 1811. The lyrics for *Wondrous Love* may have been written by Alexander Means, a Methodist pastor from Oxford, Georgia, a few miles from Atlanta. I grew up in Atlanta during the later years of Robert Shaw's tenure as music director emeritus of the Atlanta Symphony, and have always been particularly moved by the choral arrangements that Shaw created with Alice Parker in the middle of the 20th century. The text of *Wondrous Love* was a favorite of Shaw's, and appears in several of his speeches and letters. It was a great joy (and it felt like a rather weighty responsibility) to record this arrangement, first published in 1960.

New Britain ('Amazing Grace')

*Traditional hymn
Text by John Newton*

Wondrous Love

*Traditional hymn
Arranged by Robert Shaw and Alice Parker*

What wondrous love is this, O my soul?
What wondrous love is this
That caused the Lord of bliss
To bear the dreadful curse for my soul?

When I was sinking down, O my soul!
When I was sinking down
Beneath God's righteous frown
Christ laid aside His crown for my soul!

To God and to the Lamb I will sing!
To God and to the Lamb
Who is the great I AM
While millions join the theme!

And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on!
And when from death I'm free
I'll sing and joyful be
And through eternity I'll sing on!

Jordan

from *The Suffolk Harmony* (1786)
William Billings (1746-1800)
Text by Isaac Watts

There is a land of pure delight,
where saints immortal reign;
infinite day excludes the night,
and pleasures banish pain.

Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood
stand dressed in living green;
so to the Jews old Canaan stood,
while Jordan rolled between.

O could we make our doubts remove,
those gloomy doubts that rise,
and see the Canaan that we love
with un-beclouded eyes.

Could we but climb where Moses stood,
and view the landscape o'er,
not Jordan's stream, nor death's cold flood,
should fright us from the shore!

Today you will be with me in paradise

In the opening remarks to his published collections (including his aptly-named *The Singing Master's Assistant*), William Billings often provided long-winded and very specific instructions about how to perform his music. Some of these instructions are quite colorful, including the exhortation "not to force the Sound thro' your Nose; but warble the Notes in your Throat." Billings also offered specific guidance about potential embellishments and grace notes that might be added to enhance a performance. In our rendition of *Jordan*, a rousing congregational hymn in A-major, we have done our best to follow the Singing Master's guidance.

Skylark has been particularly moved by Hugo Distler's music for years, even structuring our Christmas concerts and our album *Winter's Night* around his variations of *Es ist ein Ros Entsprungen*. Distler's *Ich wollt, daß ich daheime wär* shares the same opening melodic gesture as *Jordan*, but is set in an achingly beautiful and restrained E-minor. It was debuted in October 1935, the day after Nazi Germany banned jazz from the radio. This ethereal motet progresses through ten variations of a simple chant melody. It was composed during a tumultuous time of Distler's life, the year after he suffered a nervous breakdown, and around the same time that he discovered the body of his organ student who had jumped to her death from a church bell tower. Given that Distler tragically took his own life in 1942, one could imagine that the text of this motet might have reflected his own feelings about life and mortality.

Ich wollt, daß ich daheime wär

from *Geistliche Chormusik*, op. 12
Hugo Distler (1908-1942)
Text by Heinrich von Laufenberg (1430)

Ich wollt, daß ich daheime wär und aller Welte Trost entbehre. Ich mein, daheim im Himmelreich da ich Gott schaue ewiglich.	I want to be there, all of the world is without comfort. I am at home in the Kingdom of Heaven, where I see God forever.
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Wohlauf, mein Seel, und richt dich dar, dort wartet dein der Engel Schar. Denn alle Welt ist dir zu klein, du kommest denn erst wieder heim.	Rejoice, my soul, and show thyself, there wait the angels! For all the world is too small for you, You're only going home again.
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Daheim ist Leben ohne Tod und ganze Freude ohne Not. Da sind doch tausend Jahr wie heut und nichts, was dich verdrießt noch reut.	Home is life without death, and complete joy without need. There a thousand years like today, with nothing to grieve or repent.
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Wohlauf, mein Herz und all mein Mut und such das Gut ob allem Gut! Du hast doch hie kein Bleiben nicht, obs morgen oder heut geschicht.	Rejoice, my heart, and all my courage, And seek the good of all good. You do not have a stay here, whether it's tomorrow or today's story.
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Da es denn anders nicht mag sein, so fleuch der Welt viel falschen Schein. Ade, Welt, Gott gesegne dich! Gen Himmelreich nun fahre ich.	It must be no other way, as the flesh of the world has a false light. Adieu, world! God bless you. To heaven I now go.
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Behold your son: behold your mother

The most ancient of the pieces we share on this album is the 11th century chant *Karitas Abundat*, by Hildegard von Bingen. Skylark mezzo-soprano Clare McNamara has made a meaningful portion of her career from the study and performance of Hildegard's works, even creating custom editions to help singers understand Hildegard's unique musical notation. While we considered having this chant sung by all of the Skylark sopranos and altos, to me it seemed most evocative to have this mysterious and beautiful line sung by a single voice.

The historic sheet music of our next piece, composed in Boston in 1863, bears the following inscription: *"This ballad was suggested by the following incident. On the battlefield of Gettysburg, among many wounded soldiers was a young man, the only son of an aged mother. Hearing the surgeon tell his companions that he could not survive the ensuing night, he placed his hand upon his forehead, talking continually of his mother and sister, and said to his comrades assembled around him, 'Break it gently to my mother.'"*

In addition to specific instructions about balance and ornamentation, William Billings also gave very clear guidance about tempo. For Billings, time signature and tempo were inextricably linked. Composing before the days of the modern metronome, he even went so far as to specify the length of string required to create a perfect pendulum for each tempo. His setting of *David's Lamentation* was noted in 2/4 time, which he intended to have a speed of 120 beats per minute. I had heard the piece before at slower pace, and I was aghast when we first rehearsed his piece at this tempo. However, in reflecting on the text as a new father, it strikes me as a powerful illustration of frenetically new and abject grief.

Karitas Abundat

Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179)

Caritas abundat in omnia, de imis excellentissima super sidera, atque amantissima in omnia, quia summo regi osculum pacis dedit.	Charity abounds toward all, most exalted from the depths above the stars, and most loving toward all, for she has given the High King the kiss of peace.
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Break it Gently to my Mother

Frederick Buckley (1833-1864)

Text by M. A. Geuville

See! E'er the sun sinks behind those hills; E'er darkness the earth doth cover;
You will lay me low, in the cold, damp ground; Break it gently to my mother!
I see her sweet sad face on me now, And a smile doth o'er it hover;
Oh God! I would spare the tears that will flow;
Break it gently to my mother.

Goodbye, my mother ever dear; sister, you loved your brother;
Comrades, I take a last farewell; Break it gently to my mother.

Oh, say that in battle I've nobly died, For Right and our Country's honor;
Like the reaper's grain fell the leaden rain, Yet God saved our starry banner!
My sister, playmate of boyhood's years, Will lament her fallen brother;
She must try to soothe our parent's woe;
Break it gently to my mother.

David's Lamentation

from *The Singing Master's Assistant* (1781)

William Billings (1746-1800)

David the king was grieved and moved
He went to his chamber, and wept.

And as he went he wept, and said,
"Oh my son! Would to God I had died
For thee, Oh Absalom, my son."

My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?

Since founding Skylark, we have had a particular love for music written in the first half of the twentieth century. The music of Francis Poulenc is very special to us, having re-visited his visceral 1943 masterpiece *Figure Humaine*, three times. Written in December, 1938, in Noizay, France, *Vinea mea electa* is excerpted from Poulenc's set of four motets for Lent. Although written during a time of gathering desperation in Europe, these pieces come from a period in Poulenc's life when he had re-discovered his Catholic faith. He wrote to a friend: "I will soon send you a part of a motet, the first of a series, which I adore. If you knew how pleasant it is to feel supported by religious inspiration while we still have all its 'meaning.' This helps me in a way to work through this horrible time."

Vinea mea electa opens with seven sharps in the key signature, potentially symbolic of the seven words from the cross. Benjamin Ivry noted: "In these liturgical works for Holy Week, Poulenc set the tragedy that France and the rest of Europe were experiencing in a historical, religious context. The air of sadness and defeat in these works...approaches the gloom of some African-American spirituals, and the impression created is of the depressed, frozen horror of Frenchmen who had experienced World War I and who now saw a second war coming."

Plymton is a plaintive psalm harmonization published in Billings' 1770 volume *The New England Psalm Singer*. The engraved cover of the printed edition was designed by none other than Paul Revere, five years before his storied ride. Although there is no text specified for the tune, Karl Kroeger's choice of a 1698 paraphrase of Psalm 120 fits perfectly.

Vinea mea electa

from *Quatre motets pour un temps de pénitence*
Francis Poulenc (1899-1963)

Vinea mea electa, ego te plantavi: quomodo conversa es in amaritudinem, ut me crucifigeres et Barrabam dimitteres.	O vineyard, my chosen one. I planted thee. How is thy sweetness turned into bitterness, to crucify me and take Barabbas in my place?
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Sepivi te, et lapides elegi ex te, et aedificavi turrim	I protected thee; I took the hard stones away from thy path, and built a tower in thy defense.
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Plymton

from *The New England Psalm Singer* (1770)
William Billings (1746-1800)
Text by Nahum Tate and Nicholas Brady (1698)

In deep distress I oft have cried
To GOD, who never yet denied,
To rescue me, oppressed with wrongs;
Once more, O LORD, deliverance send,
From lying lips my soul defend,
And from the rage of slandering tongues.

What little profit can accrue,
And yet, what heavy wrath is due,
O thou perfidious tongue, to thee?
Thy sting upon thyself shall turn;
Of lasting flames, that fiercely burn,
The constant fuel thou shalt be.

My hapless dwelling is with those,
Who peace and amity oppose,
And pleasure take in others' harms:
Sweet peace is all I court and seek;
But when to them of peace I speak,
They straight cry out, to arms, to arms.

I thirst

Although primarily known for her orchestral works (for which the New York Philharmonic awarded her with their *Kravis Emerging Composer Award*), contemporary Icelandic composer Anna Thorvaldsdottir also has a true gift for writing for voices.

One of the great thrills of recording our album *Crossing Over* in 2016 was the opportunity to work closely with Anna, who flew to Boston from Reykjavík for our recording session of her piece *Heyr þú oss himnum á*.

Like *Heyr þú oss himnum á*, *Pann heilaga kross* is based on an ancient Icelandic psalm. In this case, the tune and text were first published in 1589, attributed to Martin Hegelund. Anna's setting creates a wonderful balance between the ancient and modern. An opening sequence of drone sounds that undulate between dissonance and consonance create a sustained period of discomfort that for me evokes the thirst of the scriptural text. The three largely homophonic verses employ open fifths and spare harmonies that preserve the timelessness of the tune, before an extended and ultimately unresolved *Amen* returns the listener to a feeling of dull pain and unease.

Pann heilaga kross

Anna Thorvaldsdottir (b. 1977)

Pann heilaga kross vor herra bar, á holdi hans voru dauðleg sár. Fyrir oss alla hann fullnað gjörði, vér urðum ei keyptir með öðru verði.	On the holy cross our Lord, on his flesh were mortal wounds, for all of us he accomplished this, we were not redeemed for a lesser price.
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Því hlýðið, kærar kristnir menn, hvað kennir oss öllum skriftin senn. Þeir sem vist á himnum hljóta, herrans þínu þeir verða að njóta.	Therefore dear Christians, this we all teach of his scripture. Those who receive heavenly glory, the love of the Lord they must enjoy.
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Einasta Guði sé æra og dýrð, er sinn son sendi hingað á jörð. Hann stýri og stjórni oss öllum saman, svo vér hann óttumst og elskum. Amen.	One God is glory everlasting, his song is sent here on earth. He leads and guides us together, we serve him with reverence and love. Amen.
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It is finished

Jaakko Mäntyjärvi is a prolific and unique voice in modern Finnish choral composition. Skylark has performed his works in each of the last three seasons, and I have always been struck by the originality of his compositional style. When I discovered that in 2002 he had composed an as-of-yet unrecorded fantasia on a William Billings hymn, it seemed like a perfect addition to this program.

The piece unfolds in five verses of a text written by Isaac Watts. The first verse is sung by a solo tenor, and the second verse preserves the original harmonization by Billings. The subsequent verses unfold into more and more diverse and wonderfully wild variations on the theme. After a harmonically unsettling final verse that cadences into both D-minor and D-major at the same time, the opening theme returns with a sense of true finality.

Death may dissolve (fantasia on a hymn by William Billings)

Jaakko Mäntyjärvi (b. 1963)

Text by Isaac Watts

Death may dissolve my body now,
And bear my spirit home;
Why do my minutes move so slow,
Nor my salvation come?

With heav'nly weapons I have fought
The battles of the Lord;
Finished my course, and kept the faith,
And wait the sure reward.

God has laid up in heav'n for me
A crown which cannot fade;
The righteous Judge at that great day
Shall place it on my head.

Jesus the Lord shall guard me safe
From every ill design;
And to his heav'nly kingdom keep
This feeble soul of mine.

God is my everlasting aid,
And hell shall rage in vain;
To him be highest glory paid
And endless praise. Amen.

Into your hands I commend my spirit

Deep River is one of the most enduring of African-American spiritual hymns, perhaps because of its comforting and optimistic message of 'crossing over' the river Jordan into a heavenly kingdom. It was first mentioned in print in 1876 and first recorded by Marian Anderson in 1938, one year before her historic performance of the piece at the Lincoln Memorial (a concert that was broadcast to millions on radio, likely introducing *Deep River* to many Americans). We perform a lush and emotionally rich 1985 arrangement by Gerre Hancock, long-time organist and choirmaster at St. Thomas Church in New York.

We close the seven words with the first setting of *In manus tuas* by British composer John Sheppard for three reasons: It is a direct setting of the final Biblical text, it is an homage to our English setting for our concert, and I think it is one of the most elegant pieces ever composed for the human voice.

Deep River

*Traditional African-American spiritual
Arranged by Gerre Hancock*

Deep river,
My home is over Jordan.
Deep river, Lord,
I want to cross over into campground.

Oh, don't you want to go,
To the Gospel feast;
That Promised Land,
Where all is peace?

In manus tuas

John Sheppard (1515-1558)

In manus tuas, Domine,	Into your hands, O Lord,
commendo spiritum meum.	I commend my spirit.
Redemisti me Domine,	You have redeemed me, O Lord,
Deus veritatis.	God of truth.

Epilogue

Our final musical offering is one of the most popular of Christian hymns. The text is by British poet Charlotte Elliott, who struggled with illness and disability throughout her life. *Just as I am* was reportedly the hymn that played before Billy Graham converted to Christianity in 1934. It later became a Gospel hit in the US in the middle of the twentieth century. When I approached Skylark baritone Dana Whiteside about finding a piece that was meaningful to him personally that we might consider including in this program, this piece was at the top of his list. To me, the strong message of love and acceptance of all people, despite their flaws, is the greatest message of the Christian faith.

Just as I am

Traditional hymn

Tune by William Bradbury

Lyrics by Charlotte Elliott

Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bid'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

Just as I am, Thou wilt receive,
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
Because Thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!

Skylark: Seven Words From the Cross

Recorded at Church of the Redeemer, Chestnut Hill, MA, June 21-24, 2017.

Producer: Dan Merceruio

Recording, Mixing & Mastering Engineer: Daniel Shores

Editing Engineer: Dan Merceruio

Recording Technician: Allison Noah

Photography: Caleb Nei, Collin J. Rae

Graphic Design: Caleb Nei

Executive Producer: Collin J. Rae

Liner notes: Matthew Guard

Recorded with Merging Technologies Horus. Mastered with Merging Technologies Hapi. Recorded in DXD at 24 bit, 352.8kHz in Auro 9.1 Immersive Audio using Schoeps and DPA microphones.

Mixed and mastered on Legacy Audio speakers.

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