

presents

Out of This World

Saturday, May 4th, 2024, 7:30 p.m.

First Unitarian Society–Atrium Auditorium
900 University Bay Drive, Madison, WI

In celebration of Star Wars Day (“May the 4th be with you”), the Wisconsin Chamber Choir presents a far-reaching program entitled “Out of This World.” Featuring music by Brahms, Bortniansky, Reena Esmail, Stacey Gibbs, John Williams, and others, the eclectic mix of repertoire offers something for everyone. African American, Indian American, Jewish, Palestinian, and Ukrainian voices unite in a message of wonder and hope in troubled times.

Covering a wide range chronologically, geographically, and stylistically, the works on the program offer diverse responses to the perennial question, “what is our place in the universe?” Renaissance motets by Richard Dering and Duarte Lobo present texts from the *Book of Revelation*, which bears witness to the hopes and fears of people living in an uncertain world nearly 2000 years ago. Across the arc of history, *Revelation* inspired numerous African American spirituals as well, including *John Saw de Number*, which we present in a stirring arrangement by Stacey Gibbs.

Eighteenth-century Ukrainian composers Dmitry Bortniansky and Maxim Berezovsky were among the founders of the rich tradition of Russian choral music. Their Orthodox liturgical texts likewise look heavenward for solace. In the following century, the moon and the stars became central images of German Romantic poetry, gorgeously captured in two movements of Brahms’s opus 92 piano quartets, “O schöne Nacht” (O Lovely Night) and “Warum” (Why?).

In the present day, a diverse group of contemporary North American composers have responded to today’s world with music that is at times challenging, thought-provoking, and reassuring. *Lo Yisa Goy* by Chicago-based composer, Stacy Garrop, is a passionate arrangement of a traditional Jewish folksong with words from *Isaiah*, “They shall beat their swords into plowshares.” A Palestinian perspective is offered by Toronto-based composer Shireen Abu Khader, whose arrangement of the protest song *Lao Rahal Soti* (If My Voice Departs) leaves a deep impact.

Indian American composer Reena Esmail frequently sets texts about the heavens, love, and empowerment. Her *Even After All This Time* is based on a poem by the 14th-century Sufi mystic, Hafiz, set in both English and Persian. A likewise hopeful vision of the future is embodied by Edie Hill’s luminous *Poem for 2084*, which imagines a world that has avoided environmental catastrophe, admonishing us to “take heart,” as well as to “take heed.”

Finally, *Star Wars* fans will enjoy our dramatic rendition of *Duel of the Fates* for choir and instrumental ensemble.

Tickets are \$25 for adults and \$5 for students, available in advance from www.wisconsinchamberchoir.org or at the door. Discounted tickets are available for children, students, and patrons experiencing financial hardship.

Founded in 1998, the Wisconsin Chamber Choir has established a reputation for excellence in the performance of oratorios by Bach, Handel, Mozart, and Brahms; a cappella works from various centuries; and world premieres. WCC Artistic Director Robert Gehrenbeck, who serves as Director of Choral Activities at UW-Whitewater, has been hailed by critics for his vibrant and emotionally compelling interpretations of a wide variety of choral music. Under his leadership the WCC has presented major works with orchestra as well as innovative programs of rarely heard music by composers from a wide variety of eras, nationalities, and cultures.