



ELEKTRA

WOMEN'S CHOIR

creating • exploring • celebrating

Elektra's mandate is *to inspire and lead in the choral art form through excellence in performance and through the creation, exploration, and celebration of women's repertoire.*

Fire Flowers - A tribute to the resilience of the human spirit

Listener's Guide

by Morna Edmundson, Artistic Director

<http://elektra.ca/concerts-events/fire-flowers/>

March 3, 2018 (St. John's Shaughnessy Anglican Church, 1490 Nanton Ave at Granville, Vancouver)

Pre-Concert Talk with composer Carol Barnett at 6:45pm

Concert starts at 7:30pm

NOTE: This is not Elektra's usual concert venue

Performers:

Elektra Women's Choir

Morna Edmundson, Artistic Director

Stephen Smith, piano

with Nancy DiNovo, violin

and Michael Jarrett, percussion

Welcome! This "Listener's Guide" is meant to give you insight into Elektra's season programming and to make the concert experience richer and more meaningful. I'll be sharing my thoughts on the music we're singing on Saturday, March 3, 2018 and the thinking behind the program as a whole. Here you'll also find publisher information and full texts and translations of the works.

The title "Fire Flowers" refers to the wildflowers that appear on a forest floor the season following a forest fire. Where only devastation appears to be possible, something of beauty appears, something for which the conditions of the burn - new nutrients in the soil, new access to light - make life and beauty possible. This concert features music that explores the remarkable ways in which people find hope in times of deep loss and challenge. Research tells us that resilience is not innate, but learned through experience, built by support and empathy during challenging times of difficulty and loss. Some of the grief and recovery in these poems are around personal loss - things that may never be shared with another person. Others are about social change, non-violent protest, and righting wrongs.

We're delighted to have guest artists violinist Nancy DiNovo and percussionist Michael Jarrett on marimba and dumbek join the choir and pianist Stephen Smith. And composer Carol Barnett is here from Minnesota for the world premiere of her work, *My People are Rising*.

It has been my great pleasure discovering the music that you will hear in “Fire Flowers” and weaving together a journey for performers and audience that contrasts the music and poetry, points to common threads of theme, and presents an arc that I hope you will find inspiring and hopeful. I’ve included some quotations, too, that are neither sung nor read in the concert, but create connective tissue between the works.

Fire Flowers (movement #3 from the suite *Heart Songs of the White Wampum*)

Music by [Timothy Corlis](#)

Poem by [E. Pauline Johnson](#) (1861-1913) from *Flint and Feather* and adapted by the composer
Commissioned by Elektra Women’s Choir, Morna Edmundson, Artistic Director, Bella Voce Women’s Chorus of Vermont, Dr. Dawn Willis, Artistic Director, and the University of Toronto Women’s Chamber Choir, Dr. Hilary Apfelstadt, Conductor. Commissioned with the generous financial assistance of the Canada Council for the Arts and the Diane Loomer Commissioning Fund for Elektra Women’s Choir.

And only where the forest fires have sped,
Scorching relentlessly the cool north lands,
A sweet wild flower lifts its purple head,
And, like some gentle spirit sorrow-fed,
It hides the scars with almost human hands.

And only to the heart that knows of grief,
Of desolating fire, of human pain,
There comes some purifying sweet belief,
Some fellow-feeling beautiful, if brief.
And life revives, and blossoms once again.

The concert opens in a most unusual way with a sparse, repeated, staccato “A” on the marimba, no choir, no piano. I want listeners to be surprised and curious from the outset, a bit unsettled by the unusual start this piece provides. The unison choir line that begins 30 seconds in doesn’t insist on attention - it draws one in with its glissandi and building layers around a static, sustained “A”. More surprises are in store from the marimba in this mesmerizing piece.

“Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity....When we reject the single story, when we realize that there is never a single story about any place, we regain a kind of paradise.”

– [Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie](#) (Nigerian American writer)

Nocturne

Music by [Eric Tuan](#) (1990-)

Poem by [Pablo Neruda](#) (1904-1973)

“Poem XX” from *Viente poemas de amor y una cancion desesperada*

Only lines 1-17 are used in *Nocturne*

English translation copyright Alice Del Simone

Music written for Robert Geary and the Piedmont East Bay Children's Choir

Published by E.C Schirmer, No. 7856

Soloist: Danica Kell

Text

Puedo escribir los versos más tristes esta noche.

Escribir, por ejemplo: " La noche está estrellada,
y tiritan, azules, los astros, a lo lejos".

El viento de la noche gira en el cielo y canta.

Puedo escribir los versos más tristes esta noche.
Yo la quise, y a veces ella también me quiso.

En las noches como ésta la tuve entre mis brazos.
La besé tantas veces bajo el cielo infinito.

Ella me quiso, a veces yo también la quería.
Cómo no haber amado sus grandes ojos fijos.

Puedo escribir los versos más tristes esta noche.
Pensar que no la tengo. Sentir que la he perdido.

Oír la noche inmensa, más inmensa sin ella.
Y el verso cae al alma como pasto el rocío.

Qué importa que mi amor no pudiera guardarla.
La noche está estrellada y ella no está conmigo.

Eso es todo. A lo lejos alguien canta. A lo lejos.

English translation

Tonight I can write the saddest lines.

*Write, for example, "The night is starry and the blue stars
shiver in the distance."*

The night wind revolves in the sky and sings.

*Tonight I can write the saddest lines.
I loved her, and at times she loved me as well.*

*Through nights like this one I held her in my arms.
I kissed her again and again under the endless sky.*

*She loved me, at times I loved her as well.
How could one not have loved her great, still eyes.*

*Tonight I can write the saddest lines.
To think that I do not have her. To feel that I have lost her.*

*To hear the immense night, more immense without her.
And the verse falls to the soul as dew to the pasture.*

*What does it matter that my love could not keep her.
The night is filled with stars and she is not with me.*

This is all. In the distance someone is singing. In the distance.

I chose for our first consideration of personal challenge the devastating loss of a lover. The writer is standing under a dark blue sky filled with stars which used to be a source of shared joy. Now the immense night, filled with stars, is “more immense without her” and our protagonist is engulfed in grief. San Francisco-based Tuan’s marriage of music to Neruda’s painfully desolate poem is exquisitely crafted.

In the depths of winter I finally learned there was in me an invincible summer.
- Albert Camus (French writer, 1913 - 1960)

The Dawn is Not Distant

Music by [Christine Donkin](#)

[Henry Wadsworth Longfellow](#)'s *Tales of a Wayside Inn* and Genesis 15

Published by Cypress Choral Music CP1302

Soloist: Amy Dawson

Text / English Translation

Suspice caelum (*Look at the heavens*)
The dawn is not distant,
Nor is the night starless.
Suspice caelum (*look at the heavens*)
et numera stellas (*and count the stars.*)

Says Canadian composer Christine Donkin, “*The Dawn is Not Distant* joins fragments of text from two very different sources: the Latin translation of Genesis chapter 15 and *Tales of a Wayside Inn* by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. When read together out of their original context, a new meaning is created. Around the time that I began writing this piece, I was thinking about earlier times of my life, and in particular one event that left me heartbroken. *The Dawn is Not Distant* contains the message of hope and optimism that I would convey to my former self if I were able to travel back in time.”

Laulud, Laulude, Laulust (The Song of Song of Songs)

Music by [Tõnu Kõrvits](#) (1969-)

Texts from the Bible, the [Song of Solomon](#) (also known as the Song of Songs)

Soloist: Stephanie Mayer

I. Ütle sina... (1:7)

II. Ärka, põhjatuul... (4:16)

III. Vaatame, kas viinapuu ajab võrseid... (7:13)

IV. Arm ja surm (8:6-7)

Texts / English Translations

I. Ütle sina... (1:7)

Ütle sina, keda mu hing armastab: kus hoiad sa oma karja, kus lased sa tal lõuna ajal lebada?

Tell me...

Say to me, you, whom my soul does love: Where do you keep your flock, where do you let it lie and rest at mid-day?

II. Ärka, põhjatuul... (4:16)

Ärka, põhjatuul, tule, lõunatuul, puhu läbi roosiaia, laota tema palsamilõhna! Mu kallim tuleb oma rohuaeda kõige hõrgumat vilja maitsuma.

Awaken, Northwind...

Awaken, northwind, come, southwind, blow through my rose garden, spread its balm and fragrance! My beloved will come to her garden to taste the most savoury harvest.

III. Vaatame, kas viinapuu ajab võrseid... (7:13)

Vaatame, kas viinapuu ajab võrseid, kas ta õied on lahti lõõnud, kas õunapuud õitsevad. Seal, annan ma sulle oma armastuse.

Let Us See Whether the Vines Have Budded

Let us see if the vines have budded, if the blossoms have opened, if the apple trees are in bloom. There I will give you my love.

IV. Arm ja surm (8:6-7)

Pane mind pitseriks südamele, pitseriks oma käe peale, sest arm on vägev kui surm, kirg on kange kui kalm. Tema nooled on tulenoled, Jehoova on välgu lõõm: ei mata teda Allmaameri, ei kata kinni Eedeni jõed. Kui keegi annaks kõik, mis tal on, annaks armastuse eest, siis kes võiks teda laita.

For Love Is as Strong as Death

Set me as a seal on your heart, a seal on your hand, because love is as powerful as death, passion as mighty as the grave. His arrows are fire arrows, Jehova is the fire of lightning: [he] cannot be buried by the seas of the world, or covered by the rivers of Eden. If someone gave all, that they had, for the cause of love, then who could fault them?

We break free from the pain of loss with this suite of four *a cappella* settings of texts from the Song of Songs. These are glowing, light- and love-infused texts set in orchards and rose gardens. The music is supple and translucent, weaving a spell in this composition by Estonian composer Kõrvits. Elektra met him in November 2017 when we performed this suite at the International Society for Contemporary Music (ISCM) World New Music Days 2017 in downtown Vancouver, where we shared a concert as guests of the Vancouver Chamber Choir and musica intima. That performance is due to be broadcast on CBC Radio 2's *In Concert* soon.

Seikilos

Music by [Joanne Metcalf](#) (1958-)

Greek text from the [Epitaph of Seikilos](#)

Commissioned by Phillip Swan and Cantala

Soloists: Julie Edmundson, Holly Kennedy, and Danica Kell

Text

Hoson zês, phainou,
Mêden holôs su lupou;
Pros oligon esti to zên,
To telos ho chrosos apaitei.

English Translation

*For as long as you live, shine,
Do not be distressed in any way;
Life exists for a short while,
And Time demands its due.*

If you attended the Shining Light concert last spring, you may remember the title work by US composer Joanne Metcalf. In contrast to the more lyrical sounds of the pieces that came before in this concert, the instructions at the beginning of *Seikilos* say it should be sung in the style of the traditional Bulgarian choirs, that is to say full-bodied and extremely bright! The second half is marked *misterioso* and set for double SSA choir. Three soprano voices soar above the choir in searing note clusters.

Metcalf has this to say about *Seikilos*, "*The text of Seikilos, in ancient Greek, calls upon the listener to live life to its fullest for the duration of this mortal existence and to let the knowledge of its inherent brevity cast no shadow. I have long loved the close dissonant harmonies that are common to the choral music of traditional Bulgarian women's choirs, and I take them as my inspiration here to highlight the rugged, primordial nature of this ancient exhortation, which was carved upon a burial stone in the 1st century CE.*"

intermission

Sicut Liliium Inter Spinis

Anonymous (possibly Eleanora (Leonora) d'Este (1515-1575))

From the collection of motets entitled Musica quinque vocum motetta maternal lingua vocata
Score available for purchase from Musica Secreta [here](#)

Text

Sicut lilium inter spinas sic amica mea inter filia

English Translation

As the lily among thorns, so is my love among the daughters.

This stunning Renaissance motet was published 450 years ago in a 1543 collection that, unusually, credited no composer. Recent research by Deborah Roberts and Laurie Stras at Southampton University in the UK points to Eleanora d'Este. The fascinating story of this research can be found [here](#) and [here](#). Leonora was triply disqualified from being named and associated with a commercial venture in those days: being a woman, a princess, and a nun.

D'Este was brought up in Ferrara and her mother, the famous Lucretia Borgia, died when she was four. As the only girl in the noble family, the most suitable upbringing for her was in Ferrera's Corpus Domini Monastery, which she entered at age 8 as a nun. By nineteen, she was the convent's abbess. Her love and mastery of music, together with funds provided by her father, brothers, and uncles to maintain the organ there, kept the convent alive with music.

The term "agency" is defined by Merriem-Webster as "the capacity, condition, or state of acting or of exerting power." People who have agency over their own lives are in a position to make decisions that effect their life. Most of us are privileged to have considerable agency when it comes to where we live, what we devote our life's energies to, who we spend time with and who we marry, our health and our bodies. The story for an Italian noblewoman in the Renaissance was completely different. As the linked article explains, Leonora may have chosen the life of a nun because it freed her to be a musician, to avoid the expectations and distractions of marriage and politics. Her resilient solution to lack of agency was both ingenious and socially acceptable. I would love to have met her!

"I am not afraid of storms, for I am learning how to sail my ship"
- Louisa May Alcott (Little Women)

Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child

Spiritual, arr. [Robert de Cormier](#) (1922-2017)

Published by Lawson-Gould Music Publishers, Inc. 51480

Soloist: Denise O'Brien

Text

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child
A long way from home
Sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone
A long way from home
Sometimes I feel like an eagle in the air
A long way from home

True believer
A long way from home

New York conductor and arranger Robert de Cormier was part of the music and social justice scenes in the 1960s that saw black and white American artists begin to share the artistic spotlight in the US. He worked closely with Harry Belafonte and the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, collected folk songs in rural America, and arranged for Peter, Paul, and Mary and The Weavers. Of note to Vancouverites is that he was a close friend of our beloved singer and activist, Leon Bibb.

“Lack of agency” is the understatement of the century when it comes to the history and present of Black America and indigenous people across Canada and the US.

“Cultural genocide is the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group. States that engage in cultural genocide set out to destroy the political and social institutions of the targeted group. Land is seized, and populations are forcibly transferred and their movement is restricted. Languages are banned. Spiritual leaders are persecuted, spiritual practices are forbidden, and objects of spiritual value are confiscated and destroyed. And, most significantly to the issue at hand, families are disrupted to prevent the transmission of cultural values and identity from one generation to the next. In its dealing with Aboriginal people, Canada did all these things.”

- Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada,

“[E]ven through all of the struggles, even through all of what has been disrupted ... we can still hear the voice of the land. We can hear the care and love for the children. We can hear about our law. We can hear about our stories, our governance, our feasts, [and] our medicines.... We have work to do. That work we are [already] doing as [Aboriginal] peoples. Our relatives who have come from across the water [non-Aboriginal people], you still have work to do on your road.... The land is made up of the dust of our ancestors' bones. And so to reconcile with this land and everything that has happened, there is much work to be done ... in order to create balance.”

- Anishinaabe Elder Mary Deleary

Lullaby

Music by [James Rolfe](#) (1961-)

Poem by [Amanda Jernigan](#) from *All the Daylight Hours*, published by Cormorant Books, Toronto.

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Commissioned and premiered in 2011 by Lady Cove Women's Choir of St. John's, NL (Kellie Walsh, Artistic Director), with the assistance of The Canada Council for the Arts.

Published by Cypress Choral Music CP1430

Text

My little lack-of-light, my swaddled soul,
December baby. Hush, for it is dark,

and will grow darker still. We must embark
directly. Bring an orange as the toll
for Charon: he will be our gondolier.
Upon the shore, the season pans for light,
and solstice fish, their eyes gone milky white,
come bearing riches for the dying year:
solstitial kingdom. It is yours, the mime
of branches and the drift of snow. With shaking
hands, Persephone, the winter's wife,
will tender you a gift. Born in a time
of darkness, you will learn the trick of making.
You shall make your consolation all your life.

This dark poem by Canadian poet Amanda Jernigan is full of the contrasts of light and dark, colour and milky white, on a perilous but strangely serene journey. Charon is the gatekeeper of the underworld, and Persephone its formidable and majestic queen. James Rolfe's score for women's choir and marimba beautifully balances the murky darkness and sense of a parent's protection and assurance. Composer James Rolfe has this to say:

"The poem "Lullaby", by Amanda Jernigan, took its inspiration from a painting by Angela Antle titled "Upon the shore, the season pans for light". Angela and Amanda are both Newfoundlanders, and both painting and poem embody the austere beauty of that island: the muted colours and light, the dark greys and cold of sky and ocean, and the intimate bonds that flourish in defiance of harsh circumstances. Newfoundlanders must make their own warmth and colour, and this they have done for many years, seeking it in each other, finding comfort and solace in sharing music and song and words. This version of "Lullaby" features the women's voices set close together—the better to keep warm!--in dark harmonies tinged with occasional rays of light. The dark-hued marimba leads the voices through the poem with simple, gently pulsing chords."

My People are Rising (world premiere)

Music by [Carol Barnett](#) (1949-)

Poem by [Mohja Kahf](#) (1971-)

Jointly commissioned by Elektra Women's Choir, Canzona Women's Ensemble, CA (Jill Anderson and Cricket Handler), and Peninsula Women's Chorus, CA (Martín Benvenuto)

Text

My people are rising; my people are rising,
with olive branches and song, they are waking;
the earth underneath their marching is shaking.
My people are rising! They are no longer crouching;
they are no longer stooping;
and they are not hungry for bread alone.
...
My people are rising; they are shaking off
what has bound them, and their bonds scatter like moths.
...

My Sanameyn, my Jeezah, my Inkhel are rising, bless them;

...

My Banyas is rising and my Homs is rising; bless them.

My Duma is marching in the streets and my Latakia is marching; bless them.

My Qamishlo,

...

My Idlib...my Hama is marching; bless them.

...

I see them mustering unarmed, Kurd and Assyrian and Arab and Ghajar, bless them.

Christian and Alawite and Druze, bless them, Sunni and Shia and Ismailia, bless them;
tribe and tent and house and clan, bless them.

...

My people are rising. A blessing on my people.

They stand before tanks unarmed and they fall under bullets while calling,

"The earth is big enough for all of us! Let us have a little of it too! The earth is big!"

And as they bleed out on the cement in the street

where they played as children, their blood mixes with rain and runs off
into the big, big earth for which they longed.

And the young Horani said, as he lay dying that March day in Daraa City,
in the pool of rain mixed with his blood,

"It's worth it to have lived these last moments free."

...

I hear his words, and his blood runs into the soil of my dark
dark heart like the rain of this springtime in Syria.

Composer Carol Barnett creates audacious and engaging music, both for traditional instrumentation, and for cross-pollinations such as a mass accompanied by a bluegrass band or a duet for steel pan and organ. A force in the Minnesota music scene since 1970, her work has been funded by multiple regional and national organizations, and published through major houses. Carol is a charter member of the American Composers Forum and a graduate of the University of Minnesota. She was composer in residence with the renowned professional choir, the Dale Warland Singers, from 1992 to 2001, and taught composition at Augsburg College in Minneapolis from 2000 to 2015.

"My music has its roots in the Western classical tradition, supplemented by explorations of the Jewish liturgical tradition and the folk music of Greece, Italy, Russia, Southeastern Europe, and the Middle East. I often use pre-existing material: folk melodies, literary influences and texts. I believe that music is a language based on nostalgia; remembered sounds which evoke other places, times and emotions.

I am most interested in communicating with my listeners by using musical language familiar to them, then adding something new: more complex harmonies, elements from a different musical tradition, or departures from the expected formal structure. I work rather slowly, striving for a balance of well-grounded formal structure with effortless flow from one event to the next. Since I am a performer as well as a composer, I understand the occasional need to write within the parameters of limited rehearsal time and modest technical accomplishment without "writing down" to the performers. While writing accessibly, I try to find something unusual to say, something unique, magic, that bypasses intellect and goes straight to the heart."

Carol is with Elektra as part of our [Celebrating Women Composers](#) project, in which we have also experienced newly commissioned works by Kathleen Allan (*Primary Colours*) and Laura Hawley (*Carol Trilogy*) in the past 12 months. In Carol's case, she is a very well-established composer in her own country, but little-known in Canada. While she's here, we're introducing her to conductors and other music professionals and also making a video about *My People are Rising* for Elektra's YouTube channel. I hope many of you will come early for the short Pre-Concert talk she and I will give about this piece, her life as a choral composer, and the theme of the concert. It starts at 6:45 (and I'll take this opportunity to remind us all that we are at St. John's Shaughnessy Anglican Church for this concert, not our usual venue!). We are very grateful to the support of the Vancouver Foundation and the British Columbia Arts Council for their significant support over three years of the Celebrating Women Composers project.

Carol has this to share with us about her new work:

I first heard Mohja Kahf's "My People Are Rising" on a 2016 BBC podcast entitled "Poetry from Syria," and was so taken with it that I listened several times in order to write it down.

Looking up the author, I learned that she is a Syrian-American poet and novelist, born in Damascus, now a professor of comparative literature at the University of Arkansas. When I contacted her, I discovered that I had heard only a small portion of a much longer work called "My People Are Rising: An unfinished poem begun in Spring 2011 for an unfinished Revolution begun in March 2011." This longer poem is full of the pain of forty-eight years of government oppression, but also hope. The Syrian uprising was originally based on the principles of non-violence, non-sectarianism, and no foreign military intervention; they are reflected in the poem. Alas, these principles have been completely submerged in the ever-increasing violence and chaos that is Syria today.

Having obtained permission to set the text, I looked for a group to commission and sing "My People Are Rising." A mutual friend introduced me to Morna; I am delighted that she was interested enough to organize a commissioning consortium, include the work in Elektra's Celebrating Women Composers project, and program it on this Fire Flowers concert. The poem spoke to me viscerally of the tragic events in Syria that it was impossible for me to imagine setting it with Western harmonies. And so began an exploration of Arabic music, with its quarter-tone scales, its lack of vertical choral structure, its abundantly ornamented heterophony. Since quarter-tones are not a part of our Western choral training, I opted to temper the scales a bit (resulting in a fair number of augmented seconds) and add a violin to the melodic mix for pitch support. The voices and violin are accompanied by a doumbek player, who is highly encouraged to improvise; the written notation is only there as a guide.

The research for this project was fun! I found quite a few youtube videos of Arabic music - my favorites were informal house concerts by Simon Shaheen's group. (One example: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JASfmtnd3Fs>). And I took an Arabic drumming class to see how the rhythms might be written. No blinding insights into how to notate what is essentially an improvised tradition, but the class and videos helped me to understand better how this music is constructed, why it sounds the way it does, and how I might emulate that sound in service of the text.

Starting Now

Music by [Jocelyn Hagen](#) (1980-)

Poem by [Joyce Sidman](#) (1956-) from *What the Heart Knows*, HMH Books for Young Readers (Oct. 8 2013)

It is time for us to wake:
We who stumble through the day
With our gripes and complaints,
Who drift numbly
Through thronging halls and streets-
You and I,
Who rant about injustice,
Who see all that is wrong in this world
But believe we are shackled
And powerless.
It is time to look into
Each other's faces,
We who glide along the surface,
Time to dive down
And feel the currents
Of each other's lives.
Time to speak until the air
Holds *all* of our voices.
Time to weave for each other
A garment of brightness.
Open your eyes.
Feel your strength.
Bless the past.
Greet the future.
Join hands.
Right here.
Our moment: starting now.

Jocelyn is another composer you may remember from the *Shining Light* concert last year. Her *Moon Goddess* is frequently performed in the United States and Canada. This piece also came to us through the Celebrating Women Composers project, in this case an open call for existing works with piano, the winner of which would be performed in an upcoming Elektra concert. While it was not originally to be part of this particular concert, it fit the theme so beautifully, I made room for it.

Joyce Sidman is a Newbery Medal award-winning author, best known for her works for children, of which *Starting Now* is one such poem. According to the publisher: "*What the Heart Knows: Chants, Charms, and Blessings* is a collection of poems to provide comfort, courage, and humor at difficult or daunting moments in life. It conjures forth laments, spells, invocations, chants, blessings, promises, songs, and charms. Here are pleas on how to repair a friendship, wishes to transform one's life or to slow down time, charms to face the shame of a disapproving crowd, invocations to ask for forgiveness, to understand the mysteries of happiness, and to bravely face a dark and different world. These words help us remember or grieve; they bolster courage and guard against evil; they help us celebrate and give thanks." It strikes me that this is a very grown-up poem for children, but timely at this moment, between the disconnect between many Americans and their political representatives, the Me, Too movement, and the gun conversations. Like *My People are Rising*, it is hopeful and positive in the face

of extreme challenges, and it talks about individuals taking action after a long time of struggle and uncertainty.

“The greatest glory in living lies not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall.

- Nelson Mandela

Fire-Flowers (from the suite *Fire-Flowers*)

Music by Don Macdonald (1966-)

Text: see above

A few months ago, Nelson-based composer and musician Don Macdonald sent me the scores and recordings for a new 7-movement suite for women’s choir called *Fire-Flowers*. Clicking on the link, I found absolutely beautiful music and equally beautifully singing by Les Choristes from the University of Western Ontario under conductor Jennifer Moir. It was a coincidence - Don didn’t know about our upcoming concert and its theme! I immediately shuffled things and programmed the title movement to book-end the Fire Flowers concert, as the poem is the same as Tim Corlis’ *Fire Flowers*.

Spring Shall Bloom

Music by Susan LaBarr (1981-)

Amen by Christina Rossetti (1830-1894)

Text

It is over. What is over?

Nay, now much is over truly.

Harvest days we toiled to sow for;

Now the sheaves are gathered newly,

Now the wheat is garnered duly.

It is finished. What is finished?

Much is finished known or unknown:

Lives are finished; time diminished;

Was the fallow field left unsown?

Will these buds be always unblown?

It suffices. What suffices?

All suffices reckoned rightly:

Spring shall bloom where now the ice is,

Roses make the bramble sightly,

And the quickening sun shine brightly,

And the latter wind blow lightly,

And my garden teem with spices.

And finally, the coda to this concert, Susan LaBarr's exquisite *Spring Shall Bloom*. This work came to us because we participate in a Women's Choir Commissioning Consortium of the American Choral Directors Association and receive three new works a year, so far all by Canadian and American composers. Here's what Susan had to say about the creation of this work:

"When I encountered this poem by Christina Rossetti, I immediately thought of my mother's life. She has had a difficult journey, although someone meeting her for the first time would never know. She lost both of her parents to cancer when she was in college, lost her brother when he was still quite young, and most recently, lost her husband of 43 years (my father) to cancer. I was still very young when her brother passed away, and not born yet to be there for the passing of her parents, but I watched my mother care for my father throughout his battle.

My mother is undoubtedly a strong woman. But even more, she is able to see the good in difficult situations. After everything that has happened, she is able to understand that spring will, in fact, bloom where now the ice is – that all things ultimately teach us something and make us better, if only we will let them. Not only does she go on, but she chooses love, positivity, and selflessness.

There seemed no better way to honor my mother (who is a lover of music and a musician herself) than to have women's choirs across the country singing these words. Perhaps someone going through a difficult time will find comfort in them."

*stay strong through your pain
grow flowers from it
you have helped me
grow flowers out of mine so
bloom beautifully
dangerously
loudly
bloom softly
however you need
just bloom
- Rupi Kaur*