

UMERI

DRAKE UNIVERSITY ALUMNI CHOIR
AIMEE BECKMANN-COLLIER, CONDUCTOR

OF TIME AND THE SEASONS

featuring music of contemporary American, British,
and Latvian composers and the premiere of
Within the Circles of Our Lives by William Dougherty

Sunday, October 9
3:00 pm
St. Ambrose Cathedral
Sixth Avenue and High Street





NOTES FROM ABC

“How long until we get there?” “The summer has just flown!” “It’s been such a long day.” “It seems as though I blinked a couple of times and my infant child was heading for college.” “The pandemic has certainly skewed my sense of time.”

Our sense of time varies, depending on our ages and stages of life, the number of items on our “to do” list, the weather, our mood, our perception of the past and future. The changes we experience would seem to have much to do with that perception. The field of physics defines time as change or the interval over which change occurs. Physicists note that it is impossible to know that time has passed unless something changes. On both personal and societal levels, those changes then form the narrative of the seasons of our lives, individually and collectively.

Music, often defined as “sound organized in time,” measures changes over time regarding such elements as pitch, volume, timbre, texture, harmony, and articulation. Making music requires precision in managing granular units of time, while it also creates an overarching sense of a temporal landscape. And choral music, which represents the marriage of text and music, can provide an opportunity to reflect on time as captured in specific moments, in seasons of the year, in the length and breadth of a life.

Time is measured in many ways, one of which is the seasons as they occur in the natural world. Poets have used the seasons, which are such clarifying measurements for those of us who live in the Midwest, as metaphors for aspects of human life.

In this concert, we invite you to consider your perception of time, its passage in your own life, and the seasons of your living as you reflect on the words and music contained within the pieces you'll hear today. The concert begins with works exploring time in a broad-based manner, its freshness and finitude, and travels through the seasons of the year, seen by poets as metaphors for new life and love, hope, cynicism, death, paradox, changing relationships, human challenge, possibilities, and joy. Near the end of the performance, *Only in Sleep* functions as a “look back” piece, addressing the role of memory in measuring time. The concert concludes with the premiere of a piece commissioned for Umeri, *Within the Circles of Our Lives* (music by Drake emeritus professor Dr. William P. Dougherty, with text by Wendell Berry), which summarizes the circularity of life, both in our relationships with others and in relation to the passage of time itself.

Aimee Beckmann-Collier



OF TIME AND THE SEASONS

Time
No. 1 of the Choral Dances from *Gloriana* Benjamin Britten
(1913-1976)

Virtue
from *Three Elizabethan Part-Songs* John Cheetham
(b. 1939)

April is in my mistress' face
Thomas Morley
(1557-1603)

Summer
from *Seasonal Songs* Lloyd Pfautsch
(1921-2003)

Bitter for Sweet
John Chorbajian
(b. 1936)

The Snow is Deep on the Ground
Katie Kring
(b. 1983)

Lovers Love the Spring
from *Three from Shakespeare* David Dickau
(b. 1953)

Within the Circles of Our Lives
William P. Dougherty
(b. 1956)

Only in Sleep
Ēriks Ešenvalds
(b. 1977)

Kelly Schnackenberg, soprano

PROGRAM NOTES AND TEXTS



Time from *Gloriana* – Benjamin Britten (text by William Plomer, 1903-1973)

Benjamin Britten, one of Britain's most illustrious composers, wrote the opera *Gloriana* to celebrate the 1953 coronation of Queen Elizabeth II. This piece, the first of five movements that Britten called the Choral Dances, was chosen in June to begin today's concert and now, ironically, is performed shortly after the Queen's death. The text views time as "lusty and blithe," "young and strong," and as a sower of seed, as the initiator of a new era. In choosing these words, Britten clearly indicated the hope and energy that marked the national mood as the twenty-five-year-old monarch ascended the throne. In naming his opera *Gloriana*, Britten was referencing her predecessor, Elizabeth I (often referred to as *Gloriana* in the music and literature of the late Renaissance), who also became the monarch as a young woman and who reigned in Britain's golden age. Singing and hearing this piece following Queen Elizabeth II's passing, in what was the seventieth year of her reign, provides an interesting perspective on time.

*Yes he is Time,
Lusty and blithe,
Time is at his apogee!*

*Although you thought to see
A bearded ancient with a scythe.*

*No reaper he
That cries "Take heed!"
Young and strong in his prime!*

Behold the sower of the seed!

Virtue from *Three Elizabethan Part-Songs* – John Cheetham
(text by George Herbert, 1593-1633)

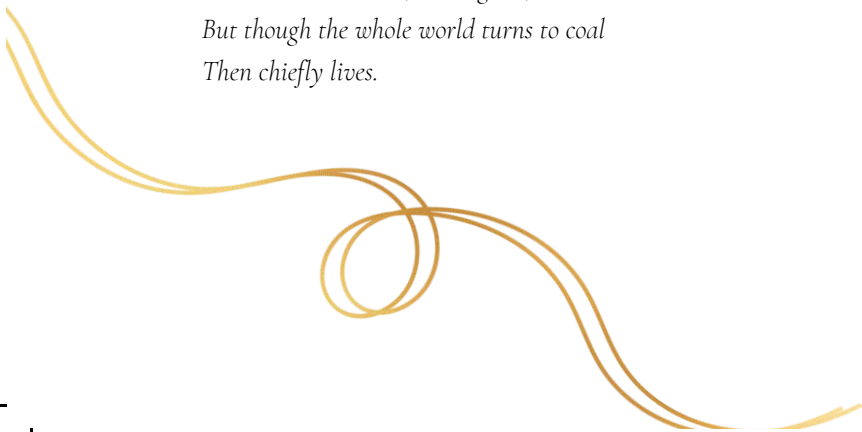
John Cheetham, Professor Emeritus of Music Theory and Composition at the University of Missouri-Columbia, chose texts by three of Elizabethan England's most famous poets for his trio of part-songs. George Herbert's well-known and often-set poem explores the transient nature of life (as seen through the lens of a single day, a flower, and a season), as well as virtue, the human attribute that guarantees immortality.

Sweet day, so cool, so calm, so bright!
The bridal of the earth and sky.
The dew shall weep thy fall tonight:
For thou must die.

Sweet rose, whose hue angry and brave
Bids the rash gazer wipe his eye,
Thy root is ever in its grave,
And thou must die.

Sweet spring full of sweet days and roses.
A box where sweets compacted lie,
My music shows ye have your closes,
And all must die.

Only a sweet and virtuous soul,
Like seasoned timber, never gives;
But though the whole world turns to coal
Then chiefly lives.



April is in my mistress' face – Thomas Morley (text – anonymous)

Thomas Morley was the most famous of all the Elizabethan madrigalists. Like other composers of this genre, he sought to create music that illustrated the emotional landscape of the words, a decidedly modern idea in the late Renaissance. Madrigals were written for the entertainment of those who sang them, rather than for a public performance, and singing them was a way that the nobility of the day engaged with one another following banquets and other social occasions. This particular madrigal traces a romantic relationship from its first flowering (compared to springtime) to its end, which is seen metaphorically as “a cold December.” Love gone wrong, in less than two minutes of music!

*April is in my mistress' face
And July in her eyes hath place.
Within her bosom is September,
But in her heart, a cold December.*

**Summer from Seasonal Songs – Lloyd Pfautsch
(text by Geoffrey Chaucer, 1340-1400)**

Pfautsch's collection of four short pieces opens with this brief celebration of the warmth of the season, which he sets in madrigal style. Pfautsch, a Missouri native, served as Director of Choral Music at Southern Methodist University, as well as the Dallas Civic Chorus, for more than twenty-five years. He composed over 300 works.

*Now welcome, Summer!
Now welcome, Summer, with thy sunne soft,
That hast this winter's weather overshake
And driven away the longe nights black.*

*Well have they cause,
Well have they cause for to gladden oft,
Since each of them recovered hath his make,
Full blissful may they singen when they wake.*

Bitter for Sweet – John Chorbajian (text by Christina Rossetti, 1830-1894)

Written in 1986, this piece captures the bittersweet and inevitable nature of the passage of time from summer to winter by consistent use of the Lydian mode and rich harmonies.

*Summer is gone with all its roses,
Its sun and perfumes and sweet flowers,
Its warm air and refreshing showers:
And even Autumn closes.*

*Yea, Autumn's chilly self is going,
And winter comes which is yet colder;
Each day the hoar-frost waxes bolder,
And the last buds cease blowing.*

The Snow is Deep on the Ground – Katie Kring (text by William Patchen, 1911-1972)

Katie Kring, a Springfield, Missouri composer and graduate of the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University, writes of her piece:

“When I was a little girl, whenever it snowed in the evening, my mother and I would go in my bedroom, open the blinds, turn off the lights, and read “Snow Poems” – poems about snow and winter—by flashlight. I’ve continued this tradition as an adult, and it was on one such snowy night that I discovered Kenneth Patchen’s wonderful poem.

It's a striking work for a number of reasons, but the thing that I found most moving about the piece was, oddly enough, the copyright date. It was first published in 1943, as the greatest war humanity has ever known raged, and yet... 'This is a good world./The war has failed./God shall not forget us.' That statement – of peace in impossible times, of hope in dark hours, and of faith in what we cannot see or understand—is so incredibly powerful, it nearly moves me to tears. And then to wrap such a profound statement in beauty—in the hush of deep snow, in the gently illuminated hair, in the person of the beloved...This is a poem that demands to be sung. I can only hope to have done it justice.”

*The snow is deep on the ground.
Always the light falls
Softly down on the hair of my beloved.*

*This is a good world.
The war has failed.
God shall not forget us.
Who made the snow waits where love is.*

*Only a few go mad.
The sky moves in its whiteness
Like the withered hand of an old king.
God shall not forget us.
Who made the sky knows of our love.*

*The snow is beautiful on the ground.
And always the lights of heaven glow
Softly down on the hair of my beloved.*



**Lovers Love the Spring from *Three From Shakespeare* –
David Dickau (text by William Shakespeare, 1564-1616)**

David Dickau recently retired from his position as Director of Choral Activities at Mankato State University. A graduate of the University of Southern California, where he studied with Morten Lauridsen, Dickau crafted the three movements of this choral cycle in distinct popular idioms. In this concluding movement, he used a slightly naughty text from *As You Like It* as the basis for a piece in a western hoe-down style.

*It was a lover and his lass,
With a hey and a ho, and a hey na-ni-no,
That o'er the green cornfield did pass
In the spring time, the only pretty ring time,
When birds do sing, hey ding a ding ding:
Sweet lovers love the spring.*

*Between the acres of the rye,
With a hey, and a ho, and a hey na-ni-no,
These pretty country folks would lie
In the spring time, the only pretty ring time,
When birds do sing...*

*This carol they began that hour,
With a hey, and a ho, and a hey na-ni-no,
How that a life was but a flow'r
In the spring time, the only pretty ring time,
When birds do sing...*

*And therefore take the present time,
With a hey, and a ho, and a hey na-ni-no,
For love is crowned with the prime
In the spring time, the only pretty ring time,
When birds do sing...*

Within the Circles of Our Lives – William Dougherty
(text by Wendell Berry, b. 1934)

This piece was commissioned for Umeri by generous supporters of the choir, including Joyce Smith, Susan and Greg Bridge, and an anonymous donor. Dr. Dougherty has written several pieces for the Drake Choir and Chamber Choir and toured with the ensembles to Italy, France, and Austria in 2019 when the Chamber Choir sang his *I am in need of music* in such notable venues as the Musikverein in Vienna and the Basilica of St. Francis in Assisi.

The composer writes:

I have had the privilege and honor to write six compositions for ensembles that Dr. Beckmann-Collier has conducted. When she asked me to write for Umeri, the Drake alumni choir, I seized upon the opportunity to work with her and to have this work performed by former Drake students.

My composed reading of Wendell Berry's *Closing the Circle* strives to capture the vibrancy of the poem's textual play of concentric circles. After the opening fifths in the soprano and bass, the melody of the tenor and alto (each a fifth apart) traverses the circle of fifths, mapping the harmonic trajectory of the composition. A dance-like fugato ("we dance the circles of our years") ensues wherein each entry is related by a fifth. The spinning, nested, fluid contrapuntal interplay gives way to set what I take as the crux of the poem, "only music keeps us here." The treatment of the final lines, "out of the sunlight gone/into the darker circles of return" recalls the opening, but now is crafted to signal sorrow and anguish: the circle of life comes to an end.

*Within the circles of our lives
we dance the circles of the years,
the circles of the seasons
within the circles of the years,
the cycles of the moon
within the circles of the seasons,
the circles of our reasons
within the cycles of the moon.*

*Again, again we come and go,
changed, changing. Hands
join, join in love and fear,
grief and joy. The circles turn,
each giving into each, into all.*

*Only music keeps us here,
each by all the others held.
In the hold of hands and eyes
we turn in pairs, that joining
joining each to all again.*

*And then we turn aside, alone.
out of the sunlight gone*

into the darker circles of return.



Only in Sleep – Ēriks Ešņvalds (text by Sara Teasdale, 1884-1933)

Ēriks Ešņvalds is one of the twenty-first century's most celebrated choral composers. A Latvian composer, he has worked with Drake choral ensembles twice, first in 2012 when the Drake Choir and Chamber Choir toured to Latvia, Estonia, and Finland and the Chamber Choir workshopped this piece with him in the State Choir Room of Latvia in Riga. In spring 2019, Ešņvalds visited Drake to coach the Drake Choir as they prepared to premiere his *I Traveled the Old Road*, commissioned by Drake choral supporters in celebration of Drake choral students past and present and sung on the Drake Choir/Chamber Choir's tour to France, Italy, and Austria.

*Only in sleep I see their faces,
children I played with when I was a child.
Louise comes back with her brown hair braided,
Annie with ringlets warm and wild.*

*Only in sleep Time is forgotten,
what may have come to them, who can know?
Yet we played last night as long ago,
and the dollhouse stood at the turn of the stair.*

*The years had not sharpened their smooth round faces,
I met their eyes and found them mild.
Do they, too, dream of me, I wonder,
And for them am I, too a child?*



UMERI



DRAKE UNIVERSITY ALUMNI CHOIR
AIMEE BECKMANN-COLLIER, CONDUCTOR
SUSAN IHNEN, PIANO

SOPRANO

Anna Gebhardt
Katelyn Mardis
Heather Nail
Chloe McCartney
Kelly Schnackenberg
Katie Highsmith
Elizabeth Watson

TENOR

Trevor Bridge
Seth Hammond
Hunter Johnson
Justin Scheel
Tanner Smith

ALTO

Macey Coppess
Jo Dikkers
Amy Deist
Brianna Dompke
Megan Houge
Emma Ksiazak
Abbi Nelson
Maggie Parker
Chelsea Rink

BASS

Benjamin Brodkey
Patrick Carroll
Jacob Fross
Jeff Johannsen
Ian Ksiazak
Daniel Minnie
Thomas Riordan
Ben Schultz



SUPPORT



We hope you'll consider donating to Umeri, which is entirely supported by singers' investments and audience gifts. You may donate online at <https://alumni.drake.edu/umeri> or give your contribution to singers stationed at the doors following the concert.

Contributors who have made this performance possible include:

Anonymous
Greg and Susan Bridge
Trevor Bridge
Rev. Larry Hoffmann
Hunter Johnson
Evelyn and Tom McKnight
Jim and Jeanne O'Halloran
Merriam and Peter Rink
Joyce Smith
Susan Wickham

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St. Ambrose Cathedral
Joni Kinnan
Kelly Mescher Collins
Gabbi Sarcone

ABOUT THE CHOIR



Founded in November 2019, Umeri is an ensemble of alumni of the Drake Choir, Drake University. Seventy-five alumni of the choir live in the Des Moines metro area and, since its inception, fifty-five of them have participated in Umeri. Alumni who have sung in the choir graduated from Drake in the years 1992 through 2022 and represent all Colleges of the University and a plethora of academic disciplines. As alumni, the singers are contributing to the Greater Des Moines community in many professional areas, including education, health care, public relations, finance, marketing, accounting, sports administration, and the arts.

Among their employers are a number of school districts, as well as the Meredith Corporation, Wells Fargo, Nationwide Insurance, US Cellular, Des Moines Performing Arts, the Iowa Arts Council, Iowa Public Radio, ACLU of Iowa, Principal Financial Group, Drake University, Target, the Iowa Events Center, Make-a-Wish Iowa, the Iowa Center for Economic Success, the Iowa High School Girls Athletic Union, the West Des Moines Chamber of Commerce, and Veterans Hospital of Central Iowa.

Umeri, which takes its name from the Latin word for “shoulders,” because Drake Choir members were frequently reminded that they stood on the shoulders of those who came before them, is a project-based ensemble. The choir rehearses 6-8 times preceding a concert, thus requiring a high level of musical independence and advance preparation on the part of each member. Umeri presents three concerts per year. For further information, contact Dr. Aimee Beckmann-Collier (aimee.beckmann-collier@drake.edu).

UMERI'S NEXT PERFORMANCE

Sunday, December 18, 3:00 pm, St. Ambrose Cathedral
The Lessons, Carols, and Reflections of Christmas
No admission charge