



SCHOOL OF
MUSIC, THEATRE & DANCE
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

CHAMBER CHOIR

EUGENE ROGERS, CONDUCTOR

ARIA MINASIAN, MEZZO-SOPRANO

NICOLÒ SPERA, GUITAR

SCOTT VANORNUM, PIANO

Saturday, October 2, 2021

Hill Auditorium

8:00 PM

DOOR OUT OF THE FIRE

Cliff Notes

Carol Barnett

(b. 1949)

text by Marg Walker

My love dwelt in a northern land

Edward Elgar

(1857–1934)

Jeremiah's Fire

Rollo Dilworth

(b. 1970)

Fitz Neeley, percussion

Door Out of the Fire

Christopher Theofanidis

Guitar Prelude

(b. 1967)

I. Burning Cathedral

text by Melissa Studdard

Guitar Interlude I

II. The Book of Rahul

Guitar Interlude II

III. Ruth's Aria

Aria Minasian, mezzo-soprano

Guitar Interlude III

IV. Migration Patterns

Nicolò Spera, guitar

*The use of all cameras and recording devices is strictly prohibited.
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Poet Marg Walker wrote *Cliff Notes from Your Mother as You Leave Home* five years ago in empathy with friends and their children who were going off to college. Loosely modeled on Polonius's advice to his son Laertes ("to thine own self be true") in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Mother's tone is varied—motivational, practical, gently exasperated, regretfully knowing that it's time for them to ignore her expectations and form their own.

Note by Carol Barnett

Cliff Notes from Your Mother as You Leave Home

If it starts to spark, remove it.
The bigger mistake is not asking.
Don't wait too long to get started.
Drop every expectation that does not belong to you
Always poke it first to see if it moves.
Sometimes the only method is inexperience.
Above all, be kind. No—be true to yourself. Also, kind.
If you're going to nap on the sofa, for heaven's sake tuck your glasses underneath it so you won't step on them when you get up.
Figure out for what you would walk through fire.
Walk through fire.

Text by Marg Walker from *Sitting in Lawn Chairs After a Complicated Day*

ELGAR, *MY LOVE DWELT IN A NORTHERN LAND*

Known primarily for his orchestral works, Edward Elgar maintained an unrivaled and unchallenged reputation as England's only eminent composer before WWI. Shortly after his marriage to Alice Roberts in 1889, Elgar composed his first two part-songs, *O Happy Eyes* and *My Love Dwelt in a Northern Land*, perhaps as a wedding gift. These two part-songs marked the important beginning of Elgar's relationship with publisher Novello, who at the time offered Elgar no money but one hundred copies in lieu of copyright.

In *My Love Dwelt in a Northern Land*, the Scottish poet Andrew Lang (1844–1912) evokes a theme common in Victorian times—the naïveté of youthful love often unrequited or unfulfilled because a lover dies. In Lang's poem, the words are spoken by a woman who remembers her dead lover and the green forest in which they sat together and watched the moon. It may seem ironic that Elgar chose to set such a despondent text at the beginning of his marriage, yet the pervading sense of joy found within the music seems to illuminate an optimistic love.

Throughout the work, Elgar uses rich harmonies, soaring melodies, terraced dynamics, and a variety of textures to romanticize and highlight the text. The first, second, and fourth verses are set nearly identically in A minor with slight changes in each part to create interest and variety. In the third verse, Elgar changes from A minor to C major and divides both the tenors and the basses to fill out the sound. The soaring melody is then heard in the sopranos and first tenors, while everyone else sings a repetitive, rhythmic motif. This "accompanimental device" was a favorite of Elgar's, later used in other works such as *Death on the Hills* and *Serenade*.

Note by David Hahn

My love dwelt in a Northern land,
A dim tower in a forest green
Was his, and far away the sand
And gray wash of the waves were seen
The woven boughs between:

And through the Northern summer night
The sunset slowly, slowly died away,
And herds of strange deer, silver-white,
Came gleaming through the forest gray,
And fled like ghosts before the day.

And oft that month, we watch'd the moon
Wax great and white o'er wood and lawn,
And wane, with waning of the June,
Till, like a brand for battle drawn,
She fell, she fell, and flamed in a wild dawn.

I know not if the forest green
Still girdles round that castle gray,
I know not if the boughs between
The white deer vanish ere the day:
The grass above my love is green,
His heart is colder than the clay.

Text by Andrew Lang

ROLLO DILWORTH, *JEREMIAH'S FIRE*

Living composer Dr. Rollo Dilworth is widely known and respected for his contemporary settings and arrangements of well-known African-American spirituals. *Jeremiah's Fire* is one of several works created by Dilworth in his quest to compose new settings of the traditional spirituals that reference popular biblical figures such as Joshua, Elijah, Daniel, and John the Revelator.

Dilworth uses varied harmonic language that builds in density and complexity as the story of Jeremiah's life unfolds. Like many spirituals, the first few measures begin slowly and declamatory in a vocal jazz style. Using syncopation and rhythmic vitality, the verses are written in a classic call and response format in which the tenors and basses tell the story while the sopranos and altos seem to comment on the story heard. In the middle of the work, a layered, rhythmic choral ostinato appears where more voices join on each repetition, reminiscent of the Moses Hogan choral tradition. Heightening the energy is the exciting tambourine part that Dilworth writes, "is vital to the successful performance of the piece. It is used to add drama and color to the choral work through voice doublings and phrase punctuations."

Jeremiah's Fire is only 52 measures long, corresponding to the 52 chapters found in Jeremiah's book in the Hebrew Bible.

Note by David Hahn

Jeremiah said it was jus' like fyer
Shut up in his bones.

Jeremiah jus' like fyer
Shut up, shut up, jus' like fyer down in his bones. Yes!
He had the fyer to preach the word.
Jeremiah's fyer. Oh!

Young man Jeremiah, the son of Hilkiyah, had a gift to prophesy, preach it!
Jeremiah! Jeremiah was given a mighty gift from the lord to prophesy. Preach it!
Prophet Jeremiah, received holy fyer so that all would turn from sin, preach it!
Jeremiah! Jeremiah was challengin' citizens of the land to turn from sin. Preach it!

Tell all generations, and warn all the nations, if they don't pray, then they surely will die! Oh!
Tell the world! Tell the world if they don't pray and learn to obey, they surely will die! Oh!
Turn from evil labor, and give love to your neighbor. Repent or life will be empty within! Oh!
Turn away! Turn away from blasphemy or life's gonna be most empty within! Oh!

Jeremiah jus' like fyer
Shut up, shut up, jus' like fyer down in his bones. Yes!
He had the fyer to preach the word.
Jeremiah's fyer. Oh!

Jeremiah Oh, Jeremiah felt the holy fyer.
Oh, Jeremiah felt the burn-in desire in his heart to preach the world! Oh!

THEOFANIDIS, *DOOR OUT OF THE FIRE*

Door Out of the Fire (2021) is a setting of four choral “messages in a bottle” based on poems by Melissa Studdard—a kind of time capsule reflecting some of the major worries and issues of our time.

The first, “Burning Cathedral,” is about the inability to find metaphoric and literal oxygen in the time of COVID, set within the context of the forest fires created as a result of climate change, and the desperation and exasperation felt across the nation in the Black Lives Matter movement.

The second, “The Book of Rahul,” lauds the heroic efforts of Rahul Dubey, who welcomed BLM protesters into his home overnight in Washington, D.C. at the moment in which they were about to be arrested for breaking curfew.

The third, “Ruth’s Aria,” is a solo reflection on the quiet power of Ruth Bader Ginsberg’s life and her evolving understanding and movement toward creating greater justice.

The last, “Migration Patterns,” is an ode to open borders and open hearts that imagines smuggling a star to another part of the sky, and suggests what is needed is a world anthem that “everyone knows the words to.”

Each of the movements has an accompanying prelude or interlude, played on the acoustic guitar, and in fact that instrument serves as the contemplative soul of the piece. I am incredibly indebted to Nicolò Spera, who was a guiding hand in the guitar writing, and whose vision and drive made this work possible.

Note by Christopher Theofanidis

Burning Cathedral

I'm Not Sure Exactly When the Forest Turned
into a burning cathedral, but I have seen the animals inside it
release to the sky like a soul leaving a body. I wore
a paper bag on my face
to their unofficial funeral—something
to hyperventilate into, to remind myself
that I still have lungs beneath the heat, beneath corona,
still have lungs inside the chokehold
of law enforcement gone awry.

I walk into what's burning
and burn myself with it—

because every time I view the news,
there's another story to bandage,
another tragedy to bury.

I can't plant fast enough:
the trees in my yard, the heart
in my garden,
the words that could be a conduit
for some lone moment of grace, can't plant
fast enough to make up for what is lost
in a year, a decade, a lifetime
when no one can breathe.

At the edge of compassion, I circle and look
for a trail. I resuscitate a memory
of who we were before we caused this.
I study it all, study
nothing, study life and death
and the enclosure
of an atmosphere-less
world. I recall a human who is part
of nature, not a lord of it,
and I step in, step into the thicket

like a deer

before the first hunter
was born.

The Book of Rahul, marginalia

Chapter 1, Verse 1, Fact Check

“Rahul Dubey, 44, described the chaotic
moments just before 9:30 p.m. when he
opened the door of his Swann Street home,
near Dupont Circle, to scrambling protesters.”
—Derrick Bryson Taylor, *The New York Times*

Chapter 1, Notes on Verse 1

He was long and wide-minded and reminded
them of love hugging itself, the way
a hurricane swirls around its own eye,
holding what it wants in its center,
hurtling everything else away with its broad
arms, the way love doesn't
back down, doesn't close
its Swann wings, or
its doors.

Chapter 4, Fact Check

“Dubey also gave them food, water, and
helped them charge their phones. As some
of the protesters were hit by pepper spray,
he helped them with milk and water for relief
for their eyes.”

—Reethu Ravi, *The Logical Indian*

Chapter 4, Notes on Verse 23

They said hungry, and he said here.
They said thirsty, and he said here.
They said tired, and he said here.
They said change, together, and he said here.

Chapter 5, Response to Verse 17

Shelter is an anchor in a wave
of city streets, a night opening to its kin.

Chapter 5, Quote from Rahul Dubey

“They’re the ones out there who got sprayed.
I just held a door open,” he said. “They’re
the heroes. They are America.”

—Qtd. by Tasneem Nashrulla, *BuzzFeed*

Chapter 8, Notes on Verse 12

In the first hour, he washes white
lies from their eyes, transforms
their fear into remembrance of who
they are, have always been, what
they have already achieved.

Chapter 11, Response to Verse 22

(r)evolution is ancient, the expansion
and contraction of space into star.

Chapter 11, Quotes from Allison Lane, Protester

“Cops are trying to convince Rahul to get us

out of the house. He said we not leaving
and bring me my pizza.”

Chapter 11, Notes on Verse 24*

God says, Thou shalt not kill.
Rahul says, But what about with kindness?

**variation on two lines from a poem by Katie Condon*

Chapter 17, Notes on Verse 16

Anger is vertical. Raising us, raising us
higher than a tower of ideas, higher than a flag.

Chapter 17, Verse 25

Reminded me of this line: “Freedom is
what you do with what has been
done to you.”

—Sartre

But anyway, to hell with Sartre.

Chapter 23, Notes on Verse 2

Is he a man or a bomb
shelter in the fallout of God’s mind?

Chapter 25, Quote from Rahul Dubey

“I hope that my 13-year-old son
grows up to be just as amazing as they are.”

Chapter 25, Notes on Verse 3

The man who birthed a family from
the pitch of his eye.

Chapter 25, Quote from Rahul Dubey

“I’m getting text messages and calls
from the random 70 strangers who
are now family who sheltered with me.”

—Qtd. by Marisa T.M. Kashino, *Washingtonian*

Chapter 26, Notes on Verse 8

On the final day, he said, Go forth, and they
went forth, neither broken sounds,
nor the singing of eagles, neither home,
nor completely away. He said, The future is not
a knotted rope in the hands of a man you
cannot see. It is an empty certificate,
and you are the signature, the pane,
the frame.

Ruth's Aria

for the notorious RBG

Because I was a hundred-year flower
the world was waiting to see bloom,

I unlatched the scabbard
for cutting shadows away from

decisions ill-made. I cut hackneyed,
hand-me-down, halftime rights

from the hands that held them, and I
returned them stitched back whole. Society

had raised me on baloney
and broken wishbones,

babel and busted platitudes,
on repeated, ruthless

galaxies of restraint. And I said, No
matter. I said, While everyone else was learning

Pig Latin, I was writing
a new alphabet, a new country, empathy's

affidavit. While the world was burning
in history's buildings, I was building

a door out of the fire. I saw that that the law
was busy watering

weeds, so I drank rainwater and opera,
set my heart cycle to bloom. And I bloomed

and bloomed and bloomed. And left
a seed-spangled wake behind me.

Migration Patterns

In the dream I tell customs my llama is a goat.
Because sometimes the heart is not large

enough to hold what is beautiful
if the mind finds it exotic. Sometimes the mind

mistakes itself for a hoarded piece of land
and little campfires spring up everywhere. Smoke

slinks through chain link. Small hands and shoulders
capsize beneath a dehydrated, salt-sick

sun. In the dream I carry mountains through
international waters. I carry the hills, their babies,

to safety. Sometimes I wave away a predator
and there is fire in my hand and my hand

does not want to be part of a human body.
It wants to belong to the llama, the goat, the hills,

the mountain. In the dream I've got the North Star
in my trunk. I'm driving it across a border.

I'm taking it to a different part of the sky. It can't
stand what it has seen. What we need

is not a fixed point. What we need is a world
anthem that everyone knows the words to, one

that says, Come in, come on, come over. I've got you.
In the dream, light leaks from thin cracks

where the trunk door meets the body of the car.
The star says, Put me on the dashboard, and I will guide

you. The officer says, Illegal. You can't take a star
to another part of the sky. And I say, Watch me.

I say, I've got enough light to do anything.

Text by Melissa Studdard

CHRISTOPHER THEOFANIDIS's music has been performed by many of the world's leading performing arts organizations, from the London Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra, and New York Philharmonic to the San Francisco Opera, the Houston Grand Opera, and the American Ballet Theatre. He is a two-time Grammy nominee for best composition, and his *Rainbow Body* is one of the most performed works of the new era, having been performed by over 150 orchestras worldwide. Mr. Theofanidis is currently on the faculties of Yale University and the Aspen Music Festival, and directs a workshop for the Albany Symphony's American Music Festival each summer.

MELISSA STUDDARD is the author of two poetry collections, *I Ate the Cosmos for Breakfast* and *Dear Selection Committee* (forthcoming summer 2021), and the chapbook *Like a Bird with a Thousand Wings*. Her work has been featured by PBS, NPR, the *New York Times*, *The Guardian*, and the Academy of American Poets' Poem-a-Day series, and has also appeared in periodicals such as *POETRY*, *Kenyon Review*, *Psychology Today*, *New Ohio Review*, *Harvard Review*, *Missouri Review*, and *New England Review*. Her awards include the Penn Review Poetry Prize, the Tom Howard Prize from Winning Writers, the Lucille Medwick Memorial Award from the Poetry Society of America, and more.

Italian guitarist **NICOLÒ SPERA** brings to his teaching and performing a unique synthesis of European and American traditions.

Nicolò is one of the few guitarists in the world to perform on both six-string and ten-string guitars, as well as on theorbo. His wide-ranging repertoire includes the extraordinary music of

the Franco-Andalusian composer Maurice Ohana. He has given lecture-recitals on the music of Ohana at different institutions and festivals, including the Mediterranean Guitar Festival, Arizona State University, Conservatorio della Svizzera Italiana, Conservatorio Giuseppe Verdi in Milan, San Francisco Conservatory, and the University of Surrey for the launch of the International Guitar Research Centre. His CD of Ohana's complete works for solo guitar (Soundset Recordings), presenting the world première recording of *Estelas*, was awarded the five-star "Disco del mese" review by Seicorde, the major Italian classical guitar magazine, and it was described as "un disco di altissimo valore."

With Soundset Recordings, Nicolò has also published his own transcriptions of J. S. Bach's Cello Suites 4, 5, and 6, for the ten-string guitar. About this recording, cellist Judith Glyde wrote that "it is a refreshing, captivating perspective on these boundless works, and a breathtaking discovery of an unprecedented sound world."

In 2017, the Anglo-Spanish label Contrastes Records presented Nicolò's recording of his transcriptions for the ten-string guitar of works by Catalan composers Federico Mompou and Enrique Granados.

Nicolò has presented recitals for some of the oldest concert series in Europe, such as the Hugh Lane Gallery in Dublin and the Sibelius Museum in Turku, and for major guitar events: Sanremo Guitar Festival, Festival Mediterraneo della Chitarra, and Festival Corde d'Autunno in Italy; Festival de la Guitarra de Sevilla in Spain; the International Guitar Symposium at the University of Surrey in the UK; and guitar concert series at the University of Louisville, University of Kentucky, University of Rhode Island, Vanderbilt University, and Belmont University in the US.

He is equally at home in outreach concerts for the young, masterclasses for all ages, solo recitals, and concerti with orchestra. As a soloist, he has performed in the US and Europe with conductors Michael Butterman, Andrés Cárdenes, Alejandro Gómez Guillén, Devin Hughes, William Intriligator, Cynthia Katsarelis, René Knetsch, and Michael Summers. About one of his concerto performances, Peter Alexander wrote: "Spera is clearly a master of his instrument who plays with a palpable love and joy in every note. He has the ability to take expressive freedom with the music without ever losing a strong sense of beat, of meter, and of phrase. Spera's joy in playing this music was contagious to all, orchestra and audience alike, making this a performance to relish and remember" (*Sharps & Flatirons*).

Together with violinist Charles Wetherbee and the Boulder Philharmonic Orchestra, he commissioned and performed the world premiere of *InvisibleCities*, a double concerto for guitar, violin, strings, and percussion, written by the Welsh composer Steve Goss, who based this work on Italo Calvino's visionary book.

In 2019, Nicolò performed in the US and in Italy three major works for guitar and choir: *Romancero Gitano* by Mario Castelnuovo-Tedesco, and two new pieces that he commissioned from Italian composers Nicola Campogrande and Nicola Jappelli. These three compositions, which offer an unprecedented full program of music for this unusual pairing, are conceived as a dialectical exchange, with each composer's poetic and musical vision presenting a different approach to the relationship between the guitar and the choir. The recording of this program, with Denver's St. Martin's Chamber Choir, was published by Brilliant Classics. It has received a five-star review by Seicorde, in which Nicolò was described as "a scrupulous and sensitive musician: his interpretations are admirable and display a profound preparation and a solid technique."

His most influential teachers are Oscar Ghiglia, Jonathan Leathwood, and Lorenzo Micheli. Nicolò holds degrees from the Claudio Monteverdi Conservatory in Bolzano and the prestigious Accademia Musicale Chigiana in Siena, an Artist Diploma in Guitar Performance from the University of Denver, and a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the University of Colorado Boulder.

In 2011, Nicolò was appointed to the faculty at the University of Colorado Boulder, where he is professor of classical guitar. He is also on the faculty of the study abroad program Chigiana Global Academy in Siena, Italy.

In 2013, he founded the University of Colorado International Guitar Festival and Competition, an unprecedented event that attracts prestigious guests, guitar performers, and students from all over the world.

Notes Edited by Andrew Kohler



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*Saturday, November 6, 2021 at 8:00 PM
Hill Auditorium
General admission \$20/\$10/\$5*

UNIVERSITY CHOIR

*Wednesday, November 10, 2021 at 8:00 PM
Hill Auditorium*

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*Friday, November 19, 2021 at 7:00 PM
University of Michigan Museum of Art*

WOMEN'S GLEE CLUB

*Saturday, November 20, 2021 at 8:00 PM
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General admission \$20/\$10/\$5*

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*Sunday, November 21, 2021 at 8:00 PM
Walgreen Drama Center, Stamps Auditorium*

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