

Emerald Ensemble – February 2019
“The Little Match Girl Passion”
Program Notes and Texts

Technicians of the Sacred (2018)

David Hahn (b.1956)

world premiere performance

1. Genesis
2. Drum Poem
3. The Killer
4. Bean Flower
5. My Sun
6. The Stars

the little match girl passion (2007)

David Lang (b.1957)

1. Come, daughter
2. It was terribly cold
3. Dearest heart
4. In an old apron
5. Penance and remorse
6. Lights were shining
7. Patience, patience!
8. Ah! perhaps
9. Have mercy, my God
10. She lighted another match
11. From the sixth hour
12. She again rubbed a match
13. When it is time for me to go
14. In the dawn of morning
15. We sit and cry

Home to Heaven (1984, rev. 2018)

William Averitt (b.1948)

first performance of revised version

1. Holy Manna (“Brethren, we have met to worship”)
2. Distress (“So fades the lovely blooming flower”)
3. Sweet Rivers (“Sweet rivers of redeeming love”)
4. Evening Shade (“The day is past and gone”)
5. The Morning Trumpet (“O when shall I see Jesus”)

This concert will be presented without intermission.

Technicians of the Sacred (2018)

by David Hahn (born 1956)

When one prepares to hear music by David Hahn, one never knows what to expect. Perhaps it will be a neo-Renaissance motet, such as *De omnibus apostolis...* perhaps a neo-ethnic work such as *Concerto Anatolia*, a guitar concerto based on Turkish themes... perhaps a post-modern, pacifist electronic composition such as *Apocalypse Cow...* perhaps one of his more recent, self-consciously modernist pieces written for the chamber ensemble Concert Imaginaire... or, as when tonight's conductor first met him, perhaps a pitchless, intentionally silly, phonetic deconstruction of text, as in *Turkey, Turkey*.

Born in Philadelphia, Hahn attended a Quaker school and studied comparative literature at Brown University. He converted eventually to music, continuing his studies at the New England Conservatory in Boston and London's Guildhall School. Upon returning to Boston, he developed a career as lutenist, founded the award-winning Boston Renaissance Ensemble, and joined the faculty at NEC. Hahn's love of early music took him to a doctoral fellowship in historical musicology at Stanford, where he began to learn composition by analyzing the scores of the great Renaissance masters, particularly Josquin. In 1993 he made his way to Seattle, where he has taught music at all levels.

The composer writes:

I recently came across a volume called *Technicians of the Sacred*, an anthology of poetry and stories selected from various native cultures from around the world. From this book, I selected six texts which I thought would work well for choral settings. Each piece has a different affect, and gives a sense of the sacred value of nature and the heightened reality of a mythic sensibility.

The text of "Genesis" relates well to the "darkness and void" of the Bible. The difference lies in the mode of action: all statements are in the negative. Each line mentions things we now know—mountains, deer, fish, grizzlies—that "were not." There is no god, only the ubiquitous "they say" after every line. I assert that "they" are the elders: those respected ones who pass down knowledge from earlier times. I have employed the treble singers as an "aura" setting the words "they say," which provides a sonic backdrop for the text. The main text is carried by the lower voices.

"Drum Poem" begins with repetitions of the sounds *m* and *f*. I use these as vocal drum sounds. They accompany the treble voices (a duet inspired by the fourteenth-century composer Francesco Landini) who beseech the Witch not to kill the children, offering the services of the Holy Dummer. There is magic in the drum. The drummer has a spiritual quality and can sound his drum which, with any luck, with assuage the Witch. "The Killer" is one of the most chilling texts I know. It is a dialog, killer to victim, about what will happen with the now alive body. Significant is the repetitive command: Listen.

"Bean Flower" is a sweet song which ends with a tinge of pessimism. Pagan hymns in praise of the sun have even found their way into the Bible (for instance, Psalms 19 and 91). My setting of "My Sun" makes extended use of quartal harmony and is inspired by one of the favorite pieces, Carl Ruggles's *Sun-treader*. I was going to complete this madrigal cycle at five pieces but then found "The Stars," an homage to the choir and all humanity: "For we are the stars. We sing."

1. Genesis

Water went / they say.

Land was not / they say.

Water only then, mountains were not / they say.

Stones were not / they say.

Fish were not / they say.

Deer were not / they say.

Grizzlies were not / they say.

People were washed away / they say.

Then wind was not / they say.

Then rain was not / they say.

Then clouds were not / they say.

Stars were not / they say.

All was dark.

— Kato (Cahto) people of coastal northern California

2. Drum Poem

O Witch, don't kill me, Witch

Please spare me, Witch

This Holy Drummer swears to you that

When he rises up some morning

He will sound his drums for you some morning

Very early

Very early

Very early

O Witch that kills our children very early

O Witch that kills our children very early

This Holy Drummer swears to you that

When he rises up some morning

He will sound his drums for you some morning

Very early

Very early

Very early

Hear me talking to you

Try and understand

— Ashanti people of central Ghana

3. The Killer

Listen: my knife drills your soul

Listen: whatever your name is, one of the Wolf people

Listen: I'll cover your bones with black flint

I'll cover your bones with black feathers

I'll cover your bones with black rocks

You're going where it's empty

Black coffin out on the hill

Listen: the black earth will hide you

will find you a black hut

out where it's dark

Listen: Your soul's spilling out

Listen: It's blue

— Cherokee people, originally from the southern Appalachians

4. Bean Flower

Bean flower,

Black and white

Like the heart of that dark man

Who loves two women.

Love live the apple.

Its tears are sweet.

This world has reason

To be bitter.

Little star of heaven

Lend me your brightness,

For the life of this world

Is a dark night.

— Quechua people of Peru

5. My Sun

My Sun, the golden garden of your hair
Has begun to flame
And the fire has spread over our cornfields.

Now the green ears are parched
Pressed by the presence of your breath
And the last drop of sweet is wrung from them.

Strike us with the rain of your arrows,
Open to us the door of your eyes,
O Sun, source of beneficent light.

— UNSPECIFIED

6. The Stars

For we are the stars. For we sing.
For we sing with our light.
For we are birds made of fire.
For we spread our wings over the sky.
Our light is a voice.
We clear a road for the soul
for its journey through death.

For we are the stars. For we sing.
For we sing with our light.

—Passamaquoddy people of Maine

the little match girl passion (2007)

by **David Lang** (born 1957)

David Lang first came to prominence as co-founder in 1987 of the populist and experimental music festival Bang on a Can. But his musical background was thoroughly academic: studies at Stanford, the University of Iowa, and Yale, under such bastions of modernism as Lou Harrison, Jacob Druckman, Morton Subotnik, and Hans Werner Henze. As with many composers who came to musical awareness during the 1980s, Lang's works often show stylistic hallmarks of minimalism: short, repeated notes; recurring rhythmic cells; static, tonal harmonies; steady, gradually shifting dynamics; complex structures built on overlapping or slowly expanding these elements. But nods to pop music often appear in harmonic progressions, driving rhythms, and instrumentation. He has written for the world's most esteemed music organizations, ranging from the adventuresome Kronos Quartet, to radical choreographer Twyla Tharp, to early-music mavens Anonymous 4, to the ultra-traditional halls of the Boston Symphony. Lang now lives in New York and teaches at Yale.

To read the many program notes on Lang's website is to delve into a questing, inquisitive, humanistic heart who yearns constantly to inspire a spirit of connectedness, of universality. For those interested in further exploring his output, I suggest listening to the following: *Are You Experienced?* (1989), for fourteen instruments and a narrator who catalogs various thoughts that may pass through the mind as the listener is hypothetically dealt a fatal blow to the head; *pierced* (2007), a driving triple concerto for cello, piano, percussion, and strings; *oh graveyard* (2010), a nearly silent choral adaptation of the spiritual "Lay this body down"; and *mountain* (2014), a veritable monolith for orchestra. One bio calls Lang "passionate, prolific, and complicated", the embodiment of "the restless spirit of invention." That just about sums him up, if anything can.

One day, David Lang was casually asked by the then Artistic Advisor of Carnegie Hall, Ara Guzelimian: "If Carnegie Hall commissioned something from you, what would it be?" Lang's wife suggested that he set her favorite story, Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Match Girl*. As Lang pithily puts it: "That was a good idea." The resulting work was scored for four solo voices playing simple percussion parts (brake drum, sleigh-bells, crotales, glockenspiel, bass drum, and tubular bells). Paul Hillier conducted his Theatre of Voices in the premiere at Carnegie Hall in 2007. The next year, Lang crafted a version for full mixed chorus. The work received the Pulitzer Prize for Music in 2008 and has since been heard around the globe.

Andersen's story recounts a poor girl who sits outside on a cold New Year's Eve, hoping to sell matches but failing. She dares not return to an abusive home that isn't much warmer than the nook where she has nestled. So she sits and slowly freezes. She lights a single match for some warmth, and is greeted with a vision. Three more times she lights a match as more visions follow. The final time, she sees her dead grandmother, "the only one who had ever loved her," surrounded in light. At dawn, the child is found dead.

Lang was fascinated by this story as a Christian allegory and thus interpolated into it elements of the Passion of Christ, the story of his torture, crucifixion, and death. *the little match girl passion* comprises fifteen connected sections rather than self-contained movements in the classical sense. In this he recalls Arvo Pärt's 75-minute contiguous *Passio* (1989). But the sections alternate between Andersen's narrative and commentaries based roughly on the arias and chorales in Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* (1727). Listeners familiar with Picander's libretto for Bach will hear many illuminating links, especially in

the first and final movements. The Christian parallel is most clear in the ninth section, when the dying girl calls out, "Eli, Eli" ("My God, my God"), just as Christ had cried from the cross. In this way the Christian story become more universal, for poverty is everywhere.

The altos lead the recitative-like narrative sections, built from a four-pitch germinal cell in F minor: C–F–G–A-flat. The cell is occasionally expanded to B-flat and C, and over the course of the narrative, the phrase rises higher, pitch by pitch, movement by movement, to D-flat, E-flat, F, and finally, at the girl's death, a top G. The narrative becomes louder and more rhythmically active. Similarly, the sections of commentary grow more dissonant and anguished, inviting the listener to observe the scene helplessly. We know from the outset that the girl will die; we observe as it happens. As Johann Jacob Van Niekerk has recently demonstrated, Lang's handling of the Passion "allows the audience ... to feel as if they were somehow part of this injustice." In the final movement, the music drifts away, leaving the germinal cell to the percussionists, which Lang has described as "just the skeletons of their voices... a kind of ghostly abstracted community." Lang further observed: "People are suffering all over the place. We live in a world where if we actually noticed everyone's suffering it would be impossible to live."

1. **Come, daughter**

Help me, daughter
Help me cry
Look, daughter
Where, daughter
What, daughter
Who, daughter
Why, daughter
Patient daughter
Guiltless daughter
Gone

2. **It was terribly cold** and nearly dark on the last evening of the old year, and the snow was falling fast. In the cold and the darkness, a poor little girl, with bare head and naked feet, roamed through the streets. It is true she had on a pair of slippers when she left home, but they were not of much use. They were very large, so large, indeed, that they had belonged to her mother, and the poor little creature had lost them in running across the street to avoid two carriages that were rolling along at a terrible rate. One of the slippers she could not find, and a boy seized upon the other and ran away with it, saying that he could use it as a cradle, when he had children of his own. So the little girl went on with her little naked feet, which were quite red and blue with the cold.

So the little girl went on.
So the little girl went on.

3. **Dearest heart**

Dearest heart
What did you do that was so wrong?
What was so wrong?
Dearest heart
Dearest heart
Why is your sentence so hard?

4. **In an old apron** she carried a number of matches, and had a bundle of them in her hands. No one had bought anything of her the whole day, nor had anyone given her even a penny. Shivering with cold and hunger, she crept along; poor little child, she looked the picture of misery. The snowflakes fell on her long, fair hair, which hung in curls on her shoulders, but she regarded them not.

5. **Penance and remorse**

Tear my sinful heart in two
My teardrops
May they fall like rain down upon your poor face
May they fall down like rain
My teardrops

Here, daughter, here I am
I should be bound as you were bound
All that I deserve is
What you have endured

Penance and remorse.
Tear my sinful heart in two
My penance
My remorse
My penance

6. **Lights were shining** from every window, and there was a savory smell of roast goose, for it was New-Year's eve—yes, she remembered that. In a corner, between two houses, one of which projected beyond the other, she sank down and huddled herself together. She had drawn her little feet under her, but she could not keep off the cold; and she dared not go home, for she had sold no matches, and could not take home even a penny of money. Her father would certainly beat her; besides, it was almost as cold at home as here, for they had only the roof to cover them, through which the wind howled, although the largest holes had been stopped up with straw and rages.

Her little hands were almost frozen with the cold.
Her little hands were almost frozen with the cold.

7. **Patience.**
Patience!

8. **Ah! perhaps** a burning match might be some good, if she could draw it from the bundle and strike it against the wall, just to warm her fingers. She drew one out—"scratch!" how it sputtered as it burnt! It gave a warm, bright light, like a little candle, as she held her hand over it. It was really a wonderful light. It seemed to the little girl that she was sitting by a large iron stove, with polished brass feet and a brass ornament. How the fire burned! and seemed so beautifully warm that the child stretched out her feet as if to warm them, when, lo! the flame of the match went out, the stove vanished, and she had only the remains of the half-burnt match in her hand.

She rubbed another match on the wall. It burst into a flame, and where its light fell upon the wall it became as transparent as a veil, and she could see into the room. The table was covered with a snowy white table-cloth, on which stood a splendid dinner service, and a steaming roast goose, stuffed with apples and dried plums. And what was still more wonderful, the goose jumped down from the dish and waddled across the floor, with a knife and fork in its breast, to

the little girl. Then the match went out, and there remained nothing but the thick, damp, cold wall before her.

9. **Have mercy, my God.**

Look here, my God.
See my tears fall. See my tears fall.
Have mercy, my God. Have mercy.

My eyes are crying.
My heart is crying, my God.
See my tears fall.
See my tears fall, my God.

10. **She lighted another match**, and then she found herself sitting under a beautiful Christmas-tree. It was larger and more beautifully decorated than the one which she had seen through the glass door at the rich merchant's. Thousands of tapers were burning upon the green branches, and colored pictures, like those she had seen in the show-windows, looked down upon it all. The little one stretched out her hand towards them, and the match went out.

The Christmas lights rose higher and higher, till they looked to her like the stars in the sky. Then she saw a star fall, leaving behind it a bright streak of fire. 'Some one is dying,' thought the little girl, for her old grandmother, the only one who had ever loved her, and who was now dead, had told her that when a star falls, a soul was going up to God.

11. **From the sixth hour** there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. And at the ninth hour she cried out:

Eli, Eli.

12. **She again rubbed a match** on the wall, and the light shone round her; in the brightness stood her old grandmother, clear and shining, yet mild and loving in her appearance. 'Grandmother,' cried the little one, 'O take me with you; I know you will go away when the match burns out; you will vanish like the warm stove, the roast goose, and the large, glorious Christmas-tree.' And she made haste to light the whole bundle of matches, for she wished to keep her grandmother there. And the matches glowed with a light that was brighter than the noon-day, and her grandmother had never appeared so large or so beautiful. She took the little girl in her arms, and they both flew upwards in brightness and joy far above the earth, where there was neither cold nor hunger nor pain, for they were with God.

13. **When it is time for me to go**

Don't go from me
When it is time for me to leave
Don't leave me
When it is time for me to die
Stay with me
When I am most scared
Stay with me

14. **In the dawn of morning** there lay the poor little one, with pale cheeks and smiling mouth, leaning against the wall; she had been frozen to death on the last evening of the year; and the New-Year's sun rose and shone upon a little corpse! The child still sat, in the stiffness of death, holding the matches in her hand, one bundle of which was burnt. 'She tried to warm herself,' said some. No one imagined what beautiful things she had seen, nor into what glory she had entered with her grandmother, on New-Year's day.
15. **We sit and cry**
And call to you
Rest soft, daughter, rest soft
Where is your grave, daughter?
Where is your tomb?
Where is your resting place?
Rest soft, daughter, rest soft
Rest soft
Rest soft
Rest soft
Rest soft
You closed your eyes.
I closed my eyes.
Rest soft

— David Lang, after H.C. Andersen, H.P. Paull, Picander, and St. Matthew

Home to Heaven (1984, revised 2018)

by **William Averitt** (born 1948)

If you want to hear group singing that is brig, brash, and oh, so glorious, then find an assemblage of shape-note singers. In the early nineteenth century, American music teachers traveled from town to town, each with his own method of instructing the local church choirs. One system caught on like wildfire, that of writing pitches with different shaped symbols based on the note's position in the musical scale. Hence, shape-note singing.

The shape-note style was especially prominent in the South and Appalachia, and can still be readily found in composer Will Averitt's native western Kentucky. Averitt pursued degrees in music at Murray State University in Kansas and at Florida State University, with summer studies in Europe and at Tanglewood and Yale. Soon thereafter, in 1973, he began teaching at Shenandoah University in Winchester, in northwestern Virginia. He remained there until retirement in 2012. But Averitt is far from the typical "university composer;" his music is instantly approachable, even in its grittier moments. Perhaps this stems from his close ties to the performers: the bulk of his music features either solo flute (his wife is the flutist Frances Lapp Averitt) or chorus (he founded a chamber choir, Winchester Musica Viva, and conducted them for ten years). He also has an impressive corpus of music for chamber ensemble, orchestra, and solo voice.

Averitt identifies the year 1992 as a watershed moment in his career as a composer. In that year, his *Afro-American Fragments*, for mixed chorus on texts of Langston Hughes, won a major competition and began to be taken up by many choirs across the country. In recent years he has been commissioned by an array of university choirs and has developed a close relationship with Choral Arts Northwest, here in Seattle. His choral output includes several works that last an hour or more, which is rare for contemporary choral composers. Then again, Averitt was never a typical "choral composer" either.

Home to Heaven consists of five arrangements of shape-note tunes for unaccompanied choir. Averitt wrote these works for Winchester Musica Viva. They were dutifully premiered, but then languished in a desk drawer for decades. After a visit to Seattle last fall, Averitt sent the scores to tonight's conductor, including the following introduction: "Four of the original arrangements are published as flute quartets and have made the rounds from here to China. Literally. Still, I never thought I quite got things right in lots of places, so I set about 'correcting' the things that I thought didn't work... several times, most recently today! I think this final attempt will be my last." We are thrilled to invite these fine arrangements back to the light.