

Note from the Artistic Director



Since I was a small child, I have been fascinated by mythology. My interest started with hearing stories of the famous ancient Greek legends. Heroes, such as Perseus, Theseus, and Hercules were engaging enough, but much cooler to me were their villainous counterparts – Medusa, the Minotaur, and Ladon. After all, it was illustrations and mental images of gorgons, bull-human hybrids, and many-headed dragons that captivated me. There was, however, something more important beneath the surface. Realizing how absurdly complicated and flawed the heroes were was overshadowed by the revelations about the nature of the supposed monsters. So often these creatures were outcasts. They were misunderstood and they were unloved. The Minotaur was, perhaps shockingly, just as relatable as the hero who had slain him. These fantastic stories weren't merely told for entertainment over the centuries; they carried profound insights into our own humanity, masked in larger-than-life characters. In that light, we're about to explore, through the art of choral music, the full richness of the legends we cherish, including their

deeper meanings. In some cases, we'll even look directly at the monsters of fear and violence that plague us mentally and physically. It is an honor for me to share the podium for our "Heroes & Monsters" concerts with Rachel Davis. I know the musicians have loved working with her, and it's been a pleasure to witness her infectious joy in the music as she leads Inversion Ensemble for the first time. Thank you for supporting new music in Austin!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Trevor F. Shaw'.

Trevor F. Shaw
Artistic Director
Inversion Ensemble

Rachel Davis, Guest Conductor

Rachel Davis, of New Orleans, Louisiana, is a choral conductor based out of Austin, Texas in pursuit of a professional conducting career. She is a recent graduate of the University of Texas at Austin with her Master of Music degree in Choral Conducting, and holds a Bachelor of Music degree in Vocal Music Education from Southeastern Louisiana University. She has had the honor of conducting prestigious groups such as the UT Austin Concert Chorale and Chamber Singers, as well as the Southeastern Louisiana University Concert Choir. In April, Rachel had the honor of premiering three beautiful pieces by New Zealand-based composer Michael Winikoff while serving as Director of the forefront classical a cappella ensemble at UT Austin—Collegium Musicum. Rachel would like to thank Trevor Shaw and Robbie LaBanca for this incredible opportunity to collaborate with Austin's innovative choral group Inversion Ensemble.



Lena Gwendolyn Hill, Narrator



Lena Hill is an actor, voice over talent and singer in Austin, Texas. She's also a mama, partner, friend, confidant, shoulder to cry on and sister. She has over 15 years of performance experience. She's sung at fancy places like The Disney Concert Hall (LA), Meyerson Symphony Hall (Dallas), The Long Center (Austin) and Carnegie Hall (NY) and many many many not so fancy but equally delightful places. She has voiced for loads of fancy brands like Tuesday Morning, Tanger Outlets, Dillard's, HEB, Office Depot, Hilton, Hampton Inn, World Market (many others) and many many many not so fancy but equally delightful brands. Most notably the character of Lefty in the video game Five Nights at Freddy's: Ultimate Custom Night. On the stage and screen, she's had the pleasure of working side-by-side with Oscar, Grammy, and Tony Award winners (such as Eric Whitacre, Hila Plitmann, Sally Kellerman, Shea Whigham, Andrea Burns and Greg Chun) and many many many incredibly talented people who have never won a darn thing. Twitter: @lenagwendolyn, Instagram: @lena.gwendolyn www.lenahill.com

Inversion Ensemble

Heroes/Monsters: songs of legends & beasts

June 1 & 2, 2019

Trevor F. Shaw, Artistic Director / Rachel Davis, Guest Conductor

*indicates World Première Performance

Reading: *The Phoenix on the Sword*, Robert E. Howard

Cimmeria, Land of Darkness*Robbie LaBanca

Text: Robert E. Howard (1906-1936)

I remember
The dark woods, masking slopes of sombre hills;
The grey clouds' leaden everlasting arch;
The dusky streams that flowed without a sound,
And the lone winds that whispered down the passes.

Vista upon vista marching, hills on hills,
Slope beyond slope, each dark with sullen trees,
Our gaunt land lay. So when a man climbed up
A rugged peak and gazed, his shaded eye
Saw but the endless vista--hill on hill,
Slope beyond slope, each hooded like its brothers.

It was a gloomy land that seemed to hold
All winds and clouds and dreams that shun the sun,
With bare boughs rattling in the lonesome winds,
And the dark woodlands brooding over all,
Not even lightened by the rare dim sun

It was so long ago and far away
I have forgotten the very name men called me.
The axe and flint-tipped spear are like a dream,
And hunts and wars are like shadows. I recall
Only the stillness of that sombre land;
The clouds that piled forever on the hills,
The dimness of the everlasting woods.

Oh, soul of mine, born out of shadowed hills,
To clouds and winds and ghosts that shun the sun,
I search my heart and find
Cimmeria, land of Darkness and the Night.

All great myths take place in legendary places - Mount Olympus, Atlantis, Camelot, Asgard and Cimmeria - the home of the great fictional hero Conan the Barbarian. The text used in this piece comes from a short poem by Robert E. Howard which he wrote while living in Boerne, Texas inspired by the terrain of the hill country. Howard uses incredibly descriptive text to paint the picture of the land of Cimmeria such as "sombre hills", "gaunt land" and "woodlands brooding". The verse then switches to the perspective of the narrator who struggles to recall what name was used for him when he existed in this ancient land. In setting this text I aimed to use a dense, sombre harmonic texture to illustrate this hazy memory of a distance place. When the voice of narrator is heard the music switches into a rough, barbaric chant and then back to the dark texture. The use of bassoon and synthesizer layered under the chorus should lend an other-worldly sound to the piece.

Oread*.....Alexander Johnson

Text: Hilda "H.D." Doolittle (1886-1961)

Whirl up, sea—
whirl your pointed pines,
splash your great pines
on our rocks,
hurl your green over us,
cover us with your pools of fir.

Hilda Doolittle (otherwise known as H.D.) is known for her association with the "imagist" school of poetry in the early twentieth century. Formed by Ezra Pound c. 1912, this movement favored simple, lucid, and vivid language over the excessively-worded and abstract poetry of the previous century. At only six lines long, H.D.'s Oread is no exception. The title is key to understanding this text; an "oread" is a mountain nymph from Classical mythology, and in this poem the oread in question is summoning a storm from the sea, explaining the blending of oceanic and forestal language (e.g. "splash your great pines" and "pools of fir"). In addition to this beautiful imagery, H.D.'s use of assonance (e.g. "whirl," "hurl," "fir"), alliteration (e.g. "pointed pines"), the half-rhyme between "over us" and "cover us," and other subtle "sentence sounds" create a wealth of musical possibility in such a short text.

To capture some of these elements, there is a constant feeling of ebb and flow in this piece. The first musical gesture depicts the initial call from the oread to the sea, followed by the distant stirring of the waters in the lower voices. The upper voices respond, depicting the increasing wind of the storm. When the tutti voices enter shortly after, the sea is becoming more and more turbulent as the music builds. After a tempestuous crescendo, the storm suddenly dissipates and the voices gradually calm as the oread pleads to be covered with the ocean's "pools of fir."

Message of Puissant Baal*.....Michael Alec Rose

Text: 13th century B.C.E. Ugaritic tablet, translation by Professor Jack M. Sasson

Word of trees and charm of stones
Whisper of Heaven with the Earth,
The Deep with Stars
To me, to me, your feet must run to me, your legs must race
I have a thought to share with you
Oh come and I will reveal it,
At the core of divine Mount Zaphon
In the sanctuary, my inherited mountain
A lovely spot, a place for:
I know lightning beyond the kin of Heaven
Matters beyond human understanding
Beyond the grasp of Earth's masses
Cancel War, ground Love in Dust!
Pour Peace in Earth.
Message of Puissant Ba'al
Word of the mightiest warrior!
Your feet must run to me, your legs must race
I have a ward to tell, a thought to share with you.

The text of “Message of Puissant Baal” is as heretical a hero/monster text as you could hope for: it is a passage from the Baal Cycle, the saga of the Canaanite gods, discovered by archaeologists on clay tablets in the 1920s at the site of the 13th-century B.C.E. city of Ugarit on the northern coast of Syria. I am extremely fortunate in my friendship with Professor Jack M. Sasson, one of the world’s leading scholars of ancient Near Eastern languages and literature. When I asked Jack to help me with the translation of my favorite passage of the Baal Cycle, within hours he sent back the most vivid and beautiful rendition. With apologies to Professor Sasson, I have taken liberties with the ordering of the text, always for the purpose of setting into highest possible relief the startling power of the archaic poem.

In the section I have adapted, Baal is sending a message to his sister, the warrior goddess Anat, asking for her help to convince their father El to build him a palace. But above and beyond these petty family concerns, the power of the Ugaritic text cuts like a bronze sword through all the intervening millennia, offering a dazzling counterpoint to the image of Baal as the enemy of the Biblical Yahweh, and especially of His prophet Elijah. With gleeful apostasy, my Message quotes the glorious aria from Mendelssohn’s *Elijah*, sung by the prophet at the triumphant climax of his battle with the prophets of Baal. The Baal Cycle vies with the awesome language I love so much in the Hebrew Bible, starkly confronting the life-giving presence of the physical world—Tree and Stone, Heaven and Earth, Stars and Lightning—all of it invested with divine agency and immediate significance for everything that happens to us: War and Peace, Love and Dust.

Reading: *Jabberwocky*, Lewis Carroll

Ladon*.....Trevor Shaw

Text: Trevor Shaw

In the Garden of Hesperides	Sixteen eyes and scaly skin
Grow the golden apple trees	His tragic life was formed in sin
The eater of whose fruit would be	As necks uncoil from branches high
Robed in immortality	Fear overtakes as death is nigh
But just beyond the garden gates	The guardian-serpent’s heads arise
A many-headed terror waits	Wafting smoke invades the skies
With fiery evil in his breath	Behold the dragon’s mighty name:
To meet him will be certain death	“I am Ladon, burn in flames!”

“Ladon, Protector of the Golden Apple Trees” is the second piece I’ve recently written for Inversion Ensemble that blends choral singing with heavy rock/metal. I felt that a creature as fierce as a legendary, multi-headed dragon deserved some fittingly aggressive music. In order for the instruments to more fully explore the metallic heaviness required, “Ladon” uses only six singers, each singing into an individual microphone. Steep portamenti and glissandi throughout the piece mimic the sight of reptilian heads on long necks weaving through the air in front of Hercules when he first encountered Ladon (Hercules was successful in slaying Ladon, but I wasn’t interested in setting that portion of the story). The eerie factor is heightened by frequent unisons breaking into dissonant harmony as well as plenty of tritones for the guitars. I simultaneously wrote two possible texts for “Ladon”, one deliberately more silly, the other a bit more serious. You may be surprised, after reading and hearing the text I chose, to learn that I opted for the more serious of the two poems. It has always been my belief that the best heavy metal is equally awesome and hilariously absurd.

Reading, *El Chupacabras*, Adam Rubin

A Proper Monster.....Darren Schmidt

Text: Margo Fitch

If monsters could meet me,
or shake my hand, I wonder
if their claws would hurt me.

Would I spin a story of a
horrible attack, or would
I say -

Or would they look at me,
so small and fragile, and
wonder what I'd tell my friends.

"I met a strange gentlemen.
He looked a bit peculiar,
but he had better manners than
the other strangers I've met."

Medusa.....Kristopher Fulton

Text: Kristopher Fulton

Let your heroes come to die,
Dawn or dusk or mid of night.
Let them come to feel my bite,
Let them come to fight or fly,
Let your heroes come to die!

They come from every city and town,
From miles and miles around.
They come from every town and city,
No mortal man can slay this beauty.

Let your heroes roll the dice,
Or meet their end to be precise.
Let heroes invade my home,
By the hundreds and along.
Hush now heroes don't you cry,
Tears of stone never dry.
Let them come to fight or fly,
Let your heroes come to die!

Don't you think me beautiful?

Let your heroes come to die,
Dawn or dusk or mid of night.
Let them come to feel my bite,
Let them come to fight or fly,
Let your heroes come to die!

Three years after commissioning my work Prometheus, Eric Hanna Director of the Vancouver Cantata Singers asked if I would be interested writing another piece to add to the series. Without hesitation I said yes, but this time I wanted to write a work for a villain. Medusa was the result. The piece should have a strong sense of range from beginning to end.-Kristopher Fulton

The Sick Rose.....Phillip Michael Bernard

Text: William Blake (1757-1827)

O Rose thou art sick.
The invisible worm,
That flies in the night
In the howling storm:

Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy:
And his dark secret love
Does thy life destroy.

The Sick Rose was written in response to the Isla Vista shooting of May 2014. The shooter, motivated by extreme misogyny, killed 6 people and injured 14 others. The hashtag #YesAllWomen was born out of the discourse that followed in order to bring awareness to the prevalence of sexism that women experience. William Blake's enigmatic poem seemed to me to provide the level of complexity and emotional intensity necessary to explore such an important topic.

The music's shifting textures, meters, tonal areas, and harmonic language seek to evoke the unsettling nature of the subject at hand. Consonant harmony is often revealed from underneath dissonance, representing the resilience of those who endure violence and discrimination. However, the stark ending serves as a reminder of the real and serious consequences that result from allowing darker forces to ferment without meaningful resistance. Rather than being discouraged by the existence of hate and prejudice, I hope that we can learn to acknowledge honestly what circumstances lead to it so to become more able to envision the path to a better future.

Reading: *Hymn to Aristogeiton and Harmodius*, Edgar Allen Poe

ΔΑΙΜΩΝ, Dämon*.....Joshua Chai

Text: Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749-1832)

Wie an dem Tag, der dich der Welt verliehen
Die Sonne stand zum Gruße der Planeten,
Bist alsobald und fort und fort gediehen
Nach dem Gesetz, wonach du angetreten.
So mußt du sein, dir kannst du nicht entfliehen
so sagten schon Sibyllen, so Propheten;
Und keine Zeit und keine Macht zerstückelt
Geprägte Form, die lebend sich entwickelt.

As on the day that you were given to the world
the sun stood to greet the planets,
you instantly thrived and continued to do so
in accordance with the law by which you appeared.
So must you be, you cannot from yourself escape
so has spoken already the Sibyls and Prophets,
and no passage of time or power can break into pieces
characteristic form, living in self-developing.

“Daemon” is the first of five 8-line metrical rhymed poems in a collection Goethe titled “Urworte. Orphisch” (“Primal words. Orphic”). The other four poems are titled Chance, Love, Compulsion, and Hope. “Orphic” refers to Goethe’s study of Orphism, a blend of religion, philosophy, and literature ascribed to Orpheus, the poet of Greek mythology who descended to the underworld. The study of Greek mythology and classical sources, especially religious sources, was especially popular in 19th-century Germany Romanticism, and Goethe’s intense interest, evidenced by his copious comments in the published version of the poem, was an attempt to bring together a hermeneutic of classical mythology combined with a humanist and natural philosophy to give humanity a sense of greater purpose.

The “daemon” of the title is the fate of the individual. Just as there was a fixed alignment of stars when you were born, just as the sun’s rising is inevitable, so you must follow the fate to which you were predestined. The natural, philosophical, and religious world (the sun, the Sibyls, and the Prophets) have pre-ordained your ultimate destiny. Goethe means this to be somewhat comforting (“daemon” doesn’t imply evil, necessarily), in that your ultimate purpose can’t be “broken into pieces,” but this is also a rather dark take on free will.

Musically, this is set in two ways. First, there’s a repeated pitch (D) which is common to the main mode of the piece (Phrygian) and to its non-functional triadic shifts. No matter how far the harmony wants to stray from the center, it doesn’t. Second, a strict canon is presented in first unison, then two, then four parts. It does not vary at all. It is written in four three-measure phrases, against an accompaniment mostly in three four-bar phrases, and each canon phrase ends with a 2-measure hemiola, a common rhythmic device in triple meter music (especially of the German Baroque) to establish finality.

Two Palimpsests on Athena*.....Trevor Villwock

Text: Homer, Hymn IX (“To Athena”) from the Homeric Hymns (translated by H.G. Evelyn White)

Dread is she...
It is she who saves the people as they go out to war and come back.

While writing this piece, I was thinking a lot about early vocal music and the way our conception of the past is distorted through filters of conflicting historical narratives. When I was super into Greek mythology as a kid, Athena was always one of my favorite deities--it's awesome to get to pay tribute to her in this way.

to the weight in my chest.....Marjorie Halloran

Text: Heather Mydosh

I did not invite you here.	you, who I cannot talk myself
I most certainly did not invite	away from, cannot tease or trick
you here tonight, in the cool	or flatter with false promises
between my simple sheets,	of making up old mistakes,
to grip and gouge the muscles	fresh missteps, new gaffs,
of my right pectoral until	and all the papercuts cuts of life.
I cannot breathe, cannot draw air.	

You, who make my ribs grind	I can no longer risk you.
like molars or glacial graniteI can no	longer harbor you.
or any other hard, immovable	I can no longer lay beneath you
thing involuntarily shifted;	and scrub my sternum with blind
you, who fish up clots of phlegm	fingertips, pushing you back
from all my raw undersides,	beneath the bone. Not anymore,
my burnt esophagus, my roiled guts;	

there's no more room for you,
nor for me. I can't let either of us
out, and you can't stay.
I didn't invite you here.

“To the weight in my chest,” a poem by Heather Mydosh, depicts a struggle with the monster that is anxiety. The piece contains close, dissonant harmonies designed to evoke feelings of discomfort and suffocation, like the way panic can leave one feeling like they “cannot breathe, cannot draw air,” or the way worry can create a feeling of unease with no apparent cause. Much of the text is homorhythmic, to mirror the feeling of being unable to break free from the cycle of anxiety. Although the key is often ambiguous, the harmony does not land in major until the narrator states “I can no longer risk you”—her attempt to triumph over the power of panic. The restatement of the first/last line, “I did not invite you here,” is blurred and fades away, to capture how anxiety can lurk just under the surface of the mind, ready to strike again.

Reading: Prometheus Unbound, Percy Bysshe Shelley

DEMON.....Matthew Brown

Text: Marcus 5:9

Legio nomen mihi	Our name is Legion
Est multi sumus	For we are many

DEMON was written and premiered on Saturday, October 15, 2015, presented to an audience of film and video game composers as a demonstration of novel vocal techniques. My challenge to myself was to write a piece with zero specific pitches or texts; previously, I had experimented with such techniques only within the context of more “traditional” choral pieces, such as Pacem. As the piece began to take shape, I realized that the addition of an appropriately spine-tingling text would complement the sound world which was emerging. The Latin included in the piece is taken from a biblical story of demon possession. Asked for a name, the response is: “Our name is Legion, for we are many.” Although this piece may be performed with smaller choirs—perhaps even as few as eight or twelve—I imagine it becoming increasingly effective (and impactful) with greater numbers, given the techniques employed. (A Roman legion consisted of about five thousand men at the time of the story, for what it’s worth!)

The Rage and Reconciliation of King Lear*.....Adrienne Inglis (ASCAP)

Text: William Shakespeare (1564-1616), *King Lear*, Act III/ii:1-9, reprinted in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, permission pending; text added (*noted below) by the composer, based on the deathbed confession of Martin Luther and words of Dr. Milton Henry Riemer, in whose memory the work was commissioned.

Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage, blow!
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout
Till you have drench'd our steeples, drown'd the cocks!
You sulph'rous and thought-executing fires,
Vaunt-couriers of oak-cleaving thunderbolts,
Singe my white head!
And thou, all-shaking thunder,
Strike flat the thick rotundity o' the world!
Crack nature's moulds, all germains spill at once
That make ingrateful man!

Wir sein Pettler, Hoc est verum.* [We are beggars. This is true.]

Where have I been? Where am I? Fair daylight?
I am mightily abus'd. I should ev'n die with pity
To see another thus. I know not what to say.
I will not swear these are my hands. Let's see, I feel this pin prick. Would I were assur'd
Of my condition!
You must bear with me.
Pray you now forget, and forgive; I am old and foolish.

Walk with light.*

(The Shakespeare text sung by the choir is replaced with a rough phonetic approximation of the original pronunciation to approximate the pronunciation probably used in Shakespeare's day.)

Scored for mixed chorus, bassoon, and piano, *The Rage and Reconciliation of King Lear* by Adrienne Inglis weaves passages from Shakespeare's *King Lear* with signature phrases of the Rev. Dr. Milton H. Riemer. Dr. Riemer's words bring insight and reflection to the poignant narrative of a parent-child relationship. Outside in a raging storm, *King Lear* angrily punishes himself for foolishly excluding his favorite daughter, Cordelia, from a portion of his kingdom. As mental illness takes hold, he suffers from curious confusion but understands his failings and begs Cordelia's forgiveness. The Scottish air *Etrick Banks* provides melodic material that yields a royal fanfare, lament, thunderstorm, dementia, regret, and reconciliation. Crunchy chords and unsettling dissonances punctuate the sounds of modal chants and medieval polyphony.

Note from Jonathan Riemer:

My father was a lover of great words and great music. I can think of no better way to honor his careful, thoughtful, yet at times desperately pragmatic journey through life than with this marriage of arts. May every note help is all to Walk With Light.

Dream of Icarus.....Stephanie K. Andrews

Text: Julie Flanders

You don't need the stars	This is what matters	We have been told a story
You don't need the sky	This is what changes	We have been told a lie
You don't need anything	This is the secret of everything	
But the dream you can fly	As the whole world rearranges itself-For you	
Before there was space	There are no strangers	You don't need the stars
Before there was time	In this place	You don't need the sky
Before there was light	Where we come from	You don't need anything
	The moment we start	But the dream you can fly
Before there was hope	We are waiting for someone	
Before there was love		
There was infinite night	Out of this silence	You can fly
	Out of this flash	
And that's where we sleep	Out of this brilliance of fire and ash	
And that's where we fall	We finally explode	
And that's where we go to forget		
And that's where we go to recall	Infinite grace	

I composed "The Dream of Icarus" at the end of 2016 and the beginning of 2017b in collaboration with October Project poet Julie Flanders. At its outset, tempo rubato is used to create an ethereal, dream-like atmosphere. Influenced by the "mystical sevenths" of Brahms, the intervallic leaps of sevenths in the melody are meant to evoke mysticism. Throughout the piece, complex harmonies including seventh, ninth, and thirteenth chords create a fundamentally spiritual character and airy quality. Another essential aspect of this work, text painting, is utilized in the setting of words such as "light" in measures 17-18 and "night" in measures 26-27. The maestoso at the conclusion of the piece is intended to remind us of the significance of our beliefs: that we can indeed fly through the power of our dreams.

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