MEREDITH CHAMBER SINGERS
Andrea Solya, *conductor*
Samuel Stephenson, *graduate assistant conductor*
Dante Freund, *violin*
Maxwell Schultz, *cello*
Andrey Ivanov, *collaborative pianist*

Foellinger Great Hall
Friday, October 16, 2026
7:30 PM

AMERICA WILL BE!

PART I

arr. SHAWN KIRCHNER — **Heavenly Home: Three American Songs**
Hallelujah

ALEX BERKO (b.1995) — **Sacred Place**
I. Opening Prayer
Cooper Coker, *tenor*
II. Amidah
III. Shema
Whitley Smith, *soprano*
Morgan Bothwell, *tenor*
IV. Mi Shebeirach
V. Kaddish
Lila Dettelback, *soprano*
Cade McHugh, *alto*
Morgan Bothwell, *tenor*
Hunter Merriman, *bass*
VI. Closing Prayer
Cooper Coker, *tenor*

arr. SHAWN KIRCHNER — **Heavenly Home: Three American Songs**
Angel Band

PART II

arr. PAUL RARDIN — **Death Came A-Knockin'**

Cade McHugh, Elizabeth Brennecke,
Morgan Lease, *soloists*

KERRY L HAGAN
(b.1974) — **Honky Tonk in Cleveland, Ohio**
world premiere

CARLOS CORDERO
(b. 1992) — **¡Ayúdame! (Venezuelan Plea for Life)**

Miles Niehaus, *bass drum*

GWYNETH WALKER
(b.1947) — **I Lift My Lamp With God's Love**

Lucas Nederloe, Hunter Merriman, Christian Diaz,
Joseph Timberlake, Audrey Brammer,
Maija Flannery, Sophia Katsma, *soloists*

PART III

JOEL THOMPSON
(b.1988) — **America Will Be!**

Sasha Van Den Berg, *soloist*
Catya Carrington, *soloist*

arr. G. PHILLIP SHOULTZ III — **We Shall Overcome**

arr. PAUL JOHN RUDOI — **America the Beautiful**

arr. SHAWN KIRCHNER — **Heavenly Home: Three American Songs**
Unclouded Day

Sopranos
Adeline Arana
Catya Carrington
Lila Dettelback
Sophia Katsma
Emily Lee
Jungmin Lee
Lily Mamminga
Dahlia Medvinsky
Whitley Smith
Sasha Van Den Berg

Altos
Lily Borkowicz
Audrey Brammer
Elizabeth Brennecke
Amelia Cosenza
Ellie Davidson
Maija Flannery
Morgan Lease
Cade McHugh
Esmé Pelton
Ariel Spector

Tenors
Omarr Cheng
Cooper Coker
Christian Diaz
Santiago He
Zihao Liu
Anish Mukherjee
Samuel Stephenson
Joseph Timberlake

Basses
Morgan Bothwell
Graham Carlson
Owen Gonzalez
David Kime
Hunter Merriman
Lukas Nederloe
Kyle Schrage
Nick Schroeder
Keiton Westfall

TEXTS & TRANSLATIONS

arr. Shawn Kirchner
Heavenly Home: Three American Songs
Hallelujah

And let this feeble body fail,
And let it faint or die;
My soul shall quit this mournful vale,
And sail to worlds on high.
And I'll sing hallelujah,
And you'll sing hallelujah,
And we'll all sing hallelujah,
When we arrive at home.

O what are all my suff'rings here,
If Lord, Thou count me meet?
With that enraptured host to appear,

And worship at Thy feet!
And I'll sing hallelujah,
And you'll sing hallelujah,
And we'll all sing hallelujah,
When we arrive at home.

Give joy or grief, give ease or pain,
Take life or friends away,
But let me find them all again,
In that eternal day!
And I'll sing hallelujah,
And you'll sing hallelujah,
And we'll all sing hallelujah,
When we arrive at home.

Alex Berko (b.1995)

Sacred Place

Sacred Place is an ecological service that connects the old with the new, the sacred with the secular, and the individual with their community, The outline of the work is a Jewish service, However, rather than Jewish prayers, the text is made up of various writers and thinkers who speak of the environment as a place of safety, comfort, and beauty. Written for SATB choir, piano, violin, and cello, the six-movement piece is at times a meditation and at times an impassioned prayer for the world we inhabit and share.

—Alex Berko

I. Opening Prayer

In the dusk of the river, the wind
gone, the leaves grow still—
The beautiful poise of lightness,
The heavy world pushing toward it.

—Wendell Berry

II. Amidah

"How softly these mountain rocks are adorned, and how fine and reassuring the company they keep – their brows in the sky, their feet set in groves and gay emerald meadows, a thousand flowers leaning confidingly against their adamantine bosses, while birds bees butterflies help the river and waterfalls to stir all the air into music – things frail and fleeting and types of permanence meeting here and blending as if into this glorious mountain temple Nature had gathered her choicest treasures, whether great or small to draw her lovers into close confiding communion with her."

—John Muir to Teddy Roosevelt (on preserving Yosemite National Park)

III. Shema

The earth says have a place, be what that place
requires; hear the sound the birds imply
and see as deep as ridges go behind
each other.

The earth says every summer have a ranch
that's minimum: one tree, one well, a landscape
that proclaims a universe - sermon
of the hills, hallelujah mountain,
highway guided by the way the world is tilted,
reduplication of mirage, flat evening:
a kind of ritual for the wavering.

The earth says where you live wear the kind
of color that your life is
and by listening with the same bowed head that sings
draw all things into one song, join
the sparrow on the lawn, and row that easy
way, the rage without met by the wings
within that guide you anywhere the wind blows.

Listening, I think that's what the earth says.

—William Stafford

IV. Mi Shebeirach

May the source of strength
Who blessed the ones before us
Help us find the courage to make our lives a blessing
And let us say Amen

Bless those in need of healing with r'fuah sh'leimah
The renewal of body, the renewal of spirit
And let us say Amen

—Hebrew Bible

V. Kaddish

"Let my thoughts come to you, when I am gone,
like the afterglow of sunset at the margin of starry silence."

—Rabindranath Tagore

VI. Closing Prayer

In the dusk of the river, the wind
gone, the leaves grow still—
The beautiful poise of lightness,
The heavy world pushing toward it.

—Wendell Berry

arr. Shawn Kirchner
Heavenly Home: Three American Songs
Angel Band

The latest sun is sinking fast, my race is almost run.
My strongest trials now are past, my triumph is begun.

Refrain:
O come, angel band, come and around me stand,
O bear me away on your snow-white wings to my eternal home.

I know I'm near the holy ranks of friends and kindred dear;
I've brushed the dew on Jordan's banks, the crossing must be near.

I've almost gained my heavenly home — my spirit loudly sings.
The Holy Ones, behold, they come — I hear the noise of wings.

arr. Paul Rardin
Death Came A-Knockin'

You know that death came a-knockin' on my mother's door
Singin', "Come on mother, ain't you ready to go?"
And my mother stooped down, buckled up her shoes,
And she moved on down by the Jordan stream.
And then she shout,
"Hallelujah, Done, done my duty,
Got on my travelin' shoes."

2. sister's
3. brother's
4. neighbor's
5. preacher's

You know that death came a-knockin' on my front door
Singin', "Come on sister, ain't you ready to go?"
I'm gonna stoop right down, buckle up my shoes,
And I will move on down by the Jordan stream.
And then I will shout,
"Hallelujah, Done, done my duty,
Got on my travelin' shoes."

Kerry L Hagan (b.1974)

Honky Tonk in Cleveland, Ohio

At the time of this poem, Cleveland, Ohio, was the 5th largest city in the US. It had a thriving steel and construction industry and booming economy. As a result, there was an influx of immigrants and an increasing wealth gap. The US was under Prohibition laws, growing the black market for speakeasys, and making Cleveland, on the edge of Lake Erie, a major entry point for smuggled alcohol from Canada. Honky tonks were speakeasys where chippies (prostitutes) and jazz music (the kind white people could listen to without controversy) were mixed with illegal alcohol.

Sandburg was well aware of the wealth gap between the rich and poor, the class animosity between the upper and lower classes, poor working conditions, and racism in response to immigration. Sandburg was a progressive and activist for workers' rights, which emerged in his poetry. His poem expresses a veneer of manic jollity while underneath lies an ugliness of poverty, seediness and racism. Sandburg also employs poetical devices such as onomatopoeia and alliteration to create a kind of spoken soundscape of the honky tonk. This setting emphasises those sounds to create a sound world for the poem in music.

—Kerry Hagan

It's a jazz affair, drum crashed and cornet razzes.
The trombone pony neighs and the tuba jackass snorts.
The banjo tickles and titters too awful.
The chippies talk about the funnies in the papers.
The cartoonists weep in their beer.
Ship riveters talk with their feet
To the feet of floozies under the tables.
A quartet of white hopes mourn with interspersed snickers;
"I got the blues.
I got the blues.
I got the blues."
And … as we said earlier:
The cartoonists weep in their beer.

—from *Smoke and steel.* Harcourt, Brace and Hower, 1920.

Carlos Cordero (b. 1992)

¡Ayúdame! (Venezuelan Plea for Life)

When was the last time you were hungry and could not immediately eat? or thirsty and could not find water for hours? This is heartbreaking: to see my country, my family, suffering. I come from Venezuela and I did go through difficult times. Since I could not do much from where I was to help, I decided to fight my pain. I asked myself all the questions and cried while working on my desk, so comfortable yet feeling so guilty and helpless. What was the last time you were sick and could not find the medicine to feel better or even to keep living?

—Carlos Cordero

Mírame,	*Look at me,*
Escúchame.	*Listen to me.*
Estoy sufriendo.	*I am suffering.*
No puedo ver,	*I can't see,*
tengo hambre,	*I am hungry*
tengo sed,	*I am thirsty,*
Estoy enfermo.	*I am sick.*
¡Ayúdame!	*Help me!*

Gwyneth Walker (b.1947)

I Lift My Lamp *With God's Love*

The song "I Lift My Lamp *With God's Love"* was composed by Gwenyth Walker in 2018. In this piece, Walker uses the text from the 1883 sonnet "The New Colossus", which reimagines the Statue of Liberty as a symbol of peace, hope, and refuge, rather than a symbol of military conquest. The author of the poem Emma Lazarus, was an activist for Jewish refugees which is embodied in the poem in the depiction of America as a sanctuary for immigrants. The tone of this song is very hopeful which shows what America should be, a place where people from all over the world can seek refuge, and have freedom. The lamp refers to the Statue of Liberty's torch, a beacon of hope for all those coming into America.

—Ariel Spector
Class of 2027

When I was hungry, did you feed me? When I was shivering, did you bring me clothes?
When I was thirsty, did you bring me water? When I was homeless, did you give a home?
When I was fearful, did you give protection? When I was injured, did you offer care?
When I was threatened, did you stand for justice? And when imprisoned, keep a vigil there?
O my sisters! O my brothers!
If you do this for the least of these, you do this for me… with God in your heart.

Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these the homeless, the homeless tempest tossed to me.
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

O my sisters, with God in your heart.

Joel Thompson (b.1988)
America Will Be!

When I was a young child, I imagined that America was like living on Sesame Street in Rogers' Neighborhood—a utopic land of opportunity and freedom. When I finally arrived at age ten, my dreams had mostly come true, but I also learned a somber lesson that not all principles are easy to put into practice. It was that friction between professed ideals and painful reality that Langston Hughes captured in his poem, "Let America Be America Again." That friction is also the foundation of the piece commissioned by Shannon Lyles and the FHS Patriot Singers in Orlando, Florida. Freedom High School serves such a diverse community of immigrants that eleven languages were represented in Lyles' top choir. As hateful and xenophobic rhetoric became prominent in national discourse, we worked together to capture the essence of the choir's ethnic diversity and artistic unity. Emma Lazarus' words, which are engraved at the base of the Statue of Liberty, are a perfect foil to Hughes' dark (but ultimately hopeful) sentiments. To add a personal touch to the piece, I also asked the members of the choir to complete three prompts—I hope.../I dream.../I sing... -which they would then translate and record so that I could get a sense of the rhythm of their respective languages. In the end, the piece aims to make plain how far we are from the ideals we've set for ourselves, but it also clings to the hope that we will one day achieve them. I can't think of anything more American than that.

—Joel Thompson

Who are you that mumbles in the dark
and who are you that draws your veil across the stars?
[...]
I'm the one who dreamt a dream while still a serf of kings
A dream so strong, so brave, so true that even yet it sings.
To build a homeland of the free.
[...]
For all the songs we've sung,
and all the dreams we've dreamed,
America was never America to me,
and yet I swear: America will be!

— adapted from Langston Hughes' Let America Be America Again

Give me your tired, your poor,
your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
give me the wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these to me!
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

— adapted from Emma Lazarus' The New Colossus

arr. G. Phillip Shoultz III
We Shall Overcome

While primarily known for its association to the Civil Rights Movement and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the origin of "We Shall Overcome" is complex and diverse-with portions of the melody tracing back to 18th-century Europe, elements of the style emerging from the gospel music tradition, and portions of the text finding roots in the labor rights movement of the 1940s. Conductors and singers who choose to sing this arrangement are encouraged to look up the names Charles Albert Tindley, Atron Twig, Kenneth Morris, Lucille Simmons, Zilphia Horton, and Pete Seeger to learn more about how each one contributed to the song's evolution into what it has become today—an anthem for freedom movement that is sung around the globe.

This song can encourage us in our journey to bridge across difference, acknowledging ways that we can learn from each other and grow together as we seek to eradicate oppressive and unjust systems and structures.

—G. Phillip Shoultz III

We shall overcome, we shall overcome, we shall overcome, some day.
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe, we shall overcome, some day.
We'll walk hand in hand, we'll walk hand in hand, we'll walk hand in hand, some day.
Oh, deep in my heart, I do believe, we shall overcome, some day.

arr. Paul John Rudoi

America the Beautiful

America the Beautiful is one of the most ubiquitous patriotic songs of the United States of America. Written over a century ago, the message of the three sets of lyrics (1893, 1904, and 1911) speak to the lofty goals and natural beauty of this nation. I find the universality of its message particularly moving, and in this arrangement I aimed to include a message of community by offering a narrated moment before the final chorus. There are so many wonderful options for that narration, but I limited the options to five excerpted quotes, all lightly adapted to suit the nature and timing of the piece. One, from Walt Whitmans iconic *Leaves of Grass* (1867), is shown within the music on page 2, and the other options can be found on the last page including excerpts from Emma Lazarus' "The New Colossus" (1883), Franklin D. Roosevelt's "Four Freedoms" speech (1941), Jane Addams' *Democracy and Social Ethics*(1902), and Lillian Smith's *Now is The Time* (1955). Given their dates, all of these quotes are surprisingly relevant when we consider how far we've come, and how far we still need to go, in addressing the needs of others and the systems that brought us to the current moment. Let us hope and work for a brighter future, as many have before us.

—Paul John Rudoi

O beautiful for spacious skies,
For amber waves of grain,
For purple mountain majesties
Above the fruited plain!
America! America!
God shed His grace on thee,
And crown thy good with brotherhood
From sea to shining sea!

O beautiful for heroes proved
In liberating strife,
Who more than self their country love
And mercy more than life!
America! America!
God shed His grace on thee
Till selfish fain no longer stain
The banner of the free!

arr. Shawn Kirchner
Heavenly Home: Three American Songs
Unclouded Day

O, they tell me of a home far beyond the skies,
O they tell me of a home far away;
O they tell me of a home where no storm clouds rise,
O they tell me Of an unclouded day.

Refrain:
O the land of cloudless day,
O the land of an unclouded day
O they tell me of a home where no storm clouds rise;
O they tell me of an unclouded day.

O they tell me of a home where my friends have gone,
O they tell me of that land far away,
where the Tree of Life in eternal bloom
sheds its fragrance through the unclouded day. [Refrain]

O they tell me of a King in His beauty there,
and they tell me that my eyes shall behold
where He sits on the throne that is whiter than snow,
in the city that is made of gold. [Refrain]

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We begin today by acknowledging that these spaces stand on the traditional territories of the Peoria, Kaskaskia, Piankashaw, Wea, Miami, Mascoutin, Odawa, Sauk, Mesquaki, Kickapoo, Potawatomi, Ojibwe, Menominee, Ho-Chunk, and Chickasaw Nations. These lands carry the ongoing stories of these Nations and their struggles for survival and identity.

The School of Music at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign acknowledges the peoples of these lands, as well as the histories of dispossession that have allowed for the growth of this institution. We share a responsibility to reflect on and actively address these histories and the role that this university has played in shaping them.

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