



CECILIA

PRESENTED AT
Pacific Spirit United Church

ON
Nov 4, 2022 7:30PM

CONDUCTOR
Kari Turunen



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VANCOUVER CHAMBER CHOIR

Artistic Director Kari Turunen began leading the Vancouver Chamber Choir - one of Canada's premier professional choral ensembles - in September 2019, its 49th concert season.

Jon Washburn founded the choir in 1971 and it has become an amazing success story, ranking with the handful of North America's best

professional choruses and noted for its diverse repertoire and performing excellence. The choir has presented concerts at home in Vancouver and on tour across Canada. International excursions have taken them to the USA, Mexico, Japan, China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, South Korea, Finland, France, Germany, the Czech Republic, Russia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Ukraine.

Honoured with the Margaret Hillis Award for Choral Excellence by Chorus America, the choir has performed countless concerts and broadcasts, released 36 recordings and received numerous awards. Foremost supporters of Canadian music, they are responsible for commissions and premieres of 334 choral works by 145 composers and arrangers, most of whom are Canadian. Over the years the choir has sung over 4,000 performances of works by Canadian composers, in addition to their extensive international repertoire.

The choir's award-winning educational programs include the *Conductors' Symposium* for advanced choral conductors, *Interplay* interactive workshops for choral composers, *Focus* professional development program for student singers, *OnSite* visitations for school choirs, the biennial *Young Composers Competition*, and many on-tour workshops and residencies.



KARI TURUNEN, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Kari Turunen was appointed Artistic Director of the Vancouver Chamber Choir - one of Canada's premier professional choral ensembles - in 2019, its 49th concert season. He is a versatile performer and continues to play an important role in the choral music scene in his native Finland as an artistic director, educator and administrator. He has toured extensively across Europe and Asia as a conductor, performer, clinician and adjudicator.

Dr. Turunen has been awarded numerous international prizes with the choral ensembles he has directed: Akademiska Damkören Lyran, Akademiska Sångföreningen, Kampin Laulu Chamber Choir, Chorus Cantorum Finlandiae, Spira Ensemble and the professional early music ensembles Ensemble Petraloysio and I Dodici, with which he continues to work. He was a founding member of Lumen Valo and appeared with them in over 250 concerts and nine critically acclaimed recordings. In 2008, he was named Finnish Choral Conductor of the Year and is the recipient of over 20 grants from Finnish and Finnish-Swedish Cultural Foundations.

In addition to his artistic activities, Dr. Turunen has been active in festival administration. He is the Artistic Director of the 2022 Finnish-Swedish Song Celebration and the 2023 Tampere Vocal Music Festival and was the Artistic Director of the Aurore Renaissance Festival in Helsinki from 2015-2020. He was also Chair of the Finnish Choral Directors' Association (FCDA) from 1997-2018.

Kari Turunen holds a doctorate in early music performance practice from the University of the Arts, Helsinki, and an MA in choral conducting from the Sibelius Academy. He lives in Vancouver with his wife, Anna.



The Vancouver Chamber Choir acknowledges that it operates and performs on the unceded Indigenous land belonging to the Coast Salish peoples, including the territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), Stó:lō and Səl̓ilwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations. We are grateful for this privilege.

VANCOUVER
CHAMBER CHOIR

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Abby Boggs
Christina Cichos
Kiyomi Hori
Jane Long
Cassie Luftspring
Siobhan Waldock

ALTOS

Sofia Avelino
Dinah Ayre
Tabitha Brasso-Ernst
Maria Golas
Martina Govednik
Fabiana Katz

TENORS

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Oliver Dalton
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VANCOUVER CHAMBER CHOIR
KARI TURUNEN AND JON WASHBURN,
CONDUCTORS

CECILIA

A Song for St. Cecilia's Day (1991/2020)

Rhona Clarke
(b. 1958)

Bright Wings (2011)

Cecilia Livingston
(b. 1984)

Cecilia, Busy Like a Bee (2017)

Cecilia McDowall
(b. 1951)

Jane Long, soprano

Gaelic Hymns (1923)

Ina Boyle
(1889-1967)

Jesu, thou Son of Mary
The Guardian Angel
The Light'ner of the Stars

Maria Golas, alto

Silence and Music (1953)

Ralph Vaughan Williams
(1872-1958)

INTERMISSION

Rädda mig (from *Min Gud*, Op. 16) (2010)

Cecilia Damström
(b. 1988)

Crooked by Nature (2020)

Carmen Braden
(b. 1985)

Near (2012)

Evelin Seppar
(b. 1986)

Hymn to St. Cecilia (1942)

Benjamin Britten
(1913-1976)

Christina Cichos and Kiyomi Hori, sopranos Martina Govednik, alto
Eric Schwarzhoff, tenor Paul Nash, bass

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PROGRAM NOTES, TEXTS & TRANSLATIONS

CECILIA

St. Cecilia, a 3rd-century Roman saint, became the patron saint of musicians quite late in the piece: the first documentation of musical feasts in her name dates from the 16th century. However, gradually the feast of St. Cecilia on November 22 has become a major musical festivity and composers and poets alike have celebrated the day with regular new offerings. For a long time, the musicians touched by the “immortal fire”, as W.H. Auden puts it, were expected to be men. This concert is a reminder that Cecilia’s inspiration is not tied to human conventions or categories.

The program of this concert might appear to be a little unruly with especially the texts ranging from devout to progressive and serene to anguished. This is a point in itself: inspiration tends to lead us down unexpected paths and make the world more colorful and surprising than sturdy craft. A Cecilian world is one that challenges, comforts and delights.

Rhona Clarke A Song for St. Cecilia’s Day

Rhona Clarke is an Irish composer with a substantial output of choral works. Rhythmic vitality and a personal, crisp tonal language are trademarks of her style. Both are apparent in *A Song for St Cecilia’s Day* to John Dryden’s famous poem from 1687. This energetic work, originally from 1991 and revised in 2020, uses many contrasting elements – harmonies that veer from spicy to medieval, speech and *glissandi* amongst traditional notation and broad passages balancing driving rhythmic sections. The overall effect is intriguingly timeless and open-ended.

FROM harmony, from Heav’nly harmony
This universal frame began.
When Nature underneath a heap
Of jarring atoms lay,
And could not heave her head,
The tuneful voice was heard from high,
‘Arise, ye more than dead!’
Then cold, and hot, and moist, and dry,
In order to their stations leap,
And music’s power obey.
From harmony, from Heav’nly harmony
This universal frame began:
From harmony to harmony
Through all the compass of the notes it ran,
The diapason closing full in Man.

(John Dryden, 1687)

Cecilia Livingston Bright Wings

Cecilia Livingston — the first of three composers called Cecilia (*nomen est omen?*) on this program — is a Canadian composer who specializes in music for voice. Livingston describes her music as “driven by melody, mixing styles from minimalism to The American Songbook to create work that is lyrical and unsettling.” *Bright Wings*, to Gerald Manley Hopkins’ poem, clearly reflects this melodic lyricism but also includes several harmonic moments that unsettle the melodic flow and defy the expectations of the listener’s inner ear.

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man’s smudge and shares man’s smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
And though the last lights off the black West went
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs —
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

(Gerald Manley Hopkins, 1877)

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Cecilia McDowall
Cecilia, Busy Like a Bee

Cecilia McDowall is a wonderful English composer with a huge choral *oeuvre*. McDowall walks in similar harmonic landscapes between tradition and experimentation as Rhona Clarke. *Cecilia, Busy Like a Bee*, scored for choir and soprano soloist, is more reflective than the title would suggest. The text, taken from Lauds of St. Cecilia's Day, refers to us all the central facets of Cecilia's story: Cecilia, who had taken a vow of chastity, was forced to marry a Roman nobleman. During her wedding, Cecilia was said to have sung praises to the Lord in her mind whilst the instrumentalists played – thus her role as the patron saint of music and musicians. She is said to have converted her husband to Christianity and then served actively in the Christian cause ("busy like a bee") until her martyrdom.

Domine, exaudi orationem meam.

[Lord, hear my prayer]

The musicians played, and Cecilia sang unto the Lord, saying:

'Let my heart be undefiled that I be not ashamed.'

Cecilia, famula tua, Domine, quasi apis tibi argumentosa deservit.

[Busy like a bee, O Lord, did thine handmaiden Cecilia serve thee.]

As dawn was fading into day, Cecilia cried, saying:

'Arise, soldiers of Christ, cast away the works of darkness,
put on the armour of light.'

Cecilia, famula tua, Domine, quasi apis tibi argumentosa deservit.

[Busy like a bee, O Lord, did thine handmaiden Cecilia serve thee.]

(Adapted from the Divine Office for St. Cecilia's Day)

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Ina Boyle Gaelic Hymns

Ina Boyle is an Irish composer who suffered a similar fate to many female composers of her era: her circumstances and a musical career were barely compatible. Reading Boyle's biography brings to mind the Brontës and Austens of the literary world: growing up in the rural home of a Reverend, being taught by governesses and parents, and having limited access to the outside world. Boyle studied music privately and managed to gain some early fame through composition competitions but caring for her parents and sister and living outside musical centers ultimately saw a dwindling in performances. Mostly because of a lack of contacts in the musical world, many of her works remained unperformed or, at best, performed once during her lifetime.

In 1923 Boyle was able to travel fairly regularly to London to take private lessons with Ralph Vaughan Williams, who apparently held Boyle in high regard. It is very likely that Boyle's *Gaelic Hymns* (fourteen in all) were inspired by Vaughan Williams, who was one of the first English composers to take part in the 'English folk song revival' and collected over 800 folk songs through 21 English counties. The Boyle Hymns are based on folk hymns collected in the late 19th century in Scotland. They are rendered in English translations from the Scots Gaelic, as was the tendency in the early 1900s. The sources of the three hymns are Coinneach the Carpenter, Isebeal Mackintosh, a crofter's (tenant farmer's) wife, and Fionnaghal Macdougall, crofter, respectively.

Jesu, thou Son of Mary clearly shows the influence of Vaughan Williams, especially in the polyphonic passages. After a tempered beginning in which the upper and lower choirs alternate, the hymn blossoms into flowing Anglican anthem style at the words "Consecrate us". *The Guardian Angel* is scored for tenors and basses and alto solo. The setting allows the folk hymn to be heard clearly and reveals the modal (pre-major/minor) character of the melody better than the full choral settings. The hymn has the feeling of an evening blessing, tender and quiet. *The Light'ner of the Stars* is the most expansive of these three hymns and full of skilled polyphonic writing for six voice parts. After a climactic passage, the hymn closes in a hushed and calm manner.

Jesu, thou Son of Mary

Jesu, thou Son of Mary,
Have mercy upon us.
Jesu, thou Son of Mary,
Make peace with us.
Oh, with us and for us
Where we shall longest be, Amen.

Be about the morning of our course,
Be about the closing of our life. Amen.
Be at the dawning of our life,
And at the darkening of our day. Amen.
Be for us and with us,
Merciful God of all. Amen.

Consecrate us, condition and lot,
Thou King of kings, thou God of men.
Consecrate us heart and body,
Thou King of kings, thou God of all.

Each heart and body,
each day to Thyself,
each night accordingly,
Thou King of kings, Thou God of all. Amen.

Coinneach Saor ("Kenneth the Carpenter")

The Guardian Angel

Thou angel of God, who hast charge of me
From the dear Father of mercifulness,
The shepherding kind of the fold of the saints
to make round about me this night:
Be thou a bright flame before me,
Be thou a guiding star above me,
Be thou a smooth path below me,
And be a kindly shepherd behind me,
Today, tonight and for ever.

I am tired and I am a stranger,
Lead thou me to the land of angels,
For me it is time to go home
To the court of Christ,
to the peace of heaven.

Isebeal Mackintosh

The Light'ner of the Stars

Behold the Light'ner of the stars
On the crests of the clouds,
And the choralists of the sky
Lauding Him.

Coming down with acclaim
From the Father above,
Harp and lyre of song
Sounding to Him.

Christ, Thou refuge of my love,
Why should not I raise Thy fame!
Angels and saints melodious
Singing to Thee.

Thou Son of the Mary of the graces,
Of exceeding white purity of beauty,
Joy were it to me
To be in the fields of Thy riches.

Oh, Christ, my beloved,
Oh, Christ of the Holy Blood,
By day and night I praise Thee.
Fionnaghal Macdougall

Fionnaghal Macdougall

Ralph Vaughan Williams Silence and Music

Boyle's teacher, Ralph Vaughan Williams, was one of ten composers chosen to create "A Garland to the Queen" for Elizabeth II in her coronation year of 1953. His contribution was *Silence and Music*, set to a poem by his wife Ursula Wood, a poet and author he had married that same year. *Silence and Music* is by no means typical of Vaughan Williams' choral music with its surprising and somewhat adventurous harmonies. The composer's dedication reads, "To the memory of Charles Villiers Stanford, and his Blue Bird", and *Silence and Music* certainly echoes *The Blue Bird* in the way the soprano floats above the sustained harmonies.

Silence, come first: I see a sleeping swan,
wings closed and drifting where the water leads,
a winter moon, a calm where wisdom dreams,
a hand outstretched to gather hollow reeds.

The four winds in their litanies can tell
all of earth's stories as they weep and cry;
the sea names all the treasures of her tides,
and birds rejoice between the earth and sky:

voices of grief and from the heart of joy,
so near to comprehension do we stand
that wind and sea and all of winged delight
lie in the octaves of man's voice and hand
and music wakes from silence as from sleep.

(Ursula Wood, 1953/59)



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The Christmas Recordings

- ❖ **A Dylan Thomas Christmas** * The Vancouver Chamber Choir's signature performance of *A Child's Christmas in Wales*, read by Welsh actor Russell Roberts with special carol settings by Jon Washburn.
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- ❖ **The Miracle of Christmas** Christmas music with a colourful Central and South American flavour played by the ensemble Ancient Cultures with several tracks featuring the Vancouver Chamber Choir.

Cecilia Damström
Rädda mig

Cecilia Damström is a Finnish composer I know from her undergraduate days. She sang in a choir of mine and wrote a piece for that choir. It was her first attempt at choral music, and I was immediately struck by her choices: the piece was scored for eight voices and had a multi-language text. These same features are central to *Rädda mig* (Liberate me) from her suite *Min Gud* (My God) from 2010. It is a setting of the central verses of Psalm 22 – one of the most intense and colorful psalms. Damström sets the text in her native Swedish as well as Latin, and certainly pulls no punches: the vocal range varies from regular singing to glides and whispers to shouting, and the rhythmic drive built on ever-changing rhythmic patterns is impressive.

Men jag är en mask, inte en människa,
hånad och föraktad av envar.
Alla som ser mig gör narr av mig,
de hånlar och skakar på huvudet:
“Han har överlämnat sig åt Herren,
nu får Herren gripa in och rädda honom
- han är ju älskad av Herren.”
Du hjälpte mig ut ur min moders liv,
du lät mig vila trygg vid min moders bröst.
Från min födelsestund är mitt liv i din hand,
alltsedan jag blev till har du varit min Gud.
Dröj inte långt borta, jag är i nöd,
och ingen finns som hjälper mig.
Tjurar skockar sig runt mig,
jag är kringränd av bestar från Bashan.
De spärrar upp sina gapsom rovlystna,
rytande lejon.
Jag rinner bort likt vatten som slås ut,
benen lossnar i min kropp,
mitt hjärta är som vax,
det smälter i mitt bröst.
Min mun är torr som en lerskärva,
tungan klibbar vid gommen.
Du lägger mig i gravens mull.
Hundar samlas runt mig,
jag omringas av en hord av våldsmän.
Händer och fötter är skrumpnade,
jag kan räkna varje ben i min kropp.
De står där och stirrar på mig,
de delar mina plagg emellan sig,
de kastar lott om mina kläder.
Men du, Herre, dröj inte långt borta,
du min styrka, skynda till min hjälp!
Rädda mig undan svärdet,
mitt liv ur hundarnas våld!
Rädda mig ur lejonets gap,
mitt arma liv undan vildoxens horn!

But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by everyone, despised by the people.
All who see me mock me;
they hurl insults, shaking their heads.
“He trusts in the Lord,” they say,
“let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him,
since he delights in him.”
Yet you brought me out of the womb;
you made me trust in you, even at my mother’s breast.
From birth I was cast on you;
from my mother’s womb you have been my God.
Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near and there is no one to help.
Many bulls surround me;
strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.
Roaring lions that tear their prey
open their mouths wide against me.
I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint.
My heart has turned to wax;
it has melted within me.
My mouth is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;
you lay me in the dust of death.
Dogs surround me,
a pack of villains encircles me;
they pierce my hands and my feet.
All my bones are on display;
people stare and gloat over me.
They divide my clothes among them
and cast lots for my garment.
But you, Lord, do not be far from me.
You are my strength; come quickly to help me.
Deliver me from the sword,
my precious life from the power of the dogs.
Rescue me from the mouth of the lions;
save me from the horns of the wild oxen.

(Psalm 22, 6–21; sung in Swedish and Latin)

Carmen Braden Crooked by Nature

Carmen Braden is an exciting Canadian composer from Yellowknife. *Crooked by Nature* is a study of women's roles and positions in Tudor England, with almost unavoidable references to our time. Braden has set three fragments of texts from the turn of the 17th century that reflect the discussion on women of the time. A few more contemporary additions by the composer add to the relevance of the work. As one might expect, this piece is not easy listening, although especially in the references to music of the Tudor period there are moments of real beauty. The ending drowns out the negative voices and leaves us looking forward with optimism.

I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman
but I have the heart and stomach of a king.

(Queen Elizabeth I, 1588, from a speech given to troops in Essex preparing for a Spanish invasion)

Women are called Night crows.
Eagles eat not men til they are dead but women devour them alive.
Then who can but say that women sprung from the devil?
And he also saith that they were made of the rib of a man
and that their forward nature shows, for the rib is a crooked thing,
good for nothing, for women are crooked by nature.
I pray you let us consider the times past with the times present.

(Joseph Swetnam, 1615, from *The Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward [sic] and Unconstant Women*)

The efficiency of women's creation was Jehovah the eternal.
The truth of which is manifest in Moses' narration.
Yet was she not produced from Adam's foot? Not to be his too low inferior,
Nor near his head to be his superior, but from his side near his heart to be his equal.
That where he is lord she may be Lady.

(Rachel Speght, 1617, from *A Mouzell for Melastomus, or an Apologetical Answer to that Irreligious and Illiterate pamphlet made by Joseph Swetnam and by him Entitled The Arraignment of Women*)

femina
homine
mela
stoma
regina

woman
man
evil
mouth
queen

crooked woman
evil mouth
lock her up

Evelin Seppar Near

Evelin Seppar's recognizable style is based on building intensity through a passage, often in combination with all the voices zooming in towards the same note. This feature is ever-present in her *Near*, set to fragments of poems from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's *Sonnets from the Portuguese* (1850). Almost minimalistic passages and two sustained, calm sections add color to this small pearl of a work.

How a mystic shape did move
Behind me and drew me,
Move still, oh, still, beside me.

When our two souls stand up,
Face to face, silent, drawing nigh and nigher,
Until our lengthening wings break into fire
At either curved point.
In this deep joy to see and hear thee
And breathe within thy shadow a new air,
I do not think of thee – I am too near thee.

Thy heart in mine
With pulses that beat double.

(Compiled from Elizabeth Barrett Browning's
Sonnets for the Portuguese (1850), Nos. 1, 6, 7, 22 and 29, by the composer)

Benjamin Britten Hymn to St. Cecilia

Benjamin Britten had long been looking for a suitable text for a work celebrating St. Cecilia's Day, which also happened to be Britten's birthday. He finally turned to W. H. Auden and commissioned a poem from him to set to music. Auden delivered the poem during the time Britten and his partner, tenor Peter Pears, who were both pacifists, were staying in New York fleeing the war in Europe. Somewhat astoundingly, Britten and Pears lived in the same building as Auden, a cultural hub that, in addition to a host of artists living there, saw regular visitors like Leonard Bernstein, Aaron Copland and Salvador Dalí.

The time Britten spent in the US was not as successful as Britten had hoped, and Britten and Pears decided to return to England in the spring of 1942. Britten had already composed *Hymn to St. Cecilia*, but when the customs officers decided to confiscate all of Britten's music, fearing it was some sort of code, Britten rewrote the work at sea. Britten's *Hymn* follows Auden's poetry closely. The first movement is lilting and upbeat and ends with the 'chorale' that appears at the end of each movement. The second music is a break-neck speed *fughetta* setting of Auden's riddle (the answer in all likelihood being, 'music'). The third poem of Auden's anthem features an incredible array of metaphors, many of them more or less friendly references to Britten's character (Britten had shunned Auden's romantic overtures in the 1930s). The musical setting is rhapsodic with a great array of characters, the most striking of which are imitations of musical instruments in four of the solos (flute, violin, timpani, trumpet). The ending is magical and brings to mind a distancing ship at sea.

I

In a garden shady this holy lady
With reverent cadence and subtle psalm,
Like a black swan as death came on
Poured forth her song in perfect calm:
And by ocean's margin this innocent virgin
Constructed an organ to enlarge her prayer,
And notes tremendous from her great engine
Thundered out on the Roman air.

Blonde Aphrodite rose up excited,
Moved to delight by the melody,
White as an orchid she rode quite naked
In an oyster shell on top of the sea;
At sounds so entrancing the angels dancing
Came out of their trance into time again,
And around the wicked in Hell's abysses
The huge flame flickered and eased their pain.

*Blessed Cecilia, appear in visions
To all musicians, appear and inspire:
Translated Daughter, come down and startle
Composing mortals with immortal fire.*

Blessed Cecilia, appear in visions
To all musicians, appear and inspire:
Translated Daughter, come down and startle
Composing mortals with immortal fire.

*Blessed Cecilia, appear in visions
To all musicians, appear and inspire:
Translated Daughter, come down and startle
Composing mortals with immortal fire.*

(W.H. Auden, 1940)

11

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