

Sunrise Mass and More by Ola Gjeilo on May 29th

The Williamsport Civic Chorus looks forward to performing Ola Gjeilo's beautiful contemporary music for you. If the program "Sunrise Mass, The Lake Isle + Other Selections" sounds familiar, that is because our plan had been to hold this concert two years ago when COVID-19 derailed so much. It is with great joy that we can proceed now.

The concert, with a string orchestra including steel string guitar, will take place on Sunday,

May 29th, at 3 pm, in the lovely sanctuary of St. John's United Methodist Church, 2101 Newberry Street, in Williamsport. The Church's lot affords ample parking, and following the program, the Chorus will host an audience reception.

Gjeilo, for those who have yet to experience his work, is a rising star in the music world. The 43-year-old pianist and composer was born in Norway and studied at the Juilliard

School. He is known for agreeable sonorities that evoke our emotions. (See pages 2 and 3 for more information).

Concert tickets may be purchased in advance for \$8 (students and seniors) and \$10 (general admission) at the Otto Book Store, R.M. Sides Family Music Center, and [online](#). Seats sold at the door will cost \$10 and \$12, and children under 12 as well as patron ticket holders will be admitted without charge. 🎵

Singers' Corner, Moving Ahead

The Chorus will be in the game even in our June through August post-season. Be sure to look for us on Saturday, August 13th, at the Muncy Bank Ballpark at Historic Bowman Field when we perform the "Star Spangled Banner" prior to the Crosscutters' minor league match up against the State College Spikes. We also hope to reprise another tradition in singing the National Anthem later that month for a Little League World Series ballgame.

The 2022-23 regular season opens with rehearsals beginning on Monday, September 12th. Michael Connor has programmed exciting repertoire for "Love and

Death", a fall concert of classical music that will feature the Fauré *Requiem*, a perennial favorite of singers and audiences. In April 2023, the Chorus' "pops" concert called "Peace and War" will showcase familiar tunes, jazz, and show music. So please reserve next season's concert dates—November 13th, 2022, and April 30th, 2023.

Somewhat further afield, we note here that before Civic Chorus activities were interrupted by COVID-19, Music Director Michael Connor had suggested to the Board that the organization could benefit from having an endowment to ensure the future of

choral music in the decades to come. Since that initial proposal, the Chorus has received several memorial gifts, which the Board set aside as a first step toward an endowment. Please stay tuned for more information in the coming months as we carry the ball forward. 🎵



Know the Score



Michael Connor

Sunrise Mass was commissioned in 2007 and premiered in Oslo in November 2008. Ola Gjeilo (pronounced Yay-low) considers himself a ‘symphonic’ composer, aiming as he does for a lush, orchestral sound. He approaches his craft from a spiritual perspective, intending to share universal and humanistic experiences in the realm of his music.

One need look no further than the names of each individual movement of *Sunrise Mass* for an illustration of how spirituality plays a role in his art. While the text comes from the Ordinary of the Mass, Gjeilo gives each movement a subtitle rooted in our world: “The Spheres (Kyrie)”, “Sunrise (Gloria)”, “The City (Credo)”, “Identity (Sanctus)”, and “The Ground (Benedictus/Agnus Dei)”. While respectful of the Latin text, Gjeilo’s overall vision lies within his titles and only loosely relates to the meaning of the Latin. In so doing, he reveals a structure outside of the text; a metaphysical, reflective journey from the Heavens to Earth.

The second movement, “Sunrise”, opens orchestrally with a long solo for the first violins over luscious, mostly major choral sonorities, warm and reassuring, like a hazy sun rising ever so slowly over an early-morning horizon. The sopranos take up the violin melody, with the “Gloria” text. Gjeilo has said he imagines this line as angels singing a subtle, dream-like incantation. As if from deep within the earth, the lower three voices sing “*Et in terra pax.*” With excitement, the strings set up a rapid *moto perpetuo*, over which the choir sings “*Laudamus te.*” The movement peaks as a regal march with the choir’s stately intonation of “*Domine Deus, Rex caelestis*” and slowly comes full circle as the sun sinks below the horizon with simple final *a capella* “Amen” drifting into silence.

“The City” is based on the *Credo* text, which Gjeilo calls “the most powerful and assured text in the mass. ‘I believe’ is a strong statement.” The music mirrors both this gravity and the hustle and bustle of urban life with the strings in “a fast, unforgiving, and relentless accompaniment.” While the tenors and basses solemnly intone the opening *Credo*, the sopranos and altos join them, streaming powerfully forward and eventually coming to a quiet resting place intoning “*Qui propter nos homines.*” This gives way to the grave and jagged motif of the *Crucifixus*. “*Et resurrexit*” introduces the new mood of optimism followed by urgent string tremolos dramatizing the compelling text in augmented note values above the furious motion of the strings.

The final movement, “Identity”, reprises the opening

motif of “The Spheres”, now sung on *Sanctus*. Like the calm after a storm, “Identity” sets the scene for sunlight to burst through the clouds. It does so in the reassuring, tender music of “The Ground”. Gjeilo comments, “The chorale, beginning at *Pleni sunt caeli...* is the culmination of the Mass, and it’s called ‘Identity & The Ground’ because I wanted to convey a sense of having ‘arrived’ at the end of the Mass; to have reached a kind of peace and grounded strength, after the long journey of the Mass, having gone through so many different emotional landscapes.” The *Mass* ends with a hushed “*Dona Nobis Pacem*”; at first only the choir sings, reverentially; then a beseeching solo violin joins in, and finally the whole ensemble, slowly and quietly comes to rest on a widely spaced major chord, as if reaching across the length and breadth of the earth for peace.

Gjeilo says: “The music of *Sunrise Mass* goes from dark and dreamlike, to more emotional and dramatic, and eventually warm and grounded as a metaphor for human development from child to adult, or as a spiritual journey. It is important to me that there is a positive evolution in artistic expressions, to move everything forward, that it has the capacity to help bring us deeper into ourselves rather than the other way. I really do think that’s the main point of art... to express a deeper connection with something sacred; soul, or God, or nature, or whatever we perceive it as, through art. And I always believed that gift should be used to uplift and remind ourselves of who we really are and what’s truly important in our lives, whatever that may be.”

(Continued on page 4)

79th SEASON
Save the Dates

Sunday, Nov. 13, 2022
 3 pm
LOVE AND DEATH

and

Sunday, Apr. 30, 2023
 3 pm
WAR AND PEACE

The Williamsport Civic Chorus receives state arts funding support through a grant from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, a state agency funded by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency.

**ENDOWING FUTURE
 CHORAL MUSIC**

The Civic Chorus has developed an endowment fund as we prepare for the future. For more information, please email wccmail@yahoo.com.



What Makes Gjeilo So Popular?

Need a break from discord while experiencing a positive and hopeful hour or two? We invite you to attend our performance of four works by Ola Gjeilo. Born in Norway in 1978, Gjeilo now lives in his adopted home—New York City—where he also serves as the composer-in-residence for DCINY, an organization that among other activities, puts together massed choir concerts. Several Civic Chorus members performed with a DCINY choir there in 2013, singing in Carol Barnett’s *The World Beloved: A Bluegrass Mass* at Carnegie Hall.



Ola Gjeilo

As Music Director Michael Connor describes in this issue’s “Know the Score”, the cornerstone of this May’s WCC concert is another contemporary mass—Gjeilo’s *Sunrise: Symphonic Mass for Choir and String Orchestra*. You need not know Latin to grasp the parts of that journey, nor do you even need to know the structure of the mass. This is because Gjeilo’s sumptuous music carries the audience along the path as it conveys a visual image of what is occurring—the emergence of humankind and its oneness with the earth.

peace that the resolving of discord can yield.”

One leaves feeling uplifted, and in case more than *Sunrise* is needed to anchor that emotion, the program will be further enriched by several shorter Gjeilo compositions, each set to different texts. One of those pieces contains the words to a hymn first intoned in the eighth century called “*Ubi Caritas*”—which in translation means, “Where charity and love are found, God is there.” 🎵

Gjeilo’s own words best define his intent. “There isn’t anything wrong with dissonance, as conflict and discord is a natural part of life and necessary for all positive development and maturation...But in a great deal of avant-garde art, the goal seems to be to stay in the conflict itself...I do think they got somewhat stuck in that. A lot of art pushed audiences away for some time. I think people naturally and instinctively want to experience transcendence, resolution, and the feeling of redemption, joy and

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

**"Sunrise Mass, The Lake
Isle + Other Selections"**

by Ola Gjeilo

Sunday, May 29, 2022

3 pm


St. John's United Methodist
Church2101 Newberry Street
Williamsportwilliamsportcivicchorus.org

“The Williamsport Civic Chorus is an open community of singers dedicated to making fine music accessible to all through education, participation, and inspiration.”

(Continued from page 2)

In addition to performing *Sunrise Mass* with string orchestra, and a few other Gjeilo gems, we will delight the audience with “The Lake Isle”, accompanied by string quartet, piano, and steel string guitar. Anglo-Irish poet William Butler Yeats (1865-1939) wrote the poem on which it is based, “The Lake Isle of Innisfree”, in 1888. The poem describes the rural landscape of County Sligo in western Ireland where Yeats spent nearly all his summers as a boy. He got his inspiration for the poem suddenly from the sound of a fountain in London and considered the poem “my first lyric with any

thing in its rhythm of my own music.” Listeners can hear rippling water throughout the song in the rhythmic repetition of the words “Innisfree go to Innisfree,” like water gently lapping at the shore. Even more, the ever-moving piano part continues, as it did for Yeats, wherever he is—country or city—for the memory lives, like music itself, in the heart.

Please scan the QR Code that follows to enjoy the *Sunrise Mass* ahead of time and to begin your musical journey with us. 



“*Know the Score*” is provided for the our readers’ enjoyment by Michael Connor. Currently in his seventh year as music director of the Williamsport Civic Chorus, Michael holds a master’s degree from Bucknell University, having served as a graduate assistant to Dr. William Payn there. Mr. Connor is director of choral activities at Central Mountain High School in Clinton County. A tenor, he has appeared with many ensembles regionally and abroad.