



PRESENTS

# OF WATER TO SKY



Alexis Renee Ward  
Artistic Director

Amy Morgan  
Assistant Director & Accompanist

FRIDAY, APRIL 26, 2024 AT 7:30PM  
SUNDAY, APRIL 28, 2024 AT 4:00PM

Christ Church Easton



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Mid-Shore  
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**St. Mark's United Methodist Church** for hosting our Spring Retreat

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# A MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Easton Choral Arts Patrons,

It is with the greatest joy that I welcome you all to our Spring 2024 program “Of Water to Sky”! This concert exclusively features women composers from as early as the 12th century to modern day, centering on works inspired by the most powerful forces of Mother Nature - from water to sky.

Amplifying the voices of female composers holds profound significance in rectifying historical injustices and promoting gender equality in the realm of classical music. For centuries, women have faced systemic barriers that have discouraged, belittled, or outright forbade them from pursuing careers in composition. It is hard to fathom how many great works or rich contributions to the choral field have never come to life due to this erasure.

Today, as we showcase the works of female choral composers, we hope to be but a small piece of this movement toward a more inclusive and equitable musical landscape. We want to contribute to diversifying repertoire and shedding light on the immense talent and creativity of women composers. Moreover, we aim to inspire future generations of composers, regardless of gender to pursue their artistic aspirations without fear of discrimination or exclusion.

We are immensely grateful for these opportunities to gather and share in our mutual love of choral music. In the words of Clara Schumann, “My imagination can picture no fairer happiness than to continue living for art.”

On behalf of all of us in the ECAS family, I thank you for your constant support and patronage. It means the world to us!

Alexis Renee Ward  
Artistic Director



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# ALEXIS REENEE WARD, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



Alexis Ward is an award-winning composer, arranger, conductor, singer, music educator, adjudicator, and accompanist. Her teaching and directing experience runs the gamut of ages and experience levels in both vocal and instrumental

fields. For over 17 years, Alexis has worked extensively in sacred music and the non-profit sector conducting amateur to professional level community choirs and orchestras, church choirs, children's choirs, handbells, praise bands, folk ensembles, theater troupes, and chamber groups. Additionally, she has been honored to serve as a board member or advisor for several ensembles and non-profit arts organizations.

She received both her Bachelors in Composition/Music Theory as well as her Masters in Composition and Choral Conducting at the University of Delaware. In addition, Alexis has performed, studied, and worked with world-renowned composers and conductors including David Lang, Eric Ewazen, Gary Graden, Anton Armstrong, James Jordan, Weston Noble, Dennis Shrock, Bruce Chamberlain, Charles Bruffy, Giselle Wyers, Rick Bjella, Simon Carrington, and Sandra Snow.

An avid performer, Alexis has performed with a wide variety of musical groups throughout the years, touring across North American, Asia, and Europe. She has most recently performed with the Mastersingers of Wilmington, CoroAllegro, the Choir School of Delaware, Delaware Shakespeare, Sine Nomine, and the Meridian Chorale of Atlanta.

She currently serves as the Director of Music at Trinity Presbyterian Church of Wilmington, Artistic Director of the Chester River Chorale, Artistic Director of the Easton Choral Arts Society, Composer-in-Residence for Sine Nomine, and Creator/Co-Founder of the Sonus School of Music. She resides in North Delaware with her husband and two daughters.

# AMY MORGAN, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR AND ACCOMPANIST

Amy Morgan is an accomplished musician whose education includes a Bachelors Degree in Piano Performance from Salisbury University and a Masters Degree in Choral Conducting from Messiah University. She is the founder and Artistic Director of



Allegro Academy where she conducts the Allegra Women's Chorus, Allegro Children's Chorus, Summer Choir Festival and serves as piano and voice instructor. Her directional and accompanying experience includes operettas of Gilbert and Sullivan, chamber ensembles, and a variety of music theatre productions. She has served as Music Director of Trinity Episcopal Cathedral and within the Diocese of Easton for more than a decade, is a member of the American Choral Directors Association, and is an active musician in the Talbot County area.

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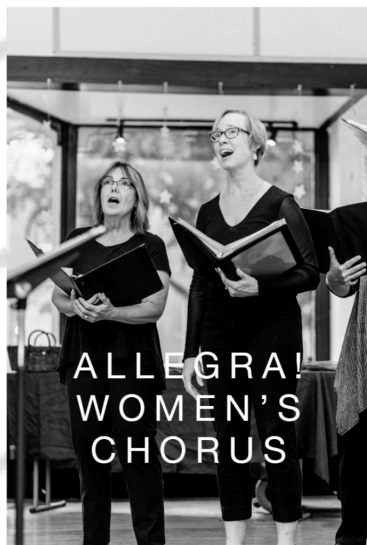
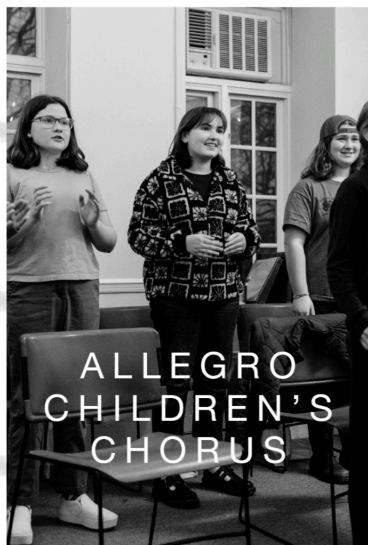
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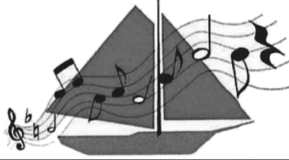
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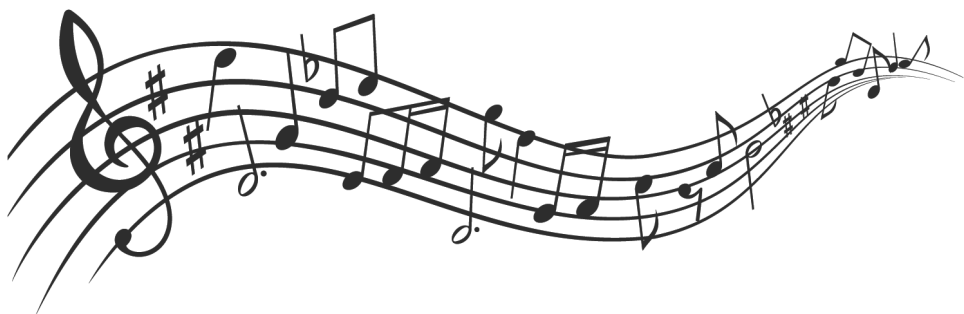
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Amy Morgan and Alexis Ward, piano  
Dana Bevard, violin  
Stephanie Stabley, clarinet and percussion

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Easton Choral Arts Society Presents

# Of Water to Sky

Alexis Renee Ward, Artistic Director

Amy Morgan, Assistant Director & Accompanist

***“O Virtus Sapientiae”***

by Hildegard von Bingen

arr. by Katerina Gimon

Soloists: Ann Bourne, Michelle Callahan, Katherine Nevius,  
and Emily Royer

***“Blessed Be”***

by Melanie DeMore



***“Hark, I Hear the Harps Eternal”***

arr. by Alice Parker

***“Close to Thee”***

by Fanny Crosby

arr. by Alexis Renee Ward

***“Arise, Beloved!”***

by Rosephanye Powell



***“The Skye Boat Song”***

arr. by Amy Gordon

Soloist: Patrick Mason

***“Gondoliera”***

by Clara Schumann

Quintet: Ann Bourne, Scott Clausen, Joe Long,  
Amy Morgan, and Alexis Ward

***“Requiem”***

by Eliza Gilkysen

Small Ensemble



***“Hymn to the Sun”***

by Lili Boulanger

Soloist: Terri Wroten

Quartet: Michelle Callahan, Scott Clausen,  
Carolyn Harrison, and Lori Royer

***“Wide Open Spaces”***

by Sarah Quartel



***“Grown Wild”***

by Melissa Dunphy

***“1941”***

by Andrea Ramsey



***“Child Moon”***

by Alexis Renee Ward

*World Premiere*

Soloist: Kethrellan Peterson



***“Measure Me, Sky!”***

by Elaine Hagenberg

***“Imagine”***

by John Lennon and Yoko Ono

Soloists: Lesley Aaron and Jennifer Kafka Smith

## Artistic Director's Program Notes

### ***O Virtus Sapientiae***

*O strength of Wisdom who, circling, circled,  
Enclosing all in one lifegiving path, three wings you have:  
One soars to the heights, one distills its essence upon the earth  
And the third is everywhere.  
Praise to you, as is fitting, O Wisdom.*

Hildegard von Bingen's almost 1,000 year old sacred chant, "O Virtus Sapientiae", provides the melodic lines of this otherwise modern composition by Canadian composer, Katerina Gimon. Hildegard, relinquished to the church at age 8 and taking her vows at 15, ascended to become an esteemed abbess and was canonized as a saint by Pope Benedict XVI in 2012. She defied societal norms, obtaining unprecedented power and authority for a woman of her time, including the privilege to preach. Throughout her life, she authored nine books, seventy poems, seventy-two songs, and a play, all of which continue to be widely performed and admired today.

### ***Blessed Be***

*Blessed Be! Blest, Be, Blessed Be the Living Tree  
Blessed Be the Tree of Life that grows within you and me.  
Steady and true, rooted in love.  
Shelter and peace below and above.  
Sing to the sky, rise from the earth.  
Seasons come round again, death to rebirth.*

Melanie DeMore, a dynamic performer, composer, and social activist from the Bronx, New York, has crafted numerous pieces like "Blessed Be" to uphold the African American Folk Tradition. Through a blend of melody and percussion techniques such as Gullah stick pounding and body percussion, DeMore pays homage to the resilience of slave communities in the American South. Denied access to instruments due to fears of rebellion, these communities found unity and strength through the power of their voices and bodies, defiantly singing together despite attempts to silence and divide them.



## Artistic Director's Program Notes

### ***Hark, I Hear the Harps Eternal***

*Hark, I hear the harps eternal ringing on the farther shore,  
As I near those swollen waters, with their deep and solemn roar.  
REFRAIN: Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Hallelujah, praise the Lamb,  
Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Glory to the great I AM.  
And my soul though stained with sorrow, fading as the light of day,  
Passes swiftly o'er those waters to the city far away.  
Souls have crossed before me, saintly, to that land of perfect rest;  
And I hear them singing faintly in the mansions of the blest.*

Alice Parker's "Hark, I Hear the Harps Eternal" is a vibrant choral composition deeply rooted in the tradition of Sacred Harp singing. With its rich harmonies and spirited melodies, the piece exemplifies Parker's talent for infusing traditional American folk hymnody with new vitality. For over 50 years, this arrangement has resonated with the jubilant energy and timeless themes of hope and salvation characteristic of Sacred Harp music, highlighting Parker's enduring legacy as a pioneer in modern choral music. Following her recent passing, Parker's contributions to the choral repertoire continue to inspire generations of musicians, particularly female composers, worldwide.

### ***Close to Thee***

*Thou my everlasting portion, close to thee,  
More than friend or life to me,  
All along my pilgrim journey, Savior, let me walk with thee.  
Not for ease or worldly pleasure, close to thee,  
Nor for fame my prayer shall be; gladly will I toil and suffer,  
Only let me walk with thee,  
Close to thee, close to thee, gladly will I toil and suffer,  
Only let me walk with thee.  
Lead me through the vale of shadows, close to thee,  
Bear me o'er life's fitful sea;  
Then the gate of life eternal may I enter Lord, with thee.  
Close to thee, close to thee.*

## Artistic Director's Program Notes

Fanny Crosby, a prolific American hymnist of the 19th century, penned thousands of beloved hymns despite being blind from infancy. One of her most enduring compositions is “Close to Thee”, a hymn that reflects her deep faith and personal intimacy with God. Through its simple yet heartfelt lyrics and gentle melody, “Close to Thee” continues to resonate with worshipers around the world, offering solace and assurance of God’s comforting presence in times of trial and triumph alike. Some of her other best-known hymns include: “Blessed Assurance”, “To God Be the Glory”, “Praise Him! Praise Him!”, “Rescue the Perishing”, “Near the Cross”, “Pass Me Not, O Gentle Savior”, and “All the Way My Savior Leads Me”.

### ***Arise, Beloved!***

*Arise! Arise! Arise! Arise, my love!*

*Arise, beloved, fair one come away; for lo, the winter is past.*

*Beloved, come away. Arise! Arise! Arise! Arise!*

*Come, the rain has gone, the flowers appear. The birds are singing.*

*Come, your hand in mine; we'll taste of the grapevines.*

*And hear the turtle doves; their voices sing of joy and love.*

*Hush! Do not awaken love. Do not arouse 'til it pleases.*

*As gazelles and does of the field, so is my beloved. Arise!*

*Arise, beloved, fair one come away. Arise, my love! Arise!*

Rosephanye Powell is a highly regarded composer known for her contributions to the choral repertoire, particularly in the realm of African American spirituals and gospel music. Powell has received numerous honors for her contributions to choral music, including the prestigious “Woman of Song” Award from the Atlanta Chapter of the National Association of Negro Musicians. A leading voice in contemporary choral music, her compositions have been performed by choirs of all levels, from community ensembles to professional groups, and have received acclaim for their accessibility and emotional impact. Although based on Song of Solomon 2:7-13, Powell wrote both the words and music of “Arise, Beloved!”, and although the source of the words is ultimately sacred, Powell’s poetry and music in “Arise, Beloved!” is truly a celebration of love.

## Artistic Director's Program Notes

### *The Skye Boat Song*

*Chorus: Speed, bonnie boat, like a bird on the wing,  
Onward! the sailors cry;  
Carry the lad that's born to be King over the sea to Skye*

*Loud the winds howl, loud the waves roar,  
Thunderclouds rend the air;  
Baffled, our foes stand by the shore,  
Follow they will not dare (Chorus)*

*Many's the lad fought on that day,  
Well the Claymore could wield,  
When the night came, silently lay  
Dead on Culloden's field. (Chorus)*

*Burned are their homes, exile and death  
Scatter the loyal men;  
Yet ere the sword cool in the sheath  
Charlie will come again.*

*Final Chorus: Sing me a song of a lad that is gone,  
Say, could that lad be I?  
Merry of soul he sailed on a day  
Over the sea to Skye.*

Amy Gordon's arrangement of "The Skye Boat Song" transports listeners to the rugged landscapes of the Scottish Highlands, with lyrics containing the true story of "Bonnie Prince Charlie" Stuart's escape to the island of Skye after the failure of the Jacobite rebellion against the English House of Hanover at the Battle of Culloden in 1746. Originally, a traditional Scottish folk song, Gordon's arrangement features a reharmonization giving the tune a contemporary twist. The melody will also be familiar to fans of the hit show, "Outlander", where it serves as the show's theme, symbolizing love, loss, and the indomitable spirit of the Scottish clans.

## Artistic Director's Program Notes

### **Gondoliera**

*Oh, come to me when daylight sets; Sweet! then come to me,  
When smoothly go our gondolets; O'er the moonlight sea.  
When Mirth's awake, and Love begins, beneath that glancing ray,  
With sound of lutes and mandolins, to steal young hearts away.  
Then, come to me when daylight sets; Sweet! then come to me,  
When smoothly go our gondolets o'er the moonlight sea.*

*Oh, then's the hour for those who love, sweet, like thee and me;  
When all's so calm below, above, in Heaven and o'er the sea.  
When maiden's sing sweet barcarolles, and Echo sings again  
So sweet, that all with ears and souls should love and listen then.  
So, come to me when daylight sets; Sweet! then come to me,  
When smoothly go our gondolets o'er the moonlight sea.*

Crafted as a gift for her husband Robert Schumann's birthday, Clara Schumann's "Gondoliera" encapsulates the romantic essence of gondola rides through Venetian canals through delicate melodies and intricate harmonies. Arguably the more gifted musician and composer of the couple, it is frequently lamented that she wasn't able to compose more prolifically. Robert himself wrote in his diary, "to have children, and a husband who is always living in the realm of imagination, does not go together with composing. She cannot work at it regularly, and I am often disturbed to think how many profound ideas are lost because she cannot work them out."

### **Requiem**

*Mother Mary, full of grace awaken,  
All our homes are gone our loved ones taken, taken by the sea  
Mother Mary, calm our fears, have mercy,  
Drowning in a sea of tears, have mercy, hear our mournful plea  
Our world has been shaken, we wander our homelands forsaken  
In the dark night of the soul bring some comfort to us all,  
O Mother Mary, come and carry us in your embrace  
That our sorrows may be faced*

## Artistic Director's Program Notes

*Mary fill the glass to overflowing,  
Illuminate the path where we are going, have mercy on us all  
In funeral fires burning each flame to your mystery returning  
In the dark night of the soul your shattered dreamers,  
Make them whole, O Mother Mary, find us where we've  
Fallen out of grace, lead us to a higher place  
In the dark night of the soul our broken hearts you can make whole  
O Mother Mary, come and carry us in your embrace,  
Let us see your gentle face, Mary.*

American folk singer-songwriter, Eliza Gilkyson, began her career in the 1960s and has since released over 20 albums. Her music often explores topics such as love, politics, environmentalism, and spirituality. Her song "Requiem" stands as a poignant tribute to the victims of the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami, one of the deadliest natural disasters in recorded history. Written in response to the overwhelming devastation and loss of life, Gilkyson's haunting melody and heartfelt lyrics capture the collective grief and longing for solace in the face of tragedy.

### ***Hymn to the Sun***

*Of the sun-god reborn let us glory the power,  
As we hail his return to the heavens above.  
Splendor crowned he leaps forth from his night-glamoured bower.  
The awakening of earth is one great hymn of love.*

*Coursers seven, o'er their strength the god but scarce prevailing  
The skyline set aflame, their fiery breath exhaling.  
Shine, O sun benign; Fill thy heaven!*

*With all its flowering fields, its mounts and forests old,  
The spreading ocean that reflects you glowing,  
Lo the world, younger, fresher grown,  
Through the cloud veils of morn, pearled with dew-drops behold!*

## Artistic Director's Program Notes

Lili Boulanger, a pioneering figure in early 20th century classical music, composed “Hymn to the Sun”, showcasing her exceptional talent and innovative approach to composition. Despite her tragically short life, Boulanger left an indelible mark with this piece, which embodies her distinctive blend of musical impressionism and religious fervor. “Hymn to the Sun” transports listeners with its complex harmonies and ethereal melodies, evoking a sense of reverence and awe akin to witnessing the sun’s majestic ascent.

### **Wide Open Spaces**

*There's part of my story, there's part of my song,  
There's part of my journey that's yet to be found.  
With life all around us and so much to see,  
Adventure is calling, it's calling to me.  
Out in the wide open spaces around me.*

*With big sky above me, I'm on my way,  
Scanning the horizon of a brand new day.  
Feet to the earth now, there's no turning back.  
Into the world now, look at me, look at me go!  
Out in the wide open spaces around me.*

*But as I journey out I look within and see the space inside of me  
Yet to be filled, filled with what I have seen and what I will be.  
Oh! Doo doo-n doo doo-n doo doo doo doo-n doo doo doo  
I'm filling the wide open spaces inside of me  
With something I love, something I would like to be!*

Sarah Quartel, a celebrated Canadian composer, showcases her exceptional talent and unique voice through her composition “Wide Open Spaces”. Commissioned for the 2015 National Conference of the American Choral Directors Association, this work reflects on the journeys and adventures to be found in the wide open spaces within ourselves and in the world around us. The piece contains rich textures and expressive nuances painting a vivid sonic landscape reminiscent of vast open spaces. A composition where the spirit



## Artistic Director's Program Notes

soars and the imagination takes flight, “Wide Open Spaces” is a piece that truly celebrates the beauty and grandeur of the natural world along with the boundless possibilities of the human spirit.

### **Grown Wild**

*You conjured springtime, leaf by leaf  
You brought the girl and wrapped her in a blue day  
And gave her to me  
Months, years, hear me: I love this girl,  
Her tendril touch and climbing dreams, her willingness  
I'm not her mother, though  
I am not the luxurious meadow  
We are one the girl and I, like sky*

Melissa Dunphy is an Australian-American composer based in Philadelphia, PA. Her piece “Grown Wild” was just recently commissioned by Concord Women’s Chorus in 2021, and as of ECAS’ Spring 2024 concerts, no public recording of the work exists. We are proud to be one of the first few ensembles to bring this piece to life. As she began to write “Grown Wild”, Dunphy recalls that the poem made her think of time she spent in intensive therapy reflecting on herself as a little girl, her relationship with the world, and growing up. She specifically recalled sessions where she was instructed as an adult to talk to that little girl she once was, giving her the love, support, and grace that perhaps her childhood lacked. She stated, “As women, society tends to wants to topiary us into little boxes and make us a certain way, and for those of us who don’t want to be that way, who find happiness in the wildness, it can be tough finding your way in the world.”

### **1941**

*There'll be no separation, Son.  
Through any day's long endless run,  
Or while Orion walks the sky,  
You will be here. You'll be close by, you'll be close by.*

## Artistic Director's Program Notes

*And though you stand in jungle mud,  
Or watch the waters turn to blood,  
You will with me wade silver streams  
And find fulfillment of our dreams  
On nights when foxholes are your bed,  
When skies are scarred and scratched with red,  
This you must know, these things we share:  
Each hope for Peace, each hour of prayer.  
And when you take my hand at last,  
(When War is horror of the Past)  
Though years have crumbled in decay,  
You will have never been away.  
There'll be no separation, Son.*

Andrea Ramsey is a prominent American composer, conductor, and music educator known for her innovative contributions to choral music. Ramsey's music often explores themes of social justice, empowerment, and human connection, using music as a means of fostering empathy and understanding. Her composition, "1941", is a setting of Shirley Eberth's poem of the same name. The text is a mother's parting words to her son before he is departing for war.

### **Child Moon**

*The child's wonder at the old moon comes back nightly  
She points her finger to the far silent yellow thing  
Shining through the branches, fluttering on the leaves a golden sand  
Crying with her little tongue, "See the moon!"  
And in her bed fading to sleep with babblings on her little mouth*

We are thrilled to feature the world premiere of "Child Moon", a dramatic telling of a little girl whose imagination soars as she ignores bedtime and fights off sleep. The instruments and certain musical themes in the piano play pivotal characters in the story with the clarinet featured as the playful imaginary friend dancing along with the little girl and singing joyful tunes interwoven throughout the piece. The piano plays the role of the music box meant to be singing

## Artistic Director's Program Notes

the little girl to sleep. With frequent rewinding of its gears featured in the unique black key glissandi, only with one final, grand attempt is the soaring melody successful in lulling the little girl to sleep.

### ***Measure Me, Sky!***

*Measure me, sky! Tell me I reach by a song  
Nearer the stars: I have been little so long.  
Horizon reach out! Catch at my hands, stretch me taut,  
Rim of the world: Widen my eyes by a thought.  
Sky be my depth; Wind, be my width and my height,  
World my heart's span; Loveliness, wings for my flight.*

A rising star in the choral world, Elaine Hagenberg's new music "soars with eloquence and ingenuity" (*ACDA Choral Journal*), and one of her latest works, "Measure Me, Sky!" is no exception. The composer writes, "'Measure Me, Sky!' encourages singers to take hold of their limitless potential. Ascending vocal lines stretch across a driving accompaniment, as if reaching out to grasp the expanse depicted in Leonora Speyer's rapturous poem. This impassioned piece builds through key changes and several returns of the opening material before arriving at its brilliant final chord, reflecting 'Loveliness, wings for my flight!'"

### ***Imagine***

*Imagine there's no heaven. It's easy if you try.  
No hell below us, above us only sky.  
Imagine all the people living for today.*

*Imagine there's no countries. It isn't hard to do.  
Nothing to kill or die for, and no religion too.  
Imagine all the people living life in peace.*

*Chorus: You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one.  
I hope some day you'll join us, and the world will be as one.*

## Artistic Director's Program Notes

*Imagine no possessions. I wonder if you can?  
No need for greed or hunger, a brotherhood of man.  
Imagine all the people sharing all the world. (Chorus)*

For nearly fifty years, credit for the song “Imagine” has gone to one writer, John Lennon. Despite this, the song’s creation has been a subject of discussion and controversy until 2017 when the National Music Publishers Association announced that Yoko Ono would be credited as a songwriter as well. Lennon himself admitted in an interview in the 1980’s, “Actually, [”Imagine”] should be credited as a Lennon-Ono song because a lot of the lyric and the concept came from Yoko. But those days I was a bit more selfish, bit more macho, and I sort of omitted to mention her contribution.” Then on his deathbed, he reportedly admitted she essentially wrote the song entirely herself. Tonight, we honor her involvement in shaping this iconic anthem of peace as well as all of the women who have been sidelined, forced to use male pen names, unmentioned, or unrecognized for their musical contributions over the centuries.



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## CALLING ALL SINGERS!

You are invited to join the Easton Choral Arts Society! All are welcome, and no auditions are required.

Rehearsals for our 2024-2025 season resume at Christ Church Easton on Tuesday, August 27 at 7pm. All newcomers are welcome to try our commitment free, two-week trial run. Simply email [ECAS@EastonChoralArts.com](mailto:ECAS@EastonChoralArts.com) to reserve your packet of sheet music or to reach out with any questions you may have.



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## SUPPORT ECAS!

Mark your calendars, grab some friends, and come out to support ECAS at our upcoming fundraiser at our local Chipotle! You must mention "Easton Choral Arts Society" when you order for your purchase to support our organization. We look forward to seeing you there!