

## About the Program

Setting a poem by the revered Syrian poet and diplomat Nizar Qabbani, Jonathan Woody's "I Conquer the World with Words" serves as something of a thesis statement for tonight's program, as we celebrate the power of young poets' words to call attention to the pressing needs in our world, especially the urgent crisis of climate change. An accomplished baritone and composer based in Brooklyn, Woody brings dynamic energy to the opening lines of the poem, with voices clamoring. A shift at the line "and with a new language" paints the flowing of water, interrupted with interjections of "the message of fire." The unresolved final chord speaks to the promise of work yet undone.

In *Elements*, Katerina Gimón draws upon the influence of Ukrainian folk music and heavy metal as well as vocal improv, exploring the use of the voice as an instrument. With the exception of "Air," there is no text. Instead, Gimón seeks to use sound to evoke the feeling and essence of each element in a visceral rather than literal way. Even in "Air," a jumble of different words for "Air" in seven different languages is more about the sound than the words themselves. These pieces create space for listeners to be washed in sound and reflect on the elements in a personal way.

Rupert Lang's "Earth, Teach Me," is a spare, meditative setting of a prayer from the Ute Nation that speaks of the lessons we can learn from the earth. Lang's music creates space to listen to the wisdom in the text as different combinations of voices take up the prayer in turn, with united choral responses interspersed.

In *Map*, Ari Messenger crafts a through-composed narrative with Aryaana Khan's words. *Map* begins simply, allowing the text to breathe, before veering into a more complex harmonic world. This modulation from simple to complex evokes the fond impressions of good people negatively impacted by the external human forces of colonialism and climate change, as explored in Aryaana's powerful poetry. Ari uses rhythm and harmony to emphasize Aryaana's anger and frustration with the effects climate change has wrought on her home of Dhaka, while simultaneously raising the call to action evident in lines such as "And if this voice drowns, let it not be in a flood. Let it be in protest, or growth."

Frank Ticheli wrote "Earth Song" as a cry for peace in the midst of war. His original words speak to the way war destroys not just human lives but also the very earth we inhabit and blinds us to how we can and should be living in harmony. It is an expression of hope amidst pain, and the stillness in the music encourages us to breathe, listen, and reflect.

"The Day Is Done" is an excellent example of the style for which Stephen Paulus was so beloved: homophonic, strophic settings in a warm harmonic language that is familiar yet identifiably Paulus's own. There is a slight instability in the way he voices chords that contributes to a sense of forward movement regardless of tempo or the length of a phrase. Longfellow's poem speaks lovingly of the beauty and comfort poetry can bring to us.

Mark Kilstofte's "This Amazing Day" sets the opening stanza of E. E. Cummings' "i thank You God for most this amazing day." Cummings was a painter who particularly loved landscapes, and this text is an ecstatic ode to beauty and inspiration of nature. Kilstofte's music is painterly as well, balancing rich sonorities with spare moments and often sweeping melodic leaps.

Drawn from Geoffrey Hudson's *A Passion for the Planet*, "Hope is a Verb" paraphrases text from poet and professor David Orr's *Dangerous Years: Climate Change, the Long Emergency, and the Way Forward*.

Hudson's treatment of the text has an almost Taizé chant quality to it at the outset, repeating the titular line as a sort of mantra. When the text speaks of change, the harmony becomes more complicated and even dissonant, alluding to the challenge of the work necessary to effect real change in the climate crisis—though the resolution remains hopeful.

Jean Ritchie was a Kentucky-born singer-songwriter and dulcimer player who dedicated her life to collecting and sharing Appalachian folk songs as well as writing her own music. "Now Is The Cool Of The Day" was part of a set of songs about the pollution and destruction of the environment by loggers and the ravaging and deadly strip-mining techniques of the coal industry. Through her voice, Ritchie revealed the reality of the industries' unchecked abuse of the earth. John Ratledge's arrangement centers a solo voice for much of the piece and wraps it in both shimmering close harmony and instances of more hollow, open chords reminiscent of Appalachian folk music.

An accomplished composer and writer, Dale Trumbore has a particular passion for setting texts by living poets and authors. She writes of this piece:

"All We Need" sets to music Annie Finch's poem "Earth Day," which is a celebration of all that the planet offers us as well as a plea to respect what we find here. The recurring refrain of the piece is simple, but profound: "All we need" is to find love in what we already have, both in the "faces of the people we love" and on the earth itself. If, as Annie writes, we need to "live with the memory / of a future we want to imagine," then it is also up to us to create this future in the way we live our lives every day.

## **I Conquer the World with Words**

*Jonathan Woody (b. 1983), poetry by Nizar Qabbani (1923-1998)*

I conquer the world with words,  
conquer the mother tongue,  
verbs, nouns, syntax.  
I sweep away the beginning of things  
and with a new language  
that has the music of water the message of fire  
I light the coming age  
and stop time in your eyes  
and wipe away the line  
that separates  
time from this single moment.

## **Earth Teach Me**

*Rupert Lang (b.1948), translation of a prayer from the Ute Tribe*

Earth, teach me stillness  
as the grasses are stilled with light.

Earth, teach me suffering  
as old stones suffer with memory.

Earth, teach me humility  
as blossoms are humble with beginning.

Earth, teach me caring  
as the mother who secures her young.

Earth, teach me courage  
as the tree which stands alone.

Earth, teach me limitation  
as the ant which crawls on the ground.

Earth, teach me freedom  
as the eagle which soars in the sky.

Earth, teach me resignation  
as the leaves which die in the fall.

Earth, teach me regeneration  
as the seed which rises in the spring.

Earth, teach me to forget myself  
as melted snow forgets its life.

Earth, teach me to remember kindness  
as dry fields weep with rain.

## **Mother Earth**

*Poem by Jennifer Martinez (b. 2003)*

Sometimes I like to think that the Earth has a heartbeat  
That she hums a gentle tune through wind and rustle and  
Rocks us to sleep at night, gives us lullabies in the forms of bird and cricket and gives us the stars to  
count until our eyes close

Sometimes I like to think Earth herself is mother.  
Is caretaker.  
Is giver of life and light and hope,  
And we her children.

Mother Earth wakes us up in the morning, shines light on our face and fills world with sound to serve as  
alarm.  
She cooks us breakfast in the form of vitamin D and then rains a little later cause she knows that we  
always forget to drink our water,

Mother Earth is there for you on your bad days, hands you snow when it's cold and cloudy because she  
knows that you need the brightness it reflects, when sun hits white

She hands you branch and stone and tells you to build your own castle in the trees,

Mother Earth is relentless and restless in her love for you.

Holds you tight in warmth, surrounds you with beauty and green and blue,

But Mother Earth is not stupid.

She knows that her kids will forget about her eventually.

Knows that they'll move on to bigger and better things and forget her midnight bird songs and her watercolor sky at dawn,

She knows that she'll take the brunt of their attitude and the brunt of their hate,

She knows that sometimes her children won't treat her so nice.

Carve name into her flesh, pour oil into the water of her bloodstreams, burn her lungs to ash, and strip her of her color- turn greens to grey and blues to beige,

She knows you will lose sight of her eventually.

So Mother Nature makes a storm.

Turns heat into fire, turns warm waters into cold floods,

Do not mistake her kindness for weakness, cause hell hath no fury like a mother scorned

She will take sky and make thunder, crash lightning to ground

She will cry and kick and scream and still you don't listen to her cries,

Still you ignore her,

Still you seem to think you're above her

Can walk all over the streets of her flesh

You seem to forget that she can open the ground up from under you, create cracks beneath your feet and pull you in,

You seem to forget that Mother Earth has a heartbeat.

And just like us, she is vengeful.

## Map

*Ari Messenger (b.1993), poetry by Aryaana Khan (b. 2003)*

ask me where i'm from,  
& i'll send you a spotify playlist,  
sing you songs in a map you cannot delete,  
point you to my mother's garden, which refused to grow  
in flood, & pollution  
show you my lungs,  
scared of stealing more air than my brother got,  
born to the fight  
we tremble,  
tire ourselves in loss,  
over a land that floods  
despite language.  
language that was taken.  
in voices we never got.  
wake up in misplaced identities,  
on days where even the sun is cursed.  
my brother and I. we come from a warm people  
who grow gardens,  
feed indiscriminate bellies.  
who drench in kindness & sweat,  
in colonized labor.  
too swamped to save centimeters  
on a broken map.  
my brother and I. we only have that map.  
when our spotify glitches,  
we talk to our mother,  
about home, about our father.  
about the map we'll hold close when  
she is gone,  
except the map will be gone, too.  
long before us.  
long before we make mistakes  
or conquer the sky.  
everyday, we live a death we  
did not choose.  
which is to say  
this death was chosen.  
by people who know maps,  
who refuse themselves garden,  
& pretend it is not for us all.  
who overextend welcome to woe.  
my brother and I. we can read too.  
substitute maps for globe.  
our brains light up with each syllable

emanating Dhaka & New York City  
& all the places the diaspora  
slips through, camouflaged.  
when you turn a people to concrete,  
they will conjure cracks.  
my brother and I. we crack.  
everyday.  
sometimes we codeswitch to exodus.  
we scream. scream in displacement.  
in search for certainty.  
we had earth once too. & then we didn't.  
we had tongue once too. & then we didn't.  
but it can not end here,  
in generational grievance.  
my brother and I. we have voice.  
& if this voice drowns, let it not be in a flood.  
let it be in protest, or growth.  
something worthy of a spotify playlist.  
let it be home.

## **Earth Song**

*Frank Ticheli (b. 1958)*

Sing, Be, Live, See.  
This dark stormy hour,  
The wind, it stirs.  
The scorched earth  
Cries out in vain:  
O war and power,  
You blind and blur,  
The torn heart  
Cries out in pain.  
But music and singing  
Have been my refuge,  
And music and singing  
Shall be my light.  
A light of song  
Shining Strong: Alleluia!  
Through darkness, pain, and strife, I'll  
Sing, Be, Live, See...  
Peace.

## **The Day Is Done**

*Stephen Paulus (1949-2014), poetry by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882)*

The day is done, and the darkness  
    Falls from the wings of Night,  
As a feather is wafted downward  
    From an eagle in his flight.

I see the lights of the village  
    Gleam through the rain and the mist,  
And a feeling of sadness comes o'er me  
    That my soul cannot resist:

A feeling of sadness and longing,  
    That is not akin to pain,  
And resembles sorrow only  
    As the mist resembles the rain.

Come, read to me some poem,  
    Some simple and heartfelt lay,  
That shall soothe this restless feeling,  
    And banish the thoughts of day.

Read from some humbler poet,  
    Whose songs gushed from his heart,  
As showers from the clouds of summer,  
    Or tears from the eyelids start;

Then read from the treasured volume  
    The poem of thy choice,  
And lend to the rhyme of the poet  
    The beauty of thy voice.

And the night shall be filled with music,  
    And the cares, that infest the day,  
Shall be banished like restless feelings  
    And as silently steal away.

## **This Amazing Day**

*Mark Kilstofte (b. 1958), poetry by e. e. cummings (1894-1962)*

i thank You God for most this amazing  
day: for the leaping greenly spirits of trees  
and a blue true dream of sky; and for everything  
which is natural which is infinite which is yes

## Hope Is A Verb

*Geoffrey Hudson (b. 1967), inspired by a quote by David Orr (b.1944)*

Hope is a verb with its sleeves rolled up.  
Hope is patient. Hope is not passive.  
Hope is steady and competent and brave.

Hope is a verb with its sleeves rolled up.  
Hope requires courage. Hope is a discipline.  
Hope requires skill. And hope, hope is something we do.

And with hope we can create the gyres of positive change,  
And that change can redeem the earth.

## the irony

*Poem by Nathaniel Valdivieso (b. 2003)*

Fishing with my grandfather has taught me 3 things.

1. you'll know when a fish bites
2. Styrofoam coolers don't work

And

3. and any organization related to protecting the environment

(Especially the coastguard)

is quote:

For a bunch of filthy communist dirtbags

end quote.

As a kid I always loved to be by the water

I'd watch the waves roll over and eclipse the shore

Rocking it to sleep every night

And waking it every morning

And when my grandfather used to take me

He would tell me that the shoreline was nothing like it used to be



About how back in the 80s he used to catch 40 or 50 a night here

Big ones, the ones with the stripe on their tail

Ive never seen one in person but Ive seen the pictures

And 10 year old me wish they stuck around a little longer

our boat had more patches than clear spots of paint

Had the tops halves of lawn chains screwed into the metal seats

And a leak he searched for for years before he found

So sometimes the coastguard would safety check our boat they'd say

Sir..

You should get that leak fixed..

Then he'd tell them to go to hell

Then they'd say sir

Do you have any catches you'd like to report tonight? Protecting our environment is important..

And he'd tell them go to hell again

They'd argue find nothing and eventually leave

Cause he'd always hide the fish in this styrofoam cooler  
cause according to him the filthy communist fishing companies destroyed these waters years ago.. what  
do they care if we keep a few extra.. its human nature

on our way back

he would points out the bank where his fathers boathouse used to be

Says that back in the 80s you could still see the posts but now the water covers them

The water is rising

I know one day the water will reach over and choke the shore

And he tells me its cause these dirtbags destroyed the Long Island sound

I wonder if he'll ever look back and get it.

## Cool of the Day

*Jean Ritchie (1922-2015), arr. by John Ratledge (b. 1974)*

Oh my Lord, He said to me,  
Do you like my garden so fair?  
If you live in my garden, you must keep my pastures green,  
And I'll return in the cool of the day.

And my Lord, He said to me,  
Do you like my garden so fair?  
If you live in my garden, you must feed my lambs,  
And I'll return in the cool of the day.

Now is the cool of the day.  
Now is the cool of the day.  
Oh the earth is a garden, the garden of my Lord.  
And He walks in His garden in the cool of the day.

And my Lord, He said to me,  
Do you like my garden so fair?  
If you live in my garden, you must keep my people free,  
And I'll return in the cool of the day.  
Yes, He walks in His garden in the cool of the day.

## All We Need

*Dale Trumbore (b. 1987), poetry by Annie Finch (b.1956)*

All we want is to find the love  
    in the faces of the people we love.  
All we need is to find the dark  
    in the nighttime sky, to lie down to sleep  
in the darkness, where stars and moon keep vigil,  
    in the silence of a sleeping earth.  
All we require is to wake to sunlight  
    in the morning, to simple sky,  
to breathe aloud as the sky is breathing,  
    to drink the water of the earth.

All we need is to touch the planet  
    and find it clean where we were born,  
where our ancestors breathed and planted,  
    where we live with the plants and birds.

All we need is to live with the memory  
    of a future we want to imagine.  
All we want is to find the love  
    in the face of the planet we love.

## **O Earth, Loving Mother**

*Mark Sirett (b. 1952), poetry by Archibald Lampman (1861-1899)*

O earth, loving mother, Nurture us, breathe in us  
Something of your beauty, your wisdom and your light.  
Your ancient mountains, gleaming seas  
Fill our hearts with care;  
Through blazing sun and darkest night,  
Breathe in us, breathe in us.  
O earth, loving mother, Nurture us, breathe in us  
Something of your beauty, your wisdom and your light.  
O earth, who was before our time,  
And after many years remains,  
Careless and blind we wander from you.  
Breathe in us, breathe in us.