

College of the Holy Cross

CrossWorks

Holy Cross Choirs Newsletter

Music Department

4-20-2021

Holy Cross Choirs (Spring 2021)

Choir, College of the Holy Cross

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HOLY CROSS CHOIRS

COLLEGE OF THE HOLY CROSS

Virtual Concert

Please join us for our Virtual Choir Concert, Friday, **April 23, at 7 pm.**

The Virtual Concert includes the Orchestra, Chamber Singers, College Choir, and Organ Scholars, including a World Premiere piece by Professor Matthew Jaskot.

Concert Link: <https://linktr.ee/hcmusic>

Save the Date!

Mark your calendars!

We are excited to announce the Chamber Singers concert, "The Road Home," on **Friday, April 30 at 7 pm.**

The College Choir concert, "Unofficial Anthems," is **Wednesday, May 5 at 7 pm.**

Livestream available at: <https://linktr.ee/hcmusic>



The Chamber Singers at their first outdoor rehearsal in March!

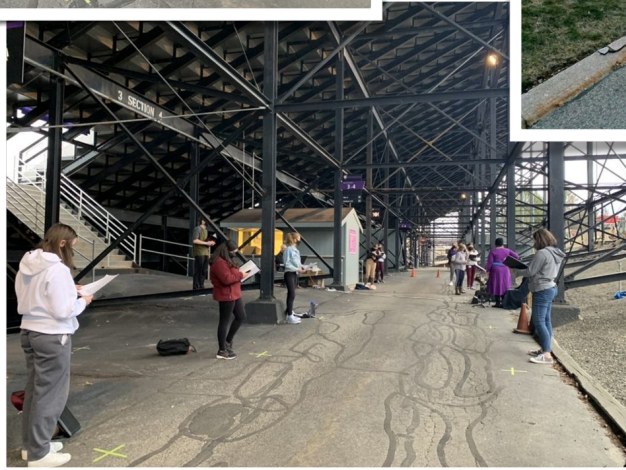
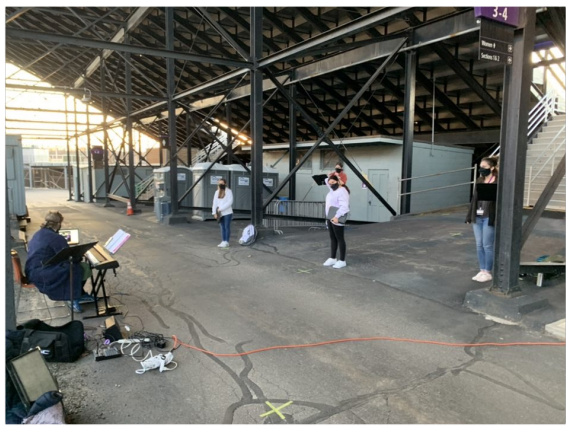
Waltzing Matilda

The piece that I am conducting for the College Choir this semester is called "Waltzing Matilda." Fitting with our theme of "unofficial anthems," the song is often known as the unofficial national anthem of Australia. The song is categorized as a "bush ballad" meaning that it describes life in the "bush" or rural areas of Australia. A lot of these ballads tell crazy, adventurous stories, and "Waltzing Matilda" is no exception. The story talks about a "swagman," or a worker traveling across Australia by foot, who captures a "jumbuck," or sheep, to eat for dinner. Unfortunately for him, the sheep's owner sees him and sends the police on a chase after the man, which causes him to jump in a nearby lake and drown, leaving his ghost to haunt the area around the lake. While the song itself is in English, it uses a lot of Australian slang, which will be fun for us to learn and explore as we tell this swagman's story. I am looking forward to working with the choir on this piece, and hopefully to be able to bring the story to life together at our live performance on May 5th! - *Meghan O'Keefe, Student Conductor*



Update From the Director

Amidst many challenges, the Holy Cross Choirs are still making music together! This semester is different from last semester, in that we are in hybrid mode. During the month of February, we rehearsed on Zoom, and recorded choral parts via an online software called SoundTrap. As I did last semester, I gave each singer individual feedback on their recordings. However, in the month of March, depending on the weather, we have been able to move outside for rehearsals. We purchased singing masks for all the singers (masks that allow for greater jaw movement) and we wear them all the time. After trying out a number of locations around campus, we have settled on rehearsing under the football bleachers. Each singer stands on their own marked X, 10 feet away from everyone else. We store our electronic keyboard and other equipment in the Snack Shack. It's still hard to hear each other under these circumstances, but it is delightful to be making music in person together. Not everyone can attend in-person rehearsals, so there is always a laptop set up and some singers continue to Zoom in - this combination of in-person and online teaching is called hybrid rehearsals. For our concert, our audio engineer will be individually mic-ing each singer for a live-streamed performance. We hope you tune in to both Chamber Singers and College Choir and share the end of a wild year with us! - *Dr. Martin, Director*



Snapshots from our outdoor rehearsals!



Professor Jaskot's World Premiere Piece

I am thrilled to hear the virtual premiere of my composition, *When Voices Spiral Through the Mind*, and am so thankful for the many people involved in the project, especially the students in the College Choir and Chamber Singers, led by Dr. Allegra Martin, and our amazing organ scholars Michelle Sacco and Matthew Luca. They have all worked incredibly hard on learning and recording their parts for this piece. I would also like to thank audio engineer Brian Saia for his recording expertise, and our organ teacher Ezequiel Menendez for his guidance.

This piece is about anxiety, what causes it, what has caused it, what will cause it, how it might appear unexpectedly, how it might spiral out of control, how it might be controlled, etc. I especially found it fitting to address this subject in a piece premiered by college students, for whom anxiety levels are particularly high due to many factors, including, but not limited to, academic performance, social interactions, and employment prospects after they graduate. There are three sources of text for the piece, a short untitled poem by American poet Rose Styron, a short poem by Indian poet Sri Chinmoy, and a text that I cobbled together from excerpts drawn from interviews with current and former Holy Cross students, and a handful other people from different stages of life who I have personal relationships with. I am thankful for all of those who contributed to the text, by answering questions that were very personal in nature. The primary interviewees were Holy Cross students (some have since graduated), but the text also includes contributions from other people at various stages of life, who offer a different perspective.

The music is complex, dramatic, a roller coaster experience akin to what one might undergo during an anxiety attack, or on a larger scale, akin to the roller coaster that is life. Amidst the turbulent textures are moments of beauty and simplicity, that act as a foil to the complex and sometimes harrowing sounds presented throughout. In composing the piece, I imagined a sonic landscape that often discomforts while striving to comfort. The performers themselves are often placed out of their comfort zone as well, called upon to perform in unconventional ways at times.

This piece was finished just before the pandemic (originally set to be premiered in April of 2020), which has obviously exacerbated anxiety globally. I often wonder how the piece would've been different if I wrote it in the midst of the pandemic, or whether I would have even written a piece addressing the subject of anxiety. As we have been working on the piece, I couldn't help but to notice the irony in one of the climactic moments of the piece, where the choir loudly sings *avoiding social isolation*, something we have all become too familiar with over the past year. I hope that you all enjoy the performance, and appreciate all those who listen, and cannot be more thankful to Dr. Allegra Martin for providing me with this opportunity. - *Professor Jaskot*

Our Concerts

The College Choir spring concert program this semester was designed to have an international scope. One advantage of our focus on remote learning is that we can bring anyone in to rehearsal, no matter where they live! Our concert program "Unofficial Anthems" is letting us explore the favorite songs of several different countries. While working on "Arirang," the best-known folk song from South Korea, we brought in Dr. Won Joo Ahn from the University of Louisville to coach us on our Korean pronunciation. And while working on "Alma Llanera" from Venezuela, we brought in alum and former Brooks Scholar Teresa Murphy '19, who has spent time living in that country, to coach us on our Spanish. She is currently living and attending school in Arizona, but that was no problem! We are also singing "Va Pensiero" by Verdi, a chorus from the opera *Nabucco* that Italians at one time petitioned to actually make their national anthem. And student conductor Meghan O'Keefe is teaching us "Waltzing Matilda," a song every Australian knows well. All of these songs are also beautiful and a great deal of fun to sing, an important factor when Zoom, masks, and distance interfere with our ease of connection.

The Chamber Singers program has a more emotional connection to our current situation. It is all about moving down life's roads even when they are difficult. We started the semester recording Henry Purcell's eight-part motet "Hear My Prayer, O Lord," a piece I chose to match with Prof. Jaskot's piece "When Voices Spiral Through the Mind." Of course I had each singer record two parts each! Then we started working on our repertoire for our outdoor, end-of-semester concert. Pieces include "Farewell Song" by Brahms, about leaving a beloved person behind while you travel (and ironically begging them to "stay in the house and be safe!"); Undine Smith Moore's tranquil and beautiful motet "We Shall Walk Through the Valley in Peace"; the classic King's Singers arrangement of James Taylor's famous tune "That Lonesome Road"; and a fantastic jazz arrangement of Elton John's "Goodbye, Yellow Brick Road." We hope you tune in for this program that reminds us that no matter what happens, we are always moving forward! - *Dr. Martin, Director*

Missed Our Past Performances?

- "Festival Of Concerts" - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oi8hEn17iY&t=1443s>
- Lessons and Carols - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2tjvCtbLw&t=2s>

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