

# CHAI COLLABORATIVE ENSEMBLE PRESENTS

## PAIRED: SONGS FOR VOICE AND OBOE

October 28, 2023 at 7:30pm | Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church

October 29, 2023 at 3:00pm | Color Club

Alicia Berneche, soprano

Laura Perkett, oboe

Juliana Hall (b. 1958).....Bells and Grass (1989)

- I. Echo
- II. Gone
- III. Why?
- IV. Coals
- V. Rain

Hilary Tann (1945-2023).....Songs of the Cotton Grass (1999-2005)

- I. A Girl's Song to Her Mother
- II. Wings of the Grasses
- III. Vale of Feathers

Jenni Brandon (b. 1977).....Love Songs for Soprano and Oboe (2014)

- I. Lullaby
- II. Song of Basket-Weaving
- III. Song of the Blue Corn Dance
- IV. Love Song (Chippewa)
- V. Love Song from the Andes
- VI. My Love has Departed (Chippewa)
- VII. Lullaby (Reprise)

## A Note from Our Artistic Director:

Welcome! We are so glad to see you here, whether this is your first-ever CHAI Collaborative Ensemble (CCE) performance, or you have been a regular attendee over the years. **We are a Chicago-based collective of musicians** dedicated to sharing vocal and instrumental chamber music that represents a diverse array of compositional voices, fosters the development of new works, and brings music by underrepresented composers to light. We seek to create a space for camaraderie and courageous conversations through the music we share. We strive to be a leading ensemble that offers a space where **music lovers can come as they are**, and experience adventurous chamber music programming in a welcoming atmosphere.

**We open our ninth season with a program of songs written for voice and oboe.** All three song cycles are written by contemporary composers, and all share an emphasis on one's relationship with nature and living with presence. **Juliana Hall's Bells and Grass** portrays five scenes, on poetry by Walter de la Mare. The poetry and the pairing between oboe and voice brings out the immediacy and intimacy found in seemingly small objects and moments. **Hilary Tann's Songs of the Cotton Grass** evoke the open, high moorland of South Wales and are "reverse lullabies" where the daughter lulls the mother to sleep. Tann developed this song cycle over the course of six years in collaboration with Welsh poet Menna Elfyn, who is known for writing in both English and in Welsh. As Tann herself states, "I write for the pleasure of the performers and listeners... and a glance at my titles reveals my joy in simply being alive in this wondrous green world." **Jenni Brandon's Love Songs** incorporates texts and melodies from Ojibwe (Chippewa), British Columbian Coast Tribes, Zuni, and Inca peoples. The piece begins as a lullaby from mother to child, and then unfolds into the mother telling the story of her own life. As the composer notes, "it is a 'love song' in that it goes beyond just romantic love, but tells of love for a child and love of the land."

This is the third installment of the ensemble's Paired Series, which explores music written for two musicians. We find the pairing of the voice with the oboe to be an alluring combination, in part because there is only a select amount of repertoire available for it. Additionally, the oboe is an instrument with a distinctly warm, vocal quality, and makes for an elegant partner with the voice.

We recently learned that Hilary Tann passed away this past February. We dedicate this weekend's performances to her memory. **With all that is going on in our world, we hope this music will be a grounding and uplifting experience for those who hear it.** This weekend's performances are also dedicated to those in need of comfort and uplifting at this time. We are excited to share this music with you, and we look forward to seeing you at our future 2023-24 Season events.

With Warmest Wishes,



Laura Perkett, Founder & Artistic Director

## SONG TEXTS - BELLS AND GRASS

### Echo

Seven sweet notes  
In the moonlight pale  
Warbled a leaf-hidden  
Nightingale:  
And Echo in hiding  
By an old green wall  
Under the willows  
Sighed back them all.

### Gone

Bright sun, hot sun, oh, to be  
Where beats on the restless sea!  
To hear the sirens of the deep  
Chanting old Ocean's floods to sleep!  
And shadowed wave to sunlit wave  
Call from the music-haunted cave!  
There, with still eyes, their watch they keep,  
While, at horizon mark, a ship,  
With cloudlike sails glides slowly on,  
          Smalls, vanishes, is gone.

### Why?

Ever, ever,  
Stir and shiver  
The reeds and rushes  
By the river:  
Ever, ever,  
As if in dream  
The lone moon's silver  
Sleeks the stream.  
What old sorrow,  
What lost love,  
Moon, reeds, rushes,  
Dream you of?

### Coals

In drowsy fit  
I hear the flames  
Syllabing o'er  
Their ancient names:  
The coals – a glory  
Of gold – blaze on,  
Drenched with the suns  
Of centuries gone;  
While, at the window,  
This rainy day  
In darkening twilight  
Dies away.

### Rain

I woke in the swimming dark  
And heard, now sweet, now shrill,  
The voice of the rain-water  
Cold and still,

Endlessly sing; now faint,  
In the distance borne away;  
Now in the air float near,  
          But nowhere stay;

Singing I know not what,  
Echoing on and on;  
Following me in sleep,  
          Till night was gone.

– Walter de la Mare

## SONG TEXTS - SONGS OF THE COTTON GRASS

### A Girl's Song to Her Mother

I remember your shawl's fragrance  
in the crook of your shoulder.  
There I'd find leaves in the palm tree, and shelter;  
there I'd find a heartbeat like hummingbirds.  
My yoke was so tender enfolded in your arms.

I remember the songlines of the blanket's murmur,  
the coverlet received every year for your labour,  
slave of the old story, caressed by your skin  
and the balm of garment to hide away your pain.

I sing nightly of the shawl, its timeless embrace,  
how gently it raised me safely with grace.  
Tonight, is my turn to place a blanket over you,  
and keep you, my mistress, without burden or cry.

(Refrain)

Take me to the vale of feathers,  
to the dancing world, my downy one,  
my head on your pillow,  
my days filled with cotton grass and love.

### Wings of the Grasses

In our sleep the wings of the grasses  
bring us secret messages and we set them free:  
tickling grass under chin, tickling maidens' legs,  
grass to plait in our hair, grass the tail of squirrels.

They will guide us to the vale of freedom  
where the candle gleams in the eye:  
the fairy's grass, the kitten's grass,  
grass of little lamb-tails, grass frog and toad.

On the gorse and on the mountain  
where the grass gives us a pillow,  
where the grass murmurs fables,  
where the grass hides our footsteps,

We'd count all the grasses:  
sweet grass, grass lock,  
grass-desiring, grass of loving,  
grass of the seasons, grass departing.

### Vale of Feathers

Who would have thought  
A cradle and bed  
Are the same in the end.

Those who are born  
Learn how to mourn,  
See the blanket all torn.

When labour is o'er  
And all is receiv'd,  
Life's last note when we leave.

(Refrain)

Take me to the vale of feathers...

## SONG TEXTS - LOVE SONGS

### Lullaby

Lullaby for children sung by the  
White Earth Chippewa and the  
Lac du Flambeau Chippewa as they  
rocked their children to sleep.

- Ed. Frances Denmore

### Song of the Basket-Weaving

Kulasgh\*, Kulasgh, my mother,  
I sit at thy knee  
Weaving my basket of grasses,  
Weaving for my harvest of berries  
when the Ripe Days come.  
Thy fingers gently touch my hair with fragrance,  
Thy mouth drips a song,  
for the wind has kissed it –  
(Love sings in thy mouth!)

The soil listens and answers;  
I feel a stirring beneath me and hear buds opening,  
The river chants thy song and the clouds dance to it.  
Tonight the stars will float upon thy singing breath,  
Gleaming like slanting flocks above the sea.  
All the earth sings; and its voices are one song!  
I alone am silent:  
I alone, a maid waiting him, the Fate,  
The Stirring One,  
the Planter of the Harvest,  
The Basket-Filler.

Kulasgh, Kulasgh, Mother!  
See how beautiful, how liberal, is my basket,  
How tightly woven for the waters of Love,  
How soft for the treading of children's feet,  
How strong to bear them up!

Kulasgh, Kulasgh, Mother, remember me –  
Ere the Sunset and the Dropping Leaf!

- Interpretation by Constance Lindsay Skinner

\*Kulasgh, or Cedar Tree, is considered  
the source of life by the British  
Columbian Tribes, as it supplies all  
their necessities, even food in famine.  
From *The Path on the Rainbow*, edited  
by George W. Cronyn, 1918

### Song of the Blue-Corn Dance (Zuni)

Beautiful, lo, the summer clouds,  
Beautiful, lo, the summer clouds!  
Blossoming clouds in the sky,  
Like unto shimmering flowers,  
Blossoming clouds in the sky,  
Onward, lo, they come,  
Hither, hither bound!

(This was apparently a work song sung  
by women as they harvested the corn.)  
Translated by Natalie Curtis Burlin;  
From *The Path on the Rainbow*, edited  
by George W. Cronyn, 1918

### Love Song (Chippewa)

Oh  
I am thinking  
Oh  
I am thinking  
I have found my lover  
Oh  
I think it is so!

- Ed. by Frances Denmore  
Washington Bureau of American  
Ethnology, Bulletin 45 (1910)

## SONG TEXTS - LOVE SONGS (CONTINUED)

### Love Song from the Andes (Inca)

To this my song  
Thou shalt sleep.  
In the dead of night  
I shall come.

- Ed. by P. Ainsworth Means  
*Ancient Civilizations of the Andes*,  
Charles Scribner & Sons, 1931

### My Love has Departed (Chippewa)

A loon  
I thought it was  
But it was  
My love's Splashing oar.

To Sault Ste. Marie  
He has departed.  
My love had gone  
On before me.  
Never again can I see him.

A loon  
I thought it was  
But it was never again  
Love's splashing oar.

- Ed. by Frances Densmore,  
reworked by Jenni Brandon  
*Washington Bureau of American  
Ethnology, Bulletin 45 (1910)*

### Lullaby (Reprise)

## OUR ARTISTS

**Alicia Berneche** has sung on stages around the globe, bringing to them a unique, beautifully produced sound, an extraordinary acting talent, and exquisite musicality. Often specializing in contemporary works, she appeared on the stages of the Lyric Opera of Chicago in "The Great Gatsby" and The Goodman Theatre in "The Barbican," as well as many others. She has sung with celebrated conductors and ensembles including Carmina Burana with the Minnesota Orchestra under Osmo Vänskä. Alicia Berneche teaches voice at Glenbrook North High School and has a private studio as well.

**Laura Perkett** enjoys a multi-faceted and thriving dual career as both an oboist and a soprano, and has earned praise for her warm, agile, and sensitive sound in both capacities. Laura's chamber music credits include numerous performances with CCE, and she is also the oboist with the Ravenswood Winds. She has also performed with numerous orchestras including the Elmhurst Symphony, Illinois Philharmonic, and Southwest Michigan Symphony. As a soprano, Laura makes regular appearances as a recitalist, chamber musician, and choral singer throughout the Chicago area. When offstage, Laura enjoys cooking, crafting, reading, and spending time with her family.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CHAI Collaborative Ensemble extends its gratitude to Pastor Monte Johnson, Julia Steiner, and everyone at Immanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church for once again opening their space to us for this concert series. It continues to be a haven for us, and we are grateful to open our current season in this space.

We would also like to thank Abby Monroe and all the staff at the Color Club for opening their doors to us. We are thankful to have the opportunity to perform in such an artist-friendly space.

Thank you to our composers on this program – Juliana Hall, Hilary Tann, and Jenni Brandon – for sharing your gifts with all of us. We are thankful to bring your music to life this weekend.

Thank you also to Aaron Gottl and the staff of Atlas Arts Media and to Elliot Mandel Photography for their recording and photography services, respectively, for these performances.

Thank you to you, our audiences and donors, for sticking with us through an unprecedented few years. Your appreciation and support makes what we do possible and worthwhile. We look forward to seeing you at many more live performances this season.

A special thank you to the Roster Artists of CCE for your dedication, both on and off the stage. These concerts would not be possible without all your hard work. Your artistry is a gift to us all.

CCE's 2023-24 Season (including this program) is sponsored in part by grant support from the Illinois Arts Council Agency, the City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (Illinois Creative Recovery Grant Program - B2B Arts), and the National Community Reinvestment Coalition's Community Development Fund.



Illinois  
Department of Commerce  
& Economic Opportunity



## UP NEXT

December 19, 2023 at 7:30pm: The Midwest Connection, in partnership with New Music Chicago  
March 22-23, 2024: Of Ballad and Breath  
May 4-5, 2024: Windows

## THANKS AGAIN

We would love to see you again soon! Please visit [chaicollaborative.org/season](https://chaicollaborative.org/season), or scan the QR code below for more information on our upcoming performances:



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