American Reflections is a program of American choral music, and I have attempted to make selections that fit into several themes or reflections. Perhaps most prominent are the themes of water and nature. *Long Time Ago*, adapted by Aaron Copland, was originally written for Baritone solo and orchestra, and included in his Old American Songs, Book 1. Here it is transcribed for chorus by Irving Fine. *Long Time Ago* is a nostalgic ballad which includes many of the musical traits that help to define Copland's style, including transparent textures and declamatory rhythms that align closely with the conventions of the text.

*Walden Pond* by Dominick Argento was chosen especially for these concerts, and fittingly, this year marks the 200th anniversary of the birth of Henry David Thoreau. Scored for 3 cellos, harp, and choir, *Walden Pond* is considered a masterpiece of American Music. Rarely does one find in a musical score the near perfect companion between text and music. Argento has allowed for the complex nature of his melodies, harmonies, and rhythms to find a happy and natural home in the equally provocative syntax of Thoreau. It is as though, even separated by nearly 200 years, both have arrived at a meaningful and natural friendship.

*Beautiful River*, or more popularly known as *Shall We Gather at the River*, is arranged in our program by William Hawley. Hawley provides a noble, straightforward setting of the music. The original tune and words were written by Reverend Robert Lowry in 1864. *Shenandoah*, arranged by James Erb, closes our program, and is a favorite among American choirs. The Shenandoah River is a tributary of the Potomac River that meanders through Virginia and West Virginia. This meandering is replicated well in the hands of Erb and certainly adds to the enjoyment of both listener and singer.

Another area of reflection in our program are musical representations of a dark chapter in American history. *Why the Caged Bird Sings*, by Jake Runestad, is a setting of the poem "Sympathy," by Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906). Dunbar's parents were both slaves in Kentucky. The poem, which demonstrates the empathy a slave might have with a caged bird, along with the well-crafted music, speaks to the emotional carnage that slavery imparted. *Great God Almighty*, arranged by Stacey Gibbs, is a spiritual or work song. The text is vivid, descriptive, and harsh. The music serves to underscore the cruel reality of slavery and the despair the slaves must have felt, yet the powerful ending speaks to the strength to overcome.

A third area of reflection in the program centers on love. Both *Dirait-on*, by Morten Lauridsen, and *She’s Like the Swallow*, by English composer Edward Chapman, are folk songs. We have admittedly strayed from our pronounced “American Music” program by including Chapman. The tune, however, is from Newfoundland, North America. *Dirait-on* is a happy, light, and delicate song that lives within a simple and charming melody. By contrast, *She’s Like the Swallow* is mournful and longing, and Chapman conveys these emotions in the manner of a true wordsmith. *Water Night* by Eric Whitacre is not a folk song, but can be interpreted as a lovely musical conveyance of love. Water may be thought of as a metaphor for love in this poem by Octavio Paz (1914-1998), as love is searched for,
described, and felt. Whitacre’s musical language of thick texture and provocative harmonies seems to ally perfectly with the text.

In a final area of reflection, our selections turn to a theme of hope. *Hark, I Hear the Harps Eternal*, by Alice Parker is a simply-set, yet powerful American folk anthem of hope in the eternal. *I Hunger and Thirst*, arranged by Kevin Siegfried, is a traditional Shaker song that originated in Alfred, Maine in 1837. The piece is a prayer for love and peace. Shawn Kirchner contributes two selections to our program. *Bright Morning Stars* is a setting of a traditional Appalachian song. Kirchner says this about the piece, “I especially liked the way the song linked the beautiful, universal, and ‘external’ imagery of dawn and morning stars to the similar ‘internal’ movements of renewal that we also experience: ‘day a-breaking in my soul.’” *Unclouded Day* is the first in a set of songs titled *Heavenly Home: Three American Songs* . It is a setting of a popular gospel tune by J.K. Alwood. In addition to Gospel influences, you will hear a bluegrass style as well.

Jeff Hunt
Hark, I hear the Harps Eternal

Arr. Alice Parker
(b. 1925)

Hark, I hear the harps eternal ringing on the farther shore,
as I near those swollen waters with their deep and solemn roar.
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.
Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Praise the Lamb!
Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Glory to the great I AM!

Souls have crossed before me saintly to that land of perfect rest;
and I hear them singing faintly in the mansions of the blest.
Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Praise the Lamb!
Hallelujah, Hallelujah, Glory to the great I AM!

II

Please hold applause until the end of the set.

Long Time Ago
Irving Fine (1914-1962)
Adapt. by Aaron Copland (1900-1990)

On the lake where drooped the willow, long time ago,
where the rock threw back the billow, brighter than snow:
Dwelt a maid beloved and cherished high and low,
but with autumn leaf she perished, long time ago.

Rock and tree and flowing water, long time ago,
bird and bee and blossom taught her Love’s spell to know.
While to my fond words she listened, murmuring low,
tenderly her blue eyes glistened, long time ago.

Dirait-on
Morten Lauridsen (b. 1943)
Text by Rainer Maria Rilke (1874-1926)

Abandon entouré d’abandon,
tendresse touchant aux tendresses…
C’est ton intérieur qui sans cesse
se caresse, dirait-on;

se caress en soi-même,
par son propre reflet éclairé.
Ainsi tu inventes le thème
du Narcisse exaucé.

Abandon surrounding abandon,
tenderness touching tenderness…
Your oneness endlessly
caresses itself, so they say;

self-caressing
through its own clear reflection.
Thus you invent the theme
of Narcissus fulfilled.
Please hold applause until the end of the set.

Walden Pond

Dominc Argento (b. 1927)
Text by Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862)

I. The Pond

Nothing so fair, so pure, lies on the surface of the earth.
It is a clear and deep green well, half a mile long,
a perennial spring in the midst of pine and oak woods.

It is earth’s eye; looking into which,
the beholder measures the depth of his own nature;
it is a mirror which no stone can crack,
whose quicksilver will never wear off;
a mirror which retains no breath that is breathed on it,
but sends its own to float as clouds, high above its surface,
and be reflected on its bosom still.

There are few traces of man's hand to be seen.
The water laves the shores as it did a thousand years ago.
This water is of such crystalline purity
that the body of the bather appears of an alabaster whiteness,
which, as the limbs are magnified and distorted,
produces a monstrous effect,
making fit studies for a Michael Angelo.
So pure, so fair.

II. Angling

In warm evenings I frequently sat in the boat playing the flute,
and saw the perch, which I seem to have charmed,
hovering around me,
and the moon travelling over the ribbed bottom,
which was strewed with the wrecks of the forest.

Sometimes, I spent the hours of midnight fishing from a boat,
anchored in forty feet of water
and communicating by a long flaxen line with mysterious nocturnal fishes,
serenaded by owls and foxes,
and hearing, from time to time,
the creaking note of some unknown bird close at hand.

There was one older man, an excellent fisher;
one in a while we sat together on the pond,
he at one end of the boat, and I at the other;
but not many words passed between us,
for he had grown deaf in his later years.
But he occasionally hummed a psalm,
which harmonized well enough with my philosophy.
Our intercourse was thus altogether one of unbroken harmony,
far more pleasing to remember
than if it had been carried on by speech.

III. Observing

It is a soothing employment to sit on a stump,
on a height overlooking the pond,
and study the dimpling circles incessantly inscribed on its surface
amid the reflected skies and trees.

It may be that in the distance
a fish describes an arc of three or four feet in the air,
and there is one bright flash where it emerges,
and another where it strikes the water.
Or here and there,
a pickerel or shiner picks an insect from this smooth surface;
it is wonderful with what elaborateness
this simple fact is advertised -- this piscine murder will out --
reported in circling dimples, in lines of beauty,
the constant welling up of its fountain,
the gentle pulsing of its life, the heaving of its breast.
Then the trembling circles seek the shore
and all is smooth again.

One November afternoon,
the pond was remarkably smooth,
so that it was difficult to distinguish its surface.
I was surprised to find myself
surrounded by myriads of small, bronze-colored perch.
In such translucent water, reflecting the clouds,
I seemed to be floating through the air as in a balloon,
and their swimming impressed me as a kind of flight or hovering,
as if they were birds passing just beneath my level,
their fins, like sails, set all around them.

IV. Extolling
Sky water!
Lake of light!
Great crystal on the surface of the earth.
Successive nations perchance have drank at,
admired, and fathomed it, and passed away,
and still its water is green and pellucid as ever.
Who knows in how many unremembered nations’
literatures this has been the Castalian Fountain?
or what nymphs presided over it in the Golden Age?

Perhaps on that spring morning
when Adam and Eve were driven out of Eden,
Walden Pond was already in existence.
And even then breaking up in a gentle spring rain
and covered with ducks and geese, which had not heard of the fall.
Even then it had clarified its waters
and colored them of the hue they now wear,
and obtained a patent of Heaven
to be the only Walden Pond in the world.

V. Walden Revisited
Since I left those shores the woodchoppers have laid them waste,
but I remember, I remember…

I remember when I first paddled a boat on Walden,
it was completely surrounded by thick and lofty pine and oak woods,
and in some of its coves, grape-vines had run over the trees
next the water, and formed bowers under which a boat could pass.
I have spent many an hour floating over its surface
as the zephyr willed, in a summer fore-noon,
lying on my back across the seats, dreaming awake.

And though the woodchoppers
have laid bare first this shore and then that,
it struck me again tonight --
Why, here is Walden,
the same woodland lake that I discovered so many years ago.
Where a forest was cut down last winter
another is springing up as lustily as ever;
the same thought is welling up to its surface that was then;
it is the same liquid joy and happiness to itself and its Maker.

He rounded this water with his hand,
deepened and clarified it in his thought.
I see by its face that it is visited by the same reflection;
and I can almost say,
Walden, it is you?
Beautiful River
(Shall We Gather at the River)
Words & Music by Rev. Robert Lowry (1864)

Arr. William Hawley (b. 1950)

Shall we gather at the river, where bright angel feet have trod, with its crystal tide forever flowing by the throne of God?

Yes, we’ll gather at the river, the beautiful river, gather with the saints at the river, that flows by the throne of God.

On the margin of the river, washing up its silver spray, we will walk and worship ever all the happy golden day.

Yes, we’ll gather at the river, the beautiful river, gather with the saints at the river, that flows by the throne of God. Amen.

INTERMISSION

V

Please hold applause until the end of the set.

She’s Like the Swallow
Newfoundland folk song


She’s like the swallow that flies so high, she’s like the river that never runs dry, she’s like the sunshine on the lee shore, I love my love, and love is no more.

‘Twas out in the garden this fair maid did go, a-picking the beautiful primerose; The more she plucked the more she pulled until she got her apron full.

It’s out of those roses she made a bed, a stony pillow for her head. She laid her down, no word did say, until this fair maid’s heart did break.

She’s like the swallow that flies so high, she’s like the river that never runs dry, she’s like the sunshine on the lee shore, I love my love, and love is no more.

Water Night
Original Spanish Text by Octavio Paz (1914-1998)

Eric Whitacre (b. 1970)

Night with the eyes of a horse that trembles in the night, night with eyes of water in the field asleep, is in your eyes, a horse that trembles, is is your eyes of secret water.

Eyes of shadow-water, eyes of well-water, eyes of dream-water.

Silence and solitude, two little animals moon-led, drink in your eyes, drink in those waters.

If you open your eyes, night opens, doors of musk, the secret kingdom of the water opens, flowing from the center of night.

And if you close your eyes, a river -- a silent and beatiful current -- fills you from within; flows forward, darkens you: night brings its wetness to beaches in your soul.
Please hold applause until the end of the set.

Great God Almighty!  
Arr. Stacey Gibbs (b. 1962)

Great God almighty,
Great God almighty, mighty!

Ridin’ in a hurry, ridin’ like he angry,
bullwhip in one hand, cowhide in the other.

Singing great God almighty,
Great God almighty mighty!

Captain went to yellin’ –
Did you hear the captain shout?
“Take off your shirt now,
’cause I’m gonna kill ya!”

Great God almighty,
Great God almighty, mighty!

Hear the captain comin’, ridin’,
won’t be no more runnin’ and hidin’. 
O hear my cry, O Lord,
please hear my plea, O Lord!

Bully went to pleadin’, O Lord, have mercy.
Please don’t you kill me, don’t kill me, Captain!
No – Stop!
I’m fightin’ till my death.
I’m gonna keep on a-runnin’ til my very last breath!

Shoutin’ great God almighty
Great God almighty, mighty.
Great God, almighty God!

Why the Caged Bird Sings  
Jake Runestad (b. 1986)  
Text: Sympathy
Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906)

I know what the caged bird feels.
When the sun is bright on the upland slopes;
When the wind stirs soft through the springing grass,
and the river flows like a stream of glass;
When the first bird sings and the first bud opes,
And the faint perfume from its chalice steals,
I know what the caged bird feels!

I know why the caged bird beats his wing
till its blood is red on the cruel bars;
For he must fly back to his perch and cling
when he fain would be on the bough a-swing;
And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars
and they pulse again with a keener sting,
I know why he beats his wing!

I know why the caged bird sings.
When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,
when he beats his bars and he would be free;
It is not a carol of joy or glee,
But a prayer…
I know why the caged bird sings!
I Hunger and Thirst
Arr. Kevin Siegfried (b. 1969)
Traditional Shaker Song

I hunger and thirst after true righteousness;
In what I've obtained my soul cannot rest.
An ocean I see without bottom or shore,
Oh, feed me, I'm hungry; enrich me, I'm poor.
I will cry unto God,
I never will cease till my soul’s filed with love,
perfect love and sweet peace.

Bright Morning Stars
Arr. Shawn Kirchner (b. 1970)
Traditional Appalachian Song

Bright morning stars are rising, 
Day is a-breaking in my soul.

O where are our dear fathers?
Day is a-breaking in my soul.

They are down in the valley praying, 
Day is a-breaking in my soul.

O where are our dear mothers?
Day is a-breaking in my soul.

They have gone to heaven shouting, 
Day is a-breaking in my soul.

Bright morning stars are rising, 
Day is a-breaking in my soul.

Unclouded Day
Arr. Shawn Kirchner
Words & Music by Rev. JK Alwood (1828-1909)

O they tell me of a home far beyond the skies, 
they tell me of a home far away, 
and they tell me of a home where no storm-clouds rise: 
O they tell me of an unclouded day!

O the land of cloudless days, 
O the land of an unclouded sky, 
O they tell me of a home where no storm-clouds rise: 
O they tell me of an unclouded day!

O they tell me of a home where my friends have gone, 
they tell me of a land far away, 
where the tree of life in eternal bloom 
sheds its fragrance through the unclouded day!

O the land of cloudless days, 
O the land of an unclouded sky, 
O they tell me of a home where no storm-clouds rise: 
O they tell me of an unclouded day!

They tell me of a King in His beauty there, 
they tell me that mine eyes shall behold 
where He sits on a throne that is bright as the sun 
in the city that is made of gold!

O the land of cloudless days, 
O the land of an unclouded sky, 
O they tell me of a home where no storm-clouds rise: 
O they tell me of an unclouded day!
O Shenandoah, I long to see you, and hear your rolling river.
O Shenandoah, I long to see you...
‘Way, we’re bound away, across with wide Missouri.

I long to see your smiling valley, and hear your rolling river.
I long to see your smiling valley...
‘Way, we’re bound away, across with wide Missouri.

‘Tis seven long years since last I see you, and hear your rolling river.
‘Tis seven long years since last I see you...
‘Way, we’re bound away, across with wide Missouri.

O Shenandoah, I long to see you, and hear your rolling river.
O Shenandoah, I long to see you...
‘Way, we’re bound away, across with wide Missouri.

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34th Season, 2017 / 2018

**Mozart Journey XII**
- Saturday, September 30th, 7:30pm
  - Baker Memorial Church, St. Charles
- Sunday, October 1st, 4:00pm
  - St. Mary’s Church, Elgin

**Candlelight Carols**
- Friday, December 1st, 7:30pm
  - Baker Memorial Church, St. Charles
- Saturday, December 2nd, 7:30pm
  - Fourth Presbyterian Church, Chicago
- Sunday, December 3rd, 3:00pm
  - Baker Memorial Church, St. Charles

**Ildebrando Pizzetti’s Requiem & English Choral Music**
- Saturday, April 28th, 7:30pm
  - Grace Lutheran Church, River Forest
- Sunday, April 29th, 3:00pm
  - Baker Memorial Church, St. Charles
Greetings from the citizens of the City of St Charles, Illinois. This performance of American Reflections is presented by one of our city treasures, the St. Charles Singers. Their collective talent is amazing; I know you will be inspired. We send good wishes to our friends in England, and encourage you to visit the choir and our wonderful community whenever the opportunity arises.

Sincerely,

The Honorable Ray Rogina, Mayor
City of St. Charles

***

Thanks to the following for your volunteer support during our 2016-17 season.

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Thanks to Baker Memorial Church, St. Charles; and Grace Lutheran Church, River Forest

Special thanks to Cathie Ruth for her on-going volunteer service as house manager.

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Special thanks to Mark and Karen Daily, whose generous gift makes possible our June 2017 tour to England.

St. Charles Singers' Klop positiv organ was given in memory of Gloria and Jim Seymour by their son and his wife, Burch and Diana Seymour.

St. Charles Singers expresses grateful appreciation for donations received to honor the memory of Vida Bardisley, Charles Brown, Eva Lauraine Cunningham, Thomas Dickens, Gamgee Dripps, Ronald Koepl, Thomas Matthews, Patricia Murray, Randy Schmidt, Janet W. Safanda and Randy Wilke.

St. Charles Singers expresses thanks to those who give anonymously to support the choir.