Princeton University Chamber Choir

FIGURE HUMAINE

Gabriel Crouch, conductor
Featuring Cyrus Chestnut, piano

UKRAINE REFUGEE APPEAL

Princeton students recently formed "02.24.2022," a student organization aimed at informing the student body about the war in Ukraine and supporting affected students on campus. One of their initiatives is to raise funds for "Cash for Refugees," a nonprofit that provides small amounts of cash in local currency to refugees at the Ukrainian border. Scan the QR code to make a donation.

Scan this QR code with your smartphone to access an expanded program with bios, translations, notes, and more.

As guidelines continue to change, visit music.princetoninfohub.com/covid on the day of the event for the latest safety requirements.

This program will be performed without an intermission. The use of photographic, video or audio equipment is strictly prohibited. Please turn off or mute electronic devices for the duration of the performance.

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As anybody who has sung it will attest, Francis Poulenc’s cantata *Figure Humaine*, composed in 1943 during the Nazi occupation of France, teeters at the very limit of what is possible for the human voice. Every chord and every line requires careful attention and almost perpetual rehearsal, particularly when combined with several hundred lines of Paul Éluard’s surrealist poetry, and the last note of the piece—a top E (the highest note in choral music!)—signals that this rejection of fascism requires an effort which appears, at first, to be beyond human reach.

The Chamber Choir planned to perform *Figure Humaine* in April 2020. The learning process was half-complete when the world shut down in early March of that year, and the students of the choir, whose initial bewilderment and fear of the piece had long since given way to a profound love, were left wondering how to find an outlet for all the work they had done. Several lockdown projects ensued: Charlie Hemler ’20, who had built a lockdown recording studio in his bedroom, created midi tracks for all fourteen voice parts—a gargantuan undertaking—and set about making virtual recordings of several of the movements, some with just his voice, and others with the voices of his fellow singers; David Kim ’20, a cellist as well as baritone, created a beautiful setting of the sixth movement for 7 cellos, and recorded it by himself; and Allison Spann ’20, a vocalist and composer, began working on a composition of her own, which explored the connections which the choir was hoping to draw on between Poulenc’s masterpiece and the other major work on the program—a forgotten treasure by jazz great Mary Lou Williams entitled *St. Martin de Porres, or Black Christ of the Andes*.

Two years later, in a world which has seen off what we hope is the worst of the pandemic, but where tyranny once again looms large, the project is back on. We’re especially thrilled to be joined by eight graduated members of the 2020 choir to perform with us tonight.
**Before the light is gone**

Poulenc’s setting of Paul Eluard’s poetry in *Figure Humaine* always reads, to me, as our most hazy and desperate journal entries: an honest pleading for sense, or peace, to freedom. But even within those dark complaints there is a reverence—for earth, for everyday objects, for the planets. Reverence held within a wild cry.

Mary Lou Williams’ *St. Martin de Porres* washes over you as a reverent tribute to one who saw suffering and managed to heal, even past his lifetime. Contained within this ode is a cry for safety and forgiveness: “spare thy people, lest you be angered with me forever.” A cry held within a moment of reverence.

These almost inverse pieces opened the door for me to explore man’s relationship to anguish and sublimity, or even the body’s relationship to divine liberation. In delving further into the works of Paul Eluard, I couldn’t help but think that he would develop a love, as I have, for the writings of Audre Lorde. In a later collection of poems (1946), he writes “Nous deux nous ne vivons que pour être fidèles A la vie” (“We two live only in order to be faithful to life”), which to me feels deeply related to Lorde’s concept of the “erotic” as outlined in her essay “Uses of the Erotic.” She separates the erotic from it’s modern pornographic connotations, which she writes are “all sensation but no feeling,” and attaches it to the deep feeling of satisfaction that one can achieve in devoting themselves fully to any number of tasks, or in Eluard’s words, “to life.” The idea of living fully, of a responsibility to the self as the gateway to liberation, is both a useful thread between the anguish and reverence of Poulenc and Lou Williams, and hugely attractive to me during a time in which helplessness can easily take over.

As my contribution to this concert, I offer a hypothetical scenario in which “Liberté,” as outlined by Eluard in *Figure Humaine*, is personified, reaching out to mankind as ardently as we cry out to her. Liberty, or freedom, or earth, is represented at first by a solo soprano, singing mankind (represented by chamber choir) a lullaby that rests on chords they have just sang in lonely anguish. She is then joined by seven other voices to pave the way for hope through rest, generosity, and compassion.

To honor the Poulenc and his structure of dialogue between voices, I set the eight voices in a double choir arrangement, and to honor the Lou Williams, I reharmonize a single melodic line throughout the piece, re-contextualizing it as the conversation between liberty and mankind develops.

This conversation rests on a responsibility to the self as the first step towards liberation. Freedom seems to ask: How can we be considerate of our neighbors, engaging to our loved ones, helpful to those deserving of our aid, if we are chronically, and in every way, exhausted? What would happen if, like Eluard, we began with what is most immediate to us? If we allowed ourselves the simple tasks of washing the sheets? Of making the bed? Of going to sleep? In doing right by ourselves, how much strength can we gain to do right for others?

I fantasize about Freedom meeting us in our nightmares, and transforming them into our most aspirational dreams before allowing us to wake: that through an evening of singing with everything...
I have, alongside those dear to me, we can create what happens in between entering the longed-for bed gratefully, and rising up empowered.

—Allison Spann ’20

**St. Martin de Porres**

By 1954, the career of Mary Lou Williams appeared to be unstoppable: a globally-renowned jazz pianist and composer at the height of her powers, she was enjoying an extended period of working residency in the jazz clubs of London and Paris. But all was not well. A series of logistical setbacks left Williams feeling stranded in Paris, unable to raise enough funds to return to the U.S., and the death of her close friend, the pianist Garland Wilson, precipitated a severe depression and period of emotional and spiritual crisis. As she wrote later: "I couldn’t take it any longer, so I just left—the piano, the money... all of it."

This crisis left her unable to perform in public for four years and brought her to a period of deep, and ultimately transformative, spiritual introspection. The Mary Lou Williams who re-emerged in the late 1950s was a devoted member of the modern Catholic Church (a significant spiritual leap for a former Baptist) and a dedicated advocate for the emerging Civil Rights Movement. It was both of these elements that led her to feel a particularly deep connection with the legacy of St. Martin de Porres—the 17th Century Peruvian friar who is considered to be the patron saint, amongst other things, of public health work, of people of mixed race, and of racial harmony. St. Martin was canonized in 1962, and Mary Lou marked the occasion with her first piece of choral music intended for liturgical use.

*St. Martin de Porres* asks a mostly-unaccompanied choir, divided into up to 10 parts, to explore a simple melody which is rendered in a variety of complex jazz harmonic progressions. We hear of the simple virtues of the Saint—his kindness, his humility, his attendance to the needs of all people and all creatures, and (through reference to the "broom" which is the Saint’s symbol) his respect for menial work. The harmony is obtuse, requiring exacting attention and rehearsal, but the revelations that come with solving its puzzles are profound, and the homophonic setting allows us to linger deeply in the reverent spirit of the prayer and the sincerity with which Williams sets it.

Appropriately for a composer who was able to say so much at the keyboard, Williams suddenly interrupts the flow of words mid-composition and invites the improvising piano to capture the unique spirit of St. Martin—a task which is tonight entrusted to the great Cyrus Chestnut!

**Figure Humaine**

Poulenc’s awakening to choral music (and to Catholicism) post 1936 naturally brought with it new explorations in the world of sacred and secular literature and poetry. For his sacred music, he was drawn to poetic non-biblical texts, as well as liturgical texts which reflected his continued devotion to the statue of the Vierge Noir (Black Virgin) of Rocamadour, as with the Marian motet *Salve Regina* (1941). Amongst the secular French poets, Poulenc explored Charles d’Orléans and the naturalist works of Maurice Fombeure, but he found most inspiration in the surrealist works of
contemporary writers Guillaume Apollinaire and Paul Eluard, discovering that their synthesis of levity and profundity matched his compositional style perfectly. Sadly, Apollinaire died too young to have a meaningful influence on Poulenc during his lifetime, but with Eluard, the relationship was more organic and yielded much more choral music. Poulenc was one of a select few who received the works of Eluard under plain cover during the Second World War, including the collection *Poésie et Vérité 42*. One of the poems from this collection, “Liberté,” was dropped in leaflet form over occupied France by the British Royal Air Force so as to boost morale among the civilian population and within the French Resistance. Poulenc was so captivated by this particular volume, and so intent on setting it to music right away, that he abandoned (and never revisited) the violin concerto he was working on, and instead set about composing his great choral cantata *Figure Humaine* in 1943.

Poulenc’s social and creative circle was destroyed by the war. The status of Paris as the cultural capital of the world had been effectively revoked, so Poulenc retreated to his country residence at Noizay. He grew paranoid about what was happening to Paris in his absence and fell victim to every rumor going around. In his search to find a good creative outlet for his feelings, these years became fruitful ones for composition. He revealed something of his motives in a letter sent after the armistice: “When I think that Noizay is so completely untouched I almost feel ashamed. I trust that *Figure Humaine* will be a sufficient tribute from a Frenchman.” With the Vierge Noir continuing to exert a powerful influence over his conscience, he visited Rocamadour again before beginning work on the piece (even though the subject matter is earthly, he saw *Figure Humaine* as the fulfillment of a sacred duty as well as a patriotic one). His initial plan was for the work to be clandestinely rehearsed and premiered on the day of liberation in Paris. However, Parisian liberation came quicker (in 1944) than he had been expecting, so after the score was complete he gave agreement for a first performance to be given by the BBC Singers in London (in an English translation) after the BBC expressed great interest in the unpublished score. Naturally Poulenc still wanted to make some sort of symbolic gesture with his work to mark the day when the Nazis were driven out of Paris, so as he wrote in a letter to the singer Pierre Bernac: “The day the Americans arrived, I triumphantly placed my cantata on the studio desk, beneath my flag, at the window.”

The eight movements of *Figure Humaine* are scored for double SMATBB choir, with frequent divisi, so that up to 14 parts are often heard. Poulenc himself recommended a large choir of 84 for the premiere, with seven singers to a part. In a large body of frequently very difficult choral works, it is undoubtedly the most challenging of all his works in the genre—not inappropriate given the terrible struggle which Europe was engaged in for liberté.

Even though it is only 20 minutes in length, the work is a supreme test of stamina, technical agility, range, aural skill, and musicianship. Poulenc maintains a basic antiphonal structure in each of the movements, juxtaposing the two choirs in virtuosic ways (at various times suggesting argument, distance, amplification, etc.) and bringing them together at moments of particular textual significance. Poulenc’s rigid belief in the primacy of text is apparent throughout, as amongst all the complications of the score there is not a single moment where the lines of text risk being clouded by excessive polyphonic writing. Even in the fugal sections, he is careful to repeat lines of text a sufficient number of times to ensure their absorption.

The first seven poems are clearly intended to form a sequence, capped by a longer epilogue (the eighth). The overarching dramatic thread oscillates between optimism and desolation, both
expressed in varying shades of caution, madness, rage, and ecstasy. (For a detailed response to the music and text of individual movements, please see the following notes.)

The reviewer of the first performance, W. R. Anderson, wrote in The Musical Times that the piece contained “dubious structure” and “evasive harmony,” and concluded that he would “need to see the score to get at it.” One cannot help but wonder if a choir assembled barely two weeks before the first performance in the immediate aftermath of the armistice might have needed a little more exposure to the score to “get at it” themselves (sadly, the original recording does not survive). But in spite, or perhaps even because, of the fierce battles which must be fought and won in staging a performance of this work, it remains synonymous with the zealous efforts made by some French artists to make a meaningful contribution to Europe’s struggle for freedom in the 1940s. Elizabeth Poston, European Music Supervisor at the BBC during the 1940s, advised her commissioning editor that the work symbolized French fortitude and suffering during the war and was thus an important work for the BBC to disseminate; today, its reputation has grown (despite the relative infrequency of performances) to the point where it is universally acknowledged as Poulenc’s crowning achievement in the realm of unaccompanied choral music.

i. De tous les printemps du monde

Poulenc’s concept for the piece is clear from the beginning, with brisk antiphonal exchanges between the two choirs emphasizing the tonal ambiguity of the text: an angry lament in B minor for the first two lines (with identically grotesque dissonant chords on each setting of the word laid —“vile”); followed by a lurch to E flat minor for the soothing note of trust which ends the first verse. This soon gives way to quiet desolation in F minor (a tritone away from the “home” key) for the two verses that follow.

The last verse brings our first bestial reference of the piece (“Je n’entends pas parler les monstres”) and introduces us to an analogy favored by Éluard and (presumably) Poulenc, with the forces of fascism as beasts programmed by their nature to destroy what’s in front of them. But perhaps in the end, as the last lines suggest, the trusting good nature of the masses can bring “ruin” to the occupiers.

ii. En chantant les servantes s’élancent

A grim opening section finds us at the site of a battle—or more likely, a bombing—where young girls attempt to clean up the remains. Poulenc’s music punches out the horror and panic of the scene, with asymmetrical Phrygian patterns set upon a throbbing repeated E in the alto, which later rises by a half step.

This throbbing E becomes a sort of pivot point for the next section: we are lowered by a minor third to C sharp minor for the gory shock of the “liquefying eyes,” and then raised by a minor third to G minor (another tritone!) for the surreal image of humankind flushing itself away in the “final toilet.” This image seems to provoke a suddenly indulgent and wistful response from Poulenc as he continues in to the following section—“the ultimate toilet of time”; but the gorgeous final cadence which brings us back home to E major feels particularly hollow, as humanity tamely surrenders to its own weakness.
This is not the last glorious E major cadence we’ll experience in this work.

iii. Aussi bas que le silence

The dismal gloom of occupation, and the shame of those who have found a way to live with it, is expressed by the downward slump of a half step to E flat minor. Poulenc consciously introduces text in the lower voices, and indeed, seems to pit upper and lower voices against each other in this movement, perhaps in expression of a fractured society.

Suddenly a more vivid note of extreme bitterness accompanies the spread of “le poison”—presumably another reference to the creep of fascism across Europe, before a lofty E flat major cadence introduces a note of hope. Can humanity rise above its current malaise and find the unity expressed in the soft, tentative unison E flat which concludes this movement?

iv. Toi ma patiente

Luscious rolling seventh chords in the key of A major bring a note of optimism to this movement, signified by the fact that Poulenc assigns the music only to Choir 1, which tends to bear the more optimistic countenance of the two choirs. Only the promise of “la vengeance” can break the serenity, delivered with savage dissonance and a menacing crescendo.

The movement bears a resemblance to the opening of a solo piano work by Maurice Ravel—“Une barque sur l’Ocean”—which was premiered in 1905 by Poulenc’s great mentor and teacher, Ricardo Viñes, who died a few weeks before Poulenc started work on *Figure Humaine*. It seems plausible that Poulenc recognized something of Viñes’ character in the words of Éluard’s poem—“my patient friend, my guardian.” Poulenc later wrote of Viñes: “I owe him everything . . . . In reality it is to Viñes that I owe my fledgling efforts in music and everything I know about the piano.

v. Riant du ciel et des planètes

Like the second movement, this is a scherzo, with a macabre, satirical tone. Upper voices lampoon the haughty ambitions of “wise” men as lower voices deliver rhythmic cackling accompaniment. The antiphonal choirs are separated musically for the entire movement, firing verbal volleys toward each other until the very last word—“ridicules”—at which point one of the all-time great harmonic moments in Poulenc’s music occurs. He suddenly lurches from the prevailing C sharp minor to deliver the penultimate exclamation in C major, before yanking us back to C sharp minor for the final hurled insult.

vi. Le jour m’étonne et la nuit me fait peur

A short, simple lament, set for the second choir only. The text uses an image which is common in Éluard’s writing of the time—of relentless pursuit through a cold and dark landscape at the hands of a wolf. The wolf is understood to represent the dark forces which poisoned Europe so profoundly in the late 1930s. Poulenc is often creative and eccentric in his tempo and dynamic markings, and here he instructs his singers to conclude the movement “surtout sans ralentir” (absolutely without slowing) which feels counterintuitive with this heartbreaking melody, until one considers the meaning of the text—and the threat to anyone whose pace slows under pursuit.
vii. La menace sous le ciel rouge

The most complex movement up to this point, and if possible, even more twisted and bitter than what precedes (how desperately we now need the hope of the final movement!). The opening fugue is the stuff of nightmares, both for singers and for students of the text, with 6-3 broken chords rapidly descending in half-step intervals as the spat-out lyrics declare the triumph of death over love. The ensuing lento is more ambiguous, with the extravagant beauty and lushness of Poulenc’s modal soundscapes offering a tiny glimmer of hope that the poisoned earth might recover from this terrible blight. The music builds to a livid and ear-splitting climax which yells out the madness and idiocy of man in a lumbering “tolling-bell” rhythm—once again using half-step descending figures over a C sharp pedal, until a final resolution to a fff C sharp major chord which yells... literally, yells out a resistance to tyranny and a reaffirmation of the indestructible essence of humanity.

viii. Liberté

After such desperate, maddening music, we need time to recover, and Poulenc instructs his singers to wait in silence before embarking on the final movement (just one 24-stanza poem left!). Where does one begin this revolution, this declaration of freedom? Eluard begins at his desk, with the everyday objects in front of him, and Poulenc obliges with a simple, easy-paced setting of gently-swaying homophony. Eluard moves his gaze out to the world, taking in warriors and kings, animals and birds, and then reaches beyond to the ether and the stars, before drawing back to the foreheads and hands of those dear to him. Surely Francis himself was touched by Eluard’s pen! On every object which Eluard sees or imagines, he daubs it with the word which is now haunting him, and he is determined to continue until he has covered the whole world with its seven letters. Poulenc captures the excitement and insane optimism perfectly, beginning in the E major which has by now become associated with redemption, but lurching from key to key, often without any formal preparation, as the poet switches dimensions from micro to macro, and from abstract to concrete. The antiphonally-apportioned singers serve Poulenc especially well here, as Choir 1 takes the role of searching the world for writing surfaces, and Choir 2 obliges each time with the refrain “J’écris ton nom.” The momentum builds perpetually, the tempo gradually quickens, and the tessitura rises almost beyond the range of earthly singers. If you don’t know what’s coming in that final chord, then I won’t spoil it by describing it here.

—Gabriel Crouch
Before the light is gone
Parentheticals indicate Chamber Choir

La terre utile effaça
Les tombes creusés d’avance
Les enfants n’eurent plus peur
Les profondeurs maternelles
Et la bêtise et la démence
Lt la bassesse firent place
A des hommes frères des hommes
Ne luttant plus contre la vie
A des hommes indestructibles.

With great care I covered up all the holes
you had made in fear of each other
I held the hands of children crying
For what their bodies would become
All your tears, your exhausted,
misunderstanding tears
Empty them so that I may pour in their place
A mess of light and noise

Tributaries into the pool
See each other as yourself
Need for arms dissolves in your holding
You wrap around so well

All my beautiful babes breathe of each other
into each other into love and noise
Laughing at the prospect of droplets
Why do you lose faith?

(De tous les printemps du monde,
Celui-ci est le plus laid)

Toute ta douleur
Sur tous tes jours
Tu écris mon nom

(De tous les printemps du monde,
Celui-ci est le plus laid)

All your pain
On all your days
You write my name

(De tous les printemps du monde,
Celui-ci est le plus laid)

Poison bereft of its flower
And of its golden monsters
Spits out its night over all men.)

Sur tes refuges détruit encore
Tu écris mon nom

On your destroyed refuges, again
You write my name

(De tous les printemps du monde,
Celui-ci est le plus laid)
(Toi, ma patiente) oui, moi
(Ma patience) oui, moi!
Ma gorge haut suspendue
Orgue de la nuit lente
(Prépare à la vengeance
Un lit d'ôù je naîtraï)
Si tu te calmes, si tu m’êtreinte,
Je promis, je le préparerai

But you must help me make the bed,
Wash the sheets, your face
Breathe, lay, with me
And know you deserve to sleep

(Sleep?)

Embrace my night and in it rest
Embrace and wake the dawn
Let me be your dream
Don’t write my name,
But kiss me
And I will give you rest

I wanna make noise
Give me noise and rest and light
Give me rest

**St. Martin de Porres**

St. Martin de Porres, his shepherd’s staff a dusty broom
St. Martin de Porres, the poor made a shrine of his tomb
St. Martin de Porres, he gentled creatures tame and wild
St. Martin de Porres, he sheltered each unsheltered child
This man of love, born of the flesh, yet of God
This humble man healed the sick, raised the dead, his hand is quick
To feed beggars and sinners, the starving homeless and the stray
Oh Black Christ of the Andes, come feed and cure us now we pray
Spare, oh lord, spare my people
Lest you be angered with me, forever.
**Figure Humaine**

*i. De tous les printemps du monde*

De tous les printemps du monde,
Celui-ci est le plus laid
Entre toutes mes façons d’être
La confiante est la meilleure

L'herbe soulève la neige
Comme la pierre d’un tombeau
Moi je dors dans la tempête
Et je m'éveille les yeux clairs

Le lent le petit temps s'achève
Où toute rue devait passer
Par mes plus intimes retraites
Pour que je rencontre quelqu’un

Je n'entends pas parler les monstres
Je les connais ils ont tout dit
Je ne vois que les beaux visages
Les bons visages sûrs d'eux mêmes

Sûrs de ruiner bientôt leurs maîtres.

*ii. En chantant les servantes s'élancent*

En chantant les servantes s'élancent
Pour rafraîchir la place où l'on tuait
Petites filles en poudre vite agenouillées
Leurs mains aux soupiraux de la fraîcheur
Sont bleues comme une expérience
Un grand matin joyeux

Faites face à leurs mains les morts
Faites face à leurs yeux liquides
C'est la toilette des éphémères
La dernière toilette de la vie
Les pierres descendent disparaissent
Dans l'eau vaste essentielle

La dernière toilette des heures
A peine un souvenir ému
Aux puits taris de la vertu
Aux longues absences encombrantes
Et l'on s'abandonne à la chair très tendre
Aux prestiges de la faiblesse.

Of all the springtimes of the world
Never was there one so vile
I may have many ways of being
But the best is the most trusting

See how the grass lifts the snow
As if it were a graveyard stone
I myself sleep in the tempest
And I awake with undimmed eyes

Slow moving time comes to an end
Where all streets had to pass
Traversing all my most secret places
So that I could meet someone

I do not hear the monsters talking
I know them well, all that they say
But I see only lovely faces
Good faces full of trust

Sure to ruin their masters.

Singing, the maidens rush forward
To tidy up the place where blood has flowed,
And little girls in their powder, kneeling,
Their hands held out towards fresher air
Are colored like a new sensation
Of some great joyous day

Face their hands, o ye dead,
And their eyes that are liquefying
This is the toilet of mayflies,
The final toilet of this mortal life
Down go the stones sinking,
Disappearing in the primal waters

For the ultimate toilet of time
No poignant memory remains
At those dry wells devoid of virtue
At long absences which we find awkward
Surrendering to the flesh so soft and tender
To the spell of human weakness.
iii. Aussi bas que le silence
Aussi bas que le silence
D’un mort planté dans la terre
Rien que ténèbres en tête
Aussi monotone et sourd
Que l’automne dans la mare
Couverte de honte mate
Le poison veuf de sa fleur
Et de ses bêtes dorées
Crache sa nuit sur les hommes.

iv. Toi ma patiente
Toi ma patiente ma patience ma parente
Gorge haut suspendue orgue de la nuit lente
Révérence cachant tous les ciels dans sa grâce
Prépare à la vengeance un lit d’où je naîtrai.

v. Riant du ciel et des planètes
Riant du ciel et des planètes
La bouche imbibée de confiance
Les sages
Veulent des fils
Et des fils de leurs fils
Jusqu’à périr d’usure
Le temps ne pèse que les fous
L’abîme est seul à verdoyer
Et les sages sont ridicules.

vi. Le jour m’étonne et la nuit me fait peur
Le jour m’étonne et la nuit me fait peur
L’été me hante et l’hiver me poursuit
Un animal sur la neige a posé
Ses pattes sur le sable ou dans la boue
Ses pattes venues de plus loin que mes pas
Sur une piste où la mort
A les empreintes de la vie.

vii. La menace sous le ciel rouge
La menace sous le ciel rouge
Venait d’en bas des mâchoires
Des écailles des anneaux
D’une chaîne glissante et lourde
La vie était distribuée
Largement pour que la mort
Prêt au sérieux le tribut
Qu’on lui payait sans compter

Hushed and still in silence wrapt
Like a corpse that lies in the earth
Head full of darkness and shadows
As deaf and monotonous
As autumn in the pond
Covered with dull shame
Poison bereft of its flower
And of its golden monsters
Spits out its night over all men.

You, my patient one, my patience, my guardian
Throat held high, organ of the calm night
Reverence cloaking all of heaven in its grace
Prepare, for vengeance, a bed where I may be born.

Laughing at the sky and planets
Mouths dripping with arrogance
The wise men
Wish for sons
And for sons for their sons
Until they die in vain
The march of time burdens not only the foolish
Hell alone flourishes
And the wise men are made foolish.

The day shocks me and the night terrifies me
Summer haunts me and winter pursues me
An animal has imprinted its paws
In the snow, in the sand or in the mud
Its pawprints have come further than my own steps
On a path where death
Bears the imprint of life.

The menace under the red sky
 Came from under the jaws
The scales and links
Of a slippery and heavy chain
Life was dispersed
 Widely so that death
Could gravely take the dues
Which were paid without a thought
La mort était le dieu d'amour
Et les vainqueurs dans un baiser
S'évanouissaient sur leurs victimes
La pourriture avait du cœur
Et pourtant sous le ciel rouge
Sous les appétits de sang
Sous la famine lugubre
La caverne se ferma
La terre utile effaça
Les tombes creusées d'avance
Les enfants n'eurent plus peur
Des profondeurs maternelles
Et la bêtise et la démence
Et la bassesse firent place
A des hommes frères des hommes
Ne luttant plus contre la vie
A des hommes indestructibles.

Death was the God of love
And the victors with a kiss
Swoon over their victims
Decay held the heart
And yet under the red sky
Beneath the lust for blood
Beneath the dismal hunger
The cavern closed up
The useful earth covered over
The graves dug in advance
The children no longer fearing
The maternal depths
And stupidity, dementia
And vulgarity gave way
To humanity and brotherhood
No longer set against life
But to an indestructible human race.

viii. Liberté
Sur mes cahiers d'écolier
Sur mon pupitre et les arbres
Sur le sable sur la neige
J'écris ton nom

Sur toutes les pages lues
Sur toutes les pages blanches
Pierre sang papier ou cendre
J'écris ton nom

Sur les images dorées
Sur les armes des guerriers
Sur la couronne des rois
J'écris ton nom

Sur la jungle et le désert
Sur les nids sur les genêts
Sur l'écho de mon enfance
J'écris ton nom

Sur les merveilles des nuits
Sur le pain blanc des journées
Sur les saisons fiancées
J'écris ton nom

Sur tous mes chiffons d’azur
Sur l'étang soleil moisi

On my school books
On my desk and on the trees
On the sand and in the snow
I write your name

On every page that is read
On all blank pages
Stone blood paper or ashes
I write your name

On gilded pictures
On the weapons of warriors
On the crown of kings
I write your name

Over the jungle and the desert
On the nests on the brooms
On the echo of my infancy
I write your name

On the wonders of the night
On the daily bread
On the conjoined seasons
I write your name

On all my blue scarves
On the pond molding in the sun
Sur le lac lune vivante
J’écris ton nom

Sur les champs sur l’horizon
Sur les ailes des oiseaux
Et sur le moulin des ombres
J’écris ton nom

Sur chaque bouffée d’aurore
Sur la mer sur les bateaux
Sur la montagne démente
J’écris ton nom

Sur la mousse des nuages
Sur les sueurs de l’orage
Sur la pluie épaisse et fade
J’écris ton nom

Sur les formes scintillantes
Sur les cloches des couleurs
Sur la vérité physique
J’écris ton nom

Sur les sentiers éveillés
Sur les routes déployées
Sur les places qui débordent
J’écris ton nom

Sur la lampe qui s’allume
Sur la lampe qui s’éteint
Sur mes maisons réunies
J’écris ton nom

Sur le fruit coupé en deux
Du miroir et de ma chambre
Sur mon lit coquille vide
J’écris ton nom

Sur mon chien gourmand et tendre
Sur ses oreilles dressées
Sur sa patte maladroite
J’écris ton nom

Sur le tremplin de ma porte
Sur les objets familiers
Sur le flot du feu béni
J’écris ton nom

On the lake alive in the moonlight
I write your name

On fields on the horizon
On the wings of birds
And on the mill of shadows
I write your name

On each rising dawn
On the sea on the boats
On the wild mountain
I write your name

On the foamy clouds
In the sweat-filled storm
On the rain heavy and relentless
I write your name

On shimmering figures
On bells of many colours
On undeniable truth
I write your name

On the living pathways
On the roads stretched out
On the bustling places
I write your name

On the lamp which is ignited
On the lamp which is extinguished
On my reunited households
I write your name

On the fruit cut in two
The mirror and my bedroom
On my bed an empty shell
I write your name

On my dog greedy and loving
On his alert ears
On his clumsy paw
I write your name

On the springboard of my door
On the familiar objects
On the stream of the sacred flame
I write your name
Sur toute chair accordée
Sur le front de mes amis
Sur chaque main qui se tend
J’écris ton nom

Sur la vitre des surprises
Sur les lèvres attentives
Bien au-dessus du silence
J’écris ton nom

Sur mes refuges détruits
Sur mes phares écroulés
Sur les murs de mon ennui
J’écris ton nom

Sur l’absence sans désir
Sur la solitude nue
Sur les marches de la mort
J’écris ton nom

Sur la santé revenue
Sur le risque disparu
Sur l’espoir sans souvenirs
J’écris ton nom

Et par le pouvoir d’un mot
Je recommence ma vie
Je suis né pour te connaître
Pour te nommer
Liberté.

On all united flesh
On the faces of my friends
On each hand held out
I write your name

On the window of surprises
On the attentive lips
Well above silence
I write your name

On my destroyed safehouses
On my collapsed beacons
On the walls of my boredom
I write your name

On absence without desire
On naked solitude
On the death marches
I write your name

On health restored
On risk disappeared
On hope without memory
I write your name

And by the power of one word
I recommence my life
I was born to know you
To give a name to you
Liberty.
PERFORMERS

Princeton University Chamber Choir

CONDUCTOR
Gabriel Crouch

SPECIAL GUEST
Cyrus Chestnut, piano

SOPRANOS
Molly Trueman ’24
Maddy Kushan GS
Lulu Hao ’23
Reese Owen ’24
Sophia Huellstrunk ’25
Alex Giannattasio ’23
Charlotte Root ’22
Noel Peng ’22
Hannah Bein ’22
Katie Chou ’23
Natalie Stein ’22
Frances Mangina ’22
Sloan Huebner ’23
Catherine Sweeney ’20
Allison Spann ’20
Zoe Kahana ’21

ALTOS
Ishani Kulkarni ’22
Giao vu Dinh ’24
Priya Naphade ’24
Lucy McKnight GS
Anastasia Shmytova GS
Cherry Ge ’24

Emma Simmons GS
Gray Collins ’21
Shruti Venkat ’23
Alison Sildorff ’25
Meredith Hooper ’20
Mariana Corichi Gómez ’21

TENORS
William Yang ’25
Tim Amarell ’22
Ashwin Mahadevan ’22
Benjamin Musachio GS
Matthew Higgins Iati ’23
Rafael Collado ’24
Chris Hodson
TJ Li ’21

BASSES
Liam Seeley ’23
Chaz Bethel-Brescia ’22
Haaris Mian ’23
David Timm ’22
Sriram Srinivasan ’22
Nicholas Allen ’23
Rupert Peacock ’24
Theo Trevisan ’22
Tim Manley ’24
Kevin Williams ’22
Ty Gardner ’20
David Kim ’20
Damien Capelle ’20
ABOUT

Princeton University Chamber Choir
The Princeton University Chamber Choir is a select group of mixed voices that sings a range of challenging music from the Renaissance period through the twenty-first century. This ensemble performs in concert with the Princeton University Glee Club as well as on a separate concert series and is frequently invited to perform off campus. Recent repertoire has included Bach’s Jesu meine Freude, Lassus’ Magnificat Praeter Rerum Seriem, Parry’s Songs of Farewell, Handel’s Dixit Dominus, Rossini’s Petite Messe Solennelle and Frank Martin’s Messe pour double choeur.

Cyrus Chestnut
Born in 1963 in Baltimore, MD, jazz pianist Cyrus Chestnut grew up in a home filled with the sounds of gospel music that his church-going parents played, along with jazz records by artists such as Thelonius Monk and Jimmy Smith. To this day, Chestnut’s ties to gospel music remain constant. After graduating from Berklee College of Music in Boston, Chestnut worked with jazz vocalist Jon Hendricks, trumpeter Terrence Blanchard, and saxophonist Donald before joining jazz legend Wynton Marsalis. Chestnut’s recordings include Dark Before the Dawn (1994), which debuted in the sixth spot on the Billboard jazz charts; Earth Stories (1995), for which he composed nine of the CD’s eleven tracks; a solo piano album, Blessed Quietness: Collection of Hymns, Spirituals, and Carols (1996); Cyrus Chestnut (1998); Soul Food (2001), a blend of jazz, classical, gospel, and R&B; and You Are My Sunshine (2003). The New York Daily News once heralded Chestnut as the rightful heir to Bud Powell, Art Tatum, and Erroll Garner. Chestnut continually tours with his trio, playing at jazz festivals around the world, as well as clubs and concert halls. His leadership and prowess as a soloist have also led him to be first on the list for the piano chair in many big bands including the Lincoln Center Jazz Orchestra and the Dizzy Gillespie All-Star Big Band.

Gabriel Crouch
Gabriel Crouch is Director of Choral Activities and Professor of the Practice in Music at Princeton University. He began his musical career as an eight-year-old in the choir of Westminster Abbey, where his solo credits included a royal wedding, and performances which placed him on the solo stage with Jessye Norman and Sir Laurence Olivier. After completing a choral scholarship at Trinity College, Cambridge, he was offered a place in the renowned a cappella group The King’s Singers in 1996. In the next eight years, he made a dozen recordings on the BMG label (including a Grammy nomination) and gave more than 900 performances in almost every major concert venue in the world. Since moving to the USA in 2005, he has built an international profile as a conductor and director, with recent engagements in Indonesia, Hawaii, and Australia, as well as Europe and the continental United States. In 2008, he was appointed musical director of the British early music ensemble Gallicantus, with whom he has released six recordings under the Signum label to rapturous reviews, garnering multiple Editor’s Choice awards in Gramophone Magazine, Choir and Organ Magazine, and The Early Music Review, and, for the 2012 release The Word Unspoken, a place on BBC Radio’s CD Review list of the top nine classical releases of the year. His recording of Lagrime di San Pietro by Orlando di Lasso was shortlisted for a Gramophone Award in 2014, and his follow-up recording, Sibylla (featuring music by Orlandus Lassus and Dmitri Tymoczko), was named “star recording” by Choir and Organ Magazine in the summer of 2018. His most recent release is Mass for the Endangered, a new composition by Sarah Kirkland Snider released on the Nonesuch/New Amsterdam labels, which has garnered high acclaim from The New York Times, Boston Globe, NPR’s All Things Considered, and elsewhere.
Allison Spann

Allison Spann is a Brooklyn-based performance creator who believes in the power of voice and collaborative art-making as a radical tool for healing. She has worked as a vocalist across genres, actor, composer for theatrical and recorded works, music director, sound designer, director, and choreographer, and enjoys sliding into whatever role a collaborative project requires. She graduated summa cum laude from Princeton University in 2020 with a degree in Music and earned certificates in Theater, Music Theater, and Vocal Performance. For her cumulative work in the Music Department, she was awarded the 2020 Edward T. Cone Prize for music composition, performance, and scholarship. She is the creator of two original evening-length pieces of music theater—Water Play and Masquerade—for which she was the 2019 Richardson Artist in Residence and Semifinalist in the 2022 National Music Theater Conference, and which she continues to develop. She was a winner of the 2020 Princeton Concerto Competition as a solo soprano and recently released her debut album, sp(inner)ace, under the artist name ALL. IS. ON. She enjoys teaching private music lessons to her wonderful students and dances at any chance she can get. She loves baking, interior design, and snow.