

**The Beautiful:  
A Recital of American Composers**

Maggie Ramsey, Mezzo-Soprano  
Faith Ellen McCandlish, Piano

Walker Chapel United Methodist Church  
Sunday, June 21, 2026  
3:00 p.m.

## The Program

### **Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson**

Music by Aaron Copland (1900-1990)

Poems by Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

- I. Nature, the Gentlest Mother
- II. There Came A Wind Like A Bugle
- III. Why Do They Shut Me Out Of Heaven?
- IV. The World Feels Dusty
- V. Heart, We Will Forget Him!
- VI. Dear March, Come In!
- VII. Sleep Is Supposed To Be
- VIII. When They Come Back
- IX. I Felt A Funeral In My Brain
- X. I've Heard An Organ Talk Sometimes
- XI. Going to Heaven!
- XII. The Chariot

### **Intermission**

### **Love After 1950**

Music by Libby Larsen (1950-)

Poems by Rita Dove (1952-), Julie Kane (1952-), Kathryn Daniels (1953-), Liz Lochhead (1947-), Muriel Rukeyser (1913-1980)

- I. Boy's Lips (A Blues)
- II. Blond Men (A Torch Song)
- III. Big Sister Says, 1967 (A Honky-Tonk)
- IV. The Empty Song (A Tango)
- V. I Make My Magic (Isadora's Dance)

### **Iconic Legacies: First Ladies at the Smithsonian**

Music by Jake Heggie (1961-)

Poems by Gene Scheer (1958-)

- I. Eleanor Roosevelt: Marian Anderson's Mink Coat
- II. Mary Todd Lincoln: Abraham Lincoln's Hat
- III. Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis: White House Christmas Card, 1963
- IV. Barbara Bush: The Muppets

**A light reception follows in the church parlor.**

## Program Notes

### Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson

“For many, Aaron Copland is the quintessential American composer. In his music, he captures the openness of spirit embodied in America’s landscape and evokes an emotional response consistent with American culture.”<sup>1</sup> “Emily Dickinson’s poems have inspired musical settings by multiple composers. She was a prolific writer, yet only seven of her verses were published during her lifetime—and those were published anonymously. From the age of twenty-three, she lived as a recluse, a charming New England eccentric whose most daring act was writing poetry which she then put away, out of sight. After Dickinson’s death in 1886, her sister discovered a box containing some 900 of her poems. The poems were originally published with alterations—to appease the literary sensibilities of the Victorian times. Later publications presented the poems in their original unedited form.”<sup>2</sup>

I first encountered Emily Dickinson in a beautiful picture book, *Emily*, given to me by my mother when I was a child. There is something tragic yet also cathartic about this set of poems. She writes so much about death, and yet she obviously had such a love of life within her to be able to write something like “Nature, the Gentlest Mother,” where she observes these beautiful things about nature, to the point where she can make us picture the sun quieting everything as it sets. Copland had this to say about the cycle:

“These twelve songs were composed at Sneden’s Landing, New York, at various times during the period from March 1949 to March 1950. They are the first works the composer has written for solo voice and piano since 1928...The poems centre about no single theme, but they treat the subject matter particularly close to Miss Dickinson: nature, death, life, eternity. Only two of the songs are related thematically, the seventh and twelfth. Nevertheless, the composer hopes that, in seeking a musical counterpart for the unique personality of the poet, he has given the songs, taken together, the aspect of a song cycle. The twelve songs are dedicated to twelve composer friends.”<sup>3</sup>

#### 1. *Nature, the Gentlest Mother* – to David Diamond

Nature, the gentlest mother  
Impatient of no child,  
The feeblest or the waywardest, –  
Her admonition mild  
In forest and the hill  
By traveller is heard,  
Restraining rampant squirrel  
Or too impetuous bird.  
How fair her conversation,  
A summer afternoon, –  
Her household, her assembly;  
And when the sun goes down  
Her voice among the aisles  
Incites the timid prayer  
Of the minutest cricket,  
The most unworthy flower.

#### 7. *Sleep is Supposed to Be* – to Irving Fine

Sleep is supposed to be,  
By souls of sanity,  
The shutting of the eye.  
Sleep is the station grand  
Down which on either hand  
The hosts of witness stand!  
Morn is supposed to be,  
By people of degree,  
The breaking of the day.  
Morning has not occurred!  
That shall aurora be  
East of Eternity;  
One with the banner gay,  
One in the red array, –  
That is the break of day.

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<sup>1</sup> Carol Kimball. *Song* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Hal Leonard Corporation, 2006), 275.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 278.

<sup>3</sup> Aaron Copland, *Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson set to music by Aaron Copland* (Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., 1951), 3.

When all the children sleep  
She turns as long away  
As will suffice to light her lamps;  
Then, bending from the sky,  
With infinite affection  
And infinitesimal care,  
Her golden finger on her lip,  
Wills silence everywhere.

**2. *There Came A Wind Like A Bugle*** – to Elliott Carter

There came a wind like a bugle,  
It quivered through the grass,  
And a green chill upon the heat  
So ominous did pass  
We barred the window and the doors  
As from an emerald ghost  
The doom's electric moccasin  
That very instant passed.  
On a strange mob of planting trees,  
And fences fled away,  
And rivers where the houses ran  
The living looked that day,  
The bell within the steeple wild,  
The flying tidings whirled.  
How much can come and much can go,  
And yet abide the world!

**3. *Why Do They Shut Me Out Of Heaven?*** - to Ingolf Dahl

Why do they shut Me out of Heaven?  
Did I sing too loud?  
But I can say a little "Minor"  
Timid as a Bird!  
Wouldn't the Angels try me  
Just once more  
Just see if I troubled them  
But don't shut the door!  
Oh, if I were the Gentleman  
In the "White Robe"  
And they were the little Hand that knocked  
Would I forbid?

**4. *The World Feels Dusty*** – to Alexei Haieff

The World feels Dusty  
When We stop to Die  
We want the Dew then  
Honors taste dry  
Flags vex a Dying face  
But the least Fan

**8. *When They Come Back*** – to Harold Shapero

When they come back if Blossoms do  
I always feel a doubt  
If Blossoms can be born again  
When once the Art is out  
When they begin, if Robins may,  
I always had a fear  
I did not tell, it was their last Experiment  
Last Year,  
When it is May, if May return,  
Had nobody a pang  
Lest in a Face so beautiful  
He might not look again?  
If I am there,  
One does not know  
What Party one may be  
Tomorrow, but if I am there  
I take back all I say

**9. *I Felt a Funeral in My Brain*** – to Camargo Guarnieri

I felt a funeral in my brain,  
And mourners to and fro,  
Kept treading, treading, till it seemed  
That sense was breaking through.  
And when they all were seated  
A service like a drum  
Kept beating, beating, till I thought  
My mind was going numb.  
And then I heard them lift a box,  
And creak across my soul  
With those same boots of lead, again.  
Then space began to toll  
As all the heavens were a bell,  
And Being but an ear,  
And I and silence some strange race,  
Wrecked, solitary, here.

**10. *I've Heard an Organ Talk Sometimes*** – to Alberto Ginastera

I've heard an Organ talk, sometimes  
In a Cathedral Aisle,  
And understood no word it said  
Yet held my breath, the while  
And risen up and gone away,  
A more Berdardine Girl  
Yet know not what was done to me  
In that old Hallowed Aisle.

Stirred by a friend's Hand  
Cools like the Rain  
Mine be the Ministry  
When they Thirst comes  
Dews of Thyself to fetch  
And Holy Balms

**5. *Heart, We Will Forget Him*** – to Marcelle de Munziarly

Heart, we will forget him  
You and I, tonight.  
You may forget the warmth he gave,  
I will forget the light.  
When you have done, pray tell me,  
That I my thoughts may dim;  
Haste! lest while you're lagging,  
I may remember him!

**6. *Dear March, Come In!*** – to Juan Orrego Salas

Dear March — Come in —  
How glad I am —  
I hoped for you before —  
Put down your Hat —  
You must have walked —  
How out of Breath you are —  
Dear March, Come right up the stairs with me —  
I have so much to tell —  
I got your Letter, and the Birds —  
The Maples never knew that you were coming — till I  
called  
I declare — how Red their Faces grew —  
But March, forgive me — and  
All those Hills you left for me to Hue —  
There was no Purple suitable —  
You took it all with you —  
Who knocks? That April.  
Lock the Door —  
I will not be pursued —  
He stayed away a Year to call  
When I am occupied —  
But trifles look so trivial  
As soon as you have come  
That Blame is just as dear as Praise  
And Praise as mere as Blame —

**11. *Going to Heaven!*** – to Lukus Foss

Going to Heaven!  
I don't know when,  
Pray do not ask me how, –  
Indeed I'm too astonished  
To think of answering you!  
Going to Heaven! –  
How dim it sounds!  
And yet it will be done  
As sure as flocks go home at night  
Unto the shepherd's arm!  
Perhaps you're going too!  
Who knows?  
If you should get there first  
Save just a little place for me  
Close to the two I lost!  
The smallest "robe" will fit me,  
And just a bit of "crown";  
For you know we do not mind our dress  
When we are going home.  
Going to Heaven!  
I'm glad I don't believe it  
For it would stop my breath,  
And I'd like to look a little more  
At such a curious earth!  
I am glad they did believe it  
Whom I have never found  
Since the mighty autumn afternoon  
I left them in the ground.

**12. *The Chariot***

Because I could not stop for Death —  
He kindly stopped for me —  
The carriage held but just ourselves —  
and Immortality.  
We slowly drove — he knew no haste,  
And I had put away  
My labour, and my leisure too  
For His Civility —  
We passed the school, where children played,  
Their lessons scarcely done.  
We passed the fields of gazing grain,  
We passed the setting sun.  
We paused before a house that seemed  
a swelling of the ground;  
The roof was scarcely visible,  
The cornice but a mound.  
Since then 'tis centuries; but each  
Feels shorter than the day

I first surmised the horses' heads  
Were toward eternity.

## Love After 1950

“Mezzo-soprano Susanne Mentzer commissioned this work and collaborated with [Libby] Larsen in planning it. Larsen: ‘Each of these songs is an interior monologue about love. We chose a deliberate progression in the poetry, from the adolescent mystery of a first kiss through an affair, break-up, and reconciliation of sorts. This work, virtuosic in its performance, demands an understand[ing] of life, is no *Frauenliebe und -leben*, rather *Love after 1950* is the new woman’s *Frau*, *Love ‘em and and Leave ‘em*.’<sup>4,5</sup>

This song cycle is, indeed, a modern-day parallel to Schumann’s beloved *Frauenliebe*, and it takes *Frauenliebe* a step further by talking about womanhood from a woman’s perspective. Faith and I have loved working on both song cycles, and with this one we hope you’re able to bask in the joy and humanity of being a woman. These songs depict the sensual aspect of that, and also the humor.

### *I. Boy’s Lips*

In water-heavy nights behind grandmother's porch  
We knelt in the tickling grasses and whispered:  
Linda's face hung before us, pale as a pecan,  
And it grew wise as she said:  
'A boy's lips are soft,  
As soft as baby's skin.'  
The air closed over her words.  
A firefly whirred near my ear, and in the distance  
I could hear streetlamps ping  
Into miniature suns  
Against a feathery sky.

### *II. Blond Men*

I think I ought to warn you that I hate blond men  
before you break your heart  
I think I ought to warn you that I hate blond men  
I hate the greenish gold of their eyebrows and lashes  
How they shatter the sun into rainbows  
And their eyes: like a long drink of water  
That clear and that cold  
Worse than the eyes  
Worse than the eyes is the blond hair  
The shock of a bright blond head slanting above me  
Like a sunbeam on the covers of my dark blue bed

### *III. Big Sister Says, 1967*

### *IV. The Empty Song*

Today saw the last of my Spanish shampoo.  
Lasted an age now that sharing with you,  
such a thing of the past is.  
Giant Size. The brand  
was always a compromise.  
My new one's tailored exactly to my needs.  
Non-spill. Protein-rich.  
Feeds Body, promises to solve my problem hair.  
Sweetheart, these days it's hard to care.  
But oh oh insomniac moonlight  
how unhoneyed is my middle of the night.  
I could see you  
far enough. Beyond me  
how we'll get back together.  
Campsites in Spain, moonlight,  
heavy weather.  
Today saw the end of my Spanish shampoo,  
the end of my third month without you.

### *V. I Make My Magic*

I make my magic  
Of forgotten things  
Night and nightmare and the midnight wings  
Of childhood butterflies—  
And the darkness, the straining dark  
Underwater and under sleep—  
Night and a heartbreak try to keep

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<sup>4</sup> Libby Larsen, song description notes to *Love after 1950*, in *The Eternal Feminine*. Suzanne Mentzer, mezzo-soprano, Craig Rutenberg, piano. Koch International Classics CD recording 3-7506-2 HI, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Carol Kimball. *Song* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Hal Leonard Corporation, 2006), 333.

"Beauty hurts," big sister says.  
 Yanking a hank of my lanky hair  
 around black wire-mesh rollers  
 whose inside bristles prick my scalp  
 like so many pins.  
 She says I'd better sleep with them in.  
 She plucks, tweezes  
 glides razor blades over tender armpit skin,  
 slathers downy legs with stinking  
 depilatory cream,  
 presses straight lashes bolt upright  
 with a medieval-looking padded clamp.  
 "Looking good hurts," Beryl warns.  
 "It's hard work."

Myself, until before my eyes  
 The morning sunlight pours  
 And I am clear of all the chains  
 And the magic now that rains  
 Down around me is  
 A sunlight magic,  
 I come to a sunlight magic,  
 Yours.

### Iconic Legacies: First Ladies at the Smithsonian

Jake Heggie's career in opera composition began after he had worked as a public relations associate for San Francisco Opera. I first encountered his work through *Dead Man Walking*, the operatic adaptation of Sister Helen Prejean's book of the same name. Heggie is also a brilliant composer of art song. Commissioned by Vocal Arts DC and the opener of its twenty-fifth season, *Iconic Legacies* premiered at the Terrace Theater at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts on September 12, 2015 with Susan Graham singing and the composer at the piano.

As I researched this work, the best and most powerful experience I had was to visit the Smithsonian and see each item (or in the case of the Muppets, exhibit) in-person. Heggie and Scheer truly captured the humanity and legacy of each of these First Ladies and the story of each object. It is thanks to Eleanor Roosevelt that we have Marian Anderson's performance at the Lincoln Memorial, it is thanks to Mary Todd Lincoln and Jackie Kennedy that the White House had renovations, and it is thanks to Barbara Bush that we have the National Literacy Act of 1991.

#### *I. Eleanor Roosevelt: Marian Anderson's Mink Coat*

Listen!  
 Listen!  
 Marian Anderson is singing of thee.  
 Beyond compromise,  
 Beyond recrimination,  
 Beyond the anger of a divided nation  
 Marian Anderson is singing.

Wearing this elegant mink,  
 she stood on the steps beneath Lincoln's  
 stony stare,  
 intoned our nation's hymn  
 and let freedom ring and ring and ring.

Oh what a sound!  
 Of thee I sing.

There are some paths no map will ever trace.

#### *II. Mary Todd Lincoln – Abraham Lincoln's Hat*

Your measured gestures mock me.  
 Words of kindness feel like crimes.  
 In a world where this can happen  
 Only madness rhymes.

I am drowning, but will not die.  
 Rip the stars from out the sky.  
 The ship is lost and you pretend  
 We'll find our way, the pain will end.

Your measured gestures mock me.  
 Words of kindness feel like crimes.  
 In a world where this can happen  
 Only madness rhymes.

He wore this hat the day he died.  
 A grieving nation cried.  
 But long before - for me –  
 He wore it as an elegy.

But, from Lincoln's steps  
to Charleston's "Amazing Grace"  
With every step on the way,  
I think about what she showed us that day:  
No one can make you feel inferior  
without your consent. No one.

Who are we?  
Beyond compromise,  
Beyond recrimination,  
Beyond the anger of a divided nation  
Marian Anderson is singing  
of thee.

### *III. Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis: White House Christmas Card, 1963*

Jack walked into the room and said:  
"Diamonds! Minks and diamonds! That's what they'll  
be wearing in Dallas."

I looked up from signing a Christmas card:  
"What would you like me to do?"  
He said: "Let me help you choose."

I was delighted! We'd never done this  
before.  
The beige and white dress? No?  
The blue and yellow suit? Maybe?  
The pink Chanel?

"Yes! Yes!" he said "Wear that.  
With the hat."  
Before I left the room, I said:  
"Jack, I just started the Christmas cards.  
There... add your name."

Fifty hours later, I walked back into the  
bedroom  
Wearing the pink Chanel suit he'd  
chosen  
Covered in his blood.

Around his hat he tied a mourning band.  
Spoke through tears, but - somehow –  
Did not understand.  
"Oh, husband! Oh, my Abraham!" I said  
"Our son, our world, our William is dead."

I am drowning, but will not die.  
Rip the stars from out the sky.  
The ship is lost and you pretend  
We'll find our way, the pain will end.

Your measured gestures mock me.  
Words of kindness feel like crimes.  
In a world where this can happen  
Only madness rhymes.

Your measured gestures mock me.  
Words of kindness feel like crimes.  
In a world where this can happen  
Only madness rhymes.

### *IV. Barbara Bush: The Muppets*

This is Pete.  
He looks like a piano, but wait...

It's magic!  
A squiggle, a curve, a line  
blossoms into a letter,  
a letter into a word.  
Then words that rhyme  
and phrases like "Once upon a time."

It's magic! The phrase becomes the  
mountain you're climbing that –  
oh, my goodness! –  
might not be a mountain at all!  
But an incredibly fleet, not petite,  
very sweet dinosaur named Pete,  
who wakes and takes you on his  
shoulders  
where the water splashes and flows  
and tickles the end of your nose  
with a drip, drip, drop and a tiny tap.  
And all of this happens from your  
mother's lap.

Imagine! You can travel anywhere.  
And it all begins with "Once upon a  
time."

And there it was, signed by both of us:  
A Christmas card propped up on the  
table  
Like a question mark.

Oh Jack, what would you like me to do?

Four little words.  
Imagine you could not read them to your  
child.  
Something must be done, I thought.  
Which is how I made my way  
to Sesame Street.  
Surrounded by dozens of Muppets  
you discover your cup  
it's overflowing with possibility.  
Fabric, buttons and thread.  
Dreams woven from Jim Henson's head.  
An alphabet of riffs and dreams.

And suddenly you're on  
the incredibly fleet, not petite,  
very sweet dinosaur named Pete  
whose feet treat you to a ride  
to the gate through a berry patch.  
There's a sign on the latch.  
And for the first time - all by yourself-  
You read the words: "Once upon a  
time."

*(Thanks, Pete!)*

## Bibliography

Copland, Aaron. *Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson set to music by Aaron Copland*. Boosey & Hawkes, Inc., 1951.

Kimball, Carol. *Song*. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Hal Leonard Corporation, 2006

Larsen, Libby. Song description notes to *Love after 1950*, in *The Eternal Feminine*. Suzanne Mentzer, mezzo-soprano, Craig Rutenberg, piano. Koch International Classics CD recording 3-7506-2 HI, 2001.

Mezzo-soprano **Maggie Ramsey** is a recitalist and opera singer based in Alexandria, VA. Most recently, in the



2025-2026 season she gave the solo recital *Witches, Britches, and Love Along The Way* with pianist Ruth Locker, appeared as La Chatte and Une Pâtre in *L'enfant et les sortilèges* with Bel Cantanti Opera Company in Rockville, MD, debuted with L'Opera Comique de Washington in Washington, D.C. as a featured soloist in *Les mousquetaires au couvent*, and performed the role of the Witch in *Hansel and Gretel* with Shakespeare Opera Theatre in McLean, VA. In 2025 she played the role of Dorothee in *The Anonymous Lover* and Katisha in *The Mikado* with Victorian Lyric Opera Company in Rockville, MD, and the Duchess of Krakenthorpe in *La fille du regiment* with BCO. In 2024 she created and sang the recital *I Love You To The Moon And Back: Songs of Woman and Child* with Ruth Locker, sang the role of Dame Hannah in *Ruddigore* with VLOC, and covered the same role with Young Victorian Theatre Company in Baltimore, MD. Other previous roles include Emilia in *Othello*, Mother in *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, Queen Gertrude in *Hamlet*, Prince Escalus in *Romeo and Juliet*, and Demetrius in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Maggie is a member of

the **Sopranessence** women's vocal ensemble and Friday Morning Music Club. She is pleased to present this recital marking the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United States by honoring American composers with her dear friend and colleague, Faith Ellen McCandlish.



. **Faith Ellen McCandlish** is a classically trained pianist and educator based in the Northern Virginia area. Best known for her collaborative musicianship, she performs regularly with soloists and ensembles, both amateur and professional alike. Over the course of her career, she has had the privilege to study with such distinguished teachers as Dr. Raffi Kasparian, Ms. Silva Blasquez, Dr. Anna Balakerskaia, Dr. Marjorie Lee, and Ms. Arlene Antin. Faith Ellen has performed at the Alden Theatre in McLean, the Millennium Stage at the Kennedy Center in DC, and at Weill Recital Hall in Carnegie Hall, New York.

Faith Ellen is also the co-founder of First Chair Music, LLC, a small business that increases access to excellent live music in Northern Virginia by connecting skilled musicians with appreciative audiences. Her work is framed around protecting humanity and community within the arts. She is grateful for this opportunity to bring music alongside Maggie Ramsey to Music For Good.

**Thank you to my friend Faith Ellen McCandlish for playing with me.**

A free will offering will be taken.