

USC THORNTON

CHAMBER SINGERS

SPRING 2023 CONCERT

SUNDAY,

APRIL 23, 7:30 PM

ALL SAINTS EPISCOPAL CHURCH, PASADENA

FEATURING

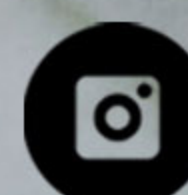
the Fauré *Requiem* for Choir and Organ,

AND WORKS BY

Nick Strimple, Zanaida Robles,
Roderick Williams, Shawn Kirchner,
Moira Smiley, and Duncan Tuomi

USC Thornton
School of Music

USC THORNTON
choral *artists*



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USC Thornton Chamber Singers

Tram Sparks, conductor

Laura Leigh Spillane, associate conductor

Matthew Harikian, collaborative pianist

Weicheng Zhao, organist

Gabriel Fauré

(1845-1924)

Requiem

I. Introit et Kyrie

II. Offertory

Koji Sakano, baritone

III. Sanctus

IV. Pie Jesu

Hannah McDonnel, soprano

V. Agnus Dei

VI. Libera Me

Connor Scott, baritone

VII. In Paradisum

INTERMISSION

Shawn Kirchner

(b. 1970)

"O What a Beautiful City!"

Moira Smiley

(b. 1976)

"Stand in that River"

Ali Sandweiss Hodges and Andrew Powell, soloists

Duncan Tuomi

(b. 1994)

"Fire-Flowers"

from Songs for a World on Fire

Duncan Tuomi, conductor

Shawn Kirchner

(b. 1970)

"Tu Voz"

Zanaida Robles

(b. 1979)

Psalm 61: "Hear My Cry"

Ann Chen and Rachel Tan, soloists

Roderick Williams

(b. 1965)

"O Guiding Night"

Nick Strimple

(b.1946)

Water Music

I. "Phlebas the Phoenician"

II. "I Have Heard the Mermaids Singing"

Nick Strimple

(b.1946)

Antiphon and Psalm

I. "O Vos Omnes"

II. "Laudate Dominum in sanctis ejus"



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Program Notes

by Laura Leigh Spillane

Gabriel Faure (1845 - 1924) - Requiem Op. 48

French composer, teacher, pianist, and organist Gabriel Fauré is known as the most advanced composer of his generation in France. He developed a distinctive personal style, typified by his treatment of harmony and tonality. His innovations were influential for many early 20th-century composers who followed. Fauré's stylistic development links the end of Romanticism with the second quarter of the 20th century, and covers a period in which the evolution of musical language was particularly rapid. Fauré's harmonic and melodic innovations affected the teaching of harmony for future generations. (Source: Grove Music Online)

Perhaps the best example of his incredible mastery of the art of melodic writing is his Requiem, Op. 48, a piece whose overarching peaceful, contemplative affect may mask the richness and complexity of the musical language employed by Fauré therein. First scored for organ and strings (but no violins, a nod to the opening of Brahms's Requiem), Fauré continued to revise the Requiem in subsequent performances after its 1888 premiere in Paris. In 1893, a new version was performed, adding the "Offertory" and "Libera Me" movements. 1990 saw a version for full orchestra premiered in France. Tonight's performance presents a version including the newer movements, accompanied by Wei Cheng Zhao on organ.

Shawn Kirchner (b. 1970) - O What a Beautiful City!

Shawn Kirchner is a composer/arranger/songwriter, singer, and pianist based in Los Angeles whose choral works are performed throughout the world. A member of the Los Angeles Master Chorale since 2001, Kirchner has enjoyed an enduring creative relationship with music director Grant Gershon, culminating in his tenure as the LAMC's Swan Family Composer-in-Residence from 2012-2015. Kirchner has also collaborated with such leading ensembles as Conspirare, Santa Fe Desert Chorale, Lorelei Ensemble, San Diego Master Chorale, Los Robles Master Chorale, Coro Allegro, Atlanta Master Chorale, and Tonality. Kirchner's creativity is driven by his passion for songwriting, folk/carol traditions, and poetry – but fused with the improvisatory virtuosity of Baroque and bluegrass instrumental traditions. His original songwriting ranges in style from jazz and gospel to folk and bluegrass, the latter featured on his CD *Meet Me on the Mountain*. (source: shawnkirchner.com)

“O What a Beautiful City” is an upbeat, accompanied choral piece which is a combination of two distinct styles. In Kirchner's own words: “this arrangement combines the African-American spiritual ‘O What a Beautiful City’ with a rhythmic ‘alleluia’ ostinato inspired by the Ukrainian Orthodox church, reflecting the image of the ‘universal city’ in the song's text. An optional ‘cut-time’ coda turns an already-elating piece into a full-blown party.” (shawnkirchner.com) The “alleluia” ostinato serves as a rhythmic motor which propels the entire piece, and culminates in the entire ensemble joining in at full force at the climax of the exciting work.

Moira Smiley (b. 1976) - Stand in that River

Composer, performer, and vocalist Moira Smiley is known worldwide for choral arrangements like “Bring Me Little Water, Silvy” and originals, “Stand in That River” and “How Can I Cry.” She is in demand as a commissioned composer, writing multi-movement pieces like “Time In Our Voices” and “In The Desert With You” for the Los Angeles Master Chorale, Vonnegut Requiem: Light Perpetual for Voces Novae, “Loud My Soul” for Ad Astra Festival and “Headwaters” for The Myrna Loy Theater. In 2018-2019 Moira released the album and choral songbook, *Unzip The Horizon* as companion to her *The Voice Is A Traveler* solo show. She continues composing and improvising in collaboration with artists in film, video game production, theater and dance, and her work can be heard on feature film soundtracks, BBC & PBS television programs, NPR, and on more than 70 commercial albums. Upcoming premieres and current projects include *Greta Sails* for youth choir, *Utopias* for voices and strings, and a re-telling of Ovid’s tale of Narcissus for mobile phones and voices.

(moirasmiley.com)

Described by the composer as a “sweet, secular folk-spiritual,” “Stand in That River” is entirely Smiley’s own musical and lyrical creation, though the melody is based on a folk tune called “The Old Settler.” The piece has a lilting, compound meter feel, and, though it begins with unison and two-part singing, swells to lush four-part choral harmony on its refrains. “Stand in that River” has a simple verse-chorus repeating structure, but Smiley offers variation particularly through the manner in which she sets the verses, sometimes as solos, duets, or featuring one section of the choir. The piece urges its listener to embody persistence and resilience in the wake of hardship.

(moirasmiley.com)

Duncan Tuomi (b. 1994) - Fire-Flowers
from *Songs for a World on Fire*

Duncan Tuomi is a choral conductor and award-winning composer based in Los Angeles, California. He currently studies choral music in the Doctor of Musical Arts program at the University of Southern California, where he also completed his Master of Music degree. He also holds a Bachelor of Music Degree in Vocal Music Education from St. Olaf College. As a composer, Tuomi was the first place winner of the American Choral Director's Association's Raymond W. Brock Memorial Student Composition Competition for 2021, and a composition fellow in Choral Arts Initiative's summer 2022 PREMIERE|Project. He has had works premiered by Choral Arts Initiative, the USC Thornton University Chorus, the Long Beach Youth Chorus, the University of Portland Chamber Singers, and the Pacific University Chamber Singers. He has received commissions from the Long Beach Youth Chorus and was commissioned to compose for the 10th annual Brothers, Sing On! Choir Festival in 2018.

(Note from the composer:) This piece is a setting of Emily Pauline Johnson's "Fire-Flowers," which remarks upon the ability for nature to heal and for new flowers to spring up after forest fires, drawing a parallel to human life, that even after great suffering, there is opportunity for revival. These works were written in response to the ongoing change in the earth's climate as a result of human expansion and industry. While the first piece serves as an opportunity to lament the damage that has already been done, the second piece provides some sense of hope that the earth will be able to recover, if humanity is able to make the necessary changes to facilitate that recovery.

Shawn Kirchner (b. 1970) - Tu Voz

“Tu Voz” is Kirchner’s setting of a romantic poem by Chilean poet Pablo Neruda. Kirchner remarks, “lyrical melodies and a rich piano accompaniment evoke the many colors of this sensual sonnet by Pablo Neruda, written in praise of the lovely voice of the poet’s wife.” Kirchner uses onomatopoeia to paint an aural landscape of crashing waves, clanging and groaning of the caravan, birdsong, and wind rushing through the pines in both the piano accompaniment and the vocal music.



Zanaida Robles (b. 1979) - Psalm 61: Hear My Cry

Dr. Zanaida Robles is an award-winning Black American composer, vocalist, and teacher. She is presently the performing arts instructor at Harvard-Westlake Upper School in Studio City, CA and director of music at Neighborhood Unitarian Universalist Church in Pasadena, CA. She is an advocate for diversity and inclusion in both music education and performance. Her compositional style can be described by the incorporated themes including soul, counterpoint, colorful harmony, rhythmic drive, modality, African elements, and progressive rock. Robles has a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the USC Thornton School of Music, a Master of Music degree from California State University (CSU), Northridge, and a Bachelor of Music from CSU Long Beach. (source: zanaidarobles.com)

Psalm 61: Hear My Cry was written in 2013, and is scored for two sopranos and a cappella mixed choir. The piece primarily utilizes dynamic swells, sudden changes in harmonic color, and shifting tempi to illustrate the urgency of its psalm text. The climax of the piece occurs at the choir's first utterance of the text "with heaviness in my heart" in which all voices swell to a dynamic climax, indicating the frustration and insistence of the cry to the almighty. Often, the two soprano voices sing different text than the choir, as in the final section of the piece, when the soloists sing "I call upon you" while the remainder of the soprano section comforts them with the mantra of "set me upon the rock that is higher than I," and the alto, tenor, and bass sections swell beneath the trio, singing an "O God" which provides harmonic support.

Roderick Williams (b. 1965) - O Guiding Night

Roderick Williams is widely regarded as one of the finest baritone singers of today. Based in the United Kingdom, he sings regularly with the BBC orchestras and all other major UK orchestras, as well as the Berlin and New York Philharmonic orchestras, among others. Known for his expressive vocalism, his compositions are also lauded for their fresh honesty. Williams has had compositions performed at the Wigmore and Barbican Halls, the Purcell Room, and live on national radio productions. In December 2016, he was awarded the prize for best composition at the British Composer Awards.

Scored for mixed choir and piano, “O Guiding Night” is a colorful and evocative setting of the text 'The Dark Night' by 16th-century Spanish mystic and poet St John of the Cross. Williams's setting heightens the romance and drama of the text, conveying a range of emotions from hushed excitement to joyous rapture. The voice of the piano is brought to the fore, as an equal partner to the voices, and the swell of emotions is depicted in the virtuosity and urgent forward motion of the writing for the piano.

Nick Strimple (b. 1946) - Water Music

I. Phlebas the Phonecian

II. I Have Heard the Mermaids Singing

Nick Strimple is an American composer, conductor, scholar, educator, and author whose interests include twentieth century music, Jewish music, the music of Dvořák and other Czech composers, the aesthetics of sacred music, and virtually all aspects of choral music. He is Professor of Practice in the Department of Choral and Sacred Music at the USC Thornton School of Music. Born in Amarillo, Texas, Strimple holds degrees from Baylor University and USC, and is the author of two critically acclaimed books, *Choral Music in the Twentieth Century* (2002) and *Choral Music in the Nineteenth Century* (2008). A prolific conductor, he has conducted some of the world's most prominent ensembles, including the London Symphony Orchestra, the Nuremberg Symphony Orchestra, and the Prague Radio Choir. A skilled composer, he has written both concert and liturgical works as well as film and television scores.

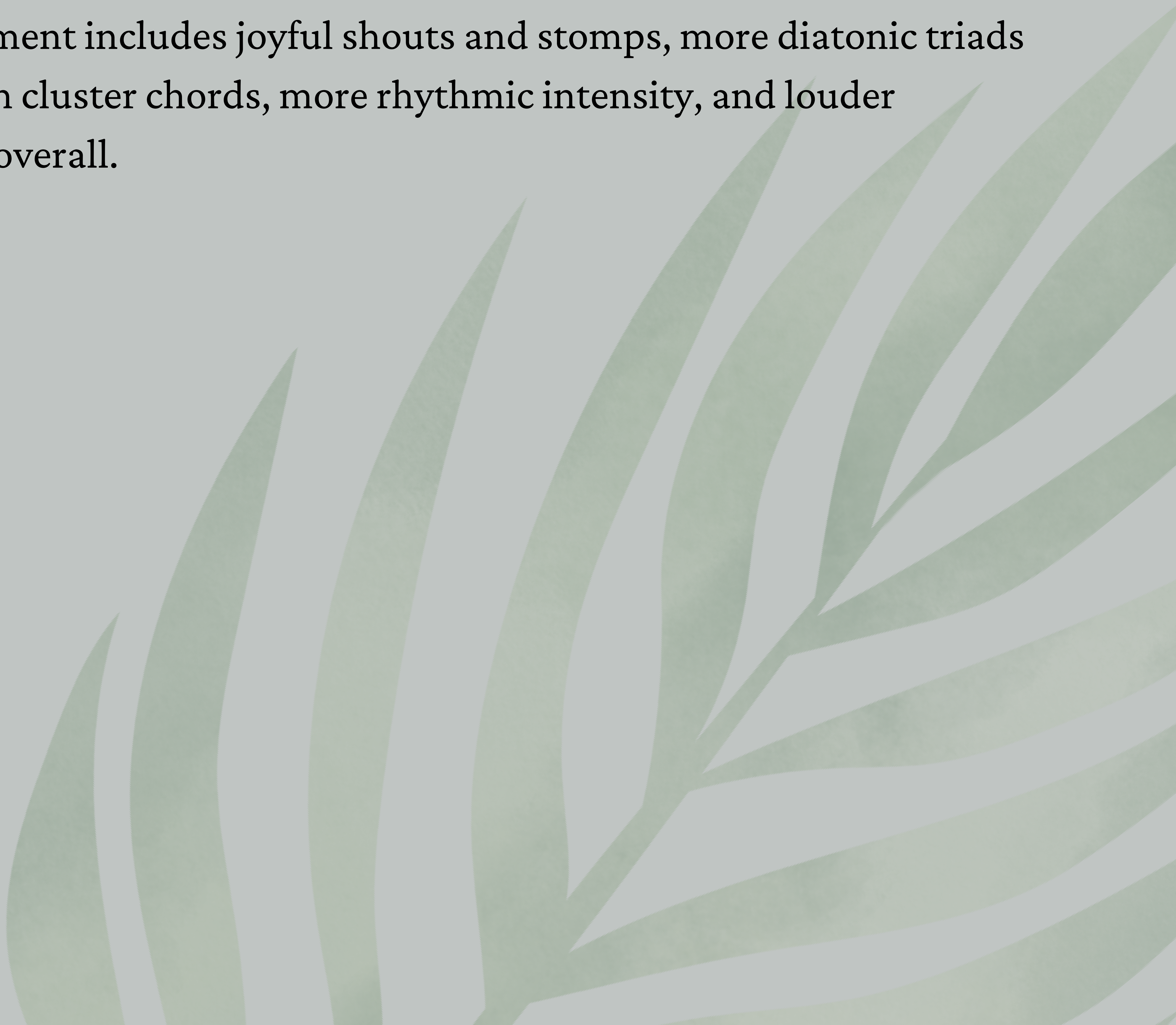
Water Music is Strimple's setting of the poetry of T. S. Eliot. He chose to set Eliot in order to honor two influential former English teachers of his, Ann Miller and Hazel Davis, to whose memory the piece is dedicated. "Phlebas the Phonecian" demonstrates Strimple's skill in utilizing compositional techniques to illuminate text, including a rhythmic and harmonic undulation on the "deep sea swell," melodic lines which leap up, then down for "as he rose and fell" and a downward swirl of unison triplets on the word "whirlpool." "Phlebas" ends modestly with a quiet B major chord, which segues, as a dominant function, into the next piece, which begins in E major. "I Have Heard the Mermaids Singing" introduces the listener to an ethereal, beautiful melody which could have been written by the likes of English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams. This tune is then heard in canon in all voices of the choir. At the apex of the piece, the canon increases in intensity until each individual chorister is singing at their own pace, resulting in waves of mermaid-song overlapping and crashing into one another. The mermaids are, fittingly, only finally quelled by the last line of the text: "Till human voices wake us, and we drown."

Nick Strimple (b.1946) - Antiphon and Psalm

I. O Vos Omnes

II. Laudate Dominum in sanctis ejus

Strimple's "Antiphon and Psalm" are two pieces which demonstrate his compositional prowess and range. Written for John Delfs and Nanette Bourne, the first piece, "O Vos Omnes," sets Lamentations 1:12 in a pensive, heart-rendingly somber manner. Chord clusters, slow dynamic rise and fall, and homophonic text setting allow the drama of the text to be fully demonstrated by the a cappella choral ensemble. The second piece in the set, "Laudate Dominum in sanctis ejus," was written for Stephen and Elizabeth Argila. Here, Strimple sets the text of Psalm 150, whose joyful tone could hardly be more different than "O Vos Omnes." The shift in text is reflected in the shift in writing style; this movement includes joyful shouts and stomps, more diatonic triads rather than cluster chords, more rhythmic intensity, and louder dynamics overall.



Texts and Translations

Requiem - Gabriel Fauré

I. Introit et Kyrie

Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine

et lux perpetua luceat eis

Te decet hymnus, Deus in Sion

et tibi reddetur votum in Jerusalem

Exaudi orationem meam

ad te omnis caro veniet

Kyrie eleison,

Christe eleison,

Kyrie eleison.

Grant them eternal rest, o Lord,

and may perpetual light shine upon them

Thou, o God, art praised in Sion, and unto Thee
shall the vow be performed in Jerusalem.

Hear my prayer,

unto Thee shall all flesh come.

Lord have mercy,

Christ have mercy,

Lord have mercy.



II. Offertory

*O Domine, Jesu Christe, Rex Gloriam
libera animas defunctorum
de poenis inferni et de profundo lacu
O Domine, Jesu Christe, Rex Gloriam
libera animas defunctorum de ore leonis
ne absorbeat eus Tartarus ne cadant in obscurum.
Hostias et preces tibi Domine, laudis offerimus
tu suscipe pro animabus illis
quarum hodie memoriam facimus
Fac eas, Domine, de morte transire ad vitam
Quam olim Abrahae promisisti et semini eus.*

Lord have mercy Lord Jesus Christ, King of glory,
deliver the souls of all the faithful departed
from the pains of hells and the bottomless pit.

Lord Jesus Christ, King of glory,
Deliver them from the lion's mouth,
nor let them fall into darkness, neither the black abyss
swallow them up.

We offer unto Thee this sacrifice of prayer and praise,
Receive it for those souls
whom today we commemorate.

Allow them, o Lord, to cross from death into the life
which once Thou didst promise to Abraham and his seed.

III. Sanctus

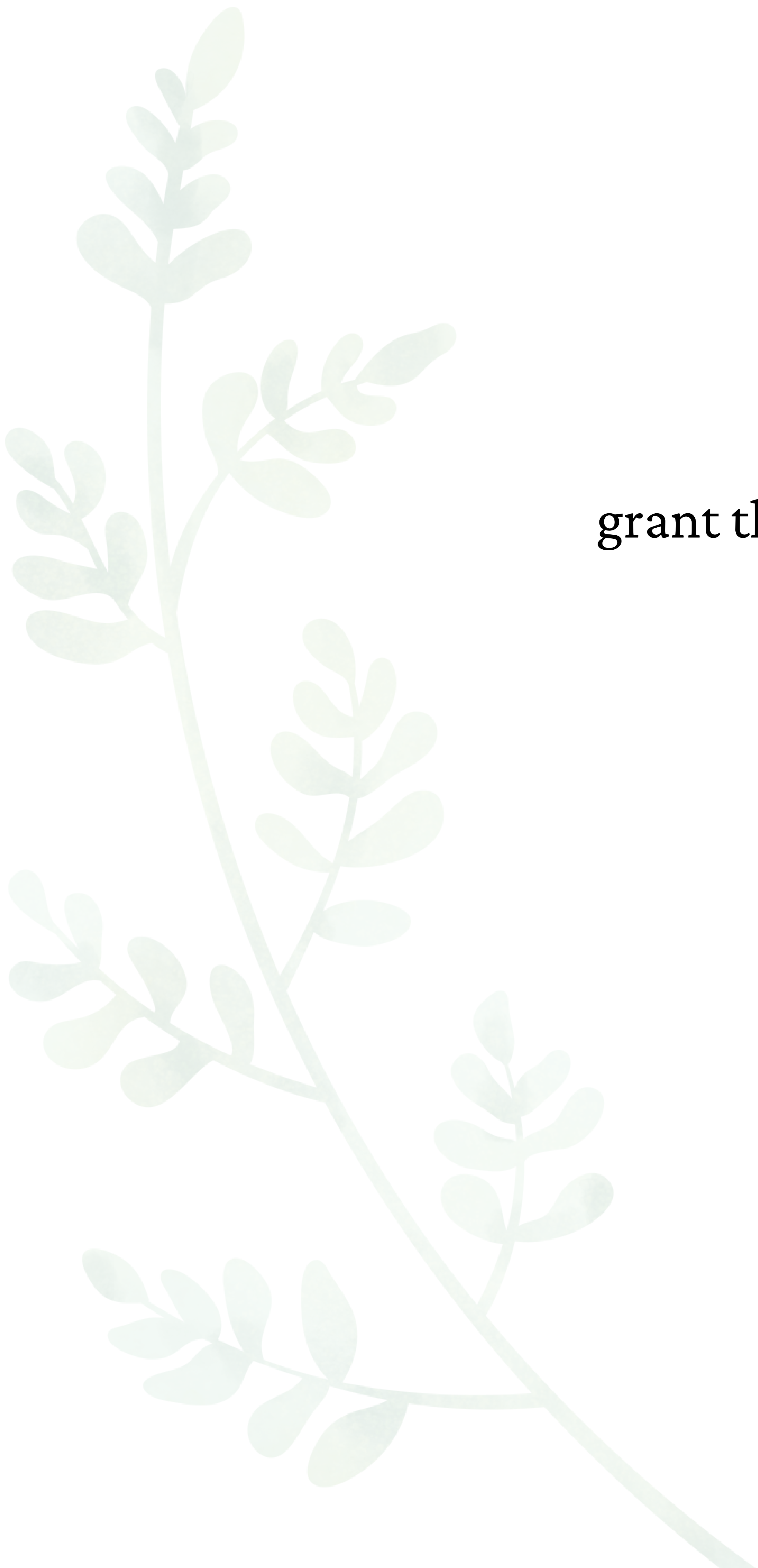
*Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus Dominus Deus Sabaoth
Pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria tua
Hosanna in excelsis.*

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth
heaven and earth are full of Thy glory
Hosanna in the highest.

IV. Pie Jesu

*Pie Jesu, Domine, dona eis requiem
dona eis requiem sempiternam requiem.*

Merciful Jesus, Lord,
grant them rest, grant them rest, eternal rest.



IV. Agnus Dei

*Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi
dona eis requiem, sempiternam requiem.*

Lux aeterna luceat eis, Domine

Cum sanctis tuis in aeternum,

quia pius es

Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine,

et lux perpetua luceat eis

O Lamb of God, that takest away the sin of the world,
grant them rest, everlasting rest.

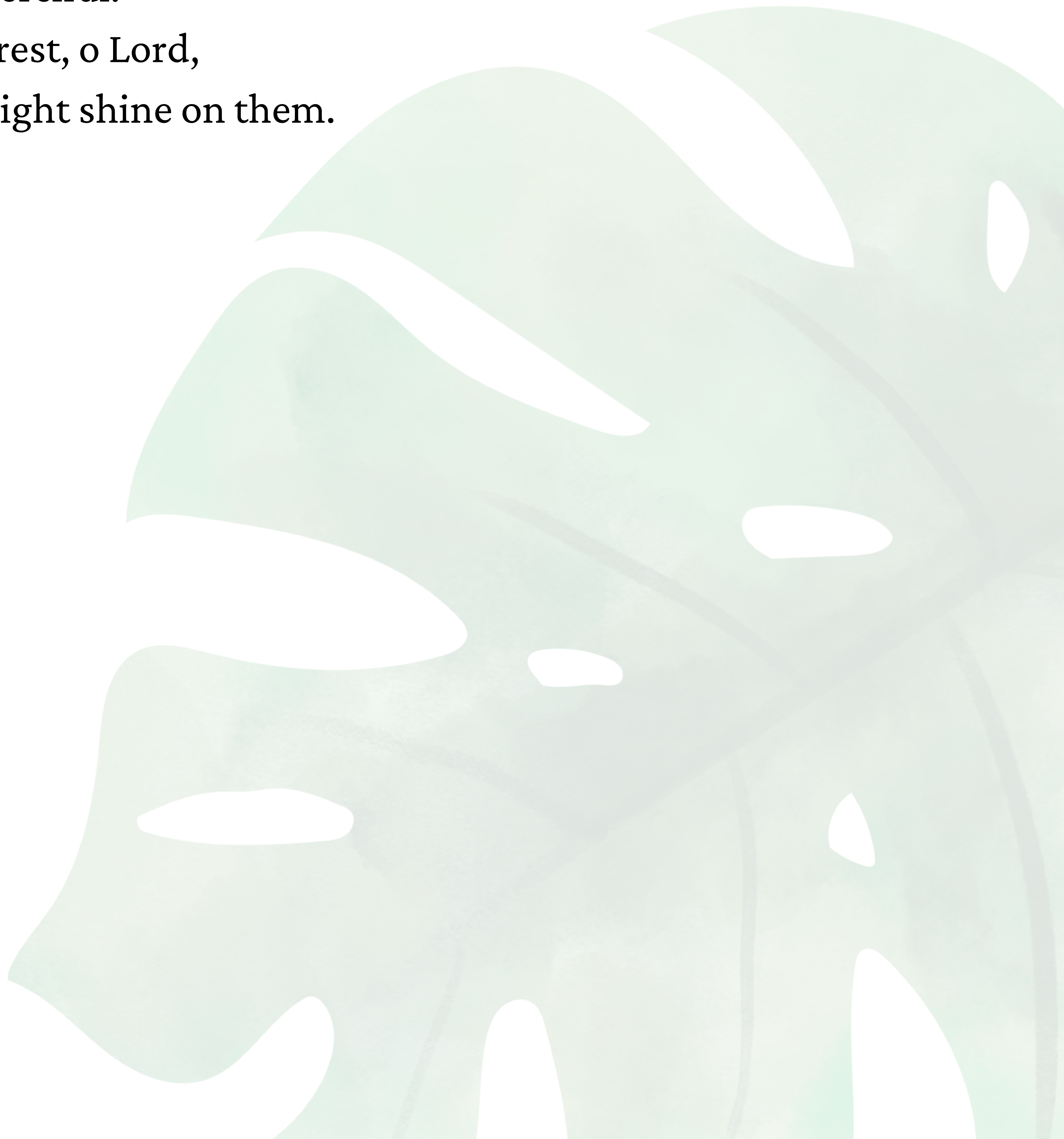
May eternal light shine on them, o Lord,

with Thy saints forever,

because Thou art merciful.

Grant them eternal rest, o Lord,

and may perpetual light shine on them.



VI. Libera Me

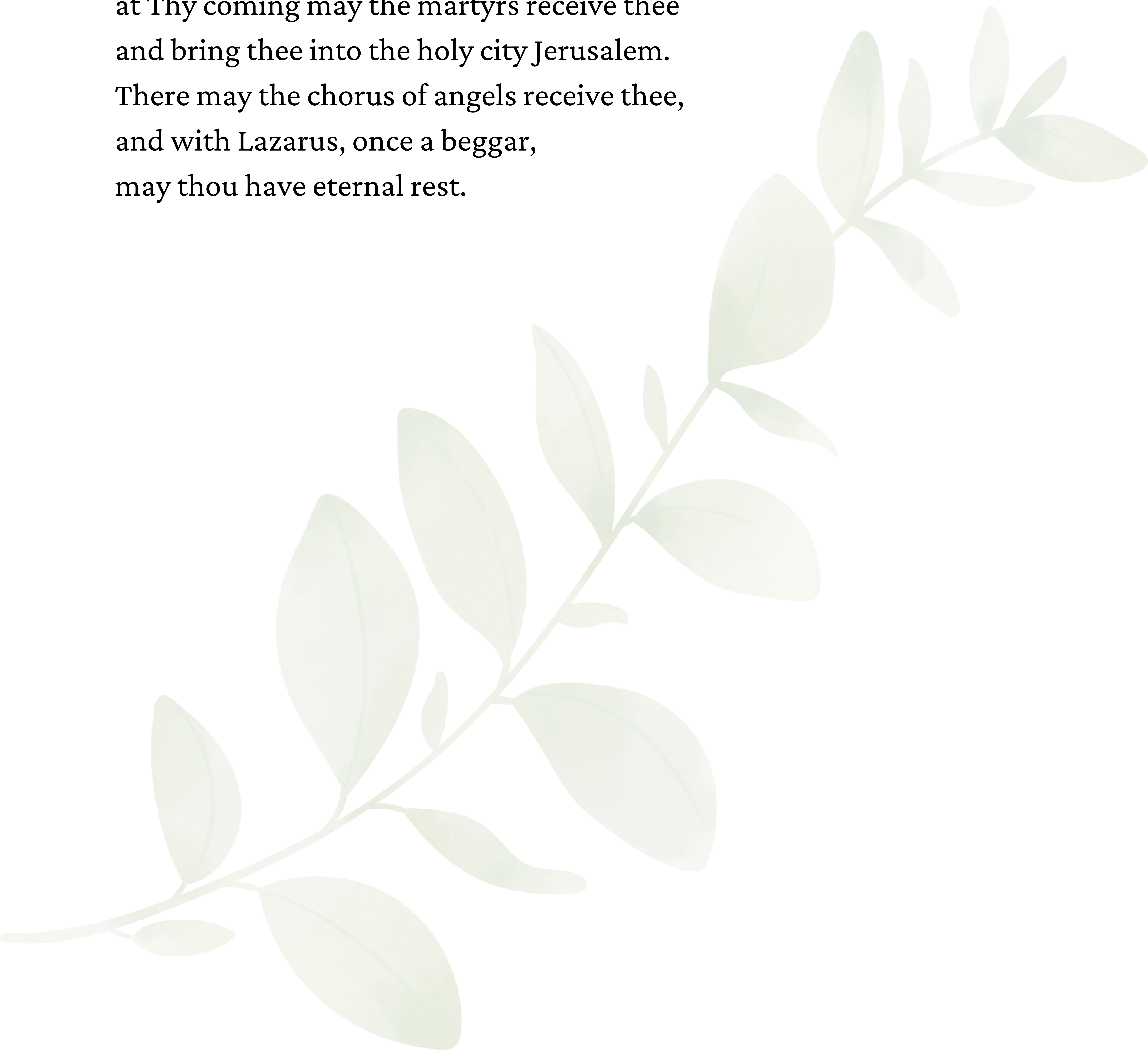
*Libera me, Domine, de morte aeterna
in die illa tremenda
Quando coeli movendi sunt et terra
Dum veneris judicare saeculum per ignem
Tremens factus sum ego et timeo
dum discussio venerit atque ventura ira
Dies illa dies irae
calamitatis et miseriae
dies illa, dies magna
et amara valde
Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine
et lux perpetua luceat eis*

Deliver me, o Lord, from everlasting death
on that dreadful day
when the heavens and the earth
shall be moved when thou shalt come to judge the world by fire.
I quake with fear and I tremble
awaiting the day of account and the wrath to come.
That day, the day of anger,
of calamity, of misery, that day,
the great day, and most bitter.
Grant them eternal rest, o Lord,
and may perpetual light shine upon them.

VII. In Paradisum

*In Paradisum deducant Angeli in tuo
adventu suscipiant te Martyres
et perducant te in civitatem sanctam Jerusalem
Chorus Angelorum te suscipiat
et cum Lazaro quondam paupere
aeternam habeas requiem*

May the angels receive them in Paradise,
at Thy coming may the martyrs receive thee
and bring thee into the holy city Jerusalem.
There may the chorus of angels receive thee,
and with Lazarus, once a beggar,
may thou have eternal rest.



Tu Voz

Text: Soneto 52 by Pablo Neruda

*Cantas y a sol y a cielo con tu canto
tu voz desgrana el cereal del día,
hablan los pinos con su lengua verde:
trinan todas las aves del invierno.*

*El mar llena sus sótanos de pasos,
de campanas, cadenas y gemidos,
tintinean metales y utensilios,
suenan las ruedas de la caravana.*

*Pero sólo tu voz escucho y sube
tu voz con vuelo y precisión de flecha,
baja tu voz con gravedad de lluvia,*

*tu voz esparce altísimas espadas,
vuelve tu voz cargada de violetas
y luego me acompaña por el cielo.*

Translation by Shawn Kirchner

Singing unto the sun and sky with your song,
your voice threshes the grain of the day,
the pines speak with their green tongues,
all the birds of winter trill.

The sea fills its cellar with footsteps,
with bells, chains, and groans –
metal and tools jangle,
the wheels of the caravan creak.

But I hear only your voice – it rises
with the flight and precision of an arrow,
it falls with the gravity of rain,
your voice scatters the highest swords,
and returns laden with violets –
my companion through the skies.

Psalm 61: Hear My Cry

Text: Psalm 61:1-2

Hear my cry, O God, and listen to my prayer.
From the ends of the earth I call upon you
I call with heaviness in my heart.
Set me upon the rock that is higher than I.



O Guiding Night

Text by St John of the Cross; Translation: The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross translated by Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD, and Otilio Rodriguez, OCD, revised edition (1991)

One dark night,
fired with love's urgent longings
– ah, the sheer grace! –
I went out unseen,
my house being now all stilled.

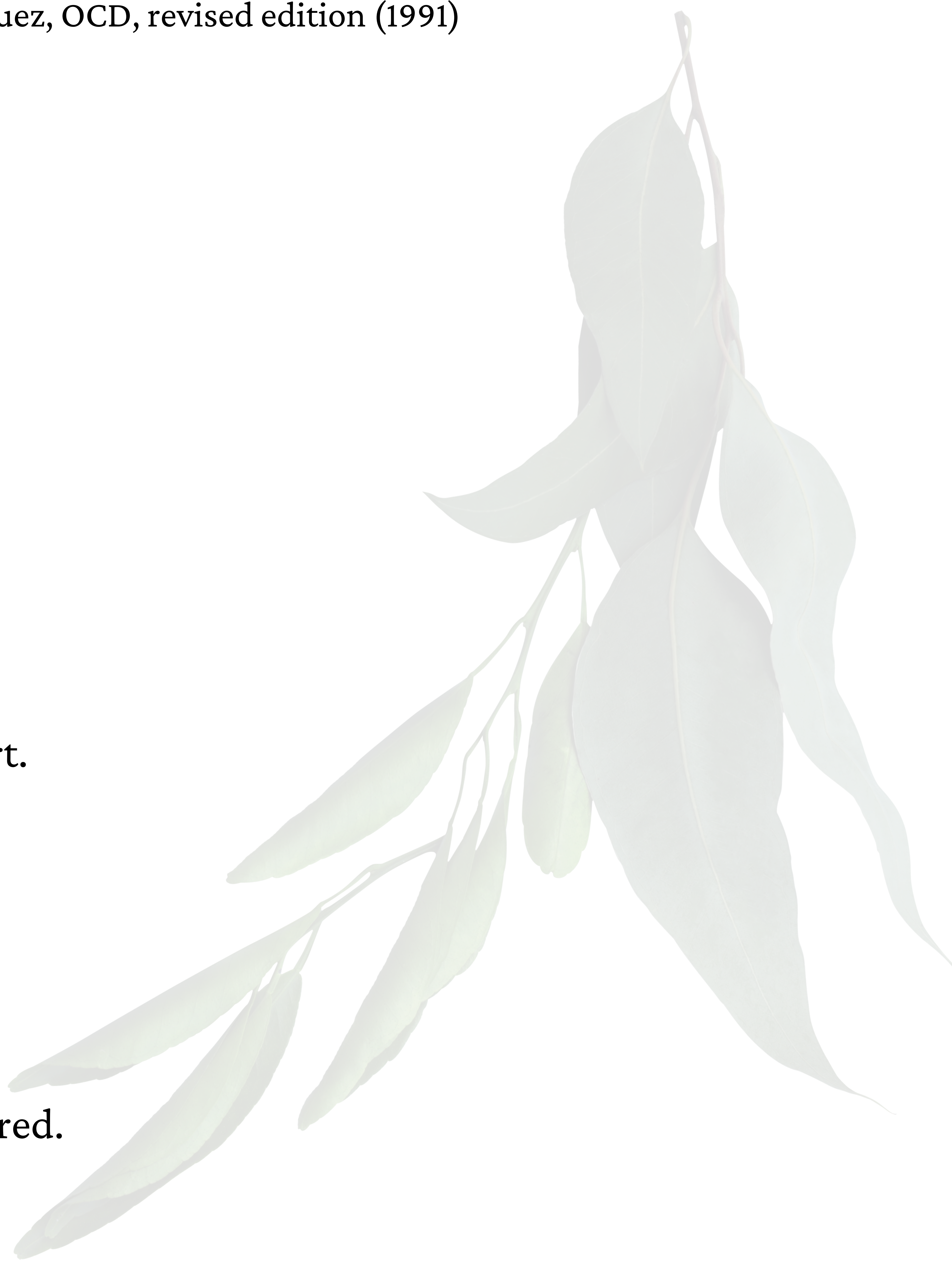
On that glad night,
in secret, for no one saw me,
nor did I look at anything,
with no other light or guide
than the one that burned in my heart.

This guided me
more surely than the light of noon
to where he was awaiting me
– him I knew so well –
there in a place where no one appeared.

O guiding night!
O night more lovely than the dawn!
O night that has united
the Lover with his beloved,
transforming the beloved in her Lover.

Upon my flowering breast
which I kept wholly for him alone,
there he lay sleeping,
and I caressing him
there in a breeze from the fanning cedars.

I abandoned and forgot myself,
laying my face on my Beloved;
all things ceased; I went out from myself,
leaving my cares
forgotten among the lilies.



Water Music

I. Phlebas the Phonecian

from *The Waste Land* by T.S. Eliot

Phlebas the Phonecian, a fortnight dead
Forgot the cry of gulls, and the deep seas swell
And the profit and loss.

A current under sea
Picked his bones in whispers. As he rose and fell
He passed the stages of his age and youth
Entering the whirlpool.

Gentile or Jew

O you who turn the wheel and look to windward,
Consider Phlebas, who was once handsome and tall as you.

II. I Have Heard the Mermaids Singing

from *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* by T.S. Eliot

I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.
I do not think that they will sing to me.

I have seen them riding seaward on the waves
Combing the white hair of the waves blown back
When the wind blows the water white and black.

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.

Antiphon and Psalm

I. O Vos Omnes

Lamentations 1:12

O vos omnes qui transitis per viam

Atendite et videte si est dolor sicut dolor meus

Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?

Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow

II. Laudate Dominum in sanctis ejus

Psalm 150

Laudate Dominum in sanctis eius laudate eum in firmamento virtutis eius

Laudate eum in virtutibus eius laudate eum secundum multitudinem magnitudinis eius

Laudate eum in sono tubae laudate eum in psalterio et cithara

Laudate eum in tympano et choro laudate eum in cordis et organo

Laudate eum in cymbalis bene sonantibus laudate eum in cymbalis iubilationis

Praise ye the Lord in his holy places: praise ye him in the firmament of his power.

Praise ye him for his mighty acts: praise ye him according to the multitude of his
greatness.

Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with psaltery and harp.

Praise him with timbrel and choir: praise him with strings and organs.

Praise him on high sounding cymbals: praise him on cymbals of joy:



USC Thornton Chamber Singers

Soprano 1

Laura Leigh Spillane, Year III, DMA Choral Music, Atlanta, GA

Haeun Baek, Graduate Certificate Voice, South Korea

Marielle Brady, Year II, MA Cinematic Arts (Media Arts, Games, and Health), Hillsborough, NJ

Soprano 2

Rachel Tan, Senior, BA Choral Music, BA Psychology, Arlington, TX

Kathrina Welborn, Sophomore, BS Environmental Studies, Los Altos Hills, CA

Hannah McDonnel, Junior, BM Choral Music, Eden Prairie, MN

Kyra Stahr, Year II, MM Choral Music, Arlington, VA

Shijia Ye, Year I, DMA Choral Music, Shenzhen, China

Alto 1

Emily Sung, Year IV, DMA Choral Music, Lawrenceville, NJ

Ann Chen, Year II, MM Choral Music, Taichung, Taiwan

Klo Garoute, Year I, MM Choral Music, Lawton, OK

Ali Sandweiss Hodges, Year I, Choral music, Detroit, MI

Kaitlyn Son, Freshman, BM Choral Music, Palo Alto, CA

Alto 2

Hyejin Jung, Year III, DMA Choral Music, Incheon, South Korea

Maheen Haseeb, Sophomore, BA Music, pre-med emphasis, Fresno, CA

Elaine Kong, Year I, MM Choral Music, Hong Kong

Rosie Ding, Junior, BM Choral Music, BA Public Relations, Beijing, China

Tenor 1

Stevie Hirner, Year III, DMA Choral Music, Whitehall, PA

Daniel Voigt, Sophomore, BM Vocal Arts, Cedarburg, WI

Samuel Avila, Senior, BM Choral Music, North Hills, CA

Tenor 2

Mike Raleigh, Year I, DMA Choral Music, Boston, MA

Andrew Powell, Junior, BA Music and BA Economics, Billings, MT

Daniel Leese, Junior, BA Jazz Vocals, Malibu, CA

Evan Fox, Freshman, BM Vocal Arts, Phoenix, AZ

Bass 1

Duncan Tuomi, Year I, DMA Choral Music, Portland, OR

Collin Boothby, Year II, DMA Sacred Music, Southworth, WA

Connor Scott, Year II, DMA Choral Music, Hillsboro, MO

Koji Sakano, Senior, BM Choral Music, Pennington, NJ

Townsend Losey, Year II, MM Choral Music, Napa, CA

Bass 2

Carlos Ramirez, Senior, BS Computer Science, Chicago, IL

Theo Trevisan, Year I, MM Composition, Princeton, NJ

David Cerna, Freshman, BM Piano Performance, Anaheim, CA

Adam White, Junior, BS Mechanical Engineering, Lenexa, Kansas, USA

Hsin-Yu Hung, Year II, MM Choral Music, Hsinchu, Taiwan

Tram Sparks

USC Thornton Chamber Singers, Conductor

Tram Sparks is Chair of the Choral and Sacred Music Department and Associate Professor of Practice at the USC Thornton School of Music. Prior to her work in Los Angeles, Sparks was Associate Professor and Associate Director of Choral Activities at Temple University Boyer College of Music & Dance, where she taught from 1999-2009. Dr. Sparks taught graduate and undergraduate courses in choral literature, conducting, and aural theory, and conducted the Concert Choir, University Chorale, Women's Chorus and University Singers over the course of her ten years at Temple University. In addition to her appointment at Temple, she has served as Visiting Assistant Professor of Music at Dordt University (Sioux Center, Iowa) and Director of the Choral Program at St. Joseph's University (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania).

A native of Vietnam and a child refugee of the Vietnam War, Sparks's earliest musical training was in Okinawa, Japan and subsequently, at the San Francisco Conservatory of Music Pre-College Division where her studies included lessons in piano, solfege, eurythmics, and choral music (children's choir). Sparks earned the Bachelor of Music in Piano Performance and the Master of Music in Choral Conducting from Temple University. Her piano training, with the late Harvey Wedeen and David L. Stone, follows in the pedagogical lineages of Adele Marcus, Isabelle Vengerova, and Josef Lhevinne.



Sparks holds a Doctor of Musical Arts in Choral Conducting from Yale University. At Yale School of Music and working with conducting mentor Marguerite Brooks, she completed the interdisciplinary certificate program in Music, Worship and the Arts at the Yale Institute of Sacred Music. She has served as music director at churches and synagogues in Philadelphia and Los Angeles, appears as guest conductor and choral clinician, and serves on the Board of Directors of Tonality. Sparks's research centers on two areas and the subtle interplay between them – conducting technique rooted in modern dance theory and movement analysis (specifically, Graham Technique® and Laban 'Effort-Shape'), and a contextual understanding of cheironomy and its forms and functions in contemporaneous early communities of worship.

Laura Leigh Spillane

USC Thornton Chamber Singers,
Associate Conductor

Laura Leigh Spillane is a third-year Doctor of Musical Arts student in Choral Music at the University of Southern California, where her fields of study are Musicology, Vocology, and Instrumental Conducting. Senior Teaching Assistant for the USC Thornton School of Music, she is in her second year as Associate Conductor of USC's premier choral ensemble, the Chamber Singers. Previously, she served the Thornton School of Music as the Lead Conductor of the University Chorus. She is currently the director of the Chamber Singers at Saddleback Community College, and is the interim director of the Claremont Concert Choir and Claremont Treble Singers (the choral ensembles of the Joint Music Program of Scripps, Pitzer, Harvey Mudd, and Claremont McKenna Colleges).

Prior to her studies at USC, Laura Leigh was a choral director at the middle and high school levels in the Fulton County and Gwinnett County School Districts in Georgia, and also holds over a decade of professional church music service. She was honored as the inaugural recipient of the GA American Choral Directors' Association Young Director Award in 2019.



Laura Leigh holds the Master of Music degree in Conducting from the University of Georgia, where she was a Carl Hoveland Fellow and graduate assistant, and the Bachelor's degree in Music Education from Reinhardt University, where she was a summa cum laude graduate. She was honored with the UGA Excellence in Graduate Teaching Award in 2015. Her conducting teachers include Drs. Cristian Grases, Tram Sparks, Larry Livingston, Daniel Bara, J.D. Burnett, and Martha Shaw.

Matthew Harikian

USC Thornton Chamber Singers,
Collaborative Pianist

A native of Fresno, California, Matthew has extensive performance and teaching experience including performing nationally as a soloist with symphony orchestras and holding faculty appointments at several institutions. He has been awarded top prizes from the Minnesota Music Teacher Association's Young Artist competition, the Schubert Club competition, the Glendale Piano competition, and the Sylvia Ghiglieri competition in Turlock, CA.

In addition to performing as a soloist with the Lompoc Pops, Opera San Luis Obispo and Buffalo Community orchestras, Matthew has maintained an active career in collaborative playing. For two seasons he served as the rehearsal pianist for California Opera Association's productions of Lucia di Lammermoor and La Cenerentola. Recent festival participation includes Pianofest in the Hamptons and Meadowmount School of Music. This past summer, he attended Music Academy of the West as one of the nine selected collaborative piano fellows, during which he was a finalist in the festival's Duo Competition.

Matthew is also passionate about education, both in regards to music theory and piano performance. He has held appointments teaching theory at St. Olaf, Gustavus Adolphus, and Augsburg



Colleges, and has had private teaching experience as well. Sharing an equal interest in performance and academia, he always seeks to stress the importance of synthesizing performance and analysis to his students.

Matthew is currently pursuing his DMA in collaborative piano under the tutelage of Kevin Fitz-Gerald at the University of Southern California. Previous teachers include Lydia Artymiw, Kent McWilliams, Ick-Choo Moon, Konrad Elser, Paul Schenly, and Eric Larsen. He holds a bachelor's degree in piano performance from St. Olaf College and master's degrees in both piano performance and music theory from the University of Minnesota.

Weicheng Zhao

Director of Music, Organist-
Choirmaster, All Saints Pasadena

Dr. Weicheng Zhao is the first Chinese to win international pipe organ competitions. He was a featured recitalist at the American Guild of Organists Regional Conventions (2015, 2019). At the invitation of Jean Guillou, Zhao played a solo recital in Paris at the Saint-Eustache Festival d'orgue, 2011. As an ensemble player, he has performed with the Los Angeles Philharmonic under the baton of Gustavo Dudamel in 2019 and 2020. He was also invited by LA Phil to play on their Chamber Music Series at Walt Disney Concert Hall, 2017. His performances can be heard on National Public Radio (Pipedreams).

Zhao has transcribed over 50 pieces including solos, concertos, and chamber music. In addition, pop music arrangements for piano in 15 volumes were published by Publishing House of the Central Conservatory of Music, Beijing. His commissioned work, transcription of Prokofiev's *The Love for Three Oranges* for three organists (six hands, six feet, one bench) was premiered by Cherry Rhodes, Alan Morrison, and Ken Cowan in 2017. It was recognized as a landmark work in the organ world. His recent commissioned work by the American Guild of Organists West Regional Convention, transcription of Stravinsky's *Fire Bird* for three organists has transfixed audiences and colleagues, and was premiered at the 2019 Convention.

Zhao also plays the Electone Organ (which features orchestral and newly developed electronic sounds). He was the first Chinese to win the 43rd Yamaha International Electronic Organ Competition (2007) which is recognized as the most significant of its kind in the world.



He went on to become a leading performer of international stature. Among numerous performances, he was selected to perform as soloist at significant celebrations, such as the National Day of China, and the World Economic Forum Summer Davos. Born in Tianjin, China, Zhao came to the United States in 2009 to pursue study of the pipe organ with Cherry Rhodes at the University of Southern California, Thornton School of Music, where he received the Doctor of Musical Arts degree. He is currently Director of Music and Organist-Choirmaster at All Saints Episcopal Church in Pasadena, California where he conducts two 50-voice adult choirs.

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