When planting perennials, gardeners will say that these plants will take three years to mature: they sleep, creep, and leap. In the first year, the plants largely grow their root systems, deepening their foundations to survive the toughest weather. In the second, they can get a little bigger, bloom, but still broaden their roots; they begin to show their true potential. In the third, they leap forward, with their full size, color, vigor, and beauty.

This is what it is to have been a choral singer, from the start of the pandemic until now. Two and a half years ago, the Pitt-Greensburg Chorale like all of us were uprooted and scattered. Campus closed before they could share their Spring 2020 music. Many graduated remotely, and then only some returned in-person to campus in the Fall of 2020. Some the singers here today, however, planted a new Chorale. They were fewer than 20 voices, singing alone but together in this very space. They grew our new roots, a foundation to endure the tough times. By Fall 2021, Chorale got a little bigger, showed its musical bloom, and further bolstered its roots. And now, we leap forward: they are as large, robust, and musical a group as we have had in the last few years. We hope tonight you will hear our most radiant colors, the choral garden we set out to grow.

Framing the first half of our program are two Latin sacred works. Faith Zimmer has captured the attention of the American choral world, with her music featured in recent gatherings of the American Choral Directors Association. Her Laus Trinitati was inspired by the 12th century chant of the same name of Hildegard of Bingen. According to Zimmer, "von Bingen’s chant speaks of the Trinity and of God as the source of creativity and life in all of creation. Though hidden to human minds, we can see aspects of God's nature in creation and in our own creativity, and this work explores the idea of being made in the image of a creative God. This setting attempts to capture majestic wonder, effervescent life, and enchanting mystery." Zimmer’s interpretation is based on a pentatonic scale, planing melodic lines, and forceful rhythmic attack. Performed in combination with von Bingen’s chant, they start this performance with serenity and fire.

From a young age, Brazilian-born composer José Maurício Nunes Garcia, living in the same time of Beethoven and Mozart, sang as a chorister, and taught himself to play guitar and harpsichord. By the age of 12, he was teaching; indeed, he learned more instruments by playing those of his students, as his family had none in their home. At 16, he was composing, helping to form a musicians guild (the Brotherhood of St. Cecilia), and beginning studies for the priesthood (he was finally ordained in 1792, but only after the father of one of his students gave him a house, for Brazilian priests had to be property owners). Many of Garcia’s compositions are consequently sacred, including his seminal Requiem. Ave Regina Caelorum displays the balance and decoration of his classical contemporaries, first through a graceful and dancelike tune developed three times in the ensemble, before switching to a boisterous and dynamic conclusion.

In between, the Pitt-Greensburg’s new instrumental ensemble, the Campana Consort (aka the JACLLs, from the names of each of its members), makes its stage debut on a theme of video game music. In the last decade, video game culture has been exploding as a medium for artistic expression. Many people think of the graphics coming first, but it is also a new frontier for music composition. Journey, Sweden, and the Gusty Garden Galaxy Theme represent a cross-section between upbeat and optimistic versus melancholic and feeling. Aside from the massively positive reception of the sequel to Destiny contributing to this piece’s popularity, Journey was also performed by the renowned Kronos Quartet. This group has been performing classical and contemporary pieces for over 45 years with the hope of redefining the creative lens through which music is expressed and
the associated quartet experience. *Sweden* captures the uniquely human curiosity for the great beyond, traversing slow melodies and rhythms as the listener traverses their own mind. Finally, beholding itself in stark contrast to the rest of the set, *GGGT* offers a positive and excited opportunity towards exploration and prospect.

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In the second half of the program, we turn to music of Spanish language and heritage, expressed in music of dance and poetry of love.

In the mid-20th century, Astor Piazzolla reimagined the Argentinian tango as genre not only for small folk instrumental ensembles, but for classical orchestra. He infused the melodies and rhythms of the tango with everything from jazz to blues to Bartok and Stravinsky. Many have been transcribed for other groups, including for choir by Oscar Escalada. *Libertango* is one of Piazzolla’s most popular compositions, recorded by artists in over five hundred releases. The title alludes to Piazzolla’s conscious artistic shift – or liberation, if you will – from traditional tango style to the new "Tango Nuevo." Traditional tango rhythms are often eschewed for new ones, but without losing the innate intensity of the dance. In addition, he incorporates his signature chromatic harmony, forming the foundation for the soaring, romantic lyric lines that make the tango, the tango. *Reminiscence* is a gentle and thoughtful dance, with an intricate soprano melody soaring above vocal imitations of guitars, strings, and bandoneón. (Though wordless, its emotional ruminations color our performance of *Los Castillos*, a song about empty castles.)

Conductor and composer Dr. Joni Jensen wrote *El Vito* in part because she wished for her women’s chorus to sing exciting flamenco-style music of Spain, but managed to find only lullabies! The *vito* is a song and dance of Andalusia, named for St. Vitus, the patron saint of dance. Jensen wrote the rhythms and the guitar-like piano part to be “fierce and flashy.” And, they are: we would not begrudge you if you felt its mania, and must get up and dance!

Garcilaso de la Vega was a Renaissance poet and military man, as skilled with the pen as he was with a sword. He wrote fewer than 40 sonnets before his death in combat at 33, but his poetry is passionate and fine. Contemporary composer Z. Randall Stroope sets his words with a split choir, the sopranos and altos largely sharing a long, languid melody atop the thick-textured tenors and basses, like a deep and rich organ accompaniment. The two sides begin to share a countermelody on the text “Mi alma os ha cortado a su medida” (My soul has formed you to its measure), before uniting at “Por habito...” – I want you as a garment for my soul. (A note from the conductor – I have had this piece in my mind and heart since first singing it 15 years ago in Arizona, and am so pleased that this Chorale now shares it with you.)

We part with the lullaby *Con Amores, la mi madre* by Renaissance composer Juan de Ancieta of Spain, a graceful thank you to all the wonderful mothers who take from us all our worries and fears, so that we may sleep peacefully. We segue to another by Stroope, *Omnia Sol*, as a ballad of parting but never apart. From its Latin refrain: “The sun warms everything even when I am far away; love me faithfully, and know that I am faithful.” This week’s weather notwithstanding, the winter melts away to the warmth of spring, showing just how far we have leapt, and how much our garden has grown.

Chris Bartley
Lucas Wycich
William E. Runyan