
Program Notes: *Where the Light Begins*

In a time when darkness often feels ever-present—whether in our world, our communities, or our inner lives—VOX Femina Los Angeles invites you on a journey toward light, hope, and renewal. Through music that spans centuries and styles, languages and landscapes, we explore what it means to encounter the shadows, to sit with uncertainty, and ultimately to move toward the brilliance of truth, peace, and possibility.

In God's Light

Our concert opens with a sense of sacred grounding. In this set, we center the divine spark that lives within us and connects us to each other. J. David Moore's ***Make Me One*** is an invocation, calling for unity amidst brokenness, setting a tone of intentional harmony. The text is a quiet prayer for spiritual connection with light and darkness and, by extension, the whole of experience: "At night, make me one with the darkness, In the morning, make me one with the light." Hildegard von Bingen's ***O frondens virga***, composed nearly 1,000 years ago, reminds us that the human spirit—like the verdant branch—can bloom and flourish under divine light. Elaine Hagenberg's ***You Do Not Walk Alone*** draws inspiration from the traditional Irish blessing that gives the piece its title. Reflecting Celtic musical elements including a simple melody that rises and falls like the rolling Irish hills and delicate folk rhythms gently grace the scene, it offers gentle reassurance: no matter the journey or struggle, we are accompanied by grace, and by one another.

A Shining Night

This set lifts our eyes skyward, embracing the gentle illumination that the night offers—quiet, poetic, and sublime. Clara Schumann's ***Der Mond kommt still gegangen*** is a tender, moonlit meditation from one of the great Romantic composers, rich with introspection and longing, describing a lover's solitude while gazing across a moonlit valley at a light in the beloved's window. Morten Lauridsen's ***Sure on This Shining Night*** sets James Agee's evocative poetry with glowing lyricism, capturing the beauty and hope that can be found even in life's quietest moments.

Conflict / Resolution

Here, we traverse the fragile terrain of a fractured world—where pain, fear, and uncertainty challenge our sense of equilibrium. These works linger in the dissonance yet gently reach toward the possibility of healing. Rich Campbell's ***In Those Years, No One Slept*** captures the unease of

living through turbulent times, its harmonies restless and unresolved. Kevin Memley's *There Will Come Soft Rains*, set to Sara Teasdale's haunting poem, envisions a world where nature endures long after human conflict has quieted. Kyle Pederson's *Can We Sing the Darkness to Light?* poses the essential question of this set—and perhaps of the entire concert: Can music lead us from despair into hope? VOX responds with a luminous and resounding “yes.” Closing the set, *Lookin' for Blue Sky*—a new commission by David O, sponsored by the Parker and Dorn families in memory of Tyler Parker—reminds us that even through the darkest night, we can still glimpse the blue sky “piercing down through the dark.”

The Promise of Light

From the shadows of conflict emerges the promise of something new. These pieces invite us to look beyond what has been and imagine what could be. *Lea Morris' Be the Light*, inspired by the poem “The Hill We Climb,” by National Youth Poet Laureate Amanda Gorman, is both anthem and call to action, reminding us that we are not passive recipients of change—we are its source. We arrive at the heart of the concert's message: the light is here. It was always within us. Susan LaBarr's *Where the Light Begins* gives the concert its title and its emotional centerpiece—a luminous reminder that light doesn't just find us; it is born from within us. Craig Carnelia's *Flight* embodies that spirit of transformation, lifting us into a place of personal freedom and possibility.

The Light Shines

This closing set celebrates awakening, clarity, and the radiant energy of being fully alive. Craig Hella Johnson's *Will There Really Be a Morning?*, setting Emily Dickinson's yearning verse, captures the ache of anticipation—and the joy of discovery. His arrangement of *Light of a Clear Blue Morning* then bursts forth in radiant affirmation, declaring a new day after long darkness.

Bold New World

In closing, Elaine Hagenberg's *By Night* captures the quiet courage it takes to step forward when the path is unclear. The composer imagines a dark and mysterious night beckoning a young woman to experience a thrilling adventure and discovery of a bold and beautiful new world.

In *Where the Light Begins*, through the voices of women and the power of choral music, we journeyed from the sacred and serene to the urgent and uplifting. The light begins here—with us, with you, with the music.