



Contemporary “shape-note” tunes on this album, by Adam Jacob Simon, Moira Smiley, and Dana Maiben, are rooted in this early musical tradition as preserved by Northern Harmony (a contemporary ensemble based in Vermont). Maiben’s optimistic tune adopts the progressive spiritual voice of Emily Dickinson (Vermont, arranged here for Lorelei from its original SATB version). Simon sets a poem of Isaac Watts (Billings’s contemporary and choice poet) infused with subtly contemporary harmonies; it is stirring in its profound simplicity (Inman). As per tradition, each of these composers names their hymn tune with a place: Maiben rode on a bus through Vermont as she wrote; Inman is Simon’s home square in Cambridge. Smiley’s place is not her own, however. Utopia (“no-place”), a setting of selected verses from Joseph Swain’s 18th-century hymn, refers to sentiments of longing for an unknown place of redemption and rest.

The works commissioned for this album speak directly to contemporary conversations about personal and national identity in the U.S., while remaining rooted in traditional tunes and texts. “Pretty Saro” is an English folk song thought to have originated in the 1700s and “rediscovered” in the Appalachian Mountains in the early 20th century. Its lyrics had been altered but the subject remained: lost love due to geographical separation.

Composer Joshua Shank writes about the personal meaning he drew from this text in arranging *Saro*: “Singers would often tailor their renditions to local customs or their own life experiences and, in the various interpretations of the story, there are many different descriptions of who Saro is. Sometimes she is a sister, sometimes a lover. Either way, she is apart from the speaker and it’s obvious that this person be it man or woman — has lost a love which sustained them in an incredibly profound way. What I always think of when I hear this tune is the experience of a person immigrating to the United States and what it must have been like for them to leave someone they loved thousands of miles away. From immigrants processing through Ellis Island in 1905 to a Hispanic boy in 2014 wearing a t-shirt that says ‘Don’t Deport My Mom,’ it’s clear that sometimes things still don’t go the way we want them to. In this moment, our lives are defined by one heart-breaking event: saying goodbye.”

Joshua Bornfield’s *Reconstruction* is a stirring and progressive contemporary statement, based on five explicitly sacred tunes: three from the 19th century Sacred Harp songbook (“Mercy Seat,” “Amazing Grace,” and “Song to the Lamb”), and two popularized during the Tent Revival movement in the Reconstruction era.

continued inside...

TRACK LISTING

1. AFRICA
WILLIAM BILLINGS (1746-1800)
2. VERMONT
DANA MAIBEN (B. 1954)
3. SARO
JOSHUA SHANK (B. 1980)
4. TAUNTON
WILLIAM BILLINGS (1746-1800)
5. INMAN
ADAM JACOB SIMON (B. 1987)
6. UTOPIA
MOIRA SMILEY (B. 1976)
- 7-11. RECONSTRUCTION
JOSHUA BORNFIELD (B. 1980)
7. CROWNS
(MERCY SEAT)
8. WRATH
(BATTLE HYMN OF THE REPUBLIC/
JOHN BROWN’S BODY)
9. BROTHER SISTER MOURNER
(AMAZING GRACE)
10. FAREWELL
(LONG TIME TRAVELIN’)
11. SALVATION
(SONG OF THE LAMB)

LORELEI ENSEMBLE

BETH WILLER
CONDUCTOR AND ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

EMILY CULLER SOPRANO
SARAH MOYER SOPRANO
MARGOT ROOD SOPRANO
SONJA TENGBLAD SOPRANO
CHRISTINA ENGLISH MEZZO-SOPRANO
CLARE MCNAMARA MEZZO-SOPRANO
STEPHANIE KACOYANIS ALTO
EMILY MARVOSH ALTO

SHAW PONG LIU VIOLIN (track 2)

CARSON COOMAN / PRODUCER
MICHAEL CULLER / ENGINEER
CAI VAIL / GRAPHIC DESIGN
ALLANA TARANTO / PHOTOGRAPHY

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www.LoreleiEnsemble.com



Lorelei Ensemble

RECONSTRUCTED

BETH WILLER, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR



Lorelei Ensemble

Boston’s Lorelei Ensemble is quickly becoming recognized as a source of some of the most innovative and inventive programming in Boston and beyond. An all-professional vocal ensemble, Lorelei is comprised of nine women whose expertise ranges from early to contemporary repertoire, and whose independent careers as soloists and ensemble singers across the globe lead to the rich and diverse vocal palate that defines the ensemble’s consistent delivery of “exact, smooth, and stylish” programming (Boston Globe). Committed to the expansion of the repertoire for women’s voices, Lorelei has commissioned and premiered more than fifty new works since its founding in 2007, its very obvious music, except that the tension are left with simple philosophy and the glorification of war. *Brother, Sister, Mourner* comes from a version of “Amazing Grace” written by R.F.M. Mann. The juxtaposition of assumption and truth that defines Reconstruction is most apparent here: the people listening know the words to this song, but the song itself is unknown to them, at least until the final verse, in which the well-known tune is presented with one of Newton’s verses that is no longer regularly performed. *Farewell*, based on Edgar Dumas’s 1856 American music, fearlessly reconstructed from the rich body of American musical language and style that precedes us.

A Note From The Director

To define an “American” aesthetic, or any national aesthetic for that matter, is to bind our artistry to a place and its people. It is a task of seeking personal identity within a specific reality or community. This definition is particularly hard to pin down with any precision in a nation of increasing diversity. What seems to remain constant in American musical language, amidst this constantly shifting landscape, is a certain melodic optimism caught between harmonic and/or rhythmic contention. There is inherently a struggle, most often dressed in sentiments of revolution, defiance, or victory. It is unapologetic and open, clear and earthbound. It does not seek a specific order, but rather accepts multiple orders and philosophies as essential to its identity. American music is, essentially, a music that strengthens and champions the individual as an independent agent of a whole—a composer’s distinct style, the personal expression of a folk tune. Accepting this cultural context, American musicians have developed an acute awareness of what has gone before, but always with an eye on what has not yet been attempted.

William Billings and his colonial contemporaries sought a new American style that was distinct from European classical models. Contention is heard in the raw harmonic language and reckless voice-leading of his hymns and anthems. Billings’s extensive output primarily used texts of his contemporaries—often the fiery words of English evangelist Isaac Watts (credited with 750 hymns), alterations of biblical verse in the vernacular, and even his own poetry. Through the publication of six collections in this “new American” style, Billings showed his commitment to the cultivation of a vibrant culture of group singing in America. Handel-ian figures and imitative textures in his “fuging tunes” (Taunton) subtly bow to older European tradition, while the texts, notation, and performance practices (voluntary octave doubling, free folk-like ornamentation, and strident vocal production) were wholly contemporary. Living in Boston, and working alongside icons such as Samuel Adams and Paul Revere (Revere engraved Billings’s New England Psalm Singer in 1770), Billings was driven by both philosophy and place. Qualities of optimism and resilience in American music certainly found their roots here, among revolutionaries.

The final song, *Salvation*, is the movement that owes the most to its source material (“Song to the Lamb,” author unknown). Though its text hearkens to the Agnus Dei of the mass ordinary, the closing consists of two musics: the old and the new that attempts to usurp it. As in the case of each of these songs, the old music refuses to allow the new to take hold long enough to change the listener’s perception. Most of the text for *Wrath* is drawn from Julia Ward Howe’s “Battle Hymn of the Republic” but intentionally lacks the chorus (“Glory, glory, hallelujah!”). Instead, we listen’s expectation for what ought to happen in this very obvious music, except that the tension generated at the end of the piece is not released within its own confines. The listener must resolve that tension by themselves.”

This album is a collection of works by individual American composers, while it is united in purpose, it presents a multiplicity of perspectives and philosophies defining American values and identity. In uniting these works into a single album for one of Newton’s verses that is no longer regularly performed. *Farewell*, based on Edgar Dumas’s 1856 American music, fearlessly reconstructed from the rich body of American musical language and style that precedes us.

— Beth Willer, Artistic Director

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