

PROMISE & PROPHECY

Sonnet, saga, soliloquy, and sorcery:

The music of Martha Sullivan

Certain dragons (2025)

Elements of distance (2010)

Epithalamion (2009)

Lazarus (2017)

Madrigals of Nostradamus (2002)

Shakespeare's throat (2016)

Two Dickinson songs (2015)



THE ESOTERICS

Directed by Eric Banks

Saturday | 17 May 2025 | 8:00pm

Plymouth United Church of Christ

1217 6th Avenue | Seattle

Sunday | 18 May 2025 | 7:00pm

Christ Episcopal Church

310 North K Street | Tacoma

PROMISE & PROPHECY

Sonnet, saga, soliloquy, and sorcery:
The music of Martha Sullivan

P R O G R A M

Please turn off all noise-making devices, and refrain from talking during the performance.
Please hold our applause until the end of each group of pieces. There will be a 10-minute intermission.

All of the compositions in this program were composed by Martha Sullivan (b 1964).

Epithalamion (2009)

- I. Time
- II. Nocturne [Sarah Haynes, Betsy Baeskens, Emily Gu, *solo trio*]
- III. Banishment
- IV. Silence & play [Sarah Haynes, *soprano solo*]
- V. Blessing

Two Dickinson songs (2015)

- I. I shall keep singing
- II. Put up my lute

Shakespeare's throat (2016)

- I. The lark [Emily Gu, *soprano solo*]
- II. Ophelia-moan [Betsy Baeskens, *soprano solo*]
- III. Who is Sylvia?

Elements of distance (2010)

- I. Dull substance and heavy tears [Sarah Haynes & Michael Saunders, *soprano & baritone solos*]
- II. The other one [Brittni Liyanage, *soprano solo*]

INTERMISSION

Madrigals of Nostradamus (2002)

- I. Lettres trouvées de la royne
- II. Les deux licornes
- III. Les oz des piedz [Eli Baum, Nick Orlando, Prayaas Aggarwal, *solo trio*]
- IV. La grande royne [Brittni Liyanage, *soprano solo*]

Lazarus (2016)

Certain dragons (2025)

- I. On a dream [Emily Gu, *soprano solo*]
- II. The dragon and the undying
- III. Hope that you may understand
- IV. Dragon of my heart
- V. A sea symphony [Lisa Wang, *soprano solo*]
- VI. Drinking song

THE ESOTERICS

Eric Banks *Founding director*

Ally King

Amy Korver

Betsy Baeskens

Brittni Liyanage

Eli Mulberry

Eli Baum

Emily Gu

Eric Samelson

Jeremy Evans

Jim Peterson

Joe Scott

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Nick Orlando

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T H E E S O T E R I C S

Now at the start of its 32nd season, Seattle's most innovative chorus has drawn local, national, and international praise for performing rarely-heard compositions of contemporary music for unaccompanied voices, for infusing elements of the literary, theatrical, and visual arts into the typical concert experience, and for inspiring and performing new *a cappella* choral settings of poetry, philosophy, and spiritual writings by composers around the world. In early 1992, Eric Banks brought together a group of friends to perform his Master's and Doctoral recitals in Choral Studies at the University of Washington. After Banks' recitals were completed, the group wanted to keep singing together, so Banks chose a name for his ensemble based on the Greek adjective **εσωτερικος** – which describes a close-knit community and the secret knowledge that its members share. Since incorporating with this name in 1993, The Esoterics has performed hundreds of concerts throughout the Pacific Northwest, has commissioned and premiered hundreds of new works for *a cappella* voices in myriad languages, and has mastered many of the most virtuosic choral works of the last century in concerts described as “compelling,” “crafted,” “luxuriant,” “lyrical,” “sumptuous,” and “superb.” The Esoterics has released twenty-one CD recordings on its own label (Terpsichore) and has been honored to compete at the 2000 Cork International Choral Festival (Ireland), the 2001 Certamen Coral de Tolosa (Spain), and the 2006 Harald Andersén International Choir Competition in Helsinki (Finland). As well, The Esoterics has demonstrated its continuing commitment to choral education in becoming the only choral ensemble in Washington State that grants continuing-education credit to its members who also teach in the public schools. In recognition for its efforts in choral education and innovation, The Esoterics has been honored five times with the ASCAP and Chorus America Award for the Adventurous Programming of Contemporary Music (in 2001, 2003, 2006, 2008, and 2017). The Esoterics has been honored to receive grants from the arts commissions of Washington State, King County, and the City of Seattle, as well as funding from Amazon, Google, Microsoft, the Seattle Foundation, the Aaron Copland Fund for Music, the BMI Foundation, and the National Endowment for the Arts. The Esoterics is a proud member chorus of ACDA (the American Choral Directors Association), Chorus America, IFCM (the International Federation for Choral Music), and GALA (the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses).

M I S S I O N S T A T E M E N T

The Esoterics is a Seattle-based vocal ensemble that is dedicated to performing and perpetuating contemporary *a cappella* choral settings of poetry, philosophy, and spiritual writings from around the world.

While cultivating artistic expression and cultural understanding among its singers and audience alike, The Esoterics aspires to reflect the beauty, power, and significance that are inherent in the music of our time.

E R I C B A N K S

Conductor, composer, clinician, vocalist, linguist, and ethnomusicologist, Eric Banks has garnered significant acclaim as one of the most creative and compelling choral directors in the United States for his unwavering commitment to new music for unaccompanied voices. In 1992, Eric founded The Esoterics, a professional-caliber chamber chorus in Seattle whose mission is to perform and perpetuate contemporary choral music beyond the scope of the established *a cappella* canon. After completing his BA in Composition at Yale University in 1990, Eric relocated to Seattle to study in the departments of Choral Studies and Music Theory at the University of Washington. His MM thesis (1992) is a performance edition of *Dixit Dominus* by Chiara Margarita Cozzolani; his MA thesis (1995) is a postmodern analysis of Arvo Pärt's *Credo*; and his DMA dissertation (1996) surveys the choral music of Mexican composer and Aztec ethnomusicologist Carlos Chávez. In 1997, at the conclusion of his graduate study, Banks traveled to Sweden as a Fulbright Scholar and Lois Roth Fellow in order to learn more about its contemporary choral culture. While in Stockholm, Eric performed with several ensembles, including the Swedish Radio Choir and the Eric Ericson Chamber Choir. In his music, Eric is drawn to ideas that are 'esoteric' in origin, and chooses to express concepts that are undiscovered, under-represented, or not easily decipherable to a wider audience. As a composer, Banks has been able to combine his love of poetry, foreign language, classical civilization, social justice, comparative religion, and the natural sciences to create a growing repertoire of new works for *a cappella* chorus. Several of Banks' commissioned works have been recorded by The Esoterics, and can be found on CDs released on the *Terpsichore* label. Eric was a visiting scholar at the Royal Conservatory of Music and Swedish National Radio in Stockholm, as well as at the Cama Oriental Institute in Mumbai, India. Winner of the 2010 *Dale Warland Singers Commission Award* from Chorus America and the American Composers Forum, Eric has received composition and research grants from 4Culture, the Aaron Copland Fund for Music, Artist Trust, the Atwood Foundation, New Music USA, the San Francisco Arts Commission, Seattle CityArtists, the Washington State Arts Commission, and three creativity grants the National Endowment for the Arts. Eric is a member of ASCAP, and you can read more about his work at: www.ericbanks.com.

MARTHA SULLIVAN

An award-winning composer, Martha Sullivan is frequently asked to create new music for particular ensembles, or for individual singers. Recent commissions include two new works as part of the concert-length retrospective of her choral work by The Esoterics; “Chasing Light”, a song cycle for Essential Voices (North Carolina); and “Bend, Break, Burn, Rise”, for the New York-based chamber ensemble ChamberQUEER.

Sullivan’s awards have come from her work in choral music, including a Chamber Music America commission to compose “Certain Dragons” for the Western Wind Vocal Ensemble; the Sorel Medallion for “Shakespeare’s Throat”; and the Dale Warland Choral Ventures commission to complete “Epithalamion”. In addition to works composed for numerous choirs around the country, Sullivan’s catalogue also includes many art songs, as well as orchestral and chamber works, and incidental music for theater. G. Schirmer, Laurendale, and See•A•Dot have all published her choral music.

Sullivan composed her first original works for voice during the seven years she sang with the Gregg Smith Singers, who promoted new American choral music for half a century; from there, she went on to sing, compose, and conduct in C4: The Choral Composer/Conductor Collective (New York). Her experience as a professional singer—she studied opera in Boston after her undergraduate work at Yale, then sang in New York for many years—helps her create work notable for its lyricism and singability.

In academia, Sullivan recently completed her PhD in Music at Rutgers (October, 2023). Her dissertation, “The Siren Topos: Definition and Signification”, analyses a particular melodic gesture—an unusually wide upward leap—through the lenses of semiotics, feminism, embodiment, and queer music theory. Her scholarship belongs to the field of topic analysis—an area within music theory—and Sullivan has presented numerous papers in that area at conferences, including international-level ones such as the Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society and the Society for Music Theory. The nature of Sullivan’s area of study allows her to critique a wide range of repertoires, ranging from nineteenth-century opera to popular music of the twentieth century to theme songs of science-fiction television shows.

Sullivan has also taught a wide variety of subjects in both college and pre-college programs. For the last several years, she has taught World Music (an introduction to ethnomusicology) at Rutgers–Newark, and Forum, the required first-year course for students at Rutgers’ Honors College in New Brunswick, NJ. In addition, Sullivan teaches music composition, musicianship, and singing at the Bard College Conservatory’s Preparatory Division, a music program for pre-college students. In all her teaching, Sullivan’s primary goal has been to help students find their own voices as creators, no matter the discipline they are pursuing. Martha Sullivan is an ASCAP composer.

Texts & translations

Epithalamion (2009)

setting verses from the epic poem *Epithalamion* (1595)
by Edmund Spenser (1552-1599)

I. Time

Ah! when will this long weary day have end,
And lende me leave to come unto my love?
How slowly do the houres theyr numbers spend?
How slowly does sad Time his feathers move?
Haste thee, O fayrest Planet, to thy home,
Within the Westerne fome:
Thy tyrèd steedes long since have need of rest.
Long though it be, at last I see it gloome,
And the bright evening-star with golden creast
Appeare out of the East.
Fayre childe of beauty! glorious lampe of love!
That all the host of heaven in rankes doost lead,
And guydest lovers through the nights sad dread,
How chearefully thou lookest from above,
And seemst to laugh atweene thy twinkling light,
As joying in the sight
Of these glad many, which for joy doe sing,
That all the woods them answer, and their echo ring.

II. Nocturne

Now welcome night, thou night so long expected,
That long daies labour doest at last defray,
And all my cares, which cruell love collected,
Hast sumd in one, and cancellèd for aye:
Spread thy broad wing over my love and me,
That no man may us see,
And in thy sable mantle us enwrap,
From feare of perrill and foule horror free.
Let no false treason seeke us to entrap,
Nor any dread disquiet once annoy
The safety of our joy:
But let the night be calme and quietsome,
Without tempestuous storms or sad afay:
Lyke as when Jove with fayre Alcmena lay,
When he begot the great Tirynthian groome:
Or lyke as when he with thy selfe did lie,
And begot Majesty.
And let the mayds and yongmen cease to sing:
Ne let the woods them answer, nor their echo ring.

III. Banishment

Let no lamenting cryes, nor dolefull teares,
Be heard all night within nor yet without:
Ne let false whispers, breeding hidden feares,
Breake gentle sleepe with misconceivèd dout.
Let no deluding dreames, nor dreadful sights
Make sudden sad affrights;
Ne let housefyres, nor lightnings helpelesse harmes,
Ne let the Pouke, nor other evill sprights,
Ne let mischivous witches with theyr charmes,
Ne let hob Goblins, names whose sence we see not,
Fray us with things that be not.
Let not the shriech Oule, nor the Storke be heard:
Nor the night Raven that still deadly yels,
Nor damnd ghosts cald up with mighty spels,
Nor griesly vultures make us once affeard:
Ne let th'unpleasant Quyre of Frogs still croking
Make us to wish theyr choking.
Let none of these theyr drery accents sing;
Ne let the woods them answer, nor their echo ring.

IV. Silence & play

But let stil Silence trew night watches keepe,
That sacred peace may in assurance rayne,
And tymely sleep, when it is tyme to sleepe,
May poure his limbs forth on your pleasant playne,
The whiles an hundred little wingèd loves,
Like divers fethered doves,
Shall fly and flutter round about your bed,
And in the secret darke, that none reproves,
Their prety stelthes shal worke, and snares shal spread
To filch away sweet snatches of delight,
Conceald through covert night.
Ye sonnes of Venus, play your sports at will,
For greedy pleasure, carelesse of your toyes,
Thinks more upon her paradise of joyes,
Then what ye do, albe it good or ill.
All night therefore attend your merry play,
For it will soone be day:
Now none doth hinder you, that say or sing,
Ne will the woods now answer, nor your echo ring.

V. Blessing

And ye high heavens, the temple of the gods,
In which a thousand torches flaming bright
Doe burne, that to us wretched earthly clods,
In dreadful darknesse lend desirèd light;
And all ye powers which in the same remayne,
More then we men can fayne,
Poure out your blessing on us plentiously,
And happy influence upon us raine...
So let us rest, sweet love, in hope of this,
And cease till then our tymely joyes to sing,
The woods no more us answer, nor our echo ring.

Two Dickinson songs (2015)

setting two poems by Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

I. I shall keep singing (#250, 1861)

I shall keep singing!
Birds will pass me
On their way to Yellower Climes—
Each—with a Robin's expectation—
I—with my Redbreast—
And my Rhymes—

Late—when I take my place in summer—
But—I shall bring a fuller tune—
Vespers—are sweeter than Matins—Signor—
Morning—only the seed of Noon—

II. Put up my lute (#261, 1862)

Put up my lute!
What of—my Music!
Since the sole ear I cared to charm—
Passive—as Granite—laps my music—
Sobbing—will suit—as well as psalm!

Would but the "Memnon" of the Desert—
Teach me the strain
That vanquished Him—
When He—surrendered to the Sunrise—
Maybe—that—would awaken—them!

Shakespeare's throat (2016)

setting songs from three plays
by William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

I. The lark (from *Cymbeline* II.3, 1611)

Hark, hark! the lark at heaven's gate sings,
And Phoebus 'gins arise,
His steeds to water at those springs
On chaliced flowers that lies;
And winking Mary-buds begin
To ope their golden eyes:
With every thing that pretty is,
My lady sweet, arise:
Arise, arise.

II. Ophelia-moan (from *Hamlet* IV.5, 1601)

And will he not come again?
And will he not come again?
No, no, he is dead,
Go to thy deathbed.
He never will come again.
His beard was as white as snow,
All flaxen was his poll.
He is gone, he is gone,
And we cast away moan,
God ha' mercy on his soul.—

III. Who is Sylvia? (from *Two gentlemen of Verona* IV.2, 1593)

Who is Silvia? what is she,
That all our swains commend her?
Holy, fair, and wise is she;
The heaven such grace did lend her,
That she might admirèd be.

Is she kind as she is fair?
For beauty lives with kindness.
Love doth to her eyes repair,
To help him of his blindness;
And, being helped, inhabits there.

Then to Silvia let us sing,
That Silvia is excelling;
She excels each mortal thing
Upon the dull earth dwelling;
To her let us garlands bring.

Elements of distance (2009-2010)

setting two sonnets about the four ancient elements
by William Shakespeare (1564-1616)

I. Dull substance and heavy tears (Sonnet XLIV, 1609)

If the dull substance of my flesh were thought,
Injurious distance should not stop my way;
For then despite of space I would be brought,
From limits far remote, where thou dost stay.
No matter then although my foot did stand
Upon the furthest earth removed from thee;
For nimble thought can jump both sea and land
As soon as think the place where he would be.
But, ah! thought kills me that I am not thought,
To leap large lengths of miles when thou art gone,
But that so much of earth and water wrought
I must attend time's leisure with my moan,
Receiving nought by elements so slow
But heavy tears, badges of either's woe.

II. The other two (Sonnet XLV, 1609)

The other two, slight air and purging fire,
Are both with thee, wherever I abide;
The first my thought, the other my desire,
These present-absent with swift motion slide.
For when these quicker elements are gone
In tender embassy of love to thee,
My life, being made of four, with two alone
Sinks down to death, oppressed with melancholy:
Until life's composition be recured
By those swift messengers returned from thee,
Who even but now come back again, assured
Of thy fair health, recounting it to me.
This told, I joy; but then, no longer glad,
I send them back again and straight grow sad.

INTERMISSION

Madrigals of Nostradamus (2002)

setting four quatrains from *Les prophéties* (1555)

by Michel de Nostredame, or Nostradamus (1503-1566)

I. Lettres trouvées de la royne (S8 Q23)

Lettres trouvées de la royne les coffres,
Letters found in the queen's cabinet,
Point de subscrit sans aucun nom d'auteur.
No signature, without any author's name.
Par la police seront cachez les offres,
By the police the offers will be hidden,
Qu'on ne sçaura qui sera l'amateur.
So that nobody will discover the beneficiary.

II. Les deux licornes (S7 Q43)

Lorsqu'on verra les deux licornes,
As soon as one sees the two unicorns,
L'une baissant, l'autre abaissant,
One reverencing, the other doing the same,
Monde au milieu, plier aux bornes,
The world in the middle, bending its boundaries,
S'enfuyra le nepveu riant.
The nephew will run away, laughing.

III. Les oz des piedz (S7 Q41)

Les oz des piedz et des mains enserrés,
The bones of the feet and the hands locked away,
Par bruit maison longtemps inhabitée:
Because of the noise, the house long uninhabited:
Seront par songes concavant deterrés,
They will be unearthed through digging in dreams,
Maison salubre et sans bruit habitée.
A house healthy and inhabited without noise.

IV. La grande royne (S1 Q86)

La grande royne quand se verra vaincue,
The great queen, when she sees herself conquered,
Fera excès de masculin courage:
Will be excessive in masculine courage:
Sur cheval, fleuve passera toute nue,
Upon a horse, she will pass over the river totally nude,
Suite par fer: à foi sera outrage.
Pursued by the sword: she will be an outrage to her faith.

Lazarus (2017)

setting the poem *The new Colossus* (1883)

by Emma Lazarus (1849-1887)

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand
Glow's world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.

"Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she
With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

Certain dragons (2019-2025)

a cycle of six poems on the theme of the dragon

I. On a dream

setting lines from the sonnet of the same title (1819)
by John Keats (1795-1821)

So on a Delphic reed, my idle spright
So play'd, so charm'd, so conquer'd, so bereft
The dragon-world of all its hundred eyes;
And seeing it asleep, so fled away,
...to that second circle of sad Hell,
Where in the gust, the whirlwind, and the flaw
Of rain and hail-stones, lovers need not tell
Their sorrows—pale were the sweet lips I saw,
Pale were the lips I kiss'd, and fair the form
I floated with, about that melancholy storm.

II. The dragon and the undying

setting the sonnet of the same title (1917)
by Siegfried Sassoon (1886-1967)

All night the flares go up; the Dragon sings
And beats upon the dark with furious wings;
And, stung to rage by his own darting fires,
Reaches with grappling coils from town to town;
He lusts to break the loveliness of spires,
And hurls their martyred music toppling down.
Yet, though the slain are homeless as the breeze,
Vocal are they, like storm-bewilder'd seas.
Their faces are the fair, unshrouded night,
And planets are their eyes, their ageless dreams.
Tenderly stooping earthward from their height,
They wander in the dusk with chanting streams,
And they are dawn-lit trees, with arms up-flung,
To hail the burning heavens they left unsung.

III. Hope that you may understand

setting the poem *The realists* (1912)
by William Butler Yeats (1865-1939)

Hope that you may understand!
What can books of men that wive
In a dragon-guarded land,
Paintings of the dolphin-drawn
Sea-nymphs in their pearly waggons
Do, but awake a hope to live
That had gone
With the dragons?

IV. Dragon of my heart

setting a poem by the composer (2019)

Dragon of my heart,
Curled in the vessels of my blood,
Hoarder of desire,
Claw of the wounded,
I thought I locked you safe inside.
But worms have their ways.
Come back, Dragon,
With your scales and your flame!
Sear all my soul away again.

V. A sea symphony

setting verses from *Symphonic studies*
(after Robert Schumann) (1871)
by Emma Lazarus (1849-1887)

Behold within the cool and liquid glass
Bright child-folk sporting with smooth yellow shells,
Astride of dolphins, leaping up to kiss
Fair mother-faces.
From the vast abyss
How joyously their thought-free laughter wells!
Some slumber in grim caverns unafraid,
Lulled by the overwhelming water's sound,
And some make mouths at dragons, undismayed.
Oh dauntless innocence! The gulfs profound
Reëcho strangely with their ringing glee,
And with wise mermaids' plaintive melody.

VI. Drinking song

setting the poem *Drinking song:*
Inscription for an antique pitcher (1845)
by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882)

Come, old friend! sit down and listen!
From the pitcher, placed between us,
How the waters laugh and glisten
In the head of old Silenus!

Now to rivulets from the mountains
Point the rods of fortune-tellers;
Youth perpetual dwells in fountains,—
Not in flasks, and casks, and cellars.

Claudius, though he sang of flagons
And huge tankards filled with Rhenish,
From that fiery blood of dragons
Never would his own replenish.

Then with water fill the pitcher
Wreathed about with classic fables;
Ne'er Falernian threw a richer
Light upon Lucullus' tables.

Come, old friend, sit down and listen
As it passes thus between us,
How its wavelets laugh and glisten
In the head of old Silenus!

THE ESOTERICS

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If you would like to receive information about future concerts, or are interested in volunteering, please contact us:

The Esoterics | 800 Columbia Street #701
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The Esoterics would like to acknowledge our generous rehearsal and concert venues, as well as their staff, for their contributions to The Esoterics' success this year:

Pastor Annie Grogan and Cheri Bowles at Queen Anne Christian Church in Seattle
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To all of you who have given so generously, The Esoterics extends its warmest thanks.

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