

SPLENDOR & SOLACE

a rare glimpse into community and divinity

Cul sec! (2022/2024) by Eric Banks

Try to understand (2019/2024) by Eric Banks

Hold (2016) by Eric Banks

To have been there before (2018/2024) by Eric Banks



THE ESOTERICS
Directed by Eric Banks

Saturday | 18 May 2024 | 8:00pm
Plymouth United Church of Christ
1217 6th Avenue | Seattle

Sunday | 19 May 2024 | 8:00pm
Plymouth United Church of Christ
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PROGRAM

Please turn off all noise-making devices, and refrain from talking during the performance.

The pieces in this program were composed by Eric Banks (b 1969).

Cul sec! (2022/2024)

Try to understand (2019/2024)

Hold (2016)

INTERMISSION

To have been there before (2018/2024)

- I. A day without night: Across the Alaskan summer sky
- II. Gazing into this leafy ocean lane: In the Alexander Archipelago
- III. A perfect shade: Into the forest near Cape Fanshawe
- IV. Sailing in silver light: At the mouth of a salmon stream
- V. A strange, unearthly splendor: Over the Fairweather Mountains
- VI. Doubling the ravishing beauty: About the cliff gardens in Sitka Harbor
- VII. The morning of creation: Upon a glacier near the Stickeen River
- VIII. Spending a whole joyful life: On the moraine of the Dirt Glacier
- IX. The wine of the woods: Along a forest stream near Chilkat
- X. Sparking beneath the stars: Between two glaciers above Glacier Bay
- XI. The wonders of the glorious night: Of four auroras in three nights

Special thanks to:

Kevin Mayes | Videographer
Gabriel Corey | Audio Producer
Willie Braun | Orchestra Manager
Daniel Powers | Audio Coordinator
Lillian Santacrocce | Publicity Coordinator
Christine Dove | Reception Coordinator
Mitchell Baier | Venue Coordinator
Matthew Bonner | Volunteer Coordinator

THE ESOTERICS

Eric Banks *Founding director*

Aaron Moore

Ally King

Avery Wong

Bayta Maring

Betsy Baeskens

Brittni Liyanage

Carly Corey

Casey Elkins

Curtis Man

Daniel Powers

Dave Doody

Erin Bathurst

Erin Eadington

Gillian Dockins

Gustavo Elias

Julia Jay

Livia Lennington

Logan Cox

Matty Bonner

Mimi Couture

Mitchell Baier

Nik Krainchich

Sarah Haynes

Tristain Lukey

THE ESOTERICS CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

Sarah Pizzichemi <i>Violin Ia</i>	Justin Kurys <i>Viola I</i>	James Doyle <i>Crotales</i>
Adrianna Hulscher <i>Violin Ib</i>	Aleida Gehrels <i>Viola II</i>	Scott Farkas <i>Glockenspiel</i>
Kimmy Rosenburg <i>Violin Ic</i>	Willie Braun <i>Cello I</i>	Stephen Karukas <i>Xylophone</i>
Cecilia Archuleta <i>Violin IIa</i>	Tim Pizzichemi <i>Cello II</i>	Melissa Wang <i>Vibraphone</i>
Brian Jankanish <i>Violin IIb</i>	Rose Gear <i>Contrabass I</i>	Rebekah Ko <i>Marimba</i>
Shelby Mass <i>Violin IIc</i>	Ethan Sobotta <i>Contrabass II</i>	Kevin Johnson <i>Piano</i>

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

Now at the start of its fourth decade, 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 **ΕΣΟΤΕΡΙΚΟΣ** – 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. His upcoming premieres include pieces for Cantori New York, the Taipei Philharmonic Chorus, and the Vancouver Chamber Choir. Eric lives in Seattle with David Gellman, his husband of 27 years (also The Esoterics' graphic design guru). You can read more about Eric's work on his own webpage: www.ericbanks.com. Eric is a member of ASCAP.

TEXTS and TRANSLATIONS

Cul sec! [Bottoms up!] (2022/2024)

setting *Six banquets* by Jean-François Pierre

In this piece, the texts of Pierre's *Six banquets* are jumbled into three octets to resemble simultaneous conversations and events at a huge, fantastic fête.

They are NOT meant to be read as a narrative. Instead, they should be experienced in a more holistic, enveloping way. Welcome to the party!

Left Octet

Hein? Non! Ben... Si! Oui? Ha?
Huh? No! Well... Indeed! Yeah? Really?
(surprise and gossip)

T'as qu'à trinquer tout à trac!
Raise your glass at every moment!
Tout est bon si tu titubes!
All is well as long as you're tipsy!

Bois cul sec, emplit ton sac,
Bottoms up! Quench your thirst!
'C'est belle et bonne habitude!
'Tis a good and beautiful habit!

Papotage en attendant qu'un plat
Chatting while waiting for a spoonful
Of parmesan hotpot, to make the belly full.
De potée-parmesan fasse panse pleine.

Bonjour! Bienvenue! Vous en prie!
Hello! Welcome! At your service!
Bien pardon! C'est qui?
Please forgive me: Who's this?

Babillage en prétendant qu'un incertain
Babbling while pretending that some unsavory
S'est ici glissé certainement.
Character is about to sneak in.

Qui c'est? Qui sait!
Who is it! Who knows?
Serait-ce qui tu sais? On boit?
Do you know who it is? Are we drinking?

Damoiselles: faisons goguettes,
Girls, let's go on a binge,
Buvons trop, soyons pompette!
Let's drink too much, let's get tipsy!

De nos corsages en appeaux,
Let's tempt them with our tight blouses
Messieurs soyez les gogos!
And watch the men act like fools!

Damoiseaux: soyons grands princes,
Guys, let's be like great princes,
Cachons pour qui l'on en pince!
And keep our crushes secret!

Center Octet

A l'heur' grise · Bisous bisés · C'est ce soir!
In the twilight · Smooches and pecks · Tonight's the night!
Bisous bisés · T'es bien mise · Sans retard!
Smooches and pecks · You're looking good · Right on time!

Gourmandises · Quelle surprise · Viens donc voir!
Delicacies · What a surprise · Come and see!
Bisous bisés · Frôle et frise · Bien l'bonsoir!
Smooches and pecks · Brushes and curls · A great evening!

Gouleyant · Pétillant · Papotant!
Refreshing · Sparkling · Chatty!
Pétillant · Gouleyant · J'en reprends!
Sparkling · Refreshing · I'll take another!

Glougloutant · Goulûment · Remets-m'en!
Gurging · Greedily · Pour me another!
Glougloutant · Gouleyant · Bon glouton!
Gurging · Refreshing · A good guzzle!

Le mondain · P'tits potins · P'tit whisky...
The socialite · Tiny rumors · A bit of whisky...
Le gratin · Le bottin, · Tout-Paris...
The upper crust · The "who's who" · High society...

P'tits potins · Ne dis rien · On m'a dit...
Tiny rumors · Don't say a word · I was told...
Cabotins · P'tits potins · M'a-t-on dit...
Posers · Tiny rumors · They told me...

Gros gâteau · Les vieux beaux · Y'a du gain...
Lots of cake · Old boyfriends · So much to gain...
Gras saumon · Gros poisson · Gros requin...
A fatty salmon · A big fish · A great shark...

Gross' galette · Gross' assiette · Y'a du grain...
Lots of pancakes · On a giant platter · So many bites...
Grosse affaire · Gros pépère · Gros Ricain...
Such a big deal · An ample ass · A chubby American...

Susurrée · Amusée · Saviez-vous?
Whispered · Entertained · Did you know?
Murmurée · Très moquée · Méfiez-vous!
Muttered · Very much mocked · Beware!

Répétée · Complotée · Pensez-vous...
Repeated · Plotted against · Do you think...?
Epluchée · Dépecée · Moquez-vous!
Peeled · Chopped · Have some fun!

Right Octet

Ho! Hey! Hep! Eh Oh... Oohee! Houra! Hourra!
Ho! Hey! Hi! Uh oh... Yay! Woot! Hooray!
(meeting and greeting)

Au salon surchauffé, amusé d'organdi,
In the suffy salon, draped in organza,
Les robes de taffetas, les sourires des dandys,
We see dresses of telfeta, smiles of dandies,

Enveniment de miel, de soupirs et de sucre,
Dripping with honey, festering with sighs and sugar,
Tout un désert doré, d'ouïe fine, de stupre, et lucre.
All a golden desert of keen ears, lust, and greed.

Pour faire ivresse, bien peu de temps!
To get drunk, there's so little time!
Pour faire bombance, bien moins encore!
To have a good time, there's even less!

Trinquons! Trinquons! Buvons autant
Let's toast! Let's raise a glass! Let's drink
Que nous pouvons, coquin de sort!
As much as we can, damn it!

Un toast aux belles, à celles d'avant,
A toast to the ex-girlfriends, from long ago,
A nos combats, au corps à corps!
To all our fights, our hand-to-hand combat!

Pour faire tendresse, beaucoup de vent,
To make up afterward, it takes a lot of hot air,
Pour faire caresse, bien plus encore!
But to snuggle up, it takes even more!

Et trinque et tinte: la coupe est pleine!
Let's raise a glass and drink: the cup is full!
Champagne! Longue vie! A la tienne!
Champagne! Long life! Here's to you!

Et trinque et tinte: la coupe est pleine!
Let's raise a glass and drink: the cup is full!
Champagne! Longue vie! A la tienne!
Champagne! Long life! Here's to you!

Les coupes s'entrechoquent, et trinquent et tintent, sonores,
The glasses clash, clink, and tinkle, resounding,
Le buffet se dévore. Tout fait ventre, tout fait corps,
The buffet is gone. It's all about the belly, the body,

Une croupe contre une danse,
And while we're not on the dance floor,
Une coupe pour qui l'on pense!
Let's raise our glasses to them!

A la tienne! Santé! Trinquons!
Here's to you! To your health! Make a toast!
Que nos verres tintent, s'entrechoquent!
Let our glasses clink and chime!

Plaise au ciel s'enivrèrent,
Heaven help us all get drunk,
Ogres et ogresses, femelles et coqs!
Ogres and ogresses, cocks and hens!

A la mienne! Bouffe bouffons!
Here's to me! Chow it down! Gobble it up!
Mâchons à jouir mandibules!
Chewing brings such joy to the jaws!

Buvons ras la coupe à bulles,
Let's drink from the brimming, bubbling cup,
N'est pas né qui dira non!
If you refuse, then you don't know how to live!

T'as qu'à trinquer tout en bulles,
Raise a glass with all the bubbly,
Vive l'heure des noctambules!
Long live the hour of the night-owl!

Vive la vie de Cocagne,
Here's to life in the land of plenty,
Bois cul sec et crie «Champagne!»
Bottom's up, and cry "Champagne!"

A la nôtre! Déraison,
Here's to us! Completely nuts,
Confit d'oie, confit d'oignons!
Potted goose and candied onions!

Double part, double mangeons,
Let's go for seconds, eat twice our fill,
Confie-toi double menton!
And give ourselves and double-chin!

Champagne! Champagne! Pleine soif!
Champagne! Champagne! We're so thirsty!
Pleine goule, coule écoulons!
A full kisser, let's drink the overflow!

Pari cul sec, je te coiffe!
I'll bet you, bottom's up: I win!
Santé! Tintinnabulons!
To your health! Let's make some noise!

Oui, ce soir tout est permis,
Yes, tonight everything is allowed,
Oublions femmes et maris!
Forget about your husbands and wives!

Bavarder · Papoter · C'est un chou!
Gossiping · Chatting · It's a hoot!
Bavasser · Caqueter · Dis-moi tout!
Ranting · Cackling · Tell me everything!

Clabauder · Dénigrer · Je sais tout!
Jeering · Belittling · I know it all!
Cancaner · Canarder · Gros bisous!
Tattling · Sniping · Big smooches!

Trinque à trois · Trinque à quatr' · Pique assiette...
Toast for three · Toast for four · Pick at your plate...
Trinque encore · Tend ta coupe · Fais cul-sec!
Toast again · Raise your cup · Bottoms up!

T'as le trac · J'ai le truc · Je me jette!
You've got the jitters · I've got the knack · I'll take the plunge!
C'est ric-rac · Pour crac-crac · Tu me jettes!
It'd be next to nothing · To hook up · But you cut me off!

J'suis patraque · J'suis foutraque · J'suis pompette!
I'm woozy · I'm kooky · I'm tipsy!
Trop d'barbaque · Tout en vrac · Les mouillettes...
Too much meat · Everywhere · With dipping bread too...

Cling! · Clang! · Tchint tchint!
Cling! · Clang! · Chin chin! (champagne glasses touching)
Baf! · Paf! · Clic! · Clac!
Bam! · Bang! · Click! · Clack! (forks drumming on the table)

On bouffe? · Miam miam...
Shall we feast? · Yum yum...
Slurp! · Grr... · Greu! · Glomp!
Slurp! · Nom nom... · Gulp! (noises made while eating)

Tout à trac · Vide le sac · Les toilettes!
All of a sudden · Nature calls · To the restroom!
Cœur en vrac · La baraque · Tourniquette...
Feeling queasy · The house · Seems to be spinning...

Borborygme · Anonyme · Air gracieux...
A rumbling stomach · Anonymous · An air of elegance...
Bulle bizarre · Air bizarre · Air classieux...
A mysterious bubble · A weird pose · A touch of class...

Mine de rien · L'air de rien · Air vicieux...
Nothing to see here · Poker face · Then a wicked look...
Vent debout · C'est trop doux · Air gazeux!
Strong breeze · That's just too sweet · Effervescent air!

Bois sans soif · Bouffe et bâfre · Tout ton saoul!
Now you're drunk · Chow down · To your heart's content!
Pique et croque · Trinque et choque · Plein la goule!
Nibble and munch · Toast and clink · Stuff your face!

Croque et craque · Estomac · Plein la boule!
Crackle and crunch · Gobsnacked · Fill the belly!
Sans dessus · Sans dessous · Je suis saoul!
Topsy turvy · Upside down · Now I'm drunk!

Tout se mâche et mastique, tout jouit aux mandibules,
Everything chomped and chewed, joy for the jaws,
Sous les lustres clinquants, / les toasts tintinnabulent.
And under gleaming chandeliers, the toasts ring out.

Tiens ta coupe! Trinque à temps! A toi! A nous!
Grab your cup! Toast in time! To you! To us!
Un tiens vaut mieux que deux tu l'auras.
A bird in the hand is better than two in the bush.

Prosit! Tchint! Cul sec...
Prost! Cheers! Bottoms up...
...Et à la tienne mon gars!
...And here's to you, my boy!

Grignotage en patientant,
Snacking while waiting,
Petits potins, amuses pleines, et bouches gueules.
Tiny bits of gossip, appetizers, and full mouths.

On boit? Glouglou...
Shall we have a drink? Glug-glug...
Gloups! Gargouillis.
Gurgle! Gargle! Gulp! (drinking sounds)

«Champagne!» crie l'amoureuse que la fête frivole.
"Champagne!" cries the lover, the life of the party.
«Champagne!» verse à flot d'or le bellâtre docile.
"Champagne!" the gentle fop pours in a golden river.

Il pleut des rires, des larmes, des désirs indociles,
In a shower of laughter, tears, and lusty desires,
Les flûtes sont levées: «Au cul de nos idoles!»
Their glasses are raised: "To our idols' asses!"

Burp! Rot! Goute!
Burp! Hiccup! Try this!
Encore! Ouf! Ha!
Again! Ugh! Ah! (overeating sounds)

Patati, patata. On a faim,
Potayto, potahto... We're hungry!
Les pieds dans le plat.
Our feet are on our plates!

De la graisse et du gros beurre,
A bit of fat and some heavy butter,
Bœuf tendron, bon gros tendon, gros bedon.
Beef brisket, a juicy tendon, and a big belly.

Bâfre et mange, reprends-en donc!
Chow down, then grab some more!
Bâfre et mange, jusqu'à rot!
Eat your fill, gobble it up, until you burp!

La fête s'engourdit; lasse, la tête fuit!
The party's dead; exhausted, all good sense has fled!
Il faut boire cul sec – ce qu'il reste de nuit!
Whatever's left tonight -- we must drink it dry!

Demain sera l'heure venue,
Tomorrow will come soon enough!
Gueule de bois et gueule dessus!
With its cruel reckoning!

T'as qu'à tintinnabuler,
Let them ring out like bells,
Verre trop plein et verre à pied!
Overfilled glasses, and glasses with stems,

Viens vivons valse et virons,
Come, let's live, let's waltz and spin,
Sur le fil virevoltons!
And twirl together on this tightrope.

Mal au ventre, mal au cœur. Silence pompette,
Upset stomach, heartburn. Cock-eyed silence,
La queue du chat balance.
while the cat's tail swings back and forth.

Respire! Expire!
Breathe in, breathe out.
Alka Seltzer, aspirine.
Alka Seltzer, aspirin.

Quoi ma gueule? Gueule de bois. Bon à rien,
What's on my face? A hangover. Nothing good.
c'est pas tout ça. Café froid.
Not even worth it. Cold coffee.

Soupir! Tais-toi! Ne me parle...
Sigh! Shut up! Don't speak...
pas comme ça! Moins fort.
...to me like that. Softer, please.

T'as qu'à trinquer tout à trac!
Raise your glass at every moment!
Tout est bon si tu titubés!
All is well as long as you're tipsy!

Bois cul sec, emplis ton sac,
Bottoms up! Quench your thirst!
C'est belle et bonne habitude!
'Tis a good and beautiful habit!

Mon estomac! Les Toilettes! Ouh!
My stomach! The bathroom! Ouch!
Ouh! Whouah! Whouhaou!
Ooh! Whoa! Wow! (sounds of sudden suffering)

Chut! Silence! Silenceux! Ça va! Compris!
Sh... Quiet! Silence! OK! Got it!
J'irai plus... Plus jamais...
I won't be back... Never again... (sounds of regret)

Grelottant · Bloblotant · L'air miteux...
Shivering · Bloating · In rough shape...
Eructant · Vomissant · L'air piteux...
Belching · Vomiting · Looking pathetic...

Tremblotant · Flageolant · Caverneux...
Trembling · Wobbling · Feeling hollow inside...
Hoquetant · Crachotant · Qui mieux-mieux...
Hiccupping · Sputtering · Outdoing one another...

C'est ma fête · Tristounette · L'est quelle heure?
It's my party · Rather dreary now · What time is it?
Mal de tête · Maudite fête · Quelle erreur!
My head aches · This blasted party · What a mistake!

C'est ma tête, · Quelle casquette · Quel malheur!
Oh my head · What a punishment · What a disaster!
Mal de crête · Vive la diète · Quelle horreur!
My throat is sore · Long live moderation · What a fright!

Mon nid doux · Mon lit doux · Edredon...
My sweet nest · My soft bed · My comforter...
Ben dis donc · Gros bidou · Gros bedon...
I told you so · A big belly · A giant gut...

Bibendum · Gros bonhomme · Gros bidon...
The Pillsbury doughboy · A giant fellow · With a big tummy...
Bien bon lit · Bonne nuit · Bon garçon...
Such a good bed · Good night · Good boy...

Ronronnement · Bourdonnement · Zozotant...
Purring · Buzzing · Lispering...
Grognement · Ronflement · Zigzagant...
Grunting · Snoring · Staggering...

Toussotement · Crachotement · Bizarrement...
Coughing · Sputtering · Strangely...
Ronflement · Grondement · Zézaïement...
Snoring · Growling · Stuttering...

Pas la peine · Pas ma veine · Quoi encore?
It's not worth it · Just my luck · What now?
Pas d' lumière · Pas d'éclair · Parl' moins fort...
No more lights · No more flashes · Not so loud...

Pas d'soleil · Trop sommeil · J'ai eu tort...
No more sun · I'm too sleepy · I was wrong...
Pas d'alcool! · Pas d'école! · Je suis mort...
No more booze! · No more mischief! · I'm dead...

Hiiii! Bouh! Ouinn! Beuh! Berk!
Uh-oh... (gasp) · Blech... · Yuck!
Beurk! Snif! Urg! Whouhaou!
Yikes! · Sniff... · Ugh! · Wow... (sounds made while sick)

Le rôt est trop sonore; même la fesse écœurée!
Even a burp is too loud; and my butt is so sore!
Il fait jour bien trop tôt; soudain, il est cinq heures!
The day begins too soon; it's already 5 am!

Et trinque et tinte: la coupe est pleine!
Let's raise a glass and drink: the cup is full!
Champagne! Longue vie! A la tienne!
Champagne! Long life! Here's to you!

Et trinque et tinte: la coupe est pleine!
Let's raise a glass and drink: the cup is full!
Champagne! Longue vie! A la tienne!
Champagne! Long life! Here's to you!

Pour vivre vieux, jusqu'à l'aurore,
To live to be old, or just until the dawn,
Et faire long feu, buvons cul sec!
To last until the very end: then drink up!

Levons nos verres, loin d'être à sec,
Raise your glasses, never leave them dry,
Chantons! Rions! Jurons encore!
Let's sing! And laugh! And swear some more!

Pour finir noir, la gueule de bois,
To end up sloshed, with a doozy of a hangover,
Rien ne vaut l'or de mille bulles!
Nothing beats a thousand golden bubbles!

Je ne sais toi, mais quant à moi,
I don't know about you, but as for me:
Je serai roi des noctambules!
I will reign king of the night-owls!

Il faut cuver l'ennui; il faut payer la note,
Now we must sleep it off; to pay the piper,
Oublier le miroir que tant d'excès annote.
And ignore the mirror that shows us the damage.

Et prier! Prier fort! A genoux!... Parler moins fort...
And pray! Pray hard! On your knees! Speak softly...
Et là, dans la cuvette, dégoûter encore...
And there, into the bowl, bring it all back again...

Mon estomac! Les Toilettes! Ouh!
My stomach! The bathroom! Ouch!
Ouh! Whouah! Whouhaou!
Ooh! Whoa! Wow! (sounds of sudden suffering)

Chut! Silence! Silenceux! Ça va! Compris!
Sh... Quiet! Silence! OK! Got it!
J'irai plus... Plus jamais...
I won't be back... Never again... (sounds of regret)

ORBIT & ORACLE

A reimagining of ancient astrological legends

19 · 20 October 2024

The world premiere of Michael Ostrzyga's *Gods and planets*.

UPCOMING ESOTERICA

CHAKRA & CHIME

A choral meditation from the Pacific Crest Trail

14 · 15 December 2024

The Pacific Northwest premiere of Jeffrey Derus' *From wilderness*.

Try to understand (2019/2024)
setting Hypatia's musings on God, "the unique one,"
from *Baudolino* by Umberto Eco,
translated into English by William Weaver.

Left Semichorus

Try to understand, O Baudolino...

*God is the unique one, and is so perfect
that it resembles neither the things that exist
nor the things that do not;*

*you cannot describe God using your human intelligence,
as if it were someone who becomes angry if you misbehave
or who worries about you out of goodness,*

*qualcuno che abbia bocca, orecchie, volto, ali,
o che sia spirito, padre o figlio, neppure di se stesso.*

*Dell'unico, non puoi dire che c'è o che non c'è;
e l'unico abbraccia tutto ma non è nulla;*

*you can name God only through dissimilarity, because it is useless to call it:
Goodness, Beauty, Wisdom, Amiability, Power, Justice;
for this would be like calling it:*

*Bear, Panther, Serpent, Dragon, or Griffin,
because whatever you say about it,
you will never fully convey God (the unique one).*

*Dio non è corpo, non è figura, non è forma,
non ha quantità, qualità, peso o leggerèzza,
non vede, non sente, non conosce disordine e perturbazione;*

*Dio non è anima, intelligenza, immaginazione, opinione;
Dio non è pensiero, parola, numero, ordine, grandezza;*

*God is neither equality nor inequality, neither time nor eternity;
God is a will without purpose.*

*Dio è una lampada senza fiamma, è una fiamma senza fuoco,
è un fuoco senza calore, è una luce oscura,*

*a silent rumble, an unseen flash,
a most luminous murkiness, a beam of its own darkness,*

*un cerchio che si espande contraendosi sul proprio centro,
una molteplicità solitaria...*

Cerca di capire, O Baudolino...

*God is a space that is not,
in which you and I are the same thing,
as we are today in this time that does not flow...*

Right Semichorus

Cerca di capire, O Baudolino...

*Dio è l'unico, ed è talmente perfetto
che non è simile a nessuna delle cose che sono
e a nessuna delle cose che non sono;*

*non puoi descriverlo usando la tua intelligenza umana,
come se fosse qualcuno che si adira se tu sei cattivo
o che si occupa di te per bontà,*

*as if it were someone who has a mouth, ears, face, wings,
or that is spirit, father or son, not even borne of itself.*

*About the unique one, you cannot say what it is or is not;
for God embraces all but is nothing;*

*puoi nominarlo solo attraverso la dissomiglianza, perché è inutile chiamarlo:
Bontà, Bellezza, Sapienza, Amabilità, Potenza, Giustizia;
sarebbe lo stesso che dirlo:*

*Orso, Pantera, Serpente, Drago o Grifone,
perché qualunque cosa tu ne dica,
non lo esprimerà mai.*

*God is not body, not figure, not form;
God has no quantity, quality, weight, or lightness;
God does not see, does not hear, and does not know disorder and perturbation;*

*God is not soul, intelligence, imagination, or opinion,
God is not thought, word, number, order, or size;*

*Dio non è uguaglianza e non è disuguaglianza,
non è tempo e non è eternità; è una volontà senza scopo.*

*God is a lamp without flame, a flame without fire,
a fire without heat, a somber light,*

*un rimbombo silenzioso, un lampo cieco,
una caligine luminosissima, un raggio della propria tenebra,*

*a circle that expands as it concentrates on its own center,
a solitary multiplicity...*

Try to understand, O Baudolino...

*Dio è uno spazio che non c'è,
in cui tu e io siamo la stessa cosa,
come oggi in questo tempo che non scorre...*

Hold (2016)

setting a poem by Anna George Meek

I.

Endless air:

We sing because the elms surround us
as they stretch their arms across the restless sky.

The chorus holds us; together,
we feel the line of music curve
like a crowded train speeding somewhere
exciting, taking us forward into our lives.

We sing on the campus grass with friends;
we sing after savoring the evening's first kiss.

We are wild with wind, and new ideas,
and dance with abandon into the night.
We love this moment and will not let it go.

But breathlessly everywhere, we lose
our voices in loneliness, or fear.
Will we break under the ache of ambition?
Friend, I am standing next to you, singing.
I will hold. I will hold you.

II.

Endless air:

The days have become measured
by what we need to do. At dawn
we pay the bills; at night we wash the ordinary
cups and plates that chatter in the sink;
all day long we believe in joy.

We work for a world we can love
and a life that we want. We bend
over the beautiful beds of our children;
we bend over the beautiful beds of our parents.

Breathless, exhausted, the body is aching,
and aching to sing again, to feel
the energy of a chorus that binds us
to the haunted but gorgeous world.
We were never that far apart after all.
I am standing next to you, singing.
I will hold. I will hold you.

III.

Endless air:

Through this quiet moment,
memory is breathing. We sing
for the days of chasing children
through the long evening light.

We sing for the newborns we have held,
and their small, warm breath against our faces.

For them, we cradle
all that we have seen, and all that we know.
How we hope they will sing!

Not everyone is breathing with us
any longer; we sing for every friend
we have lost. Our voices tremble.
Sometimes memory is shadow on shadow.
Do the young understand how fragile life is?
Even breathless, I am next to you singing.
I will hold. I will hold you.

IV.

Hold: a technique called staggered breathing
produces the effect of continuous sound.

Each singer breathes in quietly while others nearby
sustain the tone, or sustains while others breathe.

Muscle and tendon rise and relax
near where the heart is housed.

This mechanism of conscious support
extends the capacity
to go on.

V.

Go on!
We are not alone; we will breathe in
and sing out, sustained by love.

The world is singing.
In a burning stairwell, on a war-torn field,
hungry, haze-choked, and worn,
the world is singing in the face of hatred,
and all of this chorus cannot be struck down.

Hold with the delicate touch
of brushing the hand of your beloved. Hold
with the warmth of bright sunlight
across your back. Hold with the strength
of a stranger who helps you to your feet.
Hold with the joy of people gathered
to create something hopeful.

Breathe and sing, and breathe again.

We sing to love the world!
With air that is a thousand years old,
to last a thousand years more,
we have returned to one another in song
(we were never that far apart after all)
so we go on. Breathe!

-- and I will hold. I will hold you.

To have been there before (2018/2024)

setting excerpts from John's Muir's *Travels in Alaska*

I. A day without night

Across the Alaskan summer sky

An Alaska summer day is a day without night.
Midnight is only a low noon, the middle point of the gloaming.
The thin clouds almost always present are yellow and red,
a striking advertisement of the sun's progress beneath the horizon.

The day opens slowly.

The low arc of light steals around to the northeast
with a gradual increase of height and span and intensity of tone.

When at length the sun appears,
it is without much stirring, flashing, or triumphant energy.
The red clouds with yellow edges dissolve in hazy dimness,
and the whole, down-bending firmament becomes pearl-gray.

For three or four hours after sunrise
there is nothing especially impressive in the landscape.

The sun, though seemingly unclouded,
may almost be looked in the face,
and the islands and mountains,
with their wealth of woods and snow and varied architecture,
seem comparatively sleepy and uncommunicative.

As the day advances toward high noon,
the sun-flood that streams through the atmosphere
lights the water and the sky to glowing silver.

The warm air throbs, and makes itself felt
as a life-giving, energizing ocean,
embracing all the landscape, quickening the imagination,
and bringing to mind the tides, the rivers, and the satiny sky.

Through the afternoon, all the way to sunset,
the day grows in beauty.
The light seems to thicken and become more generously fruitful
without losing its soft, mellow brightness.
Everything seems to settle into conscious repose.

The winds breathe gently or are wholly at rest.
The few clouds visible are downy and luminous
and combed-out fine on their edges.
The sky, land, and water meet and blend
in one inseparable scene of enchantment.

Then comes the sunset with its purple and gold,
not a narrow arch on the horizon,
but oftentimes filling all the sky.
The level clouds are fired on their edges,
and the spaces of clear sky are greenish-yellow or pale amber,
higher up, are mostly touched with crimson
like the out-leaning sprays of maple-groves
in the beginning of Indian summer.

Soft, mellow purple flushes the sky to the zenith and fills the air,
steeping and transfiguring the islands
and making all the water look like wine.

After the sun goes down, the glowing gold vanishes;
it descends in a curve on the same plane with the horizon,
while the uppermost colors of the sunset
gradually sweep around to the north, increase to the east,
and unite with those of the morning.

II. Gazing into this leafy ocean lane

In the Alexander Archipelago

We were borne smoothly over calm, blue waters,
through the midst of countless forest-clad islands,
so numerous they seem to have been sown broad-cast.
Never before had I been embosomed in scenery
so hopelessly beyond description.

In these coastal landscapes,
there was such a multitude of features in endless succession;
the whole was so fine, so tender, so ethereal,
that all pen-work seemed hopelessly unavailing.

Tracing shining ways through fiord and sound,
past forests and waterfalls, islands and mountains, and azure headlands,
it seemed as if we would reach the very paradise of the poets,
the abode of the blessed.

Into a narrow channel, hemmed in by mountain walls,
forested down to the water's edge,
my attention was concentrated:
on the crowded spires of spruces and hemlocks
rising higher and higher upon the steep green slopes;
on stripes of paler green where winter avalanches
cleared away the trees, allowing grasses and willows to spring up;
on zigzags of cascades among the bushes and trees;
on glens with brawling streams hidden beneath alder and dogwood,
seen only where they emerge on the shore;
and on retreating hollows, with lingering snow-banks
that mark the fountains of ancient glaciers.

New scenes were brought to view with magical rapidity.
The tranquil channel was stirred here and there
by the silvery plashing of up-springing salmon,
or by flocks of white gulls floating
like water-lilies among the sun-spangles;
while mellow, tempered sunshine was streaming over all,
blending sky, land, and water in pale, misty blue.

Then, while we dreamily gazed into the depths
of this leafy ocean lane, the sound was filled with islands,
sprinkled and clustered in forms and compositions
such as nature alone can invent.

Some of them were so small that the trees growing on them
seemed like single handfuls culled from the neighboring woods,
and set in the water to keep them fresh,
while here and there we noticed bare rocks just above the water,
mere dots, punctuating the grand, out-swelling sentences of the islands.

III. A perfect shade

Into the forest near Cape Fanshawe

We came to anchor in a beautiful bay,
and as the long, northern day had still hours of good light to offer,
I gladly embraced the opportunity to go ashore.

The tide was low, exposing a luxuriant growth of algae,
which sent up a fine, fresh sea smell.
The shingle was composed of slate, quartz, and granite,
named in order of abundance.

The first plant I met was a tall grass, nine feet high,
forming a meadow-like margin in front of the forest.

Pushing my way well back into the forest,
I found it composed almost entirely of spruce and hemlock
with a few specimens of yellow cypress.

The ferns were developed in remarkable beauty
and size – about six feet high,
The underbrush was chiefly alder, to eight feet high,
in some places closely intertangled and hard to penetrate.

On the open spots beneath the trees the ground was covered
to a depth of two or three feet
with mosses of indescribable freshness.

A few dwarf conifers planted themselves on their rich furred bosses,
together with pyrola, coptis, and Solomon's-seal.
The tallest trees were about a hundred fifty feet high,
and their branches mingled together to make a perfect shade.

As the twilight began to fall,
I sat down on the mossy instep of a spruce.
Not a bush or tree was moving;
every leaf seemed hushed in brooding repose.
A thrush embroidered the silence with cheery notes,
making the solitude familiar and sweet,
while the solemn monotone of a stream, sifting through the woods,
seemed like the very voice of God:
entering one's heart as to a home prepared for it.
Go where we will, all the world over,
we seem to have been there before.

The stream was bridged with moss-embossed logs,
and the trees on its banks, leaning over from side to side,
made high embowering arches.
The log bridge I crossed was, I think,
the most beautiful I ever saw,
plushed to a depth of six inches or more
with mosses of three or four species,
with different tones of yellow shading finely into each other,
while their delicate, fronded foliage lay in exquisite order,
inclining outward and down the sides in rich, clasping sheets
that overlapped and felted together.
The pedicels and spore-cases gave a purplish tinge,
and the whole bridge was enriched with ferns,
a row of small seedling trees,
and currant bushes with colored leaves,
every one of which seemed to have been culled
from the woods for this special use,
so perfectly did they harmonize in size, shape, and color.

IV. Sailing in silver light

At the mouth of a salmon stream

After dark, in the rain, we decided
to set up camp on the bank of a salmon-stream
among dripping grasses and bushes
some twenty-five miles beyond Cape Fanshawe.
These cold, northern waters are at times brilliantly phosphorescent,
and so they were this evening.
Every stroke of the oar made a vivid surge of white light,
and the canoes left shining tracks.

As we neared the mouth of the salmon-stream
where we intended to make our camp,
we noticed jets and flashes of silvery light
caused by the startled movement of the salmon
that were on the way to their spawning-grounds,
and the Indians shouted joyfully:
"Hi-yu salmon! Hi-yu muck-a-muck!"

The water about and beneath the canoe was churned
by thousands of fins into silver fire.
The stream was so filled with them,
there seemed to be more fish than water,
and we appeared to be sailing in a boiling, seething, silver light.

V. A strange, unearthly splendor

Over the Fairweather Mountains

The dawn gave no promise of anything uncommon.
Its most impressive features were the frosty clearness of the sky
and a deep, brooding stillness.

We did not see the sunrise at all,
but we were startled by the sudden appearance of a red light
burning with a strange, unearthly splendor
on the topmost peak of the Fairweather Mountains.

Instead of vanishing, it spread
until the whole range was filled with celestial fire.
Beneath the frosty shadows of the fiord
we stood hushed and awe-stricken;
our attention could not have been more tremendously strained.

When the highest peak began to burn,
it did not seem to be steeped in sunshine,
but rather as if it had been thrust into the body of the sun itself.

At first it was a vivid crimson, as fine as the alpenglow,
but then every mountain appeared to glow from the heart
like molten metal fresh from a furnace.
Then the supernal fire slowly descended, peak after peak,
with spires and ridges and cascading glaciers, caught in its heavenly glow,
until all stood transfigured, hushed, and thoughtful.
How long we gazed I never knew.

The glorious vision gradually passed
through a thousand tones of color to pale yellow and white,
and then the work of the ice-world went on again in everyday beauty.

The green waters of the fiord were filled with sun-spangles;
the fleet of icebergs set forth on their voyages with the up-springing breeze;
and on the innumerable mirrors and prisms of these bergs,
and on the shattered crystal walls of the glaciers,
common white and rainbow light began to burn,
while the mountains shone in their frosty jewelry,
and loomed again in azure in serene terrestrial majesty.

We turned and sailed away, joining the outgoing bergs,
while "Gloria in excelsis" seemed to be sounding over all the landscape,
and our burning hearts were ready for any fate,
feeling that, whatever the future might have in store,
the treasures we gained this morning
would enrich our lives forever.

VI. Doubling the ravishing beauty

About the cliff gardens in Sitka Harbor

Gliding on and on, the scenery seemed
at every turn more lavishly fruitful in form
as well as more sublime in dimension:
snowy falls in splendid dress, colossal domes and battlements,
sculpted gray arches, green ferny dells, flowers on ledges,
fringes of willow and birch, and above all, glaciers.

The cliff gardens were exceedingly rich in color.
On every rift and bench, we found multitudes of brilliant blooms:
larkspurs, geraniums, painted-cups, bluebells,
gentians, saxifrages, epilobiums, violets,
parnassia, veratrum, spiranthes and other orchids,
fritillaria, smilax, asters, daisies, bryanthus, cassiope, linnaea,
and a great variety of flowering ribes and rubus.

The heathworts in particular were abundant in flower and fruit:
making delicate green carpets for the rocks,
flushed with pink bells, or dotted with red and blue berries.
The tallest of the grasses had ribbon leaves, well-tempered and arched,
with no lack of bristly spikes and nodding purple panicles.

The sun shone free and warm. No wind stirred.
The watery spaces between the bergs were as smooth as glass,
reflecting the unclouded sky,
and doubling the ravishing beauty of the bergs
as the sunlight streamed through their innumerable angles
in rainbow colors.

On days like this, some of the bergs show a purplish tinge.
Now and then, a new-born one is pure blue crystal,
freshly broken from the fountain or recently exposed to the air.

In all of them, old and new,
there are azure caves and rifts of ineffable beauty,
in which the purest tones of light pulse and shimmer,
lovely and untainted as anything on earth or in the sky.

VII. The morning of creation

Upon a glacier near the Stickeen River

Then, to the glacier it was decided we should venture.
Arriving opposite the mouth of its fiord,
we steered inland between wooded shores,
and the grand glacier came into sight
in its granite valley, glowing in the sunshine,
and extending a noble invitation to come and see.

After we passed between the rocks
that guard the gate of the fiord,
the view that unfolded fixed every eye in wondering admiration.
No words can convey an adequate conception of its sublime grandeur –
the noble simplicity and fineness of its magnificent proportions.

Standing in the gateway of this glorious temple,
and regarding it donly as a picture,
its outlines may be easily traced:
the watery foreground of a pale-green color,
a smooth mirror sheet sweeping back five or six miles,
bounded at the head by a beveled barrier wall
of blueish-white ice, four or five hundred feet high.

A few snowy mountain-tops appeared beyond it,
and on either hand rose a series of majestic,
pale-gray granite rocks from three to four thousand feet high,
some of them thinly forested –
striped with bushes and flowery grass on narrow shelves.

At length, we reached the foot of the glacier.
I traced the glorious crystal wall, admiring its architecture,
and the play of light in its rifts and caverns.

The whole front was gashed and sculpted
into a maze of shallow caves and crevasses,
and a bewildering variety of novel forms:
clusters of glittering lance-tipped spires, gables, and obelisks,
bold outstanding bastions and plain mural cliffs,
adorned along the top with fretted cornice and battlement,
while every gorge and crevasse, groove and hollow
was filled with light, shimmering and throbbing
in pale-blue tones of ineffable tenderness.

On the broad, melting bosom of the glacier,
many streams were rejoicing, gurgling, ringing, and singing,
in frictionless channels worn down through
the disintegrated ice of the surface
into the quick and living blue,
with a grace of motion and flashing of light
found only on the crystal hillocks and ravines of a glacier.
Along its sides, we saw the mighty flood
grinding against the granite walls with tremendous pressure,
rounding out-swelling bosses, and deepening the retreating hollows
into the forms they are destined to have.

Standing here, with facts so fresh and telling
and held up so vividly before us,
every observer must readily apprehend
the earth-sculpting action of flowing ice.

And here too, one learns that the world,
though made, is yet being made;
that this is still the morning of creation;
that mountains long conceived are now being born,
channels are traced for coming rivers, basins are hollowed for lakes;
moraine soil is being ground and outspread for coming plants,
coarse boulders and gravel for forests,
finer soil for grasses and flowers, while the finest part of the grist,
hastening out to sea in the draining streams,
is being stored away in darkness and builded
particle on particle, cementing and crystallizing,
to make the mountains and valleys and plains
of other predestined landscapes, to be followed by still others
in endless rhythm and beauty.

VIII. Spending a whole joyful life

On the moraine of the Dirt Glacier

I greatly enjoyed my walk up the majestic ice-river,
charmed by the pale-blue light in the crevasses,
moulines, and wells, the innumerable azure pools,
and the network of surface streams, gliding and swirling
with wonderful grace of motion in their frictionless channels.

Looking ahead, from the middle of the glacier,
the broad white flood, as rigid as iron,
swept in graceful curves between its mountain-like walls,
with small glaciers hanging in the hollows on either side,
and snow in every form above them.

As far as the eye could reach, tributary glaciers
silently descended from their high, white fountains
to swell the grand central ice-river.

I pushed on...

until I came to a lake with scores of small bergs floating in it,
some were aground, close inshore against the moraine,
the light playing on their angles
and shimmering in their blue caves in ravishing tones.
Hundreds of small rills and good-sized streams
were falling into the lake from the glacier,
singing in low tones, some of them pouring
in sheer falls over blue cliffs from narrow ice-valleys,
some spouting from channels in the front of the glacier,
others gurgling out of arched openings at the base.
All of these water-streams joined voices in one grand anthem
telling the wonders of their near and far-off fountains.

The lake itself was resting in a basin of ice,
and the forested moraine (overgrown with
lichens, mosses, grasses, bushes, and good-sized trees) was resting
on buried ice that was left behind as the glacier receded slowly.
The smell of the washed ground and vegetation
made every breath a pleasure.
The drip of the rain on the various leaves was delightful to hear.
More especially marked were the low-toned bumps
and splashes of large drops from the trees
on broad horizontal leaves below.
Low and calm and silent, surely never a particle of dust
has touched a leaf or crown of these blessed mosses.
And the wet berries, nature's precious jewelry, how beautiful they were!

Huckleberries in pale bloom with a crystal drop on each;
red and yellow salmon-berries with clusters of smaller drops;
and the glittering raindrops that adorned the interlacing arches
of grasses and sedges around the edges of the pools -
every drop a mirror with the entire landscape in it.
In the gardens and forests of this wonderful moraine
one might spend a whole joyful life.

IX. The wine of the woods

Along a forest stream near Chilcat

On the morning after this delightful day,
high wind was rushing down the strait against us,
and pelting rain began to fly.
The rain brought out the fragrance of the drenched trees,
and the wind made a wild melody in their tops.

Part of my ramble was along a stream that flowed
through a leafy arch beneath overlapping trees.
The water was almost black in the deeper pools
and fine clear amber in the shallows.
It was the pure, rich wine of the woods
with a pleasant taste, bringing spicy spruce groves,
widespread bogs, and meadows to mind.
In this amber stream I discovered a waterfall -
only a few feet high, but remarkably fine
in the curve of its brow and in blending shades of color.

The mossy, bushy pool into which it plunged was inky black,
but wonderfully brightened by large bells of foam
that drifted in clusters on the smooth water around the rim,
each of them carrying a picture of the overlooking trees.

X. Sparking beneath the stars

Between two glaciers above Glacier Bay

After sleeping a few hours, I stole quietly out of the camp,
and climbed the mountain between two glaciers.

The view over the icy bay, sparkling beneath the stars, was enchanting.
It seemed a sad thing that any part of so precious a night
had been lost in sleep.

The starlight was so full that I saw
not only the berg-filled bay, but most of the glaciers,
lying pale and spirit-like amid the mountains.
The nearest glacier was so distinct that it seemed
to be glowing with a light that came from within.

On this mountain-top, amid so much ice, in the heart of
so clear and frosty a night, everything was luminous.
I seemed to be poised in a vast hollow
between two skies of almost equal brightness.
This made me glad and strong and I rejoiced
that my studies called me before the glorious night!

XI. The wonders of the glorious night

Of four auroras in three nights

My bed was two boulders,
and as I lay wedged and bent on their up-bulging sides,
gazing into the starry sky and across the sparkling bay,
magnificent upright bars of light in bright, prismatic colors
suddenly appeared, marching swiftly in close succession
along the northern horizon, from west to east, as if in diligent haste.

In this glory of light, so pure, so bright, so enthusiastic in motion,
there was nothing in the least cloud-like.
The short color-bars, about two degrees in height,
were as well defined as those of the solar spectrum.
How long these glad, eager soldiers of light held on their way
I cannot tell, for all sense of time was charmed out of mind
and the blessed night circled away in measureless rejoicing.

In the early morning, after so inspiring a night,
I launched my canoe feeling able for anything.
But at sundown, I was less than half-way home,
and was glad to land on an island with a smooth beach for the canoe
and a thicket of alder for fire and bed and a little sleep.

But shortly after sundown,
while these arrangements were being made,
lo and behold, another aurora enriched the heavens!
And though it proved to be one of the ordinary, colorless kind -
thrusting long, quivering lances toward the zenith
from a cloudlike base - after last night's wonderful display,
one's expectations might well be extravagant.
So I lay wide awake, watching.

On the third night, I reached my cabin.
And just as the last of my visitors opened the door
after bidding good-night, he shouted back to me:
"Muir, come look. Here's something fine."
I ran out, and sure enough there was another aurora -
a glowing silver bow spanning the inlet
in a magnificent arch, right under the zenith,
its ends resting on the top of the mountain walls.

And though colorless and steadfast, its intense, solid white splendor,
noble proportions, and fineness of finish
excited my boundless admiration.
In form and proportion it was like a rainbow,
a bridge of one span five miles wide;
and so brilliant, so fine in every part.

I fancy that if all the stars were raked together
into one wind-row, fused and welded
and run through some celestial rolling-mill,
all would be required to make this one, glowing, colossal bridge.
I lay down on the moraine in front of the cabin and watched.
Hour after hour, the wonderful arch
stood perfectly motionless, sharply defined and substantial,
as if it were a permanent addition to the furniture of the sky.

At length, while it spanned the inlet in serene unchanging splendor,
a band of fluffy, pale gray, quivering ringlets came suddenly
all in a row over the eastern mountain top, and glided
in nervous haste, up and down the underside of the bow
and over the western mountain wall.
They maintained a vertical posture
all the way across, and slipped swiftly along,
as if they were suspended, like a curtain on rings.
They must have gone on for hundreds of miles.

Nearly an hour elapsed from their first appearance
until the last of the rushing throng vanished
behind the western mountain, leaving the bridge
as bright and solid and steadfast as before they arrived.
But later, it began to fade.
Fissures or cracks crossed it diagonally
through which a few stars were seen,
and gradually it became thin and nebulous
until it looked like the Milky Way, and at last, it disappeared,
leaving no visible monument to mark its place.

I returned to my cabin, replenished the fire,
and prepared to go to sleep.
But just as I was about to retire,
I thought I had better take another look at the sky,
to make sure that the glorious show was over;
and, contrary to all expectations,
I found that the pale foundation for another bow
was being laid overhead.
Then losing all thought of sleep, I ran back to my cabin,
carried out blankets and lay down on the moraine
to keep watch until daybreak,
that none of the wonders of the glorious night sky
within the reach of my eyes might be lost.

I had seen the first bow when it stood complete in full splendor,
and its gradual fading decay.
Now I was to see the building of a new one from the beginning.
In less than half an hour the silvery material
was gathered, condensed, and welded
into a glowing, evenly proportioned arc in the sky.

Then in due time over the eastern mountain wall
came another throng of restless, electric ringlets,
and their infinitely fine, pale-gray garments, lightly touching
against those of their neighbors as they all swept swiftly by,
along the underside of the bridge and over the western mountain,
keeping quivery step and time to music too fine for mortal ears.

While the throng glided swiftly along,
I watched the bridge for any change,
but not the slightest could I detect.
They left no visible track, and after all had passed
the glowing arc stood firm and immutable,
but at last faded slowly away, like its glorious predecessor,
in supreme, serene, supernal beauty.

THANK YOU

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To all of you who have given so generously, The Esoterics extends its warmest thanks.

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

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