CEDAR VALLEY

PRIDECHOIR

2025

Cedar Valley Pridefest

Main Stage

Saturday, August 23, 2025

1:30 p.m.

We Shall Overcome

Arranged for the Justice Choir Songbook
by Tefsa Yohannes Wondemagegnehu

Several selections on today's program are taken from the Justice Choir Songbook, a free resource developed by Minnesota-based composers & directors Abbie Betinis, Tefsa Wondemagegnehu, and Ahmed Fernando Anzalduá. Justice Choir is a template to encourage more community singing for social and environmental justice. Designed around the Justice Choir Songbook, the organization's goal is a grassroots movement to engage in the empathetic, collaborative, and collective power of singing together to create change. This first selection from the Justice Choir Songbook is a recognizable African-American spiritual. About his arrangement, Tesfa writes: "What systemic issues need to be addressed for us to truly overcome? How can we work together as a community to make this happen?"

I Will Tread Lightly

Alisa Blair & Dina Gregory

A green anthem for our times, this lilting, winsome, and infectious original beautifully expresses the ever-growing desire to preserve and protect our cherished planet. A flute-like motif, "I will tread lightly," both beguiles and inspires the listener with its heartfelt and jubilantly optimistic message of environmental stewardship.

¡No nos moverán!

Transcribed for the Justice Choir Songbook, 2017
Words from Agustín Lira, Luis Valdez, and traditional Spanish

Ahmed Anzaldúa, Justice Choir Songbook, co-editor writes: "Originally from the African-American spiritual tradition, it was in the 1930s that "We Shall Not Be Moved" and its Spanish version *"¡No nos moverán!"* both became rallying cries for solidarity in U.S. labor and civil rights movements, often deployed by singers arm-in-arm in the face of repression. *"¡No nos moverán!"* would go on to become an important part of the Chicano movement of the 1960s as well as of the social justice and revolutionary movements across Spain and Latin America. It is sung all throughout the Spanish-speaking world in this version; it's the one I grew up with."

Meet Me on the Mountain

Shawn Kirchner
Cedar Falls, Iowa native composer

Shawn Kirchner writes: “When I saw the film *Brokeback Mountain* in 2005 (short story by Pulitzer Prize-winning Annie Proulx, screenplay by legends Larry McMurtry (*Lonesome Dove*) and Diana Ossana, directed by Ang Lee), I felt it was the most powerful work of art I had witnessed in my life. The creative material elicited extraordinary performances from actors Heath Ledger, Michelle Williams, Jake Gyllenhaal, Anne Hathaway, and Linda Cardellini — all heart-breaking in their own way — and made the film transcendent, cathartic, and healing. To me, the final scenes wordlessly asked each viewer the all-important question: are you going to live the life you are meant to live? There was also the incredibly poignant “vibe” established by the composer of the film’s guitar-driven score, Gustavo Santaolalla, that you couldn’t “shake” for days. I spent six months responding to the impact by writing folk, bluegrass, and country songs inspired by its characters and plot twists. By summer of 2006, I had unwittingly created the musical version of it, whether intending to or not. “Meet Me on the Mountain” was the first song to come, and it truly sums up the film in a single song. I have been gratified to see how much it connects with people — whether or not they have any idea about the film. I’ve seen kids come up at the end of concerts and proudly sing the chorus back to me. I’ve seen people find their own deep (untold) love story, however different, somehow inside the words as well. I think everyone can connect with the idea that the special love that blooms between two people is a *sacred* thing — theirs alone to know and to treasure.”

Light of a Clear Blue Morning

Dolly Parton/arr. Craig Hella Johnson

Dolly Parton first released “Light of a Clear Blue Morning” on her 1977 album *New Harvest…First Gathering*. Parton has told interviewers over the years, "Light of a Clear Blue Morning" was her "song of deliverance," coming out of the pain from her break with longtime musical and business partner Porter Wagoner. Parton has been a champion for the LGBTQ+ community throughout her career, regularly using her platform to show them support and urge her more conservative fans to open their hearts. As far back as 2009, the “I Will Always Love You” singer has been outspoken about marriage equality. In 2016, she spoke out about controversial public bathroom debates, while states determined whether or not they would restrict trans people from using public restrooms.

“I hope that everybody gets a chance to be who and what they are. I just know, if I have to pee, I’m gon’ pee, wherever it’s got to be,” she told CNN at the time. Parton is very much pro-drag, telling ABC News in 2012 that if she had been biologically born a male, she would have been a drag queen.

This arrangement of Dolly’s classic anthem comes from Minnesota-born and Texas-based conductor, composer, and music educator Craig Hella Johnson. As an arranger, Johnson has a signature “collage” style, marrying music and poetry, and blending sacred and secular, classical and contemporary, traditional and popular styles. Johnson’s notable composition, *Considering Matthew Shepard*, was premiered in 2016 by Conspirare, which Johnson directs. The work is a concert-length fusion oratorio honoring the life and legacy of Matthew Shepard, a gay college student murdered in 1998. The work blends a range of musical styles and incorporates texts by Hildegard of Bingen, Lesléa Newman, Michael Dennis Browne, and Rumi, as well as excerpts from Shepard’s journal and interviews with his family.

This Is What Democracy Looks Like

From the Justice Choir Songbook
Words & Music by Elizabeth Alexander

Elizabeth Alexander writes: "Basing a song on my favorite protest chant was an irresistible songwriting challenge. I love it that very young children can shout out the numbers.”

Love is Love is Love is Love

from the Justice Choir Songbook
Words & Music by Abbie Betinis

Abbie Betinis writes: "This song is dedicated to the victims, and survivors, of hate crimes everywhere, and specifically for those at the Pulse nightclub in Orlando on June 12, 2016. Love is often the bravest thing we do. May love prevail."

Louder Than Words

From the musical *Tick… Tick… Boom!*

Jonathan Larson/arr. Mac Huff

Jonathan Larson was born on February 4, 1960 to Nanette and Allan Larson and grew up in White Plains, a suburb of New York City. Larson spent his youth among drama clubs and music lessons, studying multiple instruments and starring in many of his high school theater productions. Larson won a full merit scholarship to Adelphi University. At college, he was a prolific actor, writer and composer. He wrote cabarets, one about women's issues called *Herstory, Or Little Miss Muffet Spat on Her Tuffet,* and many other titles. Larson said his work was inspired by the music of Billy Joel, Nirvana, The Beatles, and Stephen Sondheim and his dream was to combine all these influences into one. During his college years, Larson even reached out to Sondheim and the latter became his mentor for the rest of his life. Larson lived in a small apartment with no heat and made do by waiting tables at the Moondance Diner. He had an illegal wood stove in the apartment to try and keep warm. He developed a close group of friends and sadly watched several pass away from HIV/AIDS in their early 30s. He also met and befriended future Broadway stars Roger Bart, Marin Mazzie, and Scott Burkell. He was also a prolific children's songwriter, composing songs for *Sesame Street*, music for *An American Tail* and *The Land Before Time*, and four songs for the children's video *Away We Go!*

In 1989, Larson decided to create an autobiographical musical about being on the cusp on 30 at the dawn of a new decade. He titled it 30/90. The show mirrors Larson's life, detailing his frustrations with his lack of success in either career or love until his best friend tells him he's HIV positive. After a mixed reaction from a development at Second Stage meant the show would not be produced until after 1990, Larson changed the show title to BoHo Days to base it on life in his neighborhood, which he said was "below Houston Street" as well as tie into bohemian life. However, because the name was his creation and no one knew what it meant he changed the title again, this time to *tick…tick…Boom!*. Larson performed this one-man rock musical a number of times. After his death, playwright David Auburn transformed the show into a three person musical.

Larson was on the cusp of a massive career breakthrough, as his next show *RENT* would go on to be a huge success on Broadway, win a score of awards, among them several Tony Awards and the Pulitzer Prize, and become a worldwide phenomenon. His natural talent was extraordinary and in his short composing time, besides writing over 200 songs, Jonathan Larson changed the musical theater landscape forever. After the first performance of *RENT*, following thunderous applause, someone in the audience broke the silence with, “thank you, Jonathan Larson.” Thank you, indeed.

Gardiner, M. (2024). *Thank you, Jonathan Larson*. Signature Theatre in Arlington, Virginia. https://www.sigtheatre.org/boheme/jonanthan-larsons-bio

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CHOIR MEMBERS

Casey Tecklenburg, conductor

Bethany Brooks, collaborative accompanist

Gabby Sealock
Karen Engels
Erica Hoppe
Adeleine Hitchman
Mason Sealock
Bailey Aukes
Chris Hale
Kevin Lam
Crystal Spencer
Karin Brunk
Ryleigh Schnell
Lauren Leman

Chloe Anderson
Amanda Reiter
Jess Lieb
Cecilia Shutt
Mitchell Stover
Bill Atkins
Eric Alberts
Tommy Truelsen
Ian Hitchman
Taylor Vessel
Jakob Reha
Brad Krug