

**WEST VILLAGE CHORALE
2025 WINTER CONCERT**

REQUIEM



**SATURDAY, MARCH 22ND, 2025
JUDSON MEMORIAL CHURCH**

THE WEST VILLAGE CHORALE CONCERT SINGERS

SOPRANOS

Yael Backner
Marne Brown
Sarah T. M. Chwe
Ortal Cohen
Wei-Ting Duo
Devi Ellant
Katie FitzGerald
Jerise Fogel
Ellen Gottlieb
Suzanne Hartman
Jenna Johnson
Jacqueline Jones
Alexa Mamoulides
Denise Mathe
Maureen McCarthy
Katie Sanborn-Price
Evelyn Simon
Sondra Ward *
Rachel Yohe
Rong Zhang
Ya Ming Zhao

TENORS

Steven Bizzell
James Dantas
Michael Figueroa
Nicholas Gottlieb
Joseph Hatem *
Liam McNamara
John Onderdonk
Terry Quinn
David Reinhart
Lia Rusli
David Styers
Michel Vazirani

ALTOS

Amy Daly
Ana de Mendoza
Nathalie Fadel
Grace Goodman
Johanna Henry
Clarice Lappé
Jung Min Lee
Susan Leicher
Christina Longo
Sara Mael
Hannah Marsh
Juliet Milhofer *
Catherine Morrison
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Dianne Patterson
Alexandra Ryan
Katherine Schoonover
Stephanie Serpick
Loren Silber
Deborah Steinglass
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BASSES

Justin Beck
Teedo Bilecky
J Robert Charles
Jack Darcey
Robert Frenzel-Berra
Donald Gallagher
Patrick Grice
John Herzfeld *
Thomas Higgins
Louis Krefsky
Tim Krol
Guy Ortmann
John Stout
Mark Sydel

WEST VILLAGE CHORALE 2025 WINTER CONCERT

REQUIEM

SATURDAY, MARCH 22, 2025 AT 5:00 PM
JUDSON MEMORIAL CHURCH



WEST VILLAGE CHORALE

COLIN BRITT - ARTISTIC DIRECTOR AND CONDUCTOR

RONG ZHANG - ASSISTANT CONDUCTOR

ELENA BELLI - PIANIST

SONYA HEADLAM - SOPRANO

JUSTIN BECK - BASS-BARITONE

*denotes section leader

ORCHESTRA

VIOLIN I

Orlando Wells ^(SQ)

VIOLIN II / VIOLA

Drew Griffin ^(SQ)

VIOLA

Alissa Smith ^(SQ)
Alexis Sykes
Aundrey Mitchell

CELLO

Titi Layoandco ^(SQ)
Hannah Holman

BASS

Christopher Johnson

HORN I

Will De Vos

HORN II

Ian Donald

HARP

Stacey Shames

PIANO/ORGAN

Elena Belli

CONTRACTOR

Alissa Smith

REQUIEM PROGRAM

SEVEN LAST WORDS OF THE UNARMED..... *Joel Thompson (b. 1988)*

- I. Kenneth Chamberlain, 68
- II. Trayvon Martin, 16
- III. Amadou Diallo, 23
Sonya Headlam, Soprano
- IV. Michael Brown, 18
- V. Oscar Grant, 22
- VI. John Crawford, 22
- VII. Eric Garner, 43

II (ANDANTE CON MOTO) FROM..... *Florence Price (1887-1953)*

PIANO QUINTET IN A MINOR

REQUIEM IN D MINOR (OP. 48) *Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)*

- I. Introit and Kyrie
- II. Offertory
Justin Beck, Bass-Baritone
- III. Sanctus
- IV. Pie Jesu
Sonya Headlam, Soprano
- V. Agnus Dei
- VI. Libera me
Justin Beck, Bass-Baritone
- VII. In Paradisum

Please hold your applause until the conclusion of the performance.

^{SQ} - players in the string quartet for *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed* and *Piano Quintet in A Minor*

WORDS & TRANSLATIONS

REQUIEM IN D MINOR (OP. 48)

I. INTROIT AND KYRIE

*Requiem aeternam dona eis Domine,
et lux perpetua luceat eis.
Te decet hymnus, Deus in Sion,
et tibi reddetur votum in Jerusalem.
Exaudi orationem meam;
ad te omnis caro veniet.*

*Kyrie eleison,
Christe eleison
Kyrie eleison.*

II. OFFERTORY

*O Domine, Jesu Christe, rex gloriae
libera animas defunctorum
de poenis inferni
et de profundo lacu.
O Domine, Jesu Christe, rex gloriae
libera animas defunctorum
de ore leonis,
ne absorbeat Tartarus,
O Domine, Jesu Christe, rex gloriae
ne cadant in obscurum.*

*Hostias et preces tibi Domine,
laudis offerimus,
Tu suscipe pro animabus illis
quarum hodie memoriam facimus.
Fac eas, Domine,
de morte transire ad vitam,
quam olim Abrahae promisisti
et semini eius.*

*O Domine, Jesu Christe, rex gloriae
libera animas defunctorum
de poenis inferni
et de profundo lacu,
ne cadant in obscurum.
Amen.*

Grant them eternal rest, O Lord,
and may perpetual light shine upon them
A hymn befits you, God in Sion,
and to you shall the vow be made in Jerusa-
lem.
Hear my prayer;
to you shall all flesh come.

Lord have mercy,
Christ have mercy,
Lord have mercy.

Lord Jesus Christ, king of glory,
deliver the souls of the departed
from the punishments of hell
and from the bottomless pit.
O Lord Jesus Christ, king of glory,
deliver the souls of the departed
from the lion's mouth,
lest hell swallow them.
O Lord Jesus Christ, king of glory,
lest they fall into darkness.

Sacrifice and prayers, Lord
To you we offer with praises.
Receive it for those souls
whom today we commemorate.
Allow them, O Lord
to cross from death into life,
which once Thou didst promise
to Abraham and his seed.

O Lord Jesus Christ, king of glory,
deliver the souls of the departed
from the punishments of hell
and from the bottomless pit,
lest they fall into darkness.
Amen.

III. SANCTUS

*Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus
Dominus Deus Sabaoth,
Pleni sunt coeli et terra gloria tua.
Hosanna in excelsis.*

IV. PIE JESU

*Pie Jesu, Domine,
Dona eis requiem
Sempiternam requiem.*

V. AGNUS DEI

*Agnus Dei,
Qui tollis peccata mundi,
Dona eis requiem.*

*Agnus Dei,
qui tollis peccata mundi
dona eis requiem,
sempiternam requiem.*

*Lux Aeterna
luceat eis, Domine,
cum sanctis tuis in aeternum,
quia pius es.*

*Requiem aeternam
dona eis Domine,
et lux perpetua luceat eis.*

Holy, holy, holy
Lord God of Hosts,
Heaven and earth are full of your glory.
Hosanna in the highest.

Merciful Jesus, Lord,
grant them rest,
everlasting rest.

Lamb of God,
Who takes away the sin of the world,
grant them rest.

Lamb of God,
Who takes away the sin of the world,
grant them rest,
eternal rest.

Let perpetual light
shine upon them, O Lord,
with your saints for eternity,
because you are merciful.

Eternal rest
grant them, O Lord,
And let perpetual light shine upon them.

REQUIEM IN D MINOR (OP. 48) CONT.

VI. LIBERA ME

*Libera me, Domine, de morte aeterna
in die illa tremenda,
quando coeli movendi sunt et terra,
dum veneris judicare saeculum per ignem.*

*Tremens factus sum ego
et timeo dum discussio venerit
atque ventura ira.*

*Dies illa, dies irae,
calamitatis et miseriae,
dies illa, dies magna,
et amara valde.*

*Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine,
et lux perpetua luceat eis.*

*Libera me, Domine, de morte aeterna
in die illa tremenda,
quando coeli movendi sunt et terra,
dum veneris judicare saeculum per ignem.*

VII. IN PARADISUM

*In Paradisum deducant angeli;
in tuo adventu suscipiant te martyres
et perducant te in civitatem sanctam,
Jerusalem.*

*Chorus angelorum te suscipiat
et cum Lazaro, quondam paupere
aeternam habeas requiem.*

Deliver me, O Lord, from everlasting death
on that dreadful day,
when the heavens and earth shall be moved,
when you will come to judge the world by
fire.

I am made to tremble,
and I fear the day of reckoning
and the wrath to come.

That day, the day of anger,
of calamity, of misery,
that day, that great day,
a day most bitter.

Grant them eternal rest, O Lord,
and may perpetual light shine upon them.

Deliver me, O Lord, from everlasting death
on that dreadful day,
when the heavens and earth shall be moved,
when you will come to judge the world by
fire.

May the angels receive you into Paradise;
at your coming may the martyrs receive you
and bring you into the holy city,
Jerusalem.

May the chorus of angels receive you,
and with Lazarus, once a beggar,
may you have eternal rest.

SEVEN LAST WORDS OF THE UNARMED

I. KENNETH CHAMBERLAIN, 68

"Officers, why do you have your guns out?"

II. TRAYVON MARTIN, 17

"What are you following me for?"

III. AMADOU DIALLO, 23

"Mom, I'm going to college."

IV. MICHAEL BROWN, 18

"I don't have a gun! STOP!"

V. OSCAR GRANT III, 22

"You shot me!"

VI. JOHN CRAWFORD III, 22

"It's not real."

VII. ERIC GARNER, 43

"I can't breathe."

PROGRAM NOTES

In my nine seasons with the West Village Chorale, I have been honored to conduct some of the staples of the Western classical music, such as Bach's *Mass in B Minor* and Rachmaninoff's *All-Night Vigil*, plus a number of smaller gems that have entered regular rotation in the American choral scene. I have also been very proud of the work our ensemble has done to expand and diversify the choral canon to include more works by women, BIPOC, and LGBTQ+ composers and arrangers. For example, our most recent holiday concert included only one piece by a white male composer, and his name was Leonard Bernstein. As artists, I believe, we have both a privilege and responsibility to use our art form to elevate composers from historically marginalized communities, as well as to inspire and challenge our audiences.

Today's concert pairs the Fauré *Requiem*, a very traditional work from the Western canon, with Joel Thompson's *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed*. On the surface, these two works may not seem to have all that much in common—one is a gentle and reassuring statement of faith and comfort, while the other is an unflinching observation of the injustice and fear leveled against young men of color in this country. But when these works are programmed sequentially, what emerges is a progression from the Thompson to the Fauré that gradually lifts us from anger, sorrow, and despair to consolation and even hope. Fauré's *Requiem* cannot and should not paper over the trauma and systemic racism explored in *Seven Last Words*, but perhaps it can help us to memorialize these seven victims and to imagine a future when no parent needs to sit down with their young children and have "The Talk."

Of *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed*, Joel Thompson writes:

In November of 2014, a Staten Island grand jury chose not to indict the officer whose actions led to the death of Eric Garner. To me, the message was clear. Any doubts I had seemed to evaporate. If I were to be killed in some interaction with authority figures, my loved ones should not expect justice. There could be a video recording of my futile attempts to describe my distress—"I can't breathe"—with the arm of the law around my neck and the life fading from my eyes, and still, my death wouldn't matter. My death wouldn't matter enough to warrant a formal charge of even manslaughter or negligent homicide. This was not an isolated incident—this was a trend. The color of my skin is a capital offense.

*Seven Last Words of the Unarmed wasn't written to be heard. It was essentially a sonic diary entry expressing my fear, anger, and grief in the wake of this tragedy. I was serving as director of choral studies and assistant professor of music at Andrew College in Cuthbert, Georgia, and my musical life mostly consisted of conducting and piano, but I occasionally composed pieces and hid them away. Finishing this work in early January 2015 was a much-needed catharsis; I felt exorcised of the emotions that had drained my spirit. However, Freddie Gray's death the following April urged me to try to bring *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed* to life. A Facebook post asking musician friends to sightread the work, a phone call by a friend to Dr. Eugene Rogers of the University of Michigan, a commission from Andre Dowell to fully orchestrate the work for the twentieth anniversary of the Sphinx Organization, and the piece is alive [ten] years later and I am very grateful.*

Liturgical settings of the "Seven Last Words of Christ" are not attempting to demonize the Roman soldiers that orchestrated the crucifixion, but they are designed to stir within the listener an empathy towards the suffering of Jesus. Similarly, this piece is not an antipolice protest work; it is really a meditation on the lives of these Black men and an effort to focus on their humanity, which is often eradicated in the media to justify their deaths.

*Listening to *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed* can be uncomfortable. As you listen, I ask that you try to remain open. It can be easy to let a spirit of defensiveness pollute the experience of the piece. I ask that you revisit the last moments of these men with fresh hearts:*

I. "Officers, why do you have your guns out?"

Encapsulating the sense of gloom that arises upon the news of the death of another unarmed Black man, the chorus rises from the funereal piano ostinato singing Kenneth Chamberlain's last words interpolated with the medieval tune "L'homme armé doibt on doubter"—"The armed man must be feared." After the final iteration of the sixty-eight-year old's dying breath, the chorus repeats one important word: "Why?"

PROGRAM NOTES CONT.

II. "What are you following me for?"

This movement uses the classical form of the fugue not only to portray Trayvon Martin's last moments trying to escape death, but also to sonically capture the daily paranoia of the Black experience while driving on roads, walking on sidewalks, and congregating at various social gatherings. Quotes of "L'homme armé" in the strings underneath the imitative counterpoint in the voices lead to a climactic yell of surprise at the movement's end.

III. "Mom, I'm going to college."

In New York, February of 1999, four police officers fired 41 shots at Amadou Diallo, a twenty-three-year old immigrant from Guinea. The undulating pattern in the piano simultaneously yields a sense of calm with its simple harmonic underpinning and unease with its odd 5/4 meter.

IV. "I don't have a gun! Stop shooting!"

Of the seven movements, this one contains the most anger. Through the use of agitated rhythms and multiple harmonic exclamations on the word "Stop," the target of the rage is media portrayal of Black men on the news, in comedies, and in dramas. Even in the aftermath of such tragedies, the rhetoric and images used to describe the deceased was markedly appalling across all media. This was the case, especially, for Michael Brown.

V. "You shot me. You shot me!"

Oscar Grant III's exclamations of surprise and incredulity were caught on several cell phone recordings in the BART station in which he was murdered. The movement honoring his life is a sonic representation of this epidemic. Aleatoric spoken exclamations of the last words crescendo alongside the humming of "L'homme armé" in the style of the Negro spiritual. Underneath the cacophony, the pulsing C of the piano, violin, and viola persist unflinchingly like a heart monitor until the end.

VI. "It's not real."

Although they were referring to the BB gun he was carrying in the Walmart where he was killed, John Crawford's last words escape the lips of thousands of African Americans. Thus, the movement's beginning is the soundtrack to my mental utopia. Saccharine sweet and soaring, the voices and strings are joined by the piano "heart monitor," which persists and gradually infects the strings, like reality interrupting a reverie.

VII. "I can't breathe!"

The decision of a Richmond County grand jury to not indict the officer responsible for Eric Garner's death was the impetus for this entire work, and it is only fitting that his last words end the piece. After using a mournful Byzantine texture for the first half of the movement, I tried to capture the panicked death thralls of asphyxiation in the music.

When the music is over, let us continue to listen. Let us listen to each other with love and hope for a more just future. Thank you.

—Joel Thompson

Bridging these two extended outer works is the middle movement from **Piano Quintet in A Minor** by Florence Price, the first African-American woman recognized nationally for her symphonic works. Aside from helping to ease the tension left in the air after the last note of *Seven Last Words* has faded, this beautiful slow movement sets up the restorative, melodic richness of the Fauré, while also elevating another underrepresented composer into our concert hall.

The **Requiem**, op. 48, of Gabriel Fauré is undoubtedly one of the most well-known and loved choral works of the Western canon, and it's no surprise—Fauré, known for his expressive melodies and gift for vocal writing, crafted a superbly lyrical setting of the Latin text that leans much more into the messages of assurance and optimism than the turbulent anxiety of several other eighteenth century requiems (such as those by Mozart and Verdi). The omission of most of the "Dies irae," following a French Baroque tradition, likewise leads to a gentler and more prayerful sentiment.

PROGRAM NOTES CONT.

As Fauré wrote the piece over the span of about twelve years, there are actually three published versions of the Requiem: the first, completed in 1888, includes only the "Introit and Kyrie," "Sanctus," "Pie Jesu," "Agnus Dei," and "In Paradisum" and is scored for organ, low strings, harp, and a solo violin. The second, completed in 1893, added previously composed "Offertory" and "Libera me" movements while also incorporating trumpets and horns. A final version for full orchestra was premiered in 1900, with the newly added violin section primarily doubling the violas throughout. In 1983, English composer and conductor Sir John Rutter published a new critical edition, which imagines the "ideal" version of the piece as it might have been heard in Fauré's post at La Madeleine. This is the version we offer today, accompanied by the (mostly) original chamber orchestra scoring.

The "Introit and Kyrie" begins with an ominous D minor chord, voiced thickly in close vocal harmonies and accompanied by slowly swelling strings. Following this introduction, the tenors introduce a lamenting melody that carries both the "Requiem aeternam" and "Kyrie eleison" texts. Fauré also sets up the solo/tutti dialogue that is featured prominently throughout the entire *Requiem*.

The "Offertory" introduces some counterpoint, first in the violas and cellos and then in the intimate duet for the alto and tenor sections of the choir. Fauré sets this text in perpetually rising minor keys, adding urgency and pathos with each new phrase, until the solo baritone arrives to warmly intone the "Hostias" portion of the text. Following a brief quotation in the organ of the "Te decet hymnus" passage from the first movement, the full choir returns to sing the final phrase, culminating in a luminous threefold "Amen."

Composers often save their most exuberant expressions of joy for the "Sanctus" in a mass or requiem, and Fauré's setting is no exception. Beginning with a simple back-and-forth between the sopranos and tenors and accompanied by the first instance of the violin solo, the music gradually builds to a triumphant "Hosanna in excelsis," with heroic trumpet and horn calls in the orchestra. As the voices repeat one last "Sanctus," the violin solo shimmers angelically in the stratosphere.

The only nonchoral movement in the piece is "Pie Jesu," sung by a solo soprano. As in the Brahms *Requiem* (which may have had some influence on Fauré), a soprano soloist portrays a motherly affection, supported by a veil of muted strings and the harp.

The "Agnus Dei" (which also contains the text of the "Lux aeterna") is a master class in form and melody and features some of Fauré's more adventurous harmonic turns. Following a lush introduction from the strings, the tenors sing a gently rising melody for the first "Agnus Dei," followed closely by some more urgent chords from the full chorus. After the third and final statement of the text, the sopranos lead into the "Lux aeterna," which hypnotically pivots around adventurous third relations in the harmonies, finally building to an A major plateau. The opening D minor material from the "Introit" returns, but Fauré departs from the original here to gradually return to a major key, with the transposed string introduction now serving as the ploy.

Although Fauré omits the "Dies irae" sequence, save for the "Pie Jesu," his treatment of the "Libera me" comes about as close as anything in the piece to the turbulent angst of the day of judgment. The movement begins with a highly expressive, almost operatic baritone solo, followed by the frightened pleas of the choir—"I am made to tremble and I fear because of the judgment that will come." As if on cue, a stormy horn call (evocative of the "Tuba mirum" from the "Dies irae") thrusts the chorus into a turbulent sea of dread. A rare unison choral texture then returns to the opening melody, hauntingly giving a final warning about the day when the world will be judged by fire.

"In Paradisum" returns us to the hopeful quality of most of the piece. In addition to the effortlessly floating soprano melody, the orchestra depicts the fluttering of angel wings, and the solo violin returns with another sparkling descant. The piece ends much as it began, with closely voiced choral harmonies repeating the phrase "Requiem," but this time in an assuredly content D major.

This program will not erase or resolve the issues that we face in society, whether they be the systemic oppression against young men of color, the rising trend of transphobia, or the cavalier disregard of human life on display in our current posturing around immigration and foreign aid. But perhaps by taking the time to sing these words and reflect on the loss of these seven lives, we can remind ourselves of their—and our own—humanity, and continue living and working toward a better, kinder future.

—Colin Britt



Praised by the *New York Times* as possessing a “well-blended sound,” the West Village Chorale is a sixty-voice avocational ensemble founded in 1971 by Gwen Gould. Originally established in connection with the 150th anniversary of the Church of St. Luke in the Fields as the St. Luke’s Community Chorus, the group incorporated in 1975 as the West Village Chorale. In 2010 the Chorale moved to our current home, the historic and acoustically magnificent Judson Memorial Church, designed by Stanford White.

Following Gwen Gould was interim Director Andrew Megill (1998-2000), and Artistic Director and Conductor Michael Conley (2000-2015). Michael developed the Chorale into an auditioned ensemble, and—in partnership with a devoted and energetic board and a motivated, talented group of singers—helped bring the Chorale to new levels of musicianship and accomplishment. Malcolm J. Merriweather led the Chorale as Artistic Director for the 2015-16 season, continuing a tradition of excellence. Since his appointment as Artistic Director in 2016, Colin Britt has further expanded the Chorale’s repertoire and reach.

The Chorale’s members are talented avocational singers with varied professional backgrounds (attorneys to Zumba instructors) but one shared goal: to make beautiful music. Our members give voice, leadership and passion to the Chorale.

The Chorale typically performs several concerts per year, with repertoire ranging from traditional and major works choral staples to contemporary pieces (including several world premieres and commissions in recent years). We also host an annual Caroling Walk that regularly sends hundreds of singers out around the Village, and a series of weekly Summer Sings, which allow the many choral singers in the area the chance to get together and sing through classic pieces while the choruses are on summer hiatus.

And because we are lucky enough to make music in New York, we’ve also had the opportunity to participate in a variety of other activities—including singing with Patti LuPone and indie rock band Sky-Pony at the 2016 Park Avenue Armory Gala, at Carnegie Hall in 2017 with tenor Amine Hachem, as part of the 2018 *Mile-Long Opera* on NYC’s High Line, and at the United Nations with the Qatar Philharmonic in celebration of UN Day in 2019, and caroling live on WNYC in December 2023.

As the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded and forced closures and shut-downs in 2020, the Chorale pivoted like so many groups—thanks to the persistence, creativity, and technical ingenuity of our artistic staff and dedicated volunteers—from in-person rehearsals and performances to virtual events.

During the 2020-2021 season, we produced two virtual concerts and one concert recorded at Judson for broadcast. In a time when so many of us stayed home to keep ourselves and our community safe, we were pleased to offer our usual Summer Sings, Messiah Sing, and Caroling Walk in a virtual format as a way to offer our choral community in New York a means of staying connected to the music we love.

As the city and the world opened back up to live performances, we were thrilled to finally celebrate our golden anniversary over two seasons—with a gala concert in March 2022 at which we welcomed back all of our previous conductors, and a performance of J.S. Bach’s monumental *Mass in B Minor* with full baroque orchestra in May 2023.

We’re so grateful that our rehearsal and performance opportunities have returned to some version of “normal” and can’t wait to see what our next half-century will bring!

Thank you for sharing this afternoon with us, and we hope to see you at a future event!

WEST VILLAGE CHORALE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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The Clergy, Administration and Staff of Judson Memorial Church



Colin Britt, Artistic Director and Conductor

Now in his ninth season as Artistic Director and Conductor of the West Village Chorale, Colin Britt also serves as Director of Choral Activities at Mount Holyoke College and Director of Music at Christ Church Cathedral, both in Western Massachusetts. Prior to his current appointments, he served for seven years as Choir Director at Rutgers Preparatory School and for ten years as Director of Music at Grace Church Van Vorst in Jersey City. He has also served on the conducting faculty at SUNY New Paltz and the Hartt School, as director of Amuse Singers and North River Sing, and he is the founding director of Terp-

sichore Ensemble, a professional chamber choir dedicated to performing music by emerging composers, especially from historically marginalized communities. In spring 2023, Colin was one of the principal conductors for the Lincoln Center premiere of Jonathan Dove's *Search for Spring*.

Colin's compositions have been performed by ensembles at Rutgers, Westminster Choir College, Hartt, Yale, and Seraphic Fire, the Yale Schola Cantorum, the Yale Alumni Chorus, C4, VOCE, and the Riverside Choral Society, and by ensembles across the country and on four continents. In April 2019, the Rutgers University Voorhees Choir premiered his work *Imagination* at Carnegie Hall. He was the commissioned composer for the Maine Bicentennial, the 100th anniversary of the Hartt School, and the 2020 ACDA Eastern Division Honor Choir, and his composition won first prize in the 2021 Missoula Community Chorus competition, *The Way Through*.

Colin holds degrees from the Hartt School, the Yale School of Music, and Rutgers University. He lives in Massachusetts with his wife Victoria, their daughters Amelia and Lilah, and their dog Mari.



Rong Zhang, a native of China, is a Doctor of Musical Arts candidate in Choral Conducting at Manhattan School of Music, under the tutelage of Kent Tritle and Dr. Ronnie Oliver. She earned a Bachelor of Music degree with academic honors from the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, a Master of Music degree and a Graduate Diploma from the New England Conservatory in choral conducting. During her time at NEC, she studied with Erica Washburn and has regularly conducted the NEC Chamber Singers and the Concert Choir, and served as a graduate assistant to William Drury with the NEC Symphonic Winds.

Rong has appeared as a guest conductor with the Navy Band Northeast, Cambridge A cappella Group, Shanghai Opera House Chorus, and the Choir of the Shanghai University for Science and Technology. Besides her experience as a conductor, Rong is also a trained pianist and won first prize in the Hong Kong International Piano Competition.

Before taking on her role as the assistant conductor at the West Village Chorale, Rong directed a few ensembles in Massachusetts and New York City. She previously served as assistant conductor at the Lincoln Center *Search for Spring* Project and the Oratorio Society of New York, where she had the opportunity to perform at Carnegie Hall. Currently, she has appeared as the guest conductor with the Berlin Radio Choir, working closely with the chorus master Simon Halsey, and directed a concert with them at St. Elisabeth Kirche in Berlin.



Elena Belli, Pianist and Assistant Conductor, is a versatile concert artist and influential teacher who has appeared nationally and internationally as both soloist and chamber musician. A sought-after collaborator, she has performed with prestigious instrumentalists and vocalists from leading ensembles, including the Metropolitan Opera, New York City Opera, Orpheus, and the New York Philharmonic. She has toured throughout Europe with members of the Berlin Philharmonic, and been hailed “a captivating performer...elegant and poetic” by the *Correio del Povo in Brazil*. Closer to home, she has been heard in NYC’s major venues, as well as on WNYC and WQXR, and been the featured

soloist with local orchestras. Always a champion for new music, she has played a broad array of world premieres, some composed expressly for her. She takes an active role in promoting young talent, is often invited to conduct Master Classes for aspiring young pianists, and for over a decade chaired the AMTL Young Musicians Concerts at Carnegie Recital Hall.

Ms. Belli holds both Bachelor and Master of Music degrees from the Manhattan School of Music. Past faculty positions have included The New School and Concordia College. Currently, she is on the piano faculty of the Manhattan School of Music Precollege Division, and the Hoff-Barthelson Music School. A devoted and valuable part of the WVC community, Ms. Belli has been the pianist for the West Village Chorale since 1988.



Soprano **Sonya Headlam** performs a wide range of repertoire spanning art song, opera, chamber music, concert works, and oratorio. She has appeared as a soloist with ensembles such as the New York Philharmonic, the Philadelphia Orchestra, Apollo’s Fire, and the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra. Notable performances include Handel’s *Messiah* with the Philadelphia Orchestra and New Jersey Symphony, Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9 with the North Carolina Symphony, Mozart’s *Mass in C minor* and Mahler’s Symphony No. 2 with the Akron Symphony Orchestra, and Steve Reich’s *Music for 18 Musicians* with the Bang on a Can All-Stars at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

A versatile artist, Headlam performs Baroque, Classical, and contemporary music, as well as music that carries deep cultural and historical resonance, including spirituals, parlor music, and music based on folk traditions—repertoire that spans from the 17th century to the present. She is featured on the Raritan Players’ recording *In the Salon of Madame Brillon: Music and Friendship in Benjamin Franklin’s Paris*.

Headlam holds a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from Rutgers University, Mason Gross School of the Arts. From 2021 to 2022, she was a visiting scholar at Rutgers University, where she conducted research on the 18th-century composer and writer Ignatius Sancho.



Bass-baritone **Justin Beck** has had a varied career both as an opera and concert soloist. He studied music with a focus on vocal performance at the University of Texas at Austin, and Texas State University. He was a Young Artist at Austin Lyric Opera for two seasons singing roles in Gounod's *Faust*, Puccini's *La fanciulla del West*, and Verdi's *Rigoletto*. He also spent two summers at the Aspen Music Festival in their Opera Theater Center. Additional opera credits include three seasons with Opera Company of Middlebury in Vermont performing in Massenet's *Thaïs*, Puccini's *La rondine*, and Bizet's *The Pearl Fishers*. Other favorite roles include Leporello in Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, and Dr. Falke

& Frank in J. Strauss Jr.'s *Die Fledermaus*, both with Opera Manhattan.

Concert soloist highlights include Handel's *Messiah* with the Austin Symphony, Berlioz's *Requiem* with the Carnegie Hall Festival Chorus under the baton of Robert Spano, Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and Orff's *Carmina Burana* with the National Chorale in Avery Fisher Hall, Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex* with the Bard Music Festival, R. Strauss's *Feuersnot* with the American Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Leon Botstein at Carnegie Hall, and most recently Saint-Saëns's *Oratorio de Noël* with the Hudson Chorale. Additional soloist engagements include concerts with West Village Chorale, Long Island Masterworks and Gregg Smith Singers. This year Justin marks ten summers as the bass-baritone soloist of the Great Auditorium Quartet in Ocean Grove, NJ where he has regularly performed in recital as well as sacred masterworks from Handel's *Messiah* to Mendelssohn's *Elijah* and more.

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We are grateful to our donors and sponsors for allowing us to give the gift of choral music. If you love choral music, or if you love someone who loves choral music, please consider making a tax-deductible donation to the West Village Chorale. With your assistance, we can continue to lift up our voices and provide not only our concerts, but also our popular Summer Sing series and annual (and quintessentially New York) Christmas Caroling stroll through the West Village.

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JOIN US!



The Chorale will be auditioning for singers in all voice parts later this summer/early fall for our 2025-2026 season.

We are a highly participatory choir, composed of experienced volunteer singers with strong sight-reading ability, excellent vocal technique, the ability to blend—and the willingness to contribute their other diverse gifts (photography, graphic/web-site design, fundraising skills, culinary artistry) towards the success of our work.

We keep our membership to around 60 people, so every voice and every personality counts. And we are always looking for new voices and new talents to add to our mix!

Rehearsals are Tuesday evenings from 7:00 to 9:45 pm at Judson Memorial Church, on Washington Square South, in the beautiful Greenwich Village section of Manhattan, with occasional additional rehearsals in advance of concerts and other events.

To schedule an audition, please contact us at westvillagechorale@gmail.com.

COMING LATER THIS SEASON

Viva Vino Fundraiser

Thursday, April 3, 2025 at 7:00pm

Judson Memorial Church

Our annual wine and music fundraiser pairs a flight of wines curated by our in-house tenor/sommelier James Dantas with performances by the Chorale and some of our most talented friends—Sopranos Sarah Blaze and Melissa Cintron, tenor John Bellemer and Bass-Baritone Justin Beck. Be a patron of the arts and join us! This fun evening of singing and toasting supports our musical and community endeavors all year long!

Transatlantic

Sunday, May 18, 2025 at 5:00pm

Judson Memorial Church

Our final concert of the 2024-2025 season draws on music from the old and new worlds, acknowledging the impact of European colonialism on Latin American choral music and celebrating the musical heritage of spirituals and gospel music in North America. This concert features compositions by underrepresented Renaissance and 20th century composers—including Modesta Bor, José Maurício Nunes Garcia, Vicente Lusitano, and Juan Gutiérrez de Padilla—contemporary American composers Arianne Abela, Jake Runestad, and Brandon Williams, and spiritual arrangements by Marques Garrett, Jester Hairston, and Moses Hogan.

2025 WVC Concert Tour of Portugal and Spain

July 3 - July 13, 2025

For the first time in seven years, members of the WVC will be hitting the road, and you are welcome to join and sing with us!

For more information, visit our website at westvillagechorale.org!