

The Memorial Church of Harvard University

Music Notes for Sunday, May 21, 2023

This morning, I would like to thank David von Behren, Carson Cooman, and the members of the Harvard University Choir for another wonderful year of music-making in the Memorial Church. It is with sadness that we say farewell to our graduating seniors and leavers, and we wish them every success in their future endeavors.

Alfred V. Fedak was organist and composer in residence at Westminster Presbyterian Church in Albany, NY, for over thirty years. Widely regarded as one of the greatest living composers of original hymn tunes, he is also a prolific composer of choral works. *A Parting Blessing* is a gentle, contemplative setting of words whose sentiments seem particularly appropriate as our leavers begin their new journeys.

Gwyneth Walker is one of America's most published composers, whose versatility is evidenced in the wide variety of genres for which she writes. Dr. Walker was formerly on the faculty of Oberlin Conservatory before devoting herself full-time to composition. *Let the Life I've Lived Speak for Me* is an arrangement of a traditional song, set in a simple and direct fashion. It is dedicated to the Ferris Choral Fellows of Harvard University and was written for the first service of Morning Prayers back in Appleton Chapel following the church's 2016 renovation.

The French organist and composer Olivier Messiaen was the organist of La Trinité, Paris, for more than sixty years. His unswerving Catholic faith is the foundation of all his compositions, and he was especially drawn to the more mystical feast days, including the Ascension. The prelude is the closing movement of his suite *L'Ascension*: the music is so slow-moving that it seems to transcend our traditional notion of time, thus creating the sense of wonder and awe appropriate for such an occasion.

The postlude is composer in residence Carson Cooman's thrilling fantasia on one of Harvard's most recognizable tunes, "Fair Harvard," whose strains can be heard echoing around the yard almost incessantly during this festive season of Commencement-tide.