

CONSTELLATION
MEN'S ENSEMBLE PRESENTS



NOVA VI: pathways



Guarneri Hall | Friday, May 19th at 6:30pm
Guarneri Hall | Saturday, May 20th at 7:30pm

a note of welcome

Dear Friends,

If we can't find any spaces to feel safe, then we'll create them. We'll find safe harbor in the arms, dreams, and music of another, allowing us to be heard, to be held, to belong.

Welcome to NOVA, our annual evening of world premieres, bringing our mission of new repertoire directly to your ears. Five composers have written new music for CME and tonight's performance will feature ideas of place, home, journey, and nostalgia. From deeply ingrained declarations becoming a line of necessary questioning to the tiniest particles of our ability to communicate our basic human desire to be heard; tonight's journey will be both boundary pushing and beautiful.



I must take a moment to thank our artists specifically, for their incredible work and willingness to take on the challenge of bringing brand new music to life, not as individuals, but as Constellation Men's Ensemble. Being here tonight already feels like an accomplishment in our chaotic world, and the chance to premiere music of our time is an enormous gift. Thank you for your passion, commitment, and willingness to be vulnerable in the name of good storytelling.

If this is your first time with us, welcome. If you're returning to us, welcome back. We're glad your path led you here, to share an evening creating new stories together and illuminating the next league of our collective path from here.

Yours in Music & Brotherhood,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Ryan Townsend Strand". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ryan" being the most prominent.

Ryan Townsend Strand

Executive Director & tenor, Constellation Men's Ensemble

NOVA VI: pathways

May 19 & 20, 2023
Guarneri Hall, Chicago, IL

CARDINAL DIRECTIONS*

ALEX BERKO (B. 1995)

I. north

SILENT NOTHING SILENT ALL*

ROSSA CREAN (b. 1975)

II. south

BERKO

THE 21ST CENTURY MAN*

JASMINE THOMASIAN (b. 1993)

SONG OF SKY AND SEA

PAUL JOHN RUDOI (b. 1985)

II. The Infinite Dwelling

III. east

BERKO

SIMPLIFY*

BENJAMIN PENWELL (b. 1989)

THE RIVER SPEAKS OF LOSS & DESIRE*.

CHAD MCCOY (b. 1980)

IV. As One Sky

RUDOI

IV. west

BERKO

** denotes world premiere performance*

*Please join us after the performance for a reception in the
conference room next door to greet the artists.*

T E X T S

CARDINAL DIRECTIONS - POETRY BY RŪTA KUZMICKAS

north

one nation,
fatherland,
semi-visible,
mythology
and artifice
for all

west

this land was made for golden spines
of sandstone, every water drop
a talisman, each curve of wind
a chisel sent to document the hours
thirst prolonged, the fractured earth
unpolished vagrant dust set out to calcify
a home within the knuckles of my hands

east

while we slept, the sea resumed
its melancholy drone, and wept;
sisters of phaethon; tarrying
your amber tears to posit
in the dusk like resin amulets
of grief laid out to mend
my hyperborean
blue heart

south

lone star, would I were steadfast
as a merle of sleepless birds
amassing on the power lines
above west alabama street,
and flocking, with eternal beaks
ajar, shepherds for floods to
allocate us temporary shores.

SILENT NOTHING SILENT ALL - WORDS BY ROSSÁ CREAM

Here it is again...
the worry,
Silent Nothing, Silent All,
until it moves to howl at me.

Always uninvited,
unexpected,
unbecoming,
unresolved,
I unravel and freeze,
coils around my insides,
squeezing

weaving the shell of my withdrawal.
tainting the well of the promise of joy.
I wrap the darkness around me,
accept discomfort as a long-loved friend

And in that stillness,
it speaks to me as a mother
“Love me!
Hold me!
See me!
Hear me!
Don’t ever leave me!”

THE 21ST CENTURY MAN - POEM BY JORDAN ASPIRAS

The 21st century man,
 No sissy stuff
 Sturdy oak
 No emotions
 Give em hell
 Daring
 Brave.

How long can this model last?
 It has lasted long enough to prove the damage done has infected more
 than just manhood.

All the traits they told the man to be,
 Became the traits that she learned,
 Became the traits of womanhood for her.

Locked up emotions,
 Learned how to be a give em hell kind of woman,
 Through arched eyebrows and dead stare eyes.

The model man,
 Taught her how to be a woman,
 But not in a way that she ever wanted to be.

She trained to be a dragon,
 Scorching her path with one fire-breathing breath.
She must now relearn the power of the woman,

With open palms,
Calloused palms,
But open.

Open for the first time in a long time.

She holds gold in the cracks of her palms.

Knowing that there is more to her womanhood than meets the eye.

She is not simply something to be stared at,

Inspected,

Dissected.

She is to be seen whole,

Holy,

Gracing this earth with a fierceness unrecognizable in the
face of insecurity.

She still breathes fire,

But a fire that does not burn those to a crisp,

She breathes a fire that allows for her to

Reclaim herself from the same america that has already stolen

More than can be returned.

There is much to be learned from the woman.

THE INFINITE DWELLING - WORDS BY KABIR

The infinite dwelling of the infinite Being is everywhere:
in earth, water, sky, and air.

SIMPLIFY - a note from the composer

I like to compose small details to sounds, to give each small piece its own identity and characteristics and shape, and to have each part express a level of individualism. But sometimes I feel like my notation can get overly dense and complex in a way that can get between the performer and their natural musical impulses, as well as their ability to be meaningfully connected to the rest of the ensemble. simplify serves as a metaphor for how individuality can be expressed in cooperation with others, not just in conflict with them.

In the first half, the music is inscrutable and individual. Despite the basses and tenors singing the same pitch as the other members of their sections, they are unable to align themselves, disagreeing on vocal sounds, rhythmic alignment, tuning, and timbre. Each voice constantly finds ways to morph away from the other voices, to somehow attempt to present its own version of the shared sound even when it comes in conflict with the musical directions of other voices.

In the second half, the voices split, with each part receiving its own note. The singers are asked to sustain this chord for an extended period of time, exploring their place in it and their relationship to the other voices, with the freedom to choose their own sounds and dynamics on the given pitch. Here, the interplay between individualism is contextualized within a cooperative whole, and within the inter-ensemble relationships between the individual voices.

simplify contains no sung words, representative of the struggle to meaningfully communicate within a vague and intentionally obscured framework. It is only when the singers work in cooperation that one of them finds the ability to speak. - Benjamin Penwell

THE RIVER SPEAKS OF LOSS & DESIRE - WORDS BY HUGHES/TEASDALE

“Suicide’s Note” - Langston Hughes

The calm,
Cool face of the river
Asked me for a kiss.

“The River” - Sara Teasdale

I came from the sunny valleys
And sought for the open sea,
For I thought in its gray expanses
My peace would come to me.

I came at last to the ocean
And found it wild and black,
And I cried to the windless valleys,
“Be kind and take me back!”

But the thirsty tide ran inland,
And the salt waves drank of me,
And I who was fresh as the rainfall
Am bitter as the sea.

AS ONE SKY - TEXT FROM “THE INWARD AND THE OUTWARD” BY KABIR

Oh my heart! Wake, oh wake!

The moon is within me, and so is the sun.
The inward and the outward are become as one sky, the Infinite and the finite
are united.
The hills and the sea and the earth.
The days and the nights.
The rising and the setting of the sun.
The oceans and the unnumbered stars.
The limit and the limitless.
The body and the mind.
The beginning, the middle, and the end.
The conscious and the unconscious.

Between the poles of the conscious and the unconscious, there has the mind made a swing:

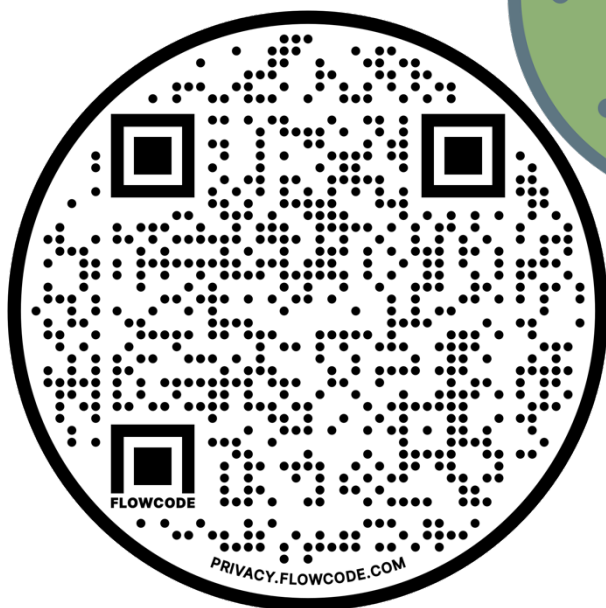
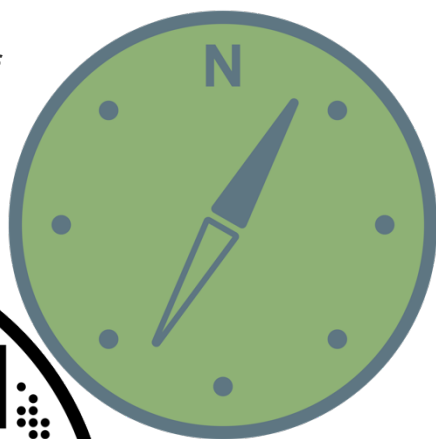
Thereon hang all beings and all worlds, and that swing never ceases its sway. Millions of beings are there: the sun and the moon in their courses are there. Millions of ages pass, and the swing goes on. All swing! The sky and the earth and the air and the water.

O brother! He who has seen that radiance of love, he is saved: There the sky is filled with music.

Day and night, the chorus of music fills the heavens:

The light of the sun, the moon, and the stars shines bright. The melody of love swells forth.

For a full list of
composer bios,
simply scan the
QR code below.



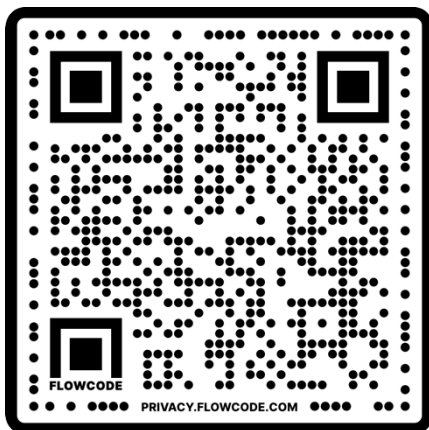
COMMUNITY UPLIFT PARTNER

Constellation partners with other local nonprofits as part of our annual NOVA series to raise awareness and funding for impactful organizations to the Chicagoland community. Our Community Uplift program seeks to join the commissioning of new music directly to the community we serve. Since 2019, Constellation has partnered with Center On Halsted, Fostering Dignity, Boys & Girls Clubs of Metropolitan Chicago, CASA Cook County, and The Alzheimer's Association of Illinois, making donations to each of the organizations following our fundraising efforts for these world premiere performances.



Chicago House

Chicago House empowers persons living with or vulnerable to HIV/AIDS to lead healthy and dignified lives through housing and compassionate, client-centered support services.



Founded in 1985 during the height of the AIDS crisis, Chicago House initially served as a housing resource, and in most cases a hospice, for those living with HIV/AIDS. Chicago House has been supporting individuals and families impacted by HIV since 1985 with housing, health, and employment services.

Chicago House aims to play a critical role in eliminating new infections and getting to zero by 2030 and believes that housing is essential to ending the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Annually, we annually serve more than 2,000 individuals and families across four program pillars: housing, health, employment services, and the TransLife Care program.





Constellation Men's Ensemble is a Chicago-based vocal group dedicated to creating distinct performances in unique spaces, empowering the next generation of singers through educational engagement, and expanding the repertoire for men's vocal music by commissioning new works from both emerging and established composers.

Since 2019, Constellation has partnered with other local nonprofits to raise awareness and funding for impactful organizations to the Chicagoland community through our Community Uplift program. Organizations to date include Center On Halsted, Boys & Girls Club of Metropolitan Chicago, CASA Cook County, Fostering Dignity, the Alzheimer's Association of Illinois, and Chicago House.

In 2016, CME founded our new music series NOVA—"New. Original. Vocal. Art." NOVA seeks to capitalize on their mission of commissioning new works and expanding the repertoire for tenor/bass voices. Last year, NOVA V premiered works dealing with the theme of *humanhood* including our largest commission to date, Robert Maggio's *Man Up/Man Down*, exploring how masculine identity takes shape in our evolving world; how our personal histories of family, race, religion, education, status, exposure, geography, etc. affect the formation of our identities. The album *Man Up/Man Down* was released on Constellation's debut album earlier this month with Sono Luminus Records.

CME has partnered with Music of the Baroque's Strong Voices program to bring music and passion to students within Chicago Public Schools. Workshop performances focused on careers in music, the joy of community through singing, and the multitude of ways that music can remain a part of your life after high school. Pre-COVID, they toured New England and Maine, working with over 2,000 middle and high school students through their passion of connecting with the next generation of singers.

CME is the 2019 winner of the American Prize in Choral Performance, professional division.

t e n o r s

Matthew Cummings, Jianghai Ho, James Judd, Ryan Townsend Strand

b a s s e s

Chuck Chandler, Rob Hansen, Dorian McCall, Ian Prichard

CONSTELLATION MEN'S ENSEMBLE

2022-2023 SEASON SUPPORTERS

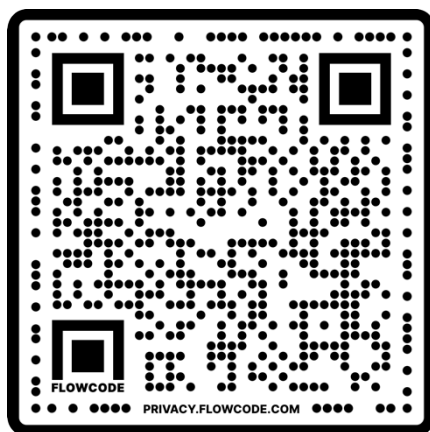
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Constellation Men's Ensemble is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, and donations are tax deductible as allowed by law.

To continue achieving our mission of distinct performances in unique spaces, please consider making a gift right from your seat or on your way home following the performance. Consider a monthly gift to CME!

We rely on the generosity of our community to achieve the level of creativity and musicianship you experienced tonight. Thank you for all that you do to support music in Chicago and beyond.



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Season Artwork by Janie Killips



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**Constellation Men's Ensemble would like to extend
very special thanks to the following, whose generosity
made *NOVA VI: pathways* possible**

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CONSTELLATION
MEN'S ENSEMBLE
season ix