

LIGHT & SHADOW

Chants, Prayers & Improvisations

RUTH CUNNINGHAM

Canam an achan o mo Bheal
(Prayer of the Ceile De)
Gayatri Mantra
Ave Maria

Virgen Madre groriosa
(Cantigas de Santa Maria 340)

Flute song
What if
Vidi speciosam
Sky
Flute song

Psalm
O virtus Sapientie
(Hildegard von Bingen)
Salve Regina
(Gregorian chant)
Maha Mrityunjaya Mantra

Sound Journey

Spring Song: *Pipes of Pan*

Ave maris stella
Alma Redemptoris Mater
(Gregorian chant)
Virgo prudentissima
O lillium convalium

Wind
The River Stick
Peace Prayer of St Francis
Asato Ma Sad gamaya
Universal Peace Prayer
Healing Song

Notes on the Program

This program pulls together all the different strands of my life. It uses my training as a singer, flute player, sound healer, my love of improvisation, the modes and medieval music, plus the different spiritual traditions that I have engaged in over the years. The program is a mixture of chants, prayers and improvisations in a variety of languages. The texts I chose are from different times and places but I feel they relate to each other on a deep level, and I have arranged the pieces to reflect this. All the music except for the Gregorian chants and Cantiga is either composed or improvised by me. I accompany myself on piano, medieval harp and shruti box (Indian drone instrument) and I also play the renaissance flute and recorder.

Scattered throughout the program are six wonderfully evocative poem-prayers that I set to music with improvised piano accompaniment. The poems were written by my sister Elizabeth Cunningham and are from her book *Small Bird, Poems and Prayers* (“What if,” “Sky,” “Psalm,” “Wind,” “The River Stick,” “Healing Song”). I also improvise on several Latin Marian texts (*Vidi speciosam, Ave maris stella, Virgo prudentissima, O lillium convalium*). I included several traditional Gregorian chants (*Salve Regina, Alma redemptoris Mater*) and a

medieval Cantiga (*Virgen Madre gloriosa*) to Mary as well as one Hildegard chant (*O virtus Sapientie*) in praise of wisdom. I’ve included three Sanskrit chants (*Gayatri Mantra, Maha Mrityunjaya Mantra, Asato Ma Sad Gamaya*) and I also sing one Gaelic text (*Canam an achan o mo Bheal*), a prayer from the Ceili De, a Celtic spiritual order. Near the center of the program is what I call a sound journey. This piece is improvised and will change with every performance. It is an intuitive musical response to the space and those gathered for each concert. As well as singing in the sound journey I often use a variety of instruments.

Though some of the pieces are set there is a very strong improvisational aspect to the entire program. It will never be the same twice. The sound journey especially can be very different at each performance. Music and sound profoundly effect the body and emotions of the people listening; it can transport you. I look at the whole experience of this concert as a journey; so when it is over, people have gone some place with me and I with them.

Thank you for joining me.

—Ruth Cunningham

Canam an achan o mo Bheal (Prayer of the Ceile De)

Canam an achan o mo Bheal
I say the prayer from my mouth
Canam an achan o mo chridhe
I say the prayer from my heart
Canam an achan dhait fhein
I say the prayer to Thee Thyself
Alla mara agus tire
Wild Lord of sea and land
Alla greine agus gile
Wild Lord of sun and moon
Alla nan riollachan alain
Wild Lord of the beautiful stars

Gayatri Mantra

Om Bhur, Om Bhuvaha, Om Swaha, Om Maha,
Om Janaha, Om Tapaha, Om Satyam
Om Tat Savitur Varenyam
Bhargo Devasya Dhimahi
Dhiyo Yonaha Prachodayat

*O self-fulgent light that has given birth to all the lokas,
who is worthy of worship and appears through the orbit of the sun,
illumine our intellect.*



Ave Maria

Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum.
Benedicta tu in mulieribus,
et benedictus fructus ventris tui, Jesus.
Sancta Maria, Mater Dei, ora pro nobis peccatoribus,
nunc, et in hora mortis nostrae. Amen.

*Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou
amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy
Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now, and in the hour of
our death. Amen.*



Virgen Madre gloriosa (Cantigas de Santa Maria 340)

Virgen Madre gloriosa, de Deus filla e esposa,
santa, nobre, preciosa, quen te loar saberia ou podia?
Ca Deus que é lum’ e dia, segund’ a nossa natura
non viramos sa figura senon por ti, que fust’ alva.

Tu es alva dos mesqos, que non erren os camos,
a grandes, a pequenos; ca tu iles mostras a via per que ya
o teu Fillo todavia, que nos sacou da escura
carreira maa e dura per ti que es nossa alva.

Tu es alva que parece ante Deus e escrareces
os ceos, e que mereces d’averes sa compania. E querria
t’ eu ver con el, ca seria quito de maa ventura
e metudo na folgura u es con Deus, u es alva.

*Glorious Virgin Mother, Daughter and Bride of God,
Holy, noble, precious, Who could know how or be able
To praise you? For God is light and Day
But because of our base nature We could not see his face
Except through you, who were the Dawn.*

*You are the Dawn of the unfortunate, Both great and small,
So that they may not Lose their way, For you show
Them the path your Son followed, He who rescued us from the dark
And arduous journey for your sake, For you are our Dawn.*

*You are Dawn which stands before God and brightens
the heavens, and you deserve to be in his company. I should like
to see you beside him for I should be freed from
misfortune and put at ease where you
are with God, where you are the Dawn.*



Flute Song

What if

What if my heart is an opening rose
and god is a honeybee gathering sweetness

what if my mind is the crown of a tree
and god is a wind raging there.

What if my soul is a deep root
and god is my dark food and drink.

from *Small Bird: Poems and Prayers*
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Vidi speciosam

Vidi speciosam sicut columbam,
ascendentem desuper rivos aquarum,
cuius inestimabilis odor erat nimis
in vestimentis eius,
et circumdabant eam flores rosarum
et lilia convallium.

*I have seen her beauty like the dove
ascending over streams of water;
a strong, unearthly perfume was in her garments,
and flowers of roses encircled her,
and lilies of the valley.*

— Trans. S. Hellauer

Sky

I love the sky
nothing else is big enough.

I love how I forget it sometimes
take it for granted
like it was some big old ceiling
then it swoops down in a
grey swirl leaves spiraling
birds crossing to safety
winged boats to harbor.

I love how it draws me up
when I look
how sky blue can be brittle or soft
how it blooms in morning glories
in the last days before the first frost

I love how the stars
dim and sharpen
how the moon rolls around
and around
losing and finding itself
in different quarters
different lights.

Somebody please
let me be a leaf
flying so high in the sky
I can't see my self
anymore.

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Flute Song



Psalm

Meet me halfway
holy one
for I have been walking a long time
in dry places
where the earth cracks and opens
onto nothing.
I have seen the shine of poison leaves
in dull noon glare
and I have been alone
not believing anymore
in you.

Today I have been singing your names
your many names.

I have arced my spine
like a green stem
like a young tree.

I have said: cool water, flow here
healing water, come.

I have hollowed myself for you

I have made an empty place
for gladness, for shouts
of joy

Come now, holy one.

I am here in the valley
under your mountain.

I am not afraid of death
or its shadow.

I only want to hear the bells of your goats
ringing ringing:

The holy one is coming
she who dwells in secret
whose face is more than moon
more than sun.

The holy one is coming
is welling within me
is here.

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O virtus Sapientiae

(*Hildegard von Bingen*)

O virtus Sapientiae, quae circuiens circuisti
comprehendendo omnia in una via, quae habet vitam,
tres alas habens, quarum una in altum volat,
et altera de terra sudat, et tertia undique volat.
Laus tibi sit, sicut te decet, O Sapientia.

*O strength of Wisdom who, circling, circled,
enclosing all in one lifegiving path,
three wings you have: one soars to the heights,
one distills its essence upon the earth,
and the third is everywhere.*

Praise to you, as is fitting, O Wisdom.

Salve Regina (*Gregorian chant*)

Salve Regina, Mater misericordiae,
Vita dulcedo et spes nostra salve.
Ad te clamamus exsules filii Hevae.
Ad te suspiramus gementes et flentes,
in hac lacrimarum valle.
Eja ergo advocata nostra,
illos tuos misericordes oculos ad nos converte.
Et Jesum benedictum fructum ventris tui
nobis post hoc exilium ostende.
O clemens, o pia, o dulcis Virgo Maria.

Hail holy queen, mother of mercy,

Hail our life, our sweetness and our hope.

To you do we cry poor banished children of Eve,

*To you do we send up our sighs, mourning and weeping
in this valley of tears.*

*Turn then, most gracious advocate
your eyes of mercy toward us.*

And after this, our exile,

Show us the fruit of your womb, Jesus.

O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary.

Maha Mrityunjaya Mantra

Om trayambakam yajamahe sugandhim pushtivardhanam
Urvaarukamiva bandhanaan mrityor muksheeya maamritaat.

*Shelter me O three-eyed Lord Shiva. Bless me with health and
immortality and sever me from the clutches of death, even as a
cucumber is cut from its creeper.*



Sound Journey

Improvisation created for this evening and this gathering of people.



Spring Song: Pipes of Pan

Letabundus rediit avium concentus,
veriocundum prodiit, gaudeat iuventus

Estivant nunc Dryades, colle sub umbroso
prodeunt Oreades cetu glorioso,
Satyrorum concio Psallit cum tripudio
Tempe per amena; his alludens concinit,
cum iocundi meminit veris philomena.

*The choir of birds is here again Elate in every feather,
New pleasure stirs the hearts of men In spring's jocund weather.*

Now dryads haunt the summer woods,

*And where the slopes are shaded
come forth the glorious sisterhoods*

*Of mountain nymphs unjaded;
Through lovely Tempe satyrs tramp,
The pipes re-echo as they stamp*

*The dance's merry measures;
The nightingale more sweetly sings
A descant of their caperings,*

Remembering springtime pleasures.

—Text is a portion of a Medieval Latin song

Translation by George Whicher



Ave maris stella

Ave maris stella, dei mater alma,
atque semper virgo, felix caeli porta.

Sumens illud ave Gabriellis ore,
funda nos in pace, mutans evae nomen.

Monstra te esse matrem: sumat per te precem,
qui pro nobis natus, tulit esse tuus.

Sit laus deo patri, summo Christo decus,
spiritui sancto, tribus honor unus. Amen.

*Hail star of the sea, dear mother of God
and ever a maiden, happy gate of heaven.*

*Accepting that "Ave" from Gabriel's lips,
establish us in peace, transforming Eva's name.*

*Show yourself as Mother, through you may He receive our prayers
Who was born for us as your own son.*

*Praise be to God the Father, to the Highest Christ Glory,
to the Holy Spirit Honor, One in Three. Amen.*

— Trans. S. Hellauer

Alma Redemptoris Mater

(gregorian chant)

Alma redemptoris Mater, quae pervia caeli porta manes,
et stella maris,
succurre cadenti, surgere qui curat, populo:
tu quae genuisti, natura mirante,
tuum sanctum Genitorem,
Virgo prius ac posterius, Gabriellis ab ore, sumens illud Ave,
peccatorum miserere.

*Kind Mother of the Redeemer, the open gateway to heaven
and star of the sea,
help your fallen people who strive to rise again:
we pray you, who bore your holy Son,
by a miracle of nature, a Virgin first and last,
who received God's greeting from the mouth of Gabriel,
have mercy on us sinners.*

Virgo prudentissima

Virgo prudentissima, quo progredieris
quasi aurora valde rutilans?
Filia Syon, tota formosa et suavis es,
pulchra ut luna, electa ut sol.

*Virgin most prudent, whither do you go,
glowing like the ruddy dawn?
Daughter of Zion, all comely and sweet are you,
beautiful as the moon, bright-shining as the sun.*

— Trans. S. Hellauer

O lilium convallium

O lilium convallium, flos virginum, stirps regia,
spes omnium fidelium, lux luminum, o filia:
Eve matri contraria,

Ave matris de gratia
nos redimens per filium.
Ave, ave remedium
nos eximens miseria.

*O lily of the valley, flower of virgins, royal branch,
hope of all the faithful, light of lights, o daughter:
mother Eve's antithesis,
by grace you redeem us from woe,
mother, through your son.
Hail, hail, o healer
who cures us of our grief.*

— Trans. S. Hellauer



Wind

Sometimes the way I know
god loves me is the wind.
I'll be sitting outside
praying why how what
and a big wind will come up
come right up in my face
lift the hairs on my scalp
count them maybe
or maybe not maybe
it's just loving like when
someone tousles your hair
or a dog licks your face.
And I say, oh, you *are* there
and god says yes
didn't you know?

from *Small Bird: Poems and Prayers*

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The River Stick

I sit in a nest of tidal roots
under leaves lit by light on water,
their dapple changing
with ripple and wind
A long, curving stick rests lightly
in the same crux that cradles me.
Here take it, says the river.
Oh, no thank you (I am polite)
it looks so lovely where it is.
It's not as if it will stay here,
reasons the river, take it
to remember me by
the way I meander
the grain of my flow
the peace you know
when you're with me.

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Peace prayer of St. Francis

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let us sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is discord, union;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.
Grant that we may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

A prayer attributed to St. Francis

Asato Ma Sad Gamaya

(Sanskrit Mantra)

Asato Ma Sad Gamaya
Tamaso Ma Jyotir Gamaya
Mrityor Ma Amritam Gamaya
Om Shanti Shanti Shanti.

*O Lord, lead us from untruth to truth,
lead us from darkness to light,
lead us from death to immortality,
let there be peace peace peace. (Rig Veda)*

Universal Prayer For Peace

Lead me from death to life, From falsehood to truth.
Lead me from despair to hope, From fear to trust.
Lead me from hate to love, From war to peace.
Let peace fill our hearts, Our world, our universe.
Peace, Peace, Peace.

—From Satish Kumar

Healing Song

At your feet, the earth
In your womb, the sea
In your belly, the fire
At your center, the sun
In your heart, the flower
In your throat, the sky
On your brow, the moon
At your crown, the star
In your hands, the earth.

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Ruth Cunningham is a classically trained musician and a sound healing practitioner. She combines these skills to improvise music that connects people to the healing and spiritual power of music. She specializes in improvisational sacred music from varied spiritual traditions in both in liturgical and concert settings.

Ruth was a member of the acclaimed women's vocal quartet Anonymous 4 for ten years. With them, she performed in concerts and festivals throughout the United States, Europe and the Far East and made ten recordings—nine of medieval chant and polyphony for harmonia mundi and one, *Voices of Light* by contemporary composer Richard Einhorn, for Sony Classical. In 2005 she released *HARC: Inside Chants*, a recording of multi-faith chants with Ana Hernandez. Among her other recordings are *Sacred Light* with harpist Diana Stork on the At Peace Music label and *Ancient Beginnings* which is part of the Open Ear Center's music for healing series. She is featured on *Invoking the Muse* a cd with Frame Drummer Layne Redmond released on the SoundsTrue label. She has been part of the women's ensemble of Early Music NY and participated in their cd *Music of Medieval Love*. She has also performed and recorded with the Renaissance vocal ensemble Pomerium. She is a regular member of the professional choir at St Mary the Virgin in New York City.

As a sound healing practitioner Ruth works with individuals and groups on using the voice and music as tools for healing and transformation. She collaborates with other healers and musicians in a variety of settings. Ruth plays regularly and teaches a sound healing class for the Integrative Stress Management Program at St Vincent's Hospital in New York. In 2001-2002 she was among the musicians who offered their services at St. Paul's Chapel, which served as a refuge for the workers at Ground Zero.

Ruth received a B. Mus. in Performance of Early Music from the New England Conservatory of Music and taught recorder and renaissance flute at the Amherst Early Music Workshops for sixteen years. She is certified as a cross cultural music healing practitioner (CCMHP) by the Open Ear Center where she studied with Pat Moffitt Cook.

Visit Ruth's website: www.ruthcunningham.com



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All music improvised or composed by Ruth Cunningham
except for *Virgen madre gloriosa*, *O Virtus Sapientie*,
Salve Regina and *Alma Redemptoris Mater*.