

Music at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church · 2025–26 Season

OF VOICE & VERSE



Friday, October 17, 2025 · 7 pm

Sanctuary

The Fifth Avenue Chamber Choir

Patrick Kreeger, piano and organ

Max Tan, violin

Ryan Jackson, director

PRESENTED BY THE ARTS & OUR FAITH COMMITTEE



Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church

Welcome to Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church and thank you for joining us.
This evening's program will be sung without an intermission.
Please refrain from taking flash photos during the performance.

Music at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church

We hope you enjoy this evening's concert, the first in the thirteenth season of our annual concert series. Please read on for more information about upcoming music events at Fifth Avenue. Be sure to mark the dates in your calendar and join us again!

Tickets for choral concerts are available online at fapc.org/tickets.

Handel's *Messiah*

Friday, Dec. 5 and Saturday, Dec. 6, 2025 • 7 pm, Sanctuary

Join the Fifth Avenue Chamber Choir and Orchestra for one of New York's most beloved holiday traditions: Handel's *Messiah*. From the gentle comfort of "He shall feed his flock" to the exultant power of the "Hallelujah" chorus, this timeless masterpiece traces a dramatic arc from prophecy to redemption. Performed by outstanding soloists and musicians, *Messiah* offers a moment of reflection, joy, and renewal at the start of the Christmas season.

Talbot: *Path of Miracles*

Friday, Feb. 6, 2026 • 7 pm, Sanctuary

Joby Talbot's *Path of Miracles* is an immersive choral journey that traces the ancient pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela through four stirring movements, each evoking a stage of the Camino. Blending haunting medieval chant with striking contemporary harmonies, the work captures the physical trials, spiritual reflection, and profound transcendence experienced by pilgrims across the centuries. A modern choral masterpiece celebrated for its evocative storytelling and dramatic impact, this is a rare opportunity to hear this deeply moving work performed live.

Bach: *St. John Passion*

Friday, March 27, 2026 • 7 pm, Sanctuary

Join us for our annual Lent concert featuring Johann Sebastian Bach's *St. John Passion*—a gripping and deeply moving account of Christ's final hours, and one of Western music's greatest masterpieces. Through intimate arias, urgent choruses, and some of the most beautiful chorales ever written, Bach brings the Passion story vividly to life with unmatched emotional and spiritual depth. Whether you're hearing it for the first time or returning to a cherished favorite, this powerful work offers a profound musical gateway into the heart of Holy Week.

Patrick Kreeger Organ Recital

Sunday, May 24, 2026 • 12 pm, Sanctuary

Free and open to all!

PROGRAM

Of Voice & Verse

The Fifth Avenue Chamber Choir
Patrick Kreeger, piano and organ
Max Tan, violin
Ryan Jackson, director

A Hymn for St. Cecilia

Herbert Howells (1892–1983)

Her Sacred Spirit Soars

Eric Whitacre (b. 1970)

Thou, Whose Harmony is the Music of the Spheres

Stephen Chatman (b. 1950)

Serenade to Music

Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958)

Hymn to St. Cecilia

Benjamin Britten (1913–1976)
Hannah Penzner, Donna Breitzer,
Emery Kerekes, and Cristóbal Arias, soloists

Morning Hymn

Patrick Murray (b. 1990)

Blest Pair of Sirens

C. Hubert H. Parry (1848–1918)

In presenting this evening's concert, the Arts and Our Faith Committee acknowledges the generous support of the Dr. Reid and Marguerite Pitts Special Music Fund.

A NOTE ABOUT THIS EVENING'S PROGRAM

Dear Friends,

Welcome, and thank you for joining us for the opening concert of our thirteenth annual concert series. The choir and I are delighted to present *Of Voice and Verse*, a program that celebrates the timeless partnership between poetry and music. From the mystical to the majestic, tonight's program explores how composers across generations have found inspiration in the written word and transformed language into song.

We begin with Herbert Howells's radiant *A Hymn for St. Cecilia* (1961), a work brimming with vitality and joy. The text portrays St. Cecilia as a life-giving muse, something of a classical goddess of spring, whose song renews the world with beauty and light. Howells's soaring melodies and glowing harmonies capture this youthful energy, offering a celebration of music's power to invigorate the spirit.

Eric Whitacre's *Her Sacred Spirit Soars* (2002) continues the tribute to St. Cecilia with a luminous text by his longtime collaborator, poet Charles Anthony Silvestri. Scored for double choir, the work unfolds like a great cathedral of sound, as rich harmonies from each ensemble overlap and ascend. Silvestri's text, written in the style of a Shakespearean sonnet, is also an acrostic: the first letter of each line spells "HAIL FAIR ORIANA," a nod to Queen Elizabeth I, under whose reign the arts flourished in Renaissance England.

Stephen Chatman's *Thou, Whose Harmony Is the Music of the Spheres* (1996) offers a contemplative reflection on creation and cosmic order, setting a poem by Robert French Leavens, a Unitarian minister. Chatman intertwines serene choral writing with a lovely obbligato for solo violin, creating a dialogue between voice and instrument that evokes the celestial harmony described in the text.

Ralph Vaughan Williams's beloved *Serenade to Music* (1938) sets text from Act V of *The Merchant of Venice*, in which Shakespeare celebrates music's power to "sweeten" the human soul. Originally written for sixteen vocal soloists and orchestra, tonight's instrumentation with piano and violin allows us an intimate opportunity to showcase the solo voices of sixteen of our remarkable singers.

Benjamin Britten's *Hymn to St. Cecilia* (1942), with its haunting text by W.H. Auden, forms the emotional heart of tonight's program. Composed during Britten's wartime exile in Brooklyn, New York, the piece blends ingenious counterpoint with his distinctive harmonic language, punctuated by moments of poignant introspection. It meditates on both the wonders and perils of human creativity, as well as the fragility and resilience of the artistic spirit.

Patrick Murray's *Morning Hymn* (2018) sets a contemplative text by Patricia Orr, reflecting on the musicality behind the rhythms of our days and the sacredness of time. This luminous a cappella work was composed in honor of Dr. Patricia Wright's retirement as director of music at Metropolitan United Church in Toronto.

The evening concludes with C. Hubert H. Parry's *Blest Pair of Sirens* (1887), a majestic setting of John Milton's ode to the timeless union of music and poetry. Written for choir and orchestra, tonight's performance with organ stands as a triumphant culmination of our journey through music devoted to the eternal dialogue between voice and verse.

Thank you again for joining us—we hope you enjoy the program!

Warmly,



Dr. Ryan Jackson

William S. Perper Director of Music & Fine Arts Ministries

LYRICS

A Hymn for St. Cecilia • *Herbert Howells (1892–1983)*

Sing for the morning's joy, Cecilia, sing,
in words of youth and phrases of the spring.
Walk the bright colonnades by fountains spray
and sing as sunlight fills the waking day.
Till angels, voyaging in upper air, pause on a wing,
and gather the clear sound into celestial joy, wound and unwound,
a silver chain or golden as your hair.

Sing for your loves of heaven and of earth,
in words of music, and each word a truth,
marriage of heart and longings that aspire,
a bond of roses and a ring of fire.
Your summertime grows short and fades away,
terror must gather to a martyr's death, but never tremble,
the last indrawn breath remembers music as an echo may.

Through the long aftermath of centuries
Cecilia's music dances in the skies,
lend us a fragment of the immortal air
where with your choiring angels we may share.
A light to light us through time-fettered night,
water of life, a rose of paradise;
so from the earth another song shall rise
to meet your own in heavens long delight.

Ursula Vaughan Williams (1911–2007)

Her Sacred Spirit Soars • *Eric Whitacre (b. 1970)*

Her sacred spirit soars o'er gilded spires,
And breathes into creative fires a force;
In well-tuned chants and chords of countless choirs
Lives ever her immortal shadowed source.
From age to age the roll of poets grows;
And yet, a lonely few are laurel-crowned,
In whose sweet words her inspiration shows,
Revealing insights deep and thoughts profound.
O shall Cecilia, or shall Goddess Muse
Reach then to me across eternal skies?
Is heaven's quick'ning fire but a ruse,
Abiding rather here before mine eyes?
Nearer than I dream'd is She whose fame
All poets sing, whose glory all proclaim:
"LONG LIVE FAIR ORIANA!"

Charles Anthony Silvestri (b. 1965)

Thou, Whose Harmony is the Music of the Spheres • *Stephen Chatman (b. 1950)*

Thou whose harmony is the music of the spheres,
By our presence here with one another,
In thy presence,
May some of the harshness and discord of our human lives
Be transmuted into music.
A new song in our hearts may there be,
And a new harmony in our beings,
So we shall return to our many duties,
With fresh courage, with rejoicing,
And with eagerness.
Amen.

Robert French Leavens (1878–1961)

Serenade to Music • *Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958)*

How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!
Here will we sit, and let the sounds of music
Creep in our ears: soft stillness and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony.
Look, how the floor of heaven
Is thick inlaid with patines of bright gold:
There's not the smallest orb that thou behold'st
But in his motion like an angel sings
Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins;
Such harmony is in immortal souls;
But, whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.
Come, ho! and wake Diana with a hymn:
With sweetest touches pierce your mistress' ear,
And draw her home with music.
I am never merry when I hear sweet music.
The reason is, your spirits are attentive:
The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not mov'd with concord of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treasons, stratagems and spoils;
The motions of his spirit are dull as night,
And his affections dark as Erebus:
Let no such man be trusted... Music! hark!
It is your music of the house.
Methinks it sounds much sweeter than by day.
Silence bestows that virtue on it.
How many things by season season'd are.
To their right praise and true perfection!
Peace, ho! the moon sleeps with Endymion,

LYRICS

And would not be awak'd.

(Soft stillness and the night
Become the touches of sweet harmony.)

From The Merchant of Venice, Act V, Scene 1 by William Shakespeare (1564–1616)

Hymn to St. Cecilia • *Benjamin Britten (1913–1976)*

Hannah Penzner, Donna Breitzer, Emery Kerekes, and Cristóbal Arias, soloists

I.

In a garden shady this holy lady
With reverent cadence and subtle psalm,
Like a black swan as death came on
Poured forth her song in perfect calm:
And by ocean's margin this innocent virgin
Constructed an organ to enlarge her prayer,
And notes tremendous from her great engine
Thundered out on the Roman air.

Blonde Aphrodite rose up excited,
Moved to delight by the melody,
White as an orchid she rode quite naked
In an oyster shell on top of the sea;
At sounds so entrancing the angels dancing
Came out of their trance into time again,
And around the wicked in Hell's abysses
The huge flame flickered and eased their pain.

Blessed Cecilia, appear in visions
To all musicians, appear and inspire:
Translated Daughter, come down and startle
Composing mortals with immortal fire.

II.

I cannot grow;
I have no shadow
To run away from,
I only play.

I cannot err;
There is no creature
Whom I belong to,
Whom I could wrong.

I am defeat
When it knows it
Can now do nothing
By suffering.

LYRICS

All you lived through,
Dancing because you
No longer need it
For any deed.

I shall never be
Different. Love me.

Blessed Cecilia, appear in visions
To all musicians, appear and inspire:
Translated Daughter, come down and startle
Composing mortals with immortal fire.

III.

O ear whose creatures cannot wish to fall,
O calm of spaces unafraid of weight,
Where Sorrow is herself, forgetting all
The gaucheness of her adolescent state,
Where Hope within the altogether strange
From every outworn image is released,
And Dread born whole and normal like a beast
Into a world of truths that never change:
Restore our fallen day; O re-arrange.

O dear[est] children casual as birds,
Playing among the ruined languages,
So small beside their large confusing words,
So gay against the greater silences
Of dreadful things you did: O hang the head,
Impetuous child with the tremendous brain,
O weep, child, weep, O weep away the stain,
Lost innocence who wished your lover dead,
Weep for the lives your wishes never led.

O cry created as the bow of sin
Is drawn across our trembling violin.

O weep, child, weep, O weep away the stain.

O law drummed out by hearts against the still
Long winter of our intellectual will.

That what has been may never be again.

O flute that throbs with the thanksgiving breath
Of convalescents on the shores of death.

O bless the freedom that you never chose.

O trumpets that unguarded children blow
About the fortress of their inner foe.

LYRICS

O wear your tribulation like a rose.
Blessed Cecilia, appear in visions
To all musicians, appear and inspire:
Translated Daughter, come down and startle
Composing mortals with immortal fire.

W. H. Auden (1907–1973)

Morning Hymn • *Patrick Murray (b. 1990)*

First voice of dawn,
Last carol of the evening sun,
Through time eternal
And what may gloriously be
You carry me,
You speak my language,
Music.

How shall we touch the rafters,
Raise the roof,
Disturb the sky,
How shall we mark the rhythm of our days,
In celebration of the language of the heart,
You speak my soul.

And we shall sing through silence when it falls,
We shall go deep,
For twilight and the dawning are bridged
By the blessed hymns of God.

Patricia Orr

Blest Pair of Sirens • *C. Hubert H. Parry (1848–1918)*

Blest pair of Sirens, pledges of Heav'n's joy,
Sphere-born harmonious sisters, Voice and Verse,
Wed your divine sounds, and mixed pow'r employ,
Dead things with inbreathed sense able to pierce;
And to our high-raised phantasy present
That undisturbed song of pure content,
Aye sung before the sapphire-colored throne
To Him that sits thereon,
With saintly shout, and solemn jubilee,
Where the bright Seraphim in burning row
Their loud uplifted angel-trumpets blow,
And the Cherubic host in thousand quires
Touch their immortal harps of golden wires,
With those just Spirits that wear victorious palms,
Hymns devout and holy psalms
Singing everlastingly:

LYRICS

That we on earth with undiscording voice
May rightly answer that melodious noise;
As once we did, till disproportioned sin
Jarred against nature's chime, and with harsh din
Broke the fair music that all creatures made
To their great Lord, whose love their motion swayed
In perfect diapason, whilst they stood
In first obedience, and their state of good.
O may we soon again renew that song,
And keep in tune with Heav'n, till God ere long
To His celestial concert us unite,
To live with Him, and sing in endless morn of light.

"At a solemn Musick" by John Milton (1608–1674)

ABOUT THE FIFTH AVENUE CHAMBER CHOIR

Founded in 2013, the Fifth Avenue Chamber Choir is a vocal ensemble comprising some of New York's finest professional singers. With a diverse repertoire spanning Renaissance polyphony through contemporary American, the choir presents an exciting series of sacred music concerts each season at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church. Although the size of the choir varies between sixteen and twenty-four singers, the ensemble's primary goal never changes: We seek to uplift and inspire all who hear us through passionate, engaging, and highly-polished performances of sacred choral music.

Ryan Jackson, director • Patrick Kreeger, piano and organ

SOPRANO

Amy Goldin
Rachel Mikol
Claire Myers-McCormick
Hannah Penzner

Howell Petty
Phoebe Rosenblum
Rebecca Soelberg

ALTO

Donna Breitzer
Sharon Byrne

Mckenzie Kitchen
Francesca Lionetta

TENOR

Cristóbal Arias
Garrett Eucker

Alex McCoy
Wilson Nichols

BASS

Fredy Bonilla
Joel Chapman
Mark Hosseini

Emery Kerekes
Max Parsons
Christopher Seefeldt

Rachel Mikol, *Choir Administrator*

SPECIAL THANKS

...to all the members of the Arts and Our Faith Committee (chaired by Nancy Moore) for their vision, leadership, and hands-on support of this series, and to our dedicated team of volunteer ushers and greeters. This series could not take place without you!

...to Fifth Avenue's wonderful Communications and Facilities teams for all the ways they support this series and make it possible.

...to our piano technician, Alex Appel, for taking such good care of our Steinway pianos.

...to our organ technician, Larry Trupiano, for keeping our Mighty Austin pipe organ sounding its best.



Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church
7 West 55th Street • New York, NY 10019