



## Life during Peacetime: Ember Ensemble honors veterans



*World War I soldiers march in Palmyra and Riverton on July 4th, 1919. Englewood Chamber Players' Concert Master Gabriel Schaff's father, Merle Schaff, was likely to have marched in the parade pictured in this photo. This photo will be part of Ember's multimedia presentation on Nov. 11. Schaff will perform with Ember. COURTESY GABRIEL SCHAFF*

*Thriving Through the Years: Wisdom from the Foxhole*

*Ember ensemble of Schola Cantorum on Hudson  
Sunday, Nov. 11, 5 p.m.  
Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, 94 Pine St.  
888-407-6002, [ScholaonHudson.org](http://ScholaonHudson.org)*

**By GWEN OREL**

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Some scars are permanent. Some wounds last forever. The psychic damage done by war is a subject the Ember ensemble of Schola Cantorum on Hudson has been exploring throughout its 2018 season, including concerts titled "Where Poppies Grow" and "Safe for Democracy." The season itself was titled "When the War Is Over."

This 2018-2019 season is titled "Coming of Age." On Veteran's Day, Ember presents a concert about the end of war, and begins its new season. It is titled "Thriving Through the Years: Wisdom from the Foxhole."

Veterans will be recognized and honored at every performance, and given red lapel poppies, the symbol of solidarity with soldiers in World War I, according to a release. Veterans can also reserve one complimentary ticket in advance.

Nov. 11 is the actual date of the WWI armistice.

The season will take place not at Immaculate Conception Roman Catholic Church, where



DEBORAH SIMPKIN KING

Schola (its vocal ensemble now called Ember) has performed in the past, but at Our Lady of Mount Carmel church. Since the merging of OLMC and Immaculate, the timing of the concert would not have worked out at Immaculate, Artistic Director Deborah Simpkin King explained. The slightly smaller size of OLMC will work well for the acoustics, King said.

The centerpiece of the concert is American composer Dan Forrest's new work "Requiem for the Living." Ember will show video clips from the Veterans History Project throughout performances of Joan Syzykko's "Be It Therefore Resolved," and Jake Runestad's "Live the Questions."

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Ember will also present "We" by Cheryl B. Engelhardt, the ensemble's new composer-in-residence.

"We've carried the season's theme across the summer," said Artistic Director Deborah Simpkin King. "Last season, 'When the War Is Over,' was about the impact of military conflict. We've had a full year of preparing for the armistice of the Centennial."

## **AGING THROUGH STRESS**

Focusing on aging is particularly relevant as the baby boomers hit retirement age, King said. "Family dynamics, social dynamics, economic dynamics" will all change, she continued. "My own view is that we grow and deepen and wiser through stressful situations." And that experience of growing through stress links aging and war. "Young people going off to battle go through things that arguably we ought not ever to have to go through in life. I'm curious as to what wisdom might come of this perspective, and the elder years of these veterans."

Forrest's piece "has a great deal more to do with comforting the living, along the lines of a Brahms Requiem, not like the fire and brimstone of Verdi or Mozart. What we now call PTSD, what used to be called shell shock, needs to die to re-enter a life post war."

Last November, Ember presented "But Who Shall Return Us Our Children?", a work by composer John Muehleisen, about the impact of war on families, specifically on Rudyard Kipling.

Ember honored veterans at that performance too. "Each time we've honored veterans, we've asked the family members of those who have served to stand and be recognized. Many people have wept. Nobody ever thinks about that. It's major. Having a veteran come back, and not be the person you sent away, how could it be?" King said.



*A page of the score of "We." COURTESY SCHOLA CANTORUM ON HUDSON*

## **VIOLENCE AND SILENCE**

"We have almost exclusively worked with the music of living composers," King said. "I always wanted a composer-in-residence, but we are a small organization. As it turns out, Cheryl [B. Engelhardt] sought me out."

When the two women met, they began finishing each other's sentences. "We were both practically out of our seats with excitement," King said. It was synergy, Engelhardt agreed. "One of the ways I like to work is to fill in the blanks. I love coming in to a choir after they've picked out 80 or 90 percent of their repertoire for the season. They say, 'We're missing this kind of text or tempo, we don't have a good opener.' Those are good parameters to work with. I have a background in science and research, and love digging into what's already there and extrapolating, creating something new."

Her piece "We" is based on a poem she wrote long ago. "It was an epiphany for me. I was



*CHERYL B. ENGELHARDT*

getting out of bad relationship. I realized that even when you're in conflict with someone, you're in a relationship with them." Finding compassion around that idea might leave room for a resolution, she realized. "I am the other half of 'We.'"

After she wrote the words, she stood in front of a microphone and sang it, coming up with a melody, then

harmonies. The result reminded her of an Imogen Heap production, heavy on vocoders, a little esoteric. She realized she'd never find pop backup singers to be able to perform the "crunchy" harmonies, and then realized it should be a choral piece.

When she played it for King, the artistic director immediately said she wanted her group to do it.

The piece is "incredibly timely," King said. "Is anybody going to be listening? That's what the piece addresses. It starts out with two words: violence. Then silence. Violence. Silence. In our silence, if we choose to do nothing, we are contributing to the violence. Her statement is very strong. It uses a variety of stylistic tools, some rap, a pop kind of sound from one of the soloists, body percussion. It's a very edgy kind of style."

"We" premiered in Israel last year.

"I want the audience to feel there's a conflict," Engelhardt said. "You hear that in the notes, dissonances, in the movement. As it progresses, you start to feel where the one is, where the chords are going. By the end there's a very clear opening up of the rhythm and the chords land on a positive note." It's as if the piece says: "You can feel like this, but also end up like this," Engelhardt reflected. "You don't stay in that moment of conflict forever. It's just a moment."