

***Annelies* Program Notes**

One of the most important factors in the continuation of the strong choral tradition is a commitment to new and intriguing repertoire. Conductors and singers are often searching for new music based on inspiring or evocative texts to challenge them musically but also mentally and emotionally. In collaboration with poet Melanie Challenger, James Whitbourn created the first major choral setting of Anne Frank's Diary with *Annelies*. When musically preserving a tragedy of this magnitude, a composer is met with inherent challenges. How would Whitbourn honor the sincerity of Anne's entries without using her words as emotional weapons? Would his music be used to support the diary, or would he choose selections to deepen his own creation? With *Annelies*, Whitbourn gives an unselfish and emotional portrayal of the events that took place between 1942 and 1944. It is at times unnerving or even menacing, though most often intimate, even in darker moments. Whitbourn's composition hedges the terror of the Holocaust with the hope and imaginative vision of Anne Frank.

Annelies (Anne) Marie Frank compiled her diary over two years that included the time before and during which she, her parents, and her sister hid from the Nazis in Amsterdam during the World War II occupation. In the Summer of 1933 when Hitler became Chancellor of Germany and established the first anti-Semitic laws, the Frank family decided to relocate to the Netherlands. This did not keep them from German control, however, as the German army invaded the Netherlands in 1940, just a month before Anne received a diary for her 13th birthday. Less than a day after Anne's older sister, Margot, was called to a Nazi labor camp, Anne's family fled to the "Secret Annexe," a small space atop Otto Frank's workplace sealed by a hinged bookcase. They were soon joined by the van Pels, Otto's business partner, his wife, and their teenage son, and later joined by another man, Fritz Pfeffer, a dentist. Since employees of the business were still working beneath them, the eight in hiding had to remain perfectly silent during workdays. The fugitives were betrayed and arrested on August 4, 1944 and deported to Westerbork transit camp. The eight prisoners were transported a month later in a sealed cattle car to Auschwitz on the last ever transport from Westerbork. The men and women were separated upon arrival at the camp. In October, Anne, Margot, and Mrs. van Pels were transported to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp, though Edith Frank remained in the women's subcamp at Auschwitz-Birkenau, where she died a few months later. Otto Frank was liberated from Auschwitz by the Russian army and taken first to Odessa and then to France before being allowed to return to Amsterdam. Anne's sister Margot died at Bergen-Belsen in March of 1945 and, believing that each of her family members had passed before her, Anne surrendered to typhus and died just days later. In Amsterdam, Otto knows his wife has died but holds out hope for his two daughters. On October 24, 1945, he receives a letter informing him of their death at Bergen-Belsen. Miep Gies, a woman who helped the

Franks hid during the occupation, returned Anne's diary to Otto. She found the diary after their arrest and hid it, hoping to return it to Anne.

Anne wrote extensively on her experience through these two years. Her diary was published shortly after her death in 1947 in the original Dutch edited by her father. During her short life, Anne dreamed of becoming a writer. We celebrate Anne's bravery and dedication and her father's realization of this dream this year as the 70th anniversary of her diary's publication. The English translation came several years later in 1952 and quickly became a bestseller in numerous additional translations worldwide. Several editions of Anne's diary have been printed since the original, which was heavily edited using pseudonyms for certain people and omitted sections of content that Otto believed to be inappropriate. These recent editions restore the original text that sometimes portrays Anne's mother and others in the Annex in a negative way, yet also provides a more complete self-depiction of Anne as a teenage girl. Anne originally intended the diary just for herself, but she was inspired to rewrite it with publication in mind upon hearing a radio broadcast encouraging Dutch people to keep written records of the atrocities they experienced.

Annelies offers a true and personal depiction of the Diary by focusing on Anne alone. Amid her observation through a window of the world outside the Annex, we hear Anne speak through the voice of the soprano soloist deepened by full chorus. Anne shows us the beautiful sky above, the chime of a nearby clock tower, and the hope of resounding church bells. We experience her profound sense of faith and courage beyond her years, even when faced with the horrors of multiple break-ins, the capture, and the desolation of the world outside the window. Within his own writing, Whitbourn incorporates tunes Anne would have heard as a child as well as Christian tradition, alluding to Anne's forgiving nature. In contrast, the arrest is set to an eerily hollow plainchant. Through the terrific drama and beauty of the work, he offers a moment of repose in the form of a chorale based on a secular tune from Anne's childhood.

Anne's cousin, Bernd Elias, who convinced the family to grant Whitbourn and Challenger the rights to use the full diary text, spoke before the first complete performance of *Annelies*. Elias said, "if Anne could be with us tonight, I know she would shed tears of joy and pride, and she would be so happy--happy the way I remember when I saw her last."

By John Verkuilen