

The Celebration Choir of First Presbyterian Church  
and Community Friends present



CREATION

Dan Forrest

Saturday, March 14, 2026

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
Fayetteville, North Carolina

# CREATION

by Dan Forrest

## I. INTROIT

Veni, Creator Spiritus,  
Mentes tuorum visita,  
Imple superna gratia  
Quae tu creasti pectora.  
*(from Veni, Creator Spiritus, ancient liturgy)*

*Come, Creator Spirit,  
Visit the souls of your devoted,  
With your divine grace fill  
The hearts that you have created.*

Introit ushers the listener into a mysterious world before the dawn of time, as chants of *Veni, Creator Spiritus* arise and are mixed with the introduction of key musical themes for the entire work.

## II. THE DANCE BEFORE TIME

Vox Domini,  
Dominus super aquas.  
In principio Deus...  
*(from Psalm 29 and Genesis 1)*

*The voice of the Lord,  
Lord over the waters.  
In the beginning, God...*

Emily Bledsoe Holloway, soloist

*The Dance Before Time* begins without pause, with the "spirit moving upon the face of the waters." A mezzo-soprano solo begins the narrative, "in principio Deus," amidst swirls of themes from this movement and the previous one, and creative energy builds, waiting to be unleashed.

## III. THE LION SINGS

...Creavit.  
Credo in unum Deum,  
Patrem omnipotentem,  
factorem coeli et terrae,  
visibilium omnium  
et invisibilium.  
*(from Genesis 1 and Credo, ancient liturgy)*

*...created.  
I believe in one God,  
The Father almighty,  
maker of heaven and earth,  
of all things visible  
and invisible.*

Mark Ream, soloist

*The Lion Sings* alludes to a well-known Lion in famous English children's literature, who sang a world into existence. A well-read listener will hear every musical detail from that story happening, from the baritone soloist singing the Lion's song, to the sun bursting into light, the unfurling of all green things, and eventually all animals coming to life in a raucous barndance celebrating the joy of all creation.

We then encounter several tableaux representing the days of creation; each sets a Scriptural or liturgical text as commentary on the beauty of that part of creation, inspired by various experiences from the composer's travels.

#### IV. LIGHT

Ego sum lux mundi,  
Ego sum lumen vitae.  
Qui sequitur me  
sed habebit lumen vitae.  
*(from John 8)*

*I am the light of the world,  
I am the light of life.  
Who follows me  
shall have the light of life.*

##### **Refrain**

Et vidit Deus  
[lucem/caelum/astra/  
creaturas/opus],  
quod opus esset bonum.  
Tota pulchra, tota es,  
et macula non est in te.  
Alleluia.  
*(from Genesis 1 and Tota Pulchra Es, ancient liturgy/Song of Solomon 4)*

*And God saw the  
[light/sky/stars/  
creatures/work],  
that the work was good.  
Wholly beautiful are you, entirely,  
and there is no stain in you.  
Alleluia.*

Emily Bledsoe Holloway, soloist

*Light*, inspired by countless sunrises, sets "I am the light of the world; who follows me shall have the light of life" as an exuberant dance in asymmetrical meter. The initial melody from the Introit then returns as a coda with new text combining "...and God saw that it was good" from Genesis with words from the *Song of Solomon* – a love song to an unspoiled creation: "wholly beautiful are you, entirely, and there is no stain in you." This refrain is then heard after each day of creation, transformed into that movement's unique musical style.

#### V. SKY

Quoniam videbo  
caelos tuos...  
Caeli enarrant  
gloriam Dei.  
Opus manus eius  
adnuntiat firmamentum.  
*(from Psalms 8 and 19)*

*When I behold  
your heavens...  
the heavens are telling  
the glory of God.  
The firmament declares  
the work of his hands.*

##### **Refrain**

Emily Bledsoe Holloway & Mark Ream, soloists

*Sky* is inspired by the expanse of the open sky. As the first tribute to Haydn, melodic themes from his *The Heavens Are Telling* are interwoven (in slow motion) with modern harmonization and new material throughout this movement.

## VI. THE GARDEN

Vinea mea electa,  
ego te plantavi.

Locus iste a Deo factus est,  
inaestimabile sacramentum;  
irreprehensibilis est.

*(from Vinea me electa and Locus Iste, ancient liturgies)*

*My chosen vineyard,  
I planted you.*

*This place was made by God,  
a priceless holy place;  
it is without fault.*

### Refrain

*The Garden* is an expression of the composer's love of various gardens in the world, from New York (Central Park) to Singapore (Botanical Gardens) to his own #forrestgardens. This setting reimagines the meaning of sacred texts to express the priceless beauty of green spaces; the Locus Iste here refers not to a cathedral, but to the sacred sanctuary of a garden. The music slowly twines around itself, almost like time-lapse photography of plants unfolding shoots and leaves.

## VII. MUSIC OF THE SPHERES

Pleni sunt caeli et terra  
gloria tua.

Hosanna in excelsis.

*(from Sanctus, ancient liturgy)*

*Heaven and earth are full  
of thy glory.*

*Hosanna in the highest.*

### Refrain

*Music of the Spheres* invokes the concept of "musica universalis" - the "music of the heavens" that the ancients believed was created by the orderly and proportional motion of the stars and planets in space, as well as "vox caelestis" - the "voice of the heavens" that speaks in the night sky. The Sanctus text is set here as a four-part mensuration canon, where each melodic subject entrance is twice as slow as the previous one; eventually we hear the same melodic line at four different speeds simultaneously, picturing the clock-like precision of the stars and planets moving through space.

## VIII. WINGS

Oh that I had wings like a dove

- wings of the morning -

then I would fly.

*(from Psalms 55, 139)*

Emily Bledsoe Holloway, soloist

*Wings* represents the "flying creatures" portion of day five, with text from the *Psalms*. The music begins delicately, like a newly hatched butterfly first unfolding its wings and fanning them, then gradually builds to the moment where it bursts into flight and is carried on the wind until it disappears from sight. The main melodic ostinato in the accompaniment of this movement is an example of augenmusik - music for the eyes - where the musical page looks like the ideas being described: its instrumental melodic contour outlines the line-drawn shape of a bird in flight.

## IX. DEEP BLUE

Vidi aquam egredientem,  
et omnes ad quos  
pervenit aqua ista  
salvi facti sunt,  
et dicent, alleluia!  
(from *Vidi Aquam*, ancient liturgy)

*I saw water flowing,  
and all to whom  
this water came  
were saved,  
and shall say Alleluia!*

### Refrain

*Deep Blue* then turns to the "deep sea" portion of day five, with liturgical text "I saw water flowing..." The mysteries of the deep are invoked with low thick textures and constantly flowing water and waves. Eventually, "Alleluias" arise from the depths, like a whale breaching the surface of the ocean.

## X. ISH ISHAH

Digitus Dei dexteræ,  
Tu rite  
promissum Patris.  
Accende lumen  
sensibus,  
Infunde amorem cordibus.  
(from *Veni, Creator Spiritus*, ancient liturgy)

*Finger of God's right hand,  
You are the one  
duly promised by the Father.  
Enkindle your light  
in our minds,  
Infuse love in our hearts.*

Emily Bledsoe Holloway & Mark Ream, soloists

*Ish Ishah* was inspired by Michelangelo's famous painting *The Creation of Adam*. Its finger of God reaching to humanity was quite possibly inspired by the *Veni Creator Spiritus* text (heard earlier in this work), in the stanza sung here: "Finger of God's right hand...kindle your light in our minds, infuse love in our hearts." Many believe that the primary character visible on God's arm in the painting is Eve; her face as she strains for a look at Adam reflects the first stirring of human love, with all its wonder and complexity - the moment God "infuses love into our hearts." The Hebrew words *Ish Ishah* are taken from the Genesis narrative, representing man and woman, and this setting presents humanity as the pinnacle of all creation, not merely in their intellect or the beauty of their form, but in their capacity to love.

## XI. DO IT AGAIN

Don Perkins, narrator

*Do It Again* is a musical underscore for narration from two of the composer's favorite passages of writing about this earth: one from English philosopher G.K. Chesterton and one from environmental advocate John Muir. The music reprises a theme introduced in the Introit but not heard again until now (thus musically picturing the sense of "do it again").

## XII. BOUNDLESS

Laudate, luces,  
Laudate, caela,  
Laudate, horti et ast'res!  
Laudate, creaturae,  
Laudate, filii!

*Praise him, lights,  
Praise him, skies,  
Praise him, gardens and stars!  
Praise him, creatures,  
Praise him, children!*

### Refrain

Emily Bledsoe Holloway & Mark Ream, soloists

*Boundless* unleashes a torrent of musical themes, all piling on top of each other, in a finale celebrating the diversity yet wholeness of all creation. The title refers both to the limitless joy found within the movement as well as the seemingly limitless number of themes (from within this work and beyond) which all tumble together. Amidst all this celebration, a fugue breaks out. Marked "Homage to FJH", it uses thematic material from this work's *Credo* within the formal and harmonic structure of Haydn's beloved *Awake the Harp*. Eventually all possible themes and subjects are recapitulated in a celebration whose joy can only be described as boundless.



Artwork note: the circle shape and the complete color spectrum represent the diversity yet wholeness and interconnectedness of all creation. The line drawings represent (clockwise) the themes of creation as presented in the work: Light, Sky, Garden, Spheres, Wings and Deep Blue (note that these lines both have double meanings: waves of the ocean and fish scales, and interlocking bird shapes that also evoke clouds/sky), and lastly, Ish Ishah (humanity) represented by double helixes. All these lines flow together in one interdependent whole, as does creation.

# CREATION

by Dan Forrest

Emily Bledsoe Holloway, Soprano Soloist

Mark Ream, Baritone Soloist

## **Soprano:**

Polly Alves  
Joyce Borum  
Suzanne Cataline  
Sue Cartee  
Frances Ellerbe  
Jennifer Godman  
Grace Hall  
Vicki Hogan  
Susan Lees  
Gail Morfesis  
Kellie Pfaff Perkins  
Annalise Sears

## **Alto:**

Daina Byrd  
Veronica Florit  
Kimberhly Hopkins  
Erin Jackson  
Susan Parrish  
Lou-Anne Smith  
Martha VorderBruegge

## **Tenor:**

Thomas Boyette  
Wess Futrell  
Theodore Schwamm  
Austin Taylor

## **Bass:**

Rick Boelke  
John Campbell  
Joe Evans  
Adam Farnham  
Bruce McRae  
Joseph Paris  
Don Perkins

## **Instrumentalists:**

Linda Lane - Flute  
Julie Jordan - Oboe  
Taiki Azuma - Clarinet  
Hunter Payne - Horn  
Laurel Wachtler - Violin  
Paul Kirkpatrick - Cello  
Winifred Garrett - Harp  
Daniel McCloud - Percussion 1  
Jake Twaddell - Percussion 2  
Tim Parsons - Percussion 3  
Wes Lockfaw - Organ  
Alice Ann Campbell - Keyboard

## **Director of Music Ministry:**

Marcia Heirman Mervin

## **Pastor:**

Rev. Mike Garrett

## **Sound and Stream Support:**

Stephen Kelly  
Jacob Regensburger  
Don Perkins

## **Housekeeper:**

Nina McLaughlin



## **EMILY BLEDSOE HOLLOWAY, SOPRANO**

A Fayetteville native and lifelong musician, Emily works as a performer, teacher, music director, content creator, and singer-songwriter, and is passionate about helping others discover their true voice. She studied Vocal Performance and Piano at Methodist University and later earned a dual Master's degree from New York University in Vocal Performance for Musical Theatre and Vocal Pedagogy, where she also served on the adjunct voice faculty.

Following her graduate studies, she continued training in vocology, somatic practices, and functional applied neurology for singers. She has performed in concerts, theatrical productions, and choral works throughout her career and now works with singers around the world through her online voice program, *Your Holistic Voice*, integrating vocal technique with nervous system awareness and authentic expression.

She is also a recording artist, and her debut album, *Colors*, enhanced with Monroe Sound Science, is available on all streaming platforms. Follow her on Instagram @EmilyHollowayVoice. She is honored to perform the soprano solos in Dan Forrest's *CREATION* alongside such talented musicians in her hometown!



## **MARK REAM, LYRIC BARITONE**

Mark Ream is an accomplished baritone soloist specializing in sacred oratorio, cantatas, and major choral works. He began singing at age five in church, earned state-level honors through high school and college at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania, where he performed with the Madrigal Singers, Concert Choir, and Chamber Singers while studying voice with Dr. Wendy Miller. His vocal training continued under Mr. David Vaughn, Dr. Jennifer Larson, Daniel Washington (Assistant Dean of Music at the University of Michigan), Patsy Gilliland, and Jim Smith (retired Peace College Music Professor).

Mark has appeared as soloist in Ralph Vaughan Williams' *Five Mystical Songs*, Handel's *Messiah*, J.S. Bach's *Christ Lay in Death's Dark Prison (Cantata No. 4)*, John Rutter's *Requiem and Te Deum*, Beethoven's *Mass in C Major*, Mozart's *Vesperae Solennes de Confessore*, Théodore Dubois' *The Seven Last Words of Christ*, Henry Purcell's *Te Deum Laudamus*, and many other sacred masterpieces. He has soloed with the Michigan Choral Union, NC Masters Chorale, Tar River Chorus and Orchestra, and church ensembles across North Carolina and Michigan. In 2014 he co-founded the Rocky Mount Chamber Choir (now in its 12th season) and remains active with the ensemble. By day he serves as Vice President of IT at Eagle Transport Corp, but his heart is always in the music—made possible by the loving support of his wife Paulette and son Jackson.

Mark is thrilled to perform the baritone solos in Dan Forrest's *CREATION* with the First Presbyterian Church Celebration Choir and community singers.



## THE CELEBRATION CHOIR AT FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, FAYETTEVILLE, NC

The Celebration Choir, established in 2013, enjoys performing large classical choral works accompanied by chamber orchestra. Since its inception, the group has presented Theodore Dubois' *The Seven Last Words of Christ*, Johann Sebastian Bach's *Christ lag in Todesbanden*, Franz Schubert's *Mass in G*, Antonio Vivaldi's *Gloria*, and several works by composer Dan Forrest.

The choir first performed Dan Forrest's *Requiem for the Living* in 2015 and 2016, followed by *Jubilate Deo* in 2017 and 2018. In March 2017, several members traveled to New York City to perform in the Carnegie Hall premiere of *Jubilate Deo*, with Henry Leck conducting and Dan Forrest providing insights during festival chorus rehearsals. Members of the Celebration Choir have participated in mass festival choruses at Carnegie Hall three times (2013, 2017, and 2022). In 2019, members of the choir and friends traveled to Italy to sing at Santa Croce in Florence, with additional sightseeing in Florence, Venice, Verona, and Lake Garda.

After recovering from the disruptions of COVID-19, community singers once again joined the Celebration Choir to perform *Jubilate Deo* in 2023 with the Fayetteville Symphony Orchestra, and again in fall 2025 in celebration of the church's 225th anniversary.

Today, we are excited to present *CREATION* by Dan Forrest. We warmly welcome trained community singers who may be interested in performing with us in future concerts. It is truly a joy to have community members enrich the choir with their talent, enthusiasm, and energy.

As we continue our love for major classical choral works, we plan to offer more afternoon concerts for the community. If you are an accomplished singer and would like to join us for our next concert—Vivaldi's *Gloria* in December, 2026, or a spring 2027 performance (TBD)—please contact Dr. Marcia Mervin.





## **DR. MARCIA HEIRMAN MERVIN, DIRECTOR**

Dr. Marcia Heirman Mervin is completing her 14th year as Director of Music Ministry at First Presbyterian Church in Fayetteville, North Carolina. She began playing the piano at age 4 and the organ at age 11, becoming the primary organist for a Baptist church in her hometown of Marshall, Michigan, at age 15. She studied organ with Mrs. Dorothy Hendon and later with Dr. Roberta Bitgood from sixth grade through high school, continuing her organ studies with Dr. Albert Bolitho at Albion College in Albion, Michigan.

Preferring to be “behind the organ and away from the spotlight,” Dr. Mervin very reluctantly began directing a church choir at age 25 while living in Atlanta, Georgia. After nearly 30 years of serving small churches in Michigan, Georgia, Oregon,

and the Netherlands on a part-time basis while enjoying full-time motherhood, she returned to graduate school at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. There, she earned both a Master of Church Music (Organ) in 2006 and a Doctor of Musical Arts in Organ Performance (Liturgical, Church, and Synagogue Music) in 2008, studying with Dr. Marilyn Mason, Dr. Michelle Johns, and Dr. James Kibbie.

Dr. Mervin began full-time church music ministry at First United Methodist Church in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, in the summer of 2007 while completing her dissertation recitals. She began serving First Presbyterian Church in August 2012 and finds deep fulfillment in serving the Lord through music ministry.

She lives with her husband, the Rev. Marvin Mervin, pastor of Faison Presbyterian Church in Faison, North Carolina. Together, they have five adult children: Jonas Heirman (Neha) of Kathmandu, Nepal; Jamaal Mervin of Charlotte, North Carolina; Erik Heirman (Michelle) of Tucson, Arizona; Rachel Rocker (Sam) of Ewa Beach, Hawaii; and Tiffany Mervin of Garner, North Carolina. They are also the proud grandparents of seven grandchildren, ranging in age from six to thirteen.



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## DAN FORREST, COMPOSER

Dan Forrest (b. 1978) is widely recognized as one of the leading American choral composers of our time. He has been described as having “an undoubted gift for writing beautiful music...that is truly magical” (NY Concert Review), with works hailed as “magnificent, very cleverly constructed sound sculpture” (Classical Voice), and “superb writing...full of spine-tingling moments” (Salt Lake Tribune). His music has sold millions of copies, has received numerous awards (including, most recently, the 2027 ACDA Raymond Brock Commission), and has become well established in the repertoire of choirs around the world via commissions, festivals, recordings, radio/TV broadcasts, and premieres in prominent international venues.

Dan’s work ranges from small choral works to instrumental solo works, wind ensemble works, and extended multi-movement works for chorus and orchestra. His *Requiem for the Living* (2013) and *Jubilate Deo* (2016) have become standard choral/orchestral repertoire for ensembles around the world, with *LUX* (2018), *the breath of life* (2020), and *CREATION* (2023) also receiving critical acclaim.

Dan holds a D.M.A in Composition (University of Kansas, 2007) and a master’s degree in piano performance. He served for several years as a professor and department head (music theory and composition) in higher education, and is a past Chair of the National ACDA Composition Initiatives Committee. He currently mentors composers through his Forrest Fellows initiative, and serves as Vice President of Publications and Editor at Beckenhorst Press, Composer in Residence at Furman University, Artist in Residence at Mitchell Road Presbyterian Church (Greenville, SC), and collaborative pianist for all Beckenhorst Singers recordings and concerts.

When not creating music, Dan can be found spending time with his wife and three kids, maintaining his extensive landscape gardens, playing Irish traditional music on the concertina and accordion, and participating in his supportive church community. Details about Dan and his work can be found at [www.danforrest.com](http://www.danforrest.com).



If something goes on endlessly repeating itself,  
it might feel like mere clockwork.  
We might feel that if the universe was personal, it would vary –  
that if the sun were alive, it would dance.  
But perhaps...the sun rises every morning  
because he never gets tired of rising.  
His routine might be due not to lifelessness, but to a rush of life.  
Children, with their endless energy,  
always want things repeated and unchanged...  
they always say, "Do it again."  
What if God has this eternal vitality,  
and is strong enough to exult in repetition?  
Perhaps God says every morning, "Do it again" to the sun;  
and every evening, "Do it again" to the moon,  
...but has never gotten tired of it.  
It may not be necessity that makes all daisies alike;  
perhaps God makes every daisy, one at a time,  
because he has never grown tired of making them.  
This grand show is eternal.  
It is always sunrise somewhere;  
a shower is forever falling; vapor is ever rising.  
Eternal sunrise, eternal sunset,  
eternal dawn and gloaming,  
on sea and continents and islands,  
each in its turn, as this round earth rolls.

*-Adapted from G.K. Chesterton and John Muir (used by permission)*