

Program Note: *Étoile*

Étoile is about gazing at the stars and wondering what they mean. It's about reaching out in the dark to search for one another, about kindred spirits, about orbits that draw us together and apart. It exists in a place of both profound loneliness and incredible togetherness, and it pushes the boundaries between strict form and absolute chaos, between melody and speech. It is sung by an ensemble of six, constantly searching for one another, sometimes aligning, sometimes falling out of orbit.

"Prelude" sets the ensemble in motion. With only one real motive, "Prelude" plays with space as the ensemble passes the motive around, breaks it apart, digresses from and returns to it. It refuses to settle until the end of the movement, when pure notes and meter bring the ensemble together, only to rob the audience of a satisfying conclusion.

"Traveler" presents an ensemble in search of each other. Built around a simple falling motive in a melancholic harmonic world, the movement refuses to bring the ensemble together; instead, it teases audience and ensemble alike with moments of almost-cohesion, only to disintegrate into speech, sighs, and a lack of metrical unity. The end of the movement presents an ensemble desperately trying to form a cadence, only to fall away from each other once again.

"Hundreds" begins, finally, with the entire ensemble singing together, of planets and stars and the hundreds of things we see in the night sky. Even though the movement plays with the ideas of meter, harmony, and melody, it never leaves them completely behind; musical time and common harmony, in some form or another, are the threads that keep the group together. The movement proclaims the beauty of the invisible, and concludes the piece with an ensemble that has finally managed to find each other in the darkness, no matter how they see the stars.

-- Skyelar Ginsberg, composer