

# International Women's Day Concert 2nd Annual Tribute to Women in the Arts

Featuring "Will They Remember Life Was Beautiful?"  
by lyricist Mary Grace Bertulfo and composer Elizabeth Dolye

## VOCALISTS

Sarah Kropski, soprano  
Susan Nelson, soprano  
Christine Steyer soprano  
Anna Tonna, mezzo-soprano

## COLLABORATIVE PIANISTS

Jennifer McCabe  
Shannon McGinnis

## EMCEE

Jeanne Franks

## VISUAL ARTIST

Cheri Wolf

## GUEST ENSEMBLE

C21



Show your support for  
International Women's Day  
#IWD2023 #EmbraceEquity

Good Shepherd Lutheran Church  
611 Randolph St., Oak Park, IL  
March 5, 2023, 2:30PM

Co-presented by Bellissima Opera, an initiative of Working In Concert  
and Good Shepherd Lutheran Church.

Major support from the Musicians' Club of Women, Unity Temple  
Unitarian Universalist Congregation, Judy & Terry Grace, Mila Tellez  
& Nile Wendorf, Jethra Kapp, Illinois Arts Council.



International Women's Day Concert —2nd Annual Tribute to Women in the Arts  
March 5, 2023

Sarah Kropski, Susan Nelson, Christine Steyer and Anna Tonna  
with Jennifer McCabe, Shannon McGinnis, Jeanne Franks and C21  
Backdrop images by Cheri Wolf  
*Bellissima Opera Artistic Director*, Christine Steyer

Welcome on behalf of Good Shepherd Lutheran Church      The Reverend Kathy Nolte  
Embrace Equity      Emcee Jeanne Franks

*Part 1*

O mio Fernando, from <i>La favorita</i>	Gaetano Donizetti
Song to the Moon, from <i>Rusalka</i>	Antonín Dvořák
Stetit puella, from <i>Carmina Burana</i>	Carl Orff
Come scoglio, from <i>Così fan tutte</i>	Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

*Part 2*

Lullaby	Christina Rossetti & Cyril Scott
El corazón triste, from <i>Five Spanish Songs</i>	Pauline Viardot-García
Beyond All Price, from <i>The Scarlet Letter</i>	David Mason & Lori Laitman
The Man-in-the-Mune, from <i>Suite O Bairnsangs</i>	Maurice Lindsay & Thea Musgrave

*Part 3*

Katia on Mt. Unzen	Germaine Shames & Amy Scurria
Oh! Quand je dors	Victor Hugo & Franz Liszt
Heart of a Rose	Alfred Noyes & Elinor Remick Warren
Amazonia from Above, from <i>On Call: COVID-19</i>	Christine Steyer & David Shenton

...Short Intermission...

*On Behalf of Working In Concert*      Claudia Hommel, Executive Director

*Part 4 Guest Ensemble C21*

Sisters You Keep Us Fighting	Muse & Patty Huntington, arr. Diana Porter
Never One Thing	May Erlewine, arr. Corie Brown

Martha Swisher, *Artistic Director*      Myron Silberstein, *Keyboard Collaborator*  
*Singers:* Anna Bensch Tondelli, Kate Burch, Lindsay Bruce, Diane Deckert,  
Karen Barbee Dixon, Judy Earley, Erin Fox, Emily Gage, Czerina Salud, Lauren Schachter,  
Terri Schultz, Amanda Thomas, Jess Vogt and Salina White-Vicks

*On Behalf of Bellissima Opera*      Christine Steyer, Artistic Director

*Part 5 Quartet World Premiere*

Will They Remember Life Was Beautiful?	Mary Grace Bertulfo & Elizabeth Doyle
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*Part 6*

With the Wind and the Rain in Your Hair	Jack Lawrence & Clara Edwards
The Year of Death	Elaine Romanelli
Second Hand Rose	Grant Clarke & James F. Hanley
La vie en rose*	Edith Piaf & Louiguy
	*audience joins on English refrain

...On-site reception to follow, all are invited...



## Will They Remember Life Was Beautiful?

Lyrics by Mary Grace Bertulfo    Composed by Elizabeth Doyle

Commissioned by Working in Concert

for Bellissima Opera's International Women's Day Concert 2023

Premiered by Christine Steyer, Sarah Kropski, Susan Nelson and Anna Tonna,  
with Shannon McGinnis, piano

Ah, Ah, Ah.

Will they remember life was beautiful?

Is beautiful.

Be beautiful, again.

### 1. Lucy's Mom

I packed Lucy's school lunch yesterday  
If I'd known at breakfast she wasn't coming home,  
I'd have let my fingers linger in her braids.  
An extra spoon of pancake syrup  
For my brave and honest girl.  
Breathe her shower-fresh skin.  
Coulda kept her home and dreamt  
of all the tomorrows that would never come  
Could I have stopped my baby from going to school?  
I didn't suspect the danger hiding deep inside.  
One more day. Just one more hour with my baby, please.

Refrain

Ah,

Will they remember life was beautiful?

Is beautiful.

Be beautiful, again.

### 2. Teacher

Moving fast in my classroom.  
The shooter stalks the halls. He calls for revenge.  
Shut the blinds. Lock the door. Get quiet in our spots.  
Hide under posters of galaxies and hope.  
Nothing prepares me for young eyes, wide and trembling  
Whisper for mama and papa.  
Pull them behind me. Put on my brave face  
and let me save them! Save them!

Refrain

### 3. Emergency Pediatric Surgeon

Emergency pediatrics. It's not what it used to be.  
Now, I'm the one who's sewing the kids together.  
Most are gone before they arrive.  
My silver needles can't stop the pain  
of forty-five rounds a minute.  
Forty-five rounds a minute.  
I'm so sick of telling parents,  
"Sorry. They didn't make it."  
God, I'm out of patience,  
stitching up the innocent.  
Let me save them! Save them!

Refrain

### 4. Mom of the Shooter

His hair was thin and sticky the morning he was born.  
He screamed to live.  
I used to pack his lunches,  
Make him shine for school.  
But he was lonely. He stacked up his grudges.  
Who would help me help him?  
Duffle bag in his closet.  
Did I suspect the danger hiding deep inside?  
Could I have stopped him?  
Could I have stopped my baby from going to school?  
Could I have made him stay? Stay, stay.  
One more day. Just one more hour with my baby, please.

Refrain

Will they remember life was beautiful?

Is beautiful?

Be beautiful.

Please, be beautiful again.

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**Be a Supporter of our 2024 Commission for the  
next International Women's Day Concert**  
by underwriting a new work by a woman lyricist and composer

Go to: [workinginconcert.org/donate/](https://workinginconcert.org/donate/)  
Note "IWD Commission" in the memo line

**Sarah Kropski** is a soprano soloist and main stage performer in the Chicagoland area. She is a collaborator and performer of children’s programs at libraries and a recital series educating audiences on classical soprano traditions and styles. Sarah is a member of the original cast of *Jane Austen’s Persuasion: A Musical Drama* and has performed the role of Henrietta in numerous international productions with Chamber Opera Chicago. Other credits include: Liesl in *The Sound of Music* and Kitty in *Jane Austen’s Pride and Prejudice* (Chamber Opera Chicago), Rapunzel in *Into the Woods* (Southland Area Theatre Ensemble), and Phyllis in *Iolanthe* (Prairie Fire Theater). Most recently, Sarah was featured as an artist on the Youtube world premiere of Elizabeth Rudolph’s “Circles, Cycles & Seasons”. Sarah earned a Vocal Performance degree from Illinois Wesleyan University and is the recipient of a Bella Voce Award from Chicago’s Bel Canto Foundation. She works during the school year as a project specialist for the Music & Theatre Department and Performing Arts Division of New Trier High School.

Equally at home on the operatic stage or in concert repertoire, soprano **Susan Nelson** has been praised by critics for her “full, powerful voice – agile and pliant” as well as her interpretations, called both “sensitive and moving” and “full of life and vigor”, showcasing her versatility in repertoire from Bach and Mozart to verismo and contemporary opera, as well as light opera and popular music. A member of the Grant Park Chorus since 2003 and soloist in their 2021 *Vivaldi Gloria*, she also stepped in to sing the soprano solos in Benjamin Britten’s *Spring Symphony* on 36 hours notice. Susan’s Chicago area solo appearances include Fort Wayne Philharmonic Orchestra, South Bend Symphony, Elmhurst Choral Union, and Midwest Mozart Festival. The 2022-23 season includes Six Characters in Search of Gilbert and Sullivan, Rosalia in *West Side Story* with the Northwest Indiana Symphony, Handel’s *Messiah* with the Rockford Choral Union, Mozart’s *Requiem* with the Chicago Bar Association Orchestra and Chorus, and a Bach cantata at Grace Lutheran in River Forest. During the pandemic she recorded five hundred songs by women composers/songwriters of all different genres and has presented lecture recitals on the topic at universities, clubs and retirement homes.

**Christine Steyer** is the 2020 Honored Artist of The American Prize for outstanding contributions to the arts. The soprano has received acclaim for her portrayals of Madame Butterfly and Violetta, and has sung in 40 productions at Lyric Opera of Chicago. She recently shared the stage with Lawrence Brownlee, members of the Chicago Symphony and Lyric Opera of Chicago Orchestras and was featured on WFMT’s program *Music Notes: Music of Healing and Peace*. Steyer is an avid recitalist and producer, showcasing unique works by women writers and composers. In 2021, she premiered the role of the Rio de Janeiro Health Care Worker in *On Call: COVID-19* and in 2022 premiered the role of Flanna in *Future Perfect*. Steyer served as librettist for these award-winning operas. Steyer has brought music to 24,000 youths in underserved areas with Bellissima’s *In the Classroom*. She is President of the vocal alliance Working in Concert, and Artistic Director of its Bellissima Opera initiative. She is on the music faculty at Concordia University in River Forest and teaches music at Ascension Catholic School in Oak Park, IL.

**Anna Tonna** has been described as a “mezzo heroine who knows how to sing Rossini” by the *Rossini Gesellschaft*, and as “showing off her warm, secure mezzo-soprano to maximum advantage” by the *New York Magazine*. Her operatic roles have included Rosina, Carmen, and Dorabella, as well as rarer repertoire by Paisiello, Vivaldi, Mascagni, Zandonai and Giordano. She has appeared with the Casals Festival and Festival Iberoamericano de las Artes in Puerto Rico; El Festival de Segovia, Fundación Juan March, Auditorio Nacional de España and the Museo del Romanticismo in Spain; Teatro Grattacielo, Joy in Singing, Elysium Between Two Continents, Música de Cámara, Americas Society and Hispanic Society in New York City; and the Pacific Music Festival in Japan. Her numerous recital appearances include the Weill Recital Hall at Carnegie Hall, the St. Anton Palace in Valletta (Malta), the Palacio Nacional de Ajuda in Lisbon, Teatro 1793 at Villa Adrovandi Mazzacorati in Bologna, the Atheneums in Madrid and Barcelona and the ElbPhilharmonie in Hamburg. Her commercial recordings include “The songs of Julio Gómez” (Verso), “España alla Rossini” (iTinerant Records) and “The Unknown Pauline Viardot” (Cezanne Productions) and recently "1915: A Trip to Granada" with Klassic Cat Label.

As a collaborative pianist, **Jennifer McCabe** has worked and performed at The Kennedy Center, DePaul University, Northwestern University, Music Institute of Chicago, Wheaton College, The Musical Offering, Opera on Tap, Merit School of Music, NATS, Royal George Theater and ChiArts. Many of her collaborators are Chicago-area university faculty as well as Lyric Opera and Grant Park chorus members. She was previously managing director and board member of Opera on Tap Chicago and faculty representative on the board of The Musical Offering. She has played master classes for Renee Fleming, Ramsey Lewis, Elizabeth Futral, Jane Bunnell, and Michael Ehrman and performed with Nisanne Howell, former violinist with the CSO. An in-demand private piano teacher and music director for

over 25 years, Jennifer was the recipient of “Best of Chicago 2019” for Harmony Piano Studio and received a Sycamore High School Legacy Award in 2020 when she was inducted into their Music Hall of Fame for her lifetime contributions to music. Jennifer has also been an active church musician for over 25 years. She has a B.A. in piano from Northern Illinois University and graduate studies at NIU and MTSU in piano performance and education.

Pianist **Shannon McGinnis** has been recognized for partnerships with some of the brightest stars in the classical vocal music world. Recent highlights include recitals with mezzo-soprano Anna Laurenzo; soprano Nicole Heaston and members of the Elgin Symphony Orchestra (recorded for broadcast on *WFMT*); and appearances with the Collaborative Works Festival, Laguna Beach Music Festival, San Francisco Performances, and the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society. In past seasons she has been heard in concert with members of the Ryan Opera Center and has served official pianist for the Joyce DiDonato masterclasses at Carnegie Hall, broadcast live on medici.tv. A passionate educator, McGinnis serves as Director of Opera Programs at the Chicago College of Performing Arts at Roosevelt University and as Co-Chair of the College's Interdisciplinary Conservatory. She is a co-founder of Collaborative Arts Institute of Chicago and since 2017 has served on the faculty of Prague Summer Nights Opera and Orchestra Festival, which brings together college-aged and pre-professional singers and instrumentalists from across the world for performances in historic venues in the Czech Republic.

Emcee **Jeanne Franks** is a jazz vocalist and an on-air radio host at WDCB 90.9 FM, Chicagoland’s premier jazz station. A board member of Working in Concert, she’s inspired by WIC’s Black Voices in Cabaret, an initiative that supports Black artists nationwide. A Chicago native, she started piano lessons at age five after hearing her father’s jazz trio rehearsing in the living room and asking him for a piano so she could play that music! Jeanne played the flute for her elementary and high school bands and later studied piano and voice privately at Elmhurst College and Benedictine University. For two decades, she was a soprano and soloist in the Wooten Choral Ensemble, singing hymns, spirituals, traditional and contemporary gospel music. She is a graduate of Knox College and earned an MBA from Lake Forest Graduate School of Management. Jeanne fills in the spaces between singing and her radio show as a self-employed marketing, business development and interior design professional in the architecture and construction industry.

**Elizabeth Doyle**, singer-pianist-composer, has written extensively for musical theater and cabaret, including “Sleepy Hollow”(presented at the Disney ASCAP Workshop in California), “Burnham’s Dream”(Theater Wit) and “Duo” (Steppenwolf). She had chamber works performed at the Paradiso in Amsterdam which were heard on Dutch radio. Her cabaret performing career has taken her to France, Germany and throughout the US. This commission marks her further foray into writing art songs and modern classical choral works.

**Mary Grace (“M.G.”) Bertulfo** has had works commissioned by the Pleasant Home Foundation and Bellissima Opera and her short story “Community Builder” was staged and performed at Open Door Theater. She has written for CBS, Pearson Education Asia, *Sierra*, and *Chicago Wilderness*. Her poetry, fiction, and essays have appeared in *City of Big Shoulders: An Anthology of Chicago Poetry* (University of Iowa Press), *Amerasia Journal*, *Growing Up Filipino II*, and various anthologies. She is the founder of Banyan: Asian American Writers Collective and has served on the Oak Park Arts District Board.

**Cheri Wolf** is an artist and maker who can be found actively engaged in creating things on most days of her life. At age 11, she earned her first of many scholarships to the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Although talented in most mediums tried, she has a propensity toward painting, drawing and textiles. Eleven years traveling as a full-time RVer, Cheri has left her marks on the southern states of the country in signs, murals, rain barrels, clothing and digital designs. Back to Chicagoland in August of 2016, she currently resides in Rolling Meadows and works in Special Education to support her son, dog and her incessant need to create. This is her first showing as an adult.

**C21 Women's Ensemble** is a progressive, auditioned choral ensemble for women, which strives to be fresh and unpredictable, embracing modern compositions and composers while remaining respectful and grateful to the classic choral tradition. Now in its fifth season under the direction of Martha Swisher, its goal is to create musical experiences of deeper meaning with humanistic themes that ring true for audiences. In 2014, it first started as a mixed chorus called the 21st Century Chorale, which evolved through the years to become a small ensemble of women with a mission of women’s empowerment. Its programs feature the work and influence of women, whether performing contemporary compositions or carrying forward music from centuries past. C21 Women’s Ensemble gains strength from the inspiration in the compositions they sing and brings that strength into the roles they navigate daily as professionals, daughters, mothers, partners and teachers.



## Upcoming Bellissima Opera Events



Highlights of our 2022 and 2023 IWD Concerts, featuring works by women, released on our You Tube channel in upcoming months.

Free viewing of our award-winning opera "On Call: Covid 19"  
[bellissimaopera.com/covidopera/](http://bellissimaopera.com/covidopera/)

Streaming of our "Future Perfect" opera this May  
[bellissimaopera.com/futureperfect/](http://bellissimaopera.com/futureperfect/)

"Opera in the Classroom" at the Kehrein Center for the Arts, March 20, 2023

World Opera Day Masked Ball Fundraiser, October 2023

3rd Annual IWD Concert, March 2024

Sign-up for our Newsletter: [bellissimaopera.com](http://bellissimaopera.com)

### Special Thanks

Kimberly Adami-Hasegaw, Andy Bossov, Kerri Burkhardt, Dave DeGooyer, Diane Deckert & Roy Hunt, Ralph Earlandson, Juliana & Peter Engel Storms, Paul Geiger, Claudia Hommel, Kimberly & Susan Huizinga, Cappy Kidd, Brian Kinyon, David Reithoffer, Reverend Kathy Nolte, Katie Rub, Mila Tellez, Lynn Zamora



### LA VIE EN ROSE Sing-along in English

Hold me close and hold me fast  
The magic spell you cast  
This is "La vie en rose".

When you kiss me, heaven sighs  
And though I close my eyes  
I see "La vie en rose".

When you press me  
to your heart.  
I'm in a world apart  
A world where roses bloom.  
And when you speak,  
angels sing from above.  
Everyday words seem to  
turn into love songs.

Give your heart and soul to me  
And life will always be  
"La vie en rose".

The paintings that inspired our backdrops are on display. If interested in purchasing, take artist Cheri Wolf's contact card next to her artwork.



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Meet up with Michèle Barbier, Isabelle Georges, Myline Laumy, Benjamin Legend, Jean-Claude Orfali...



[cabaretconnexion.org](http://cabaretconnexion.org)



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**Launch Party**

Friday, March 10, 4:30-6:30 pm  
First United Church, Oak Park

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Our shared initiatives:

- Bellissima Opera
- Black Voices in Cabaret
- Chicago Cabaret Week
- Chicago Paris Cabaret Connexion
- SongShop Live
- In the Classroom

**BELLISSIMA OPERA**, led by Christine Steyer, creates innovative professional concert events and operas. Our Tales of Transcendence opera series began in 2021 with the award-winning online opera, *On Call: COVID-19*, and continued with the world premiere of *Future Perfect* in 2022. Our annual International Women's Day concerts feature female artists performing classical works by women.



#### **BLACK VOICES IN CABARET**

Winner of the 2021 American Prize for virtual performance, is a forum for education, entertainment, and mutual support of Black artists. Starting in Chicago where American cabaret had its first roots, we highlight emerging and established African-American cabaret performers, embrace their many genres, and encourage opportunities to perform for new audiences.

#### **CHICAGO CABARET WEEK**

The second annual Cabaret Week May 12-20, 2023 continues the celebration of more than a century of Chicago cabaret, its diverse arts and artists, and their future. Working In Concert joins with Chicago Cabaret Professionals and Acts Of Kindness Cabaret to coordinate this citywide cabaret festival in collaboration with the tourism bureau Choose Chicago.



#### **CHICAGO PARIS CABARET CONNEXION**

Advancing together the intimate art of cabaret, this ongoing international performer exchange hosts multi-day conferences of workshops, round tables and concerts. The fifth Connexion will host the first Cabaret Festival of Paris in late summer 2023.



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