



ĒRIKS EŠENVALDS

TRANSLATIONS

Portland State Chamber Choir
Ethan Sperry

Ēriks
EŠENVALDS
(b. 1977)
Translations

1	O salutaris hostia (2009) (Text: St Thomas Aquinas, 1224/25–1274)	3:36
2	The Heavens' Flock (2014) (Text: Paulann Petersen, b. 1942)	4:29
3	Translation (2016) (Text: Paulann Petersen)	4:44
4	My Thoughts ('Мысли мои') (2019) (Text: Saint Silouan the Athonite, 1866–1938)	9:30
5	Vineta (2009) (Text: Wilhelm Müller, 1794–1827)	12:02
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7	In paradisum (2012) (Text: Catholic Liturgy)	12:52

Anna Krytenberg, Savannah Panah, Gina Rizk, Soprano Descants 4
Kate Ledington 1, **Maeve Stier** 1 3, **Rebecca Yakos** 6, **Savannah Panah** 6, **Soprano**
Celine Clark 3, **Bryanna West** 6, **Alto**
Juan Castaneda 3, **Jereme Wilkie** 6, **Ulises Zavaleta** 6, **Tenor**
Jorden Moss, Baritone 6 • **Jonathan Roberts** 3, **Rex Bennett** 6, **Bass**

Charles Noble, Viola 7 • **Marilyn de Oliveira, Cello** 7
David Walters, Singing Handbells 3
Joel Bluestone, Vibraphone, Glockenspiel, Chimes 5
Florian Conzetti, Vibraphone, Suspended Cymbal, Bass Drum 5

Portland State Chamber Choir

Ethan Sperry

Ēriks Ešenvalds (b. 1977)

Translations

Born in Priekule, Latvia in 1977, Ēriks Ešenvalds is a composer with such acclaim that his music is among that most often performed throughout the world. He has won multiple awards, including the Latvian Grand Music Award (2005, 2007 and 2015), the International Rostrum of Composers First Prize (for *Legend of the Walled-In Woman*, 2006), and New-Composer Discovery of the Philadelphia Inquirer (2010). His works have been performed by the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, the Utah Symphony, and the Britten Sinfonia. Ešenvalds has written for The King's Singers, Latvian Voices, the Choir of Trinity College Cambridge, the Holst Singers, Imogen Heap, Polyphony and numerous choirs in the US. Ešenvalds' compositions appear on many recordings and, to date, eight are exclusively devoted to his choral music. This album is the sequel to *The Doors of Heaven* (Naxos 8.579008, 2017), performed by Portland State University Chamber Choir – the first recording by an American choir.

Eriks Ešenvalds often writes complex music, dividing the choir into eight or even sixteen parts, using an expanded tonality to create gorgeous, lush textures that nearly overwhelm the senses. This style may epitomise '21st-century choral sound'. But, unlike many of his contemporaries, Ešenvalds is equally comfortable writing in an angular, aggressive style that channels more stringent tonalities of the previous century. What makes Ešenvalds' music so compelling is that he uses these two musical vocabularies side by side. His expertise shines through the uniqueness of the texts he selects and their powerful musical realisations.

This album features seven selections on the idea of 'translation' or the transformations that occur within us when we encounter the power of nature (*Translation* and *The Heavens' Flock*), legends (*Legend of the Walled-In Woman* and *Vineta*), or the divine (*O salutaris hostia*, *My Thoughts ('Мысли мои')* and *In paradisum*). Oregon Poet Laureate Paulann Petersen, whose poetry is set on the first two tracks of this album, stated:

'Art is translation. Art translates the ineffable into what we can see and hear, what we can experience, what *touches* us. Art translates mystery for us without destroying that mystery. As translation, art truly is a vehicle for transformation.

Art enters and transforms us: lucky, lucky us.'

O salutaris hostia (2009) is a short, simple and exquisitely beautiful prayer for peace. It features two soprano soloists singing first antiphonally and then in duet, suspended above a choir that grows from the upper voices to a full eight-part divisi texture. The piece is assembled from short phrases continuously elided together, so that the next begins before the previous one completely resolves. The resolution is as elusive as peace has been for humanity, especially the Latvian people, who have endured nearly constant foreign occupation throughout recorded history. After over three minutes of continuous staggered breathing, the choir gets one communal breath before the final, 'Amen'.

The Heavens' Flock (2014) was commissioned by the Portland State Chamber Choir and served as Eriks Ešenvalds' introduction to Paulann Petersen's poetry. The narrator wanders as a lowly shepherd lost on earth while the stars dwell separately above as Heavens' flock. The narrator resolves to become more like a star by building a fire. And true to the ethos of America's Pacific Northwest, the narrator creates the transformational fire out of discarded twigs and lichens – the refuse that appears to have been discarded by nature, but is actually the fuel of divinity. Ešenvalds' sets this text as a newly composed folksong. The piece begins with wordless singing – the music of the stars. The text again is delivered entirely homophonically in textures ranging from six to eight-part divisi for the choir, with the melody almost entirely in the soprano line. The music oscillates between B minor and D major, which could be a simple allegory: humanity appears in minor and the divinity of the stars in major. But

when the climax arrives and the translation is complete, the music is solidly set in B minor.

Translation (2016) was commissioned for The Crossing's *Jeff Quartets*, a concert-length set of 15 new works for four voices dedicated to the memory of the choir's co-founder Jeff Dinsmore. The text for Ériks' quartet is by Paulann Petersen; it focuses on the moon, noticing it seems to be waiting to be realised in art — like a poem, waiting to be found. Then beauty is translated into humanity. Communion with the moon is like 'a thin wafer melting in the mouth' and art is born, 'words having found their tongue'. *Translation* is scored for a quartet of vocal soloists (as outlined in the commission) singing the text homophonically, accompanied by a five-part background choir, which envisions the changing scope of the night sky, and singing handbells, played like Tibetan singing bowls, shimmer into existence after words have 'found their tongue'.

My Thoughts ('Мысли мои') (2019) is a setting of the preface of Saint Silouan the Athonite's treatise *My Soul is Crying to the Whole World*. While the book itself is a collection of sayings, prayers and beliefs, the preface concerns the struggle of attempting to take divine perfection and write it down in words. Saint Silouan believed his thoughts came to him in perfect form from God, but the act of translating these divine ideas into human language made them human, and thus imperfect. Saint Silouan apologised to his readers for the imperfections of his work.

The piece begins with a three minute highly static section for the lower voices of the choir: the altos are divided into three parts alternating their singing with the tenors and basses in four parts. The sopranos enter alone, singing two separate themes that are each repeated in sequence through multiple keys, attempting to find home. The piece builds to crisis, a rare cadence to a pure minor chord, as the attempt to capture the divine has failed. And then, only after the failure, true inspiration arrives softly. Starting with just the soprano and alto voices, the choir's texture peacefully expands to a final chord that covers over four octaves, from the lowest bass note to the highest soprano descant.

Vineta (2009) was commissioned by the Bavarian Radio Chorus, who also chose the text of the piece. *Vineta* is a legendary city consumed by the Baltic Sea because of its citizens' hedonistic tendencies, and whose church bells still ring from beneath the surface of the waters calling sailors to their deaths. Wilhelm Müller, the 19th-century German poet whose poetry forms the libretti for Schubert's famous *Winterreise* and *Die schöne Müllerin*, takes this story more as allegory, maybe even as a precursor to Freud's death drive — the Ego's struggle between giving in to or resisting its own basest desires. In his poem, these wishes call from within the depths of the soul, much as the church bells of *Vineta* call from beneath the sea.

Vineta begins very clearly on a pedal E, the choir accompanied by vibraphone and orchestral chimes, and emerges from and returns to that E, as if the sunken city is coming in and out of focus from beneath the waves. Many lines of the poem are followed by reflective music where the words fall away, and the choir shifts to tone syllables. Percussion takes the foreground as vibraphone (simultaneously bowed and played with mallets) and glockenspiel create space for the listener's imagination to inhabit the mood of the story — to find the spaces beneath the surface of the water or perhaps the surface of consciousness. Following a stormy climax involving bass drum, the piece ends as the lower voices of the choir sink back to their pedal E while the sopranos soar to their highest pitches accompanied by a shimmer of suspended cymbal and a dozen triangles played gently with knitting needles.

Legend of the Walled-In Woman (2005) was commissioned by the Latvian Radio Choir. It begins with a vocal quintet singing an ancient Albanian folk song that dates the time of the building of the Rozafa Castle (Albanian: 'Kalaja e Rozafës'), near the city of Shkodër in northwestern Albania. Legend is that three brothers built the fortress to protect against Greek and Roman invaders. The brothers worked each day but found each morning their work had been mysteriously ruined in the night. One night their mother had a dream: one of the brothers would have to wall up his wife alive within the fortress to keep it standing. After telling her sons, they agreed to keep silent and let fate choose its sacrifice: the

wife who brought food to the brothers the next day would be immured. The two older brothers broke the agreement and warned their wives, but the youngest kept his word.



Sculpture at Rozafa Castle, Albania

Legend of the Walled-In Woman begins with the mother urging first the wife of the oldest son, then the wife of the middle, and finally Rozafa, the wife of the youngest, to bring the men bread and wine. Rozafa picks up the bread and wine and makes her way to the site. The brothers sadly explain what must happen next. Rozafa does not protest and accepts her fate, asking that she be built into the castle while still alive. Her plea continues, as she asks for her right eye to be left showing so that she might still see her infant son, her right breast to be exposed so that she might still feed the babe, and for her right foot to be free so that she might still be able to rock his cradle. It is this authentic Albanian folksong which Ešenvalds has transcribed from an old recording, carefully notating every nuance of the unique Albanian Iso-Polyphony. He repeats this ancient music three times, juxtaposed with the full choir singing fragments of the same text in an otherworldly texture, static at first, but growing more rhythmically intense and tonally dissonant with each iteration.

After the third and most violent choral section, *Legend of the Walled-In Woman* ends with a funeral

march sung by the chorus and two soprano soloists. The soloists represent the wives of the two older brothers mourning Rozafa, who ask to join her in living memorial. Her three last pleas now are mirrored in three statements from Martin Camaj's 20th-century poem *My Land*:

When I die, may I turn into grass...
(symbolizing her right foot on the grass
to rock her son's cradle)
When I die, may I turn into water...
(representing the sustenance of
her right breast to feed her son)
When I die, may I turn into stone,
On the confines of my land
May I be a landmark...
(the right eye to see her son, to be visible
through the stone, to be a marker to others).

In paradisum (2012) was written in memory of Ešenvalds' grandmother who passed away on the morning of the premiere. The beauty of *paradisum* comes across in the mostly wordless choir, which accompanies the angelic strains of a solo viola and cello. Only rarely does the choir take the foreground, singing the Requiem Mass antiphon that would be sung as the body is taken from the church for burial. The choral writing is homophonic throughout, and except for the few brief places where the choir sings words, this piece is almost a concerto for viola and cello with the choir serving as the orchestra.

I have often thought of the tonal music of the 18th and 19th centuries as being the music of human construction, with major and minor chords representing the lines and blocks we construct to depict order within nature. Ešenvalds' expanded tonality, though it includes dissonant tones, sounds to me even more consonant than major and minor, something like the next dimension of construction. Perhaps these are the harmonies of the Fibonacci sequence, the sounds of the spiral, or the way in which nature orders itself that remains beyond complete human comprehension. Perhaps this is why it works equally well to depict the wonder a human feels when translating the divinity of nature into oneself or when

encountering the Divine in a religious context. Ešenvalds' ability to write this music is a rare gift, one that allows us to be transformed, translated by the beauty and complexity of his compositions. Lucky, lucky us.

Ethan Sperry

1 O salutaris hostia

(Text: Prayer of St Thomas Aquinas, 1224/25–1274)

O salutaris hostia,
Quæ cæli pandis ostium:
Bella premunt hostilia,
Da robur, fer auxilium.
Uni trinque Domino
Sit sempiterna gloria,
Qui vitam sine termino
Nobis donet in patria.
Amen.

*O, saving victim,
who opens the door of heaven:
hostile armies press,
give us strength; bring us aid.
To the One and Triune Lord,
may there be everlasting glory;
May the one who gives life without end
give peace to us in our homeland.
Amen.*

2 The Heavens' Flock

(Text: Paulann Petersen, b. 1942,
former Oregon Poet Laureate)

Stars, you are the heavens' flock, tangling your pale wool
across the night sky,
bits of oily fleece catching on barbs of darkness
to swirl in black wind.
You appear, disappear by thousands,
scattered wide to graze but never straying.
While I – a mere shepherd of these words – am lost.
What can I do but build a small blaze,
feed it with branches the trees let fall –
that twiggy clatter strewn along the ground.
And lichen crusting such dead limbs glows silver, white.
The earth-food for a fire so unlike and like your own.

3 Translation

(Text: Paulann Petersen)

Empty of words, not empty of light, the moon's face awaits
the touch of a pen.
Empty of ink, but not of silver, that pale slate that is the moon
Waits for the sweep of letters inscribed in strokes deep
as the dark in which it floats.
Emptied of nothing, filled with story, the moon becomes
a thin wafer melting,
Melting in the mouth, words having found their tongue.

4 My Thoughts ('Мысли мои')

(Text: preface to *My Soul is Crying for the Whole World*
by Saint Silouan the Athonite, 1866–1938.
English translation by Ruth Taziyeva, b. 1998)

Мысли мои пережиты долгими годами.
Божии милости были со мною без конца...
Я пишу милости Господни,

и мне легко писать, ибо душа моя знает
Господа Духом Святым
и знает, как много Он любит человека.

За писание моё, кто будет читать,
за всё простите, за ошибки мои,
и прошу вас молиться за меня.

Но писал я потому, что влекла меня любовь Божия,
в которой я сытости не знаю.
Я сидел, и вся душа моя была занята Богом,

и ни единая мысль не приближалась ко мне
и не мешала уму моему писать
о любимом Господе.

И когда я пишу слово,
то другого ещё не знаю,
но рождается оно во мне, и я пишу его.

*I have lived with these thoughts for many years.
God's mercies were with me without end.
I write out of Lord's grace,*

*And it is easy for me to write, for my soul knows
the Lord through the Holy Spirit,
and knows how much He loves humanity.*

*For those who read my writings,
I ask you to forgive everything, forgive my mistakes,
and I ask you to pray for me.*

*But I wrote because God's love drew me,
and I will never have enough of it.
I sat and my entire soul was filled with God.*

*And not a single thought came to me
that would distract my mind from writing
about the dear Lord.*

*And when I write each word,
then the next is not yet in my mind,
but it is being born inside me and I write it.*

5 Vineta

(Text: Wilhelm Müller, 1794–1827.
English translation by Harry Baechtel, b. 1978)

Aus des Meeres tiefem, tiefem Grunde
klingen Abendglocken, dumpf und matt.
Uns zu geben wunderbare Kunde
von der schönen, alten Wunderstadt.

In der Fluten Schoß hinabgesunken,
blieben unten ihre Trümmer stehn.
Ihre Zinnen lassen goldne Funken
widerscheinend auf dem Spiegel sehn.

Und der Schiffer, der den Zauberschimmer
einmal sah im hellen Abendrot,
nach der selben Stelle schiff't er immer,
ob auch ringsumher die Klippe droht.

Aus des Herzens tiefem, tiefem Grunde
klingt es mir wie Glocken, dumpf und matt.
Ach, sie geben wunderbare Kunde
von der Liebe, die geliebt es hat.

Eine schöne Welt ist da versunken,
ihre Trümmer blieben unten stehn,
lassen sich als goldne Himmelsfunken
oft im Spiegel meiner Träume sehn.

Und dann möcht ich tauchen in die Tiefen,
mich versenken in den Wiederschein,
und mir ist, als ob mich Engel riefen
in die alte Wunderstadt herein.

*Out of the deepest depths of the sea
Evening bells sound dull and faint,
Offering us wonderful tidings
Of the beautiful, bygone, wondrous city.*

*Swallowed by the surging tide,
Its remnants still stand.
Its battlements emit golden sparks
That reflect luminously on the mirrored surface.*

*And the sailor that saw this magical shimmering,
Once in the bright sunset,
Sails to the same place ever again,
Despite the threatening cliffs that surround him.*

*Out of the deepest depths of the heart
Rings a bell like sound, dull and faint.
Ah, it gives wonderful tidings
Of the love that it has spent.*

*Sunken there lies a beautiful world,
Its remnants still stand,
Emitting golden, heavenly sparks
Often visible in the mirror of my dreams.*

*And then I would like to dive into the depths,
To immerse myself in the reflection,
It is as if angels call me
Into the bygone, wondrous city.*

6 Legend of the Walled-In Woman

(Text: Traditional: Albanian folk song; *Vendit Tem*
(‘My Land’) by Martin Camaj, 1925–1992.
English translations by Robert Elsie, 1950–2017.)

Atje te ura në lumë, Oooooi, E mjera unë,
Most a bëre të bëje punë, Oooooi, E mjera unë.
Qi fletë vjehrra nusës së madhe, Oooooi, E mjera unë,
Bjera bukën mos të vale, Oooooi, E mjera unë.
Qi fletë vjehrra nusës së vogël, Oooooi, E mjera unë,
Bjera bukën mos të vale, Oooooi, E mjera unë.
Në themelët e Kalasë, Oooooi, E mjera unë,
Është pendu se ja dhanë një vashë, Oooooi, E mjera unë.

When I die, may I turn into grass
On my mountains in spring,
In autumn I will turn to seed.

When I die, may I turn into water,
My misty breath
Will fall onto the meadows as rain.

When I die, may I turn into stone,
On the confines of my land
May I be a landmark.

7 In paradisum

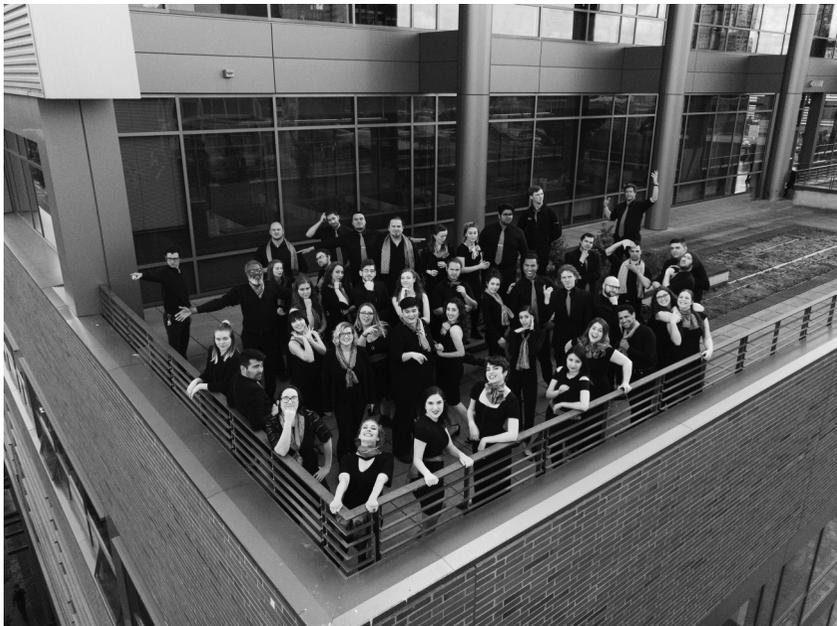
(Text: Catholic Liturgy)

In paradisum deducant Angeli
in tuo adventu suscipiant te Martyres
et perducant te in civitatem sanctam Jerusalem.
Chorus Angelorum te suscipiant
et cum Lazaro quondam paupere
aeternam habeas requiem.

*There at the bridge o'er the river, Woe, oh woe is me.
Do not set forth a-working. Woe, oh woe is me.
To her eldest son's wife speaks the mother: (woe, woe)
Take them food, do not fail. Woe, oh woe is me.
To her youngest son's wife speaks the mother: (woe, woe)
Take them food, do not fail. Woe, oh woe is me.
To the foundations of that fortress (woe, woe)
They regret that they once gave a girl. Woe, oh woe is me.*

*May the angels lead you into paradise;
may the martyrs receive you at your arrival
and lead you into the holy City of Jerusalem.
May the choir of Angels greet you
and like Lazarus, who once was a poor man,
may you have eternal rest.*

Portland State Chamber Choir



Since its founding in 1975, the Portland State Chamber Choir has performed and competed in venues across the US and around the world, earning over 30 medals and awards in international choir competitions, including being the only American choir to have won the 'Seghizzi' International Competition for Choral Singing in Italy in 2013, and the Bali International Choir Festival in Indonesia in 2017. Praised by *Classics Today* as 'one of the finest choirs in the world', the choir has performed multiple times at National and Divisional Conferences of the American Choral Directors Association and the National Association for Music Education, and in 2014 hosted the 2014 National Conference of the National

Collegiate Choral Organization. In the summer of 2020, they will represent the US at the World Symposium on Choral Music in Auckland, New Zealand. In February 2011 the Chamber Choir collaborated with Portland-born composer Morten Lauridsen, and the choir's 2012 album *A Drop in the Ocean* was favourably reviewed and featured in both *Fanfare* and *Stereophile* magazines, and was a finalist for the 2012 American Prize in Choral Music. Their 2014 recording *Into Unknown Worlds*, was named a 'Recording to Die For' by *Stereophile* magazine – the first student recording to receive this distinction – and was a finalist for the 2014 Contemporary A Cappella Recording Award (CARA) Award for Best Classical Album. Their most recent album, *The Doors of Heaven*, featuring the music of Eriks Ešēnvalds (Naxos 8.579008. 2017) debuted at number one on the Billboard Traditional Classical Chart (a first for a university choir), and was also a number one seller on Amazon and iTunes, with Apple Music adding the album to its *The A-List: Classical* playlist. Since 2013 the choir has performed regularly with the Oregon Symphony in works as diverse as Debussy's *Sirènes*, Beethoven's *Choral Fantasy* and *Symphony No. 9*, Handel's *Messiah*, Mahler's *Symphony No. 2* and Stravinsky's *Perséphone* in a fully staged production with direction by Michael Curry. In 2014 they presented the Portland premiere performances of both David Lang's *The Little Match Girl Passion* and Samuel Barber's *The Lovers*. www.pschamberchoir.com

Sopranos

Rachel Bard
Hannah Delgado
Jessie Flasschoen
Madisen Hallberg
Natalie Hurley
Anna Krytenberg
Savannah Panah
Gina Rizk
Maeve Stier
Rebecca Yakos

Altos

Aimee Altamirano
Shayla Bailey
Celine Clark
Abigail Graves
Sabrina Hockett
Kate Ledington
Natalia Olivares
Lizzie Soper
Helen Soultanian
Ruth Taziyeva
Bryanna West
Vanessa Zmolek

Tenors

Juan Castaneda
Spencer Hughes
Steven Livingston
Andrew Lucht
Bryan Morris-Brand
Ben Reed
Nicholas Wavers
Jereme Wilkie
Ulises Zavaleta

Basses

Rex Bennett
Jeff Evans
André Flynn
Zach Frunk
Kenan Koenig
Jordan Moss
Daniel Nyounai-Herrera
Eric Olson
Jonathan Roberts
Luis Ortiz-Rodriguez
David Walters

Ethan Sperry



Hailed by *The Oregonian* for providing 'the finest choral concerts in Portland in recent memory', Ethan Sperry is in his tenth year as director of choral activities at Portland State University, where he conducts the world-renowned Chamber Choir and leads undergraduate and graduate programmes in conducting. He is also the artistic director and conductor of the Oregon Repertory Singers, one of America's most distinguished adult choruses. A prolific arranger of world music for choirs, Dr Sperry is the editor of the Global Rhythms series for *Earthsongs Music*, one of the best-selling choral series in the world, and is also published by Hal Leonard. Sperry is also a frequent collaborator with film composer A.R. Rahman and has appeared as a guest conductor for him numerous times including at Bollywood Night at the Hollywood Bowl and the 2008 Filmfare Awards. He also serves as a consultant for the KM Music Conservatory in Chennai, the first classical music school in India, which opened in 2009. Born in New York City in 1971, Sperry began studying conducting at the age of eight, cello at the age of twelve, and singing at the age of eighteen. He has earned a Bachelor's degree in philosophy from Harvard College and Master's and Doctoral degrees in choral conducting from the University of Southern California. Choirs under his direction have performed at over a dozen American Choral Directors Association and the National Association for Music

Education conferences, toured over 20 foreign countries and sung at the Hollywood Bowl, The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, and the United Nations. Prior to moving to Oregon, Sperry served for ten years on the faculty of Miami University in Ohio where he conducted the Men's Glee Club, Collegiate Chorale, and Global Rhythms Ensemble. He has also served as artistic administrator of the Arad Philharmonic Chorus in Romania and conductor of the Coeur Regional de Guadeloupe, the only symphonic chorus in the French West Indies. www.psuchamberchoir.com

The multi-award-winning Latvian composer Ēriks Ešņvalds' 21st-century choral sound is both exquisite and angular, and in this album he explores ideas of 'translation', legend and the divine. With his expanded tonality and employment of shimmering singing handbells in *Translation*, and the angelic use of the viola and cello in *In paradisum* he creates music of ravishing refinement. In *Legend of the Walled-In Woman* Ešņvalds transcribes and employs an authentic Albanian folk song.

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(b. 1977)

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***WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING**

Portland State Chamber Choir • Ethan Sperry

A full track list and performers' details can be found inside the booklet. The sung texts are included in the booklet, and may also be accessed at www.naxos.com/libretti/574124.htm

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