In Principio (2020)

In principio erat verbum,	In the beginning was the word,
et verbum erat apud Deum,	and the word was in the presence of God,
et Deus erat verbum.	and God was the word.
Hoc erat in principio apud Deum.	It was with God in the beginning.
Omnia per ipsum facta sunt:	all things through it were made,
et sine ipso factum est nihil.	and without it nothing was made.
Quod factum est in ipso vita erat,	What was made in it was life,
et vita erat lux hominum:	and life was the light of men.
et lux in tenebris lucet,	And the light shines in the darkness,
et tenebræ eam non comprehenderunt.	yet the darkness did not understand it.

As a composer, performer, and educator, so much of my background is in choral music—I consider it to be my true love. Naturally, I jumped at the chance when I was approached by Dr. Jonathan Richter, my former choir director at UMass Lowell, and asked to compose a piece for virtual choir back in the fall of 2020. In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, and not having had a chance to write for choir, I was excited to return to my true love and work with my dear friends in UMass Lowell's Chamber Singers once again.

My goal for this piece was for it to be something unlike anything my colleagues in Chamber Singers had ever sung before in a choir, and something unlike any choral piece I had ever written. This was the result: a rhythmically driven fanfare and aria, based around the whole tone scale.

Something in the Way (1992, arr. 2021)
*Kurt Cobain (1967-1994), arr. Burke

When the illustrious Kurt Cobain wrote "Something in the Way" in 1990, he drew from his own experience with homelessness, describing the isolation and despair he felt while living under a bridge in his hometown of Aberdeen, Washington. The original version of "Something in the Way" as recorded by Nirvana on their seminal album *Nevermind* conveys this emptiness with sparse, detuned guitar. While much of my own compositional work focuses on doing more with less, I wanted to expand Kurt Cobain's artistry into a different, larger sonic palette, while still capturing this idea of isolation and hauntedness.

The Virtual Choir

Sopranos: Quinn Gutman, Annetta Whetham
Altos: Alexis Boucugnani, Caroline Wolfe
Tenors: Teddy Coughlin, Alex Morrow
Basses: Chris Ruben Winters, Eva Morrison
Solo: Quinn Gutman, soprano
Paige Burke, conductor

Where the Wild Things Are (2020)

Lorenzo Macuja, clarinet

where the wild things are, for solo B-flat clarinet, was the first piece I completed as a student at the Longy School of Music, and one of my first forays into non-traditional compositional techniques—looking back, for me it represents my breaking free from what I thought was my "compositional style" at the time into an ongoing process of self-discovery.

Based on my very first assignment from my first composition professor, Dr. Amy Beth Kirsten, which was to compose a three-measure melodic theme, soon enough this three-measure melody spiraled off into a nearly four-minute rhapsody. I drew on influences from jazz, blues, and also from my days as a music education major, dealing with beginner band students learning to make sound through their instruments. Beginning with a series of overblown, under-blown, and (purposely) sloppy-sounding notes and descending glissandi, the piece blusters into the main theme before developing into something more fanciful—an adventure into uncharted territory, where all the wild things are.

In this way, *where the wild things are* was my introduction to writing for a solo instrument, as well as a trial-by-fire in extended techniques, melodic fragmentation, atonality, and experimenting with timbre. All this is just to say, this was one of the first full-length pieces I had ever written that wasn't a pretty, lyrical choral piece about Jesus.

between sacred silence and sleep (2021)

TianQi (Angel) Peng, piano

Still drawing on inspiration from '90s and '00s metal, *between sacred silence and sleep* is a minimalist-inspired take on System of a Down's "Toxicity"—the title is a direct reference to the song's chorus. System of a Down's original song discusses the "toxicity" of society and popular culture, but in this take I attempt to explore the effects of this "toxicity," creating this sparse sonic wasteland and evoking an image of the liminal space "between sacred silence and sleep." The guitar riff from the original song, based on open fifths, becomes the basis for the perpetual constant rhythmic and harmonic motion throughout. Although the piano part is in perpetual rhythmic motion, this constant movement blends into a single, sustained line.

Two Victorian Songs (2021)

    I.   Roses and Rue: a prelude

Text by Oscar Wilde (1854-1900)

    II.   Awake Her Not

Text by Christina Rossetti (1830-1894)

Annetta Whetham, soprano
Sage Fogle, piano

I have always admired Christina Rossetti's poetry, not only for its evocativeness but for its simplicity and musicality—so many of her poems lend themselves to musical setting. As I was working on "Awake Her Not," I was approached by another vocalist who asked me to compose an aria based on Oscar Wilde's "Roses and Rue," a favorite poem of hers. In my mind, these *Two Victorian Songs* are a 21st-century take on the tradition of German lieder, blending classical art song with influences from contemporary pop ballads—in particular, songs like Evanescence's "My Immortal." While sparse and haunting, they are short, sweet, and heartfelt.

Lux Aeterna (2020)
Caroline Wolfe, soprano

Vanessa Moya, mezzo-soprano

  Lux Aeterna was composed in memory of my beloved grandmother, who passed away in 2019 after a years-long battle with dementia. The text, taken from the Latin Requiem mass, is a prayer for eternal rest:

Lux aeterna luceat eis, Domine, *cum sanctis tuis in aeternum,* *quia pius es.*	Let perpetual light shine upon them, O Lord, with your saints forever, for you are merciful.
Requiem aeternam dona eis, Domine, *et lux perpetua luceat eis.*	Grant them eternal rest, O Lord, and let perpetual light shine upon them.

  The music aims to create a feeling of *liminality*, or existing at the threshold between one thing and another. This threshold represents the transition between the physical and spiritual realms, or between vague memories and reality.

  Drawing on influences from Renaissance polyphony, the two voices are in a constant push and pull against one another, finding relative peace in dissonance. Each resolution gives rise to further harmonic and rhythmic tension, reinforcing this idea of liminality.

Selections from *The Happy Prince* (2021)
Libretto based on *The Happy Prince* by Oscar Wilde (1854-1900)

Swallow: Caroline Wolfe, soprano

Prince: Alexis Boucugnani, soprano

TianQi (Angel) Peng, piano

As a non-binary person who has been relegated to performing in the traditional "trouser roles" (Prince Orlovsky, Hansel, Cherubino—you know the ones) as an undergraduate in my university's opera workshop program, I always wondered if there were any operatic roles for people like me. Even though I don't do much solo

singing anymore, I thought it was still important to provide this sort of representation in an operatic medium. Taking inspiration from singer and librettist Aiden Feltkamp's series of articles in *New Music Box*, I set out to create an opera where the roles are flexible for any gender or voice type, and that could be performed by a school or community-based ensemble that might not have the personnel or the rigorous training needed to stage a traditional opera. I felt that Oscar Wilde's "The Happy Prince" would lend itself well to this medium, as it is a simple and beautiful story, and part of the queer literary canon to boot.

In the first aria presented from these selections, we are introduced to the Swallow, who is on their way to Egypt for the winter. They are preoccupied with living a life of pleasure, reflecting on their summer fling with the Reed, and looking forward to finally meeting up with their friends in Egypt and seeing all the great sights. The Swallow finally meets the Prince, who is in the form of a bejeweled statue, perching at the Prince's feet. The Prince reveals their past life of pleasure, but now that they can see outside of the palace walls, they can see the pain and abject poverty that the people of the city live in, resolving to do something to help. The Prince gives up all of their gold and precious jewels to the people of the city with the help of the Swallow, until both of them have nothing left to give. It is truly a timeless tale of selfless love and sacrifice.