

HYMN OF THE TREES

Reaching up to heaven with branches and fronds,
Like Simeon seeking the face of the Lord,
Timeless as the galaxy, stars in its branches,
And the sweetness of joy in the sap as it rises...
Here the sequoia millennia endures,
Ancient of witnesses, o tree of life -
We cherish, we bless and we pour out our love,
We vow to preserve our sweet earth.

*Let the heavens and earth sing in exultation;
Let the oceans roar and all within give voice,
Let the field and its creatures sound in celebration;
Then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice!*

Let us join our hands, ring the core of gold,
Our circle expanding, our circle enfold,
Binding us together in songs of our praises,
And the blessings of nature, enwrapped in ev'ning rays -
Here the sequoia brings comfort through the day,
Long may you shelter us, o tree of life,
Sequoia, may you see, o Simeon tree,
A glimpse of the Lord now in peace.

*Let the heavens and earth sing in exultation;
Let the oceans roar and all within give voice,
Let the field and its creatures sound in celebration;
Then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice!*

**Jessica Duchen,
refrain freely adapted from Psalm 96**

When I was approached by Choir of St Paul's Burlingame's Director Susan Jane Matthews and the Marcia McCowin Estate to write this anthem for the 2025 Youth Choir Festival West, I immediately felt that the young singers should have some ownership of the creative process. Jessica Duchen (who wrote these beautiful words) and I sent them a questionnaire to ask what was important to them, both in sentiment and musically. We incorporated as many of their requests as we could and they're listed in **bold** below.

We asked them what they'd most like to thank God for: **plants, flowers, nature, natural beauty, happiness**, family and **shelter** and **all the diversity of things in life**. Then what are the three biggest things they'd like to pray for: a popular concern was for climate change, along with **peace, nature, spreading happiness**. Adding local relevance, Jessica focuses on the timelessness of ancient Sequoia trees, combining the themes of Evensong (this will be premiered at the Feast of the Presentation/Candlemas) and Simeon's relief at seeing the Lord's salvation in Jesus, allowing him to rest in peace, in the Nunc Dimittis.

The verses start **calm, soothing** and **legato**, the voices initially **singing in octaves**. **6/8** gives way to a suddenly **suspenseful 5/8** and then **3/4**, as the voices sing in a harmonic **canon** with a little **syncopation**. The chorus is **happy, fast, loud, wordy, strong** and **exuberant** with **triplets!** Throughout, the music contains **crunchy harmonies** with **dissonance that gets resolved**.

I am hugely grateful to the Marcia McCowin Estate for commissioning this anthem in celebration of Marcia's life. It has been a joy to work with Susan Jane Matthews and a privilege to see into the minds and hearts of the young singers for whom we're writing.

RP, 29/07/24