

Eric Banks, Founding Director

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FINE: Irving Fine Centennial

SEATTLE - In keeping with its tradition of celebrating the centenaries of modern composers, The Esoterics will commemorate the music and life of the American composer Irving Fine (3 December 1914 - 23 August 1962.) Fine, a member of the "Boston School" was a contemporary of Leonard Bernstein, Aaron Copland, and Lukas Foss, and a friend to Igor Stravinsky. His pedigree as a musician was extraordinary, having studied composition with Walter Piston and Nadia Boulanger, as well as conducting with Serge Koussevitzky. He taught at Brandeis University, and was known for his contributions to the Tanglewood Festival, where he taught composition.

This program will feature Fine's entire choral oeuvre, including his notable cycle *The hour glass* (1949) and six choruses from his two *Alice in wonderland* suites. *The hour glass* sets six poems of love and loss by Ben Johnson for a *cappella* chorus and soloists, including *Have you seen the white lily grow* and *Against jealousy*. Between 1942 and 1953, Fine set six poems in two suites from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in wonderland*, each successive poem more ridiculous than the next. (You might recognize such poems as *Lullaby of the duchess* and the turtle's *Beautiful soup!*) These accompanied works are among some of his most well-remembered choral music.

The texts from *The Choral New Yorker* (1944) are based on poems from the magazine of the same name. The four accompanied pieces in the set are intense and virtuosic, capturing the witticism and sardonic nature of the poetry. (Included in these pieces are the infamous poems *Hen party* and *Caroline Million*.) For this cycle as well as his *Alice in Wonderland* suite, The Esoterics will be joined by pianist Kevin Johnson. In a nod to his Jewish heritage, Fine's *An old song* (1953) is the musical recollection of a sword smith crafting a weapon for a Japanese samurai. The text is a translation from the Yiddish poem by the Lithuanian-American Yehoash (Solomon Blumgarten).

Finally, the men's and women's ensembles of The Esoterics will perform separately to perform *A short alleluia* (1945) and *McCord's menagerie* (1957). Written for three-part women's voices, *A short alleluia* is a quick and lively anthem that has become part of the standard repertoire for female choruses. *McCord's menagerie* was written for the 100th anniversary of the Harvard Glee Club, which Fine conducted while he studied there. This bizarre bestiary for men's voices includes poems about the vulture, jerboa, mole, and clam.

Please join The Esoterics for one of these three performances of FINE:

Friday | 5 December 2014 | 8pm

St Stephen's Episcopal Church
4805 NE 45th Street | Seattle

Saturday | 6 December 2014 | 8pm

All Pilgrims Christian Church
500 Broadway E | Seattle

Sunday | 7 December 2014 | 3pm

Holy Rosary Catholic Church
4142 42nd Avenue SW | West Seattle

Ticket prices are \$20 at the door, \$18 in advance, and \$15 for students, seniors, the un(der)employed, and the differently-abled. The ticket price for groups of five or more is \$12 per person. Active singers of any choral group may attend for only \$10. Advance tickets are available online at www.TheEsoterics.org (through PayPal.com).

If you have any questions about this project or The Esoterics in general, please contact Scott Kovacs at scott@TheEsoterics.org.

A creative community of virtuosic voices

The Esoterics is a Seattle-based vocal ensemble dedicated to performing and perpetuating contemporary *a cappella* choral settings of poetry, philosophy, and spiritual writings from around the world. While cultivating artistic expression and cultural understanding among its singers and audience alike, The Esoterics aspires to reflect the beauty, power, and significance inherent in the music of our time.

Now in its twenty-first season, **The Esoterics** has drawn local, national, and international praise for performing rarely-heard compositions of contemporary music for unaccompanied voices, for infusing elements of the literary, theatrical, and visual arts into the typical concert experience, and for inspiring and performing new *cappella* choral settings of poetry, philosophy, and spiritual writings by composers around the world in myriad languages. In early 1992, Eric Banks brought together a group of singing friends to perform his Master's and Doctoral recitals in Choral Studies at the University of Washington. After Banks' recitals were completed, the group wanted to keep singing together, so Banks chose a name for his ensemble based on the Greek adjective εσοτερικός – which describes a close-knit community and the secret knowledge that its members share. Since incorporating with this name in 1993, The Esoterics has performed hundreds of concerts throughout the Pacific Northwest, has commissioned and premiered over 150 new works for a cappella voices in dozens of languages, and has mastered many of the most virtuosic choral works of the last century in concerts described as “compelling,” “crafted,” “luxuriant,” “lyrical,” “sumptuous,” and “superb.” The Esoterics has released sixteen CD recordings (now distributed worldwide by NAXOS), and has been honored as the only North American chorus invited to compete in the 2000 Cork International Choral Festival (Ireland), the 2001 Certamen Coral de Tolosa (Spain), and the 2006 Harald Andersén International Choir Competition in Helsinki (Finland). Always on the search for the next great choral masterpiece, The Esoterics inaugurated its annual choral composition competition, POLYPHONOS, in 2006. Through this competition, The Esoterics awards commissions to three composers each year – a national winner, an international winner, and a young winner (under age 30). As well, The Esoterics has demonstrated its complete commitment to choral education as the only choral ensemble in Washington State that grants continuing-education credit to its members who also teach in the public schools. In recognition for its efforts in choral education and innovation, The Esoterics has been honored four times with the ASCAP/Chorus America *Award for the Adventurous Programming of Contemporary Music* (in 2001, 2003, 2006, and 2008). The Esoterics has been honored to receive grants from the arts commissions of Washington State, King County, and the City of Seattle, as well as funding from ArtsFund, Boeing, Expedia, Microsoft, the Seattle Foundation, the Aaron Copland Fund for Music, and The National Endowment for the Arts. The Esoterics is a proud member chorus of ACDA (the American Choral Director's Association), Chorus America, IFCM (the International Federation for Choral Music), and GALA (the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses).

Eric Banks has garnered international acclaim as one of America's most innovative choral musicians for his unwavering dedication to new music for unaccompanied chorus. Eric earned his BA in Composition (1990) at Yale University, and his Master's and Doctoral degrees in Music Theory and Choral Studies at the University of Washington. In 1997, Banks was awarded a Fulbright Fellowship as a visiting scholar at the Royal Conservatory of Music in Stockholm, where he performed with the Swedish Radio Choir and the Eric Ericson Chamber Choir. As a composer, Banks has harnessed his passions for poetry, foreign language, classical civilization, comparative religion, social justice, and the history of science to create choral works that reach far beyond the scope of the established *cappella* canon. As a composer and choral scholar, Eric has been awarded grants from the Arch and Bruce Brown Foundation (2005), 4Culture (since 1999), Seattle City Artists (2007, 2010), the San Francisco Arts Commission (2011), New Music USA's Composer Assistance Program (2012), a composer's fellowship from Artist Trust and Washington State Arts Commission (2007), and several ASCAP Plus Awards. Together with The Esoterics, Eric Banks has received grants from the National Endowment for the Arts to compose, produce, and record two concert-length works: *Twelve Qur'anic visions* (2005-2007) and *The seven creations* (2007-2010). While studying in India, Eric was a resident scholar at the Cama Oriental Institute in Bombay (2006-2007). In 2008, Banks presented the paper *Contemporary American Choral Music Inspired by Islam* at the *Aswatuna* conference of Arab choral music in Petra, Jordan. In 2010, Eric was granted the prestigious Dale Warland Singers Commission Award from Chorus America and the American Composers Forum. In 2011, Eric was awarded Conductor of the year by the Washington State chapter of the American Choral Directors Association for his ground-breaking work with The Esoterics over the last two decades. In May 2013, Eric was featured in “13 for '13,” a collaborative article between the Seattle Times and KUOW-FM that features 13 artists who have had an impact in Seattle and are “poised to shape the cultural landscape in the decade to come.” In August 2013, Eric was honored to serve as the North American judge for the inaugural Andrea O Veneracion International Choral Competition in Manila. Eric has been commissioned by the Atlanta Young Singers, the Boston Children's Chorus, Clerestory, the Northwest Girlchoir, Kitka, the Philippine Madrigal Singers, the Singapore Youth Ensemble Singers, and Voces Nordicae; his upcoming commissions include works for Cantori New York and Conspirare. In 2013, Eric completed a series of three chamber operas on Pacific Northwest native ecosystems for Seattle Opera; these were recently remounted by Seattle Symphony.

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