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### **Creating a New Golden Age: The Music of Composer Morten Lauridsen**

In a recent interview, British choral conductor Suzi Digby describes the astonishing change she has noticed in the choral world over the past few decades. Remarking that “we are in a new Golden Age” of choral music, Digby notes that for the first time in more than a century, composers have been writing new works that audiences are “eager to hear.” She credits Morten Lauridsen with initiating this revival of creativity through his innovative choral works, in which he has put forward a striking “language of music” that is so “beautiful and original,” that listeners, critics, and musicians have all been captivated.

In his book *Choral Music in the Twentieth Century* (2002), Nick Strimple asserts that Lauridsen is the only American composer who may be described as a “mystic.” Emphasizing the “immediacy” of the music, Strimple points out that Lauridsen’s well-honed compositions radiate “an illusive and indefinable ingredient” that suggests “all the questions have been answered.” In Lauridsen’s settings of sacred texts, including the unaccompanied motet *O Magnum Mysterium* (1994) and the non-liturgical requiem *Lux Aeterna* (1997), his music elicits a feeling of serenity. Lean, harmonious, lyrical melodies are brought into focus through the imaginative application of compositional techniques to word painting. The mellifluous choral lines are layered gently with rippling cascades of sound, suggestive of flowing water or waves on a shoreline. Drawing from the time period and culture of each text he sets to music, Lauridsen creates immaculately symmetrical forms that evoke a satisfying musical, textual, and emotional unity. In his secular works such as the introspective reflection on relationships of the *Mid-Winter Songs* (1983), the fiery Italian Renaissance pieces of his *Madrigali* (1987), the playful song cycle *Les Chansons*

*des Roses* (1993), and the quiet beauty of the *Nocturnes* (2008), Lauridsen pays close attention to the poetic text, along with the biographical circumstances of the poet. All those factors yield compelling compositions that reanimate past musical forms, which are tinged softly with a distinctively modern sound—all for the listener’s pleasure and elevation.

As Lauridsen’s reputation has grown from the mid-1990s, musicians and listeners from around the world have relished his remarkably accessible music, which probes deep questions of the human experience. His achievement was recognized with a National Medal of Arts, awarded to him by President George W. Bush in 2007, and by a Life in Music Award, given by the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP) in 2016. After teaching and mentoring students for fifty-two years at the University of Southern California’s Thornton School of Music, Morten Lauridsen has retired to the tranquility of his home in the San Juan Islands, Washington State, from where he continues to compose his timeless music.

During these two evenings of concerts, which celebrate the completion of the Armerding Center for Music and the Arts, listeners will be treated to a broad array of Lauridsen’s compositions. Friday evening provides a rare opportunity to hear the composer’s art songs for solo voice and mixed duet, works that distill the lyricism at the heart of his creative vision. On Saturday evening the world premiere of *Ave Verum Corpus* offers Lauridsen’s communal meditation on the significance of the Eucharist for Christians. Both concerts mark a new era for the Wheaton College Conservatory of Music, which, through the ongoing sustenance of patrons and donors, promises to continue the vocation of serving Christ and His Kingdom.