



## **CORO ALLEGRO**

DAVID HODGKINS, ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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**Coro Allegro presents “We Will Rise,” Sunday, March 11, 2018 at 3pm at Sanders Theatre, Cambridge.**

January 26, 2018 (Boston, MA) — [Coro Allegro](#), Boston’s LGBTQ+ and allied classical chorus, and Artistic Director David Hodgkins present “We Will Rise,” featuring the world premiere of Kareem Roustom’s *Rage Against the tyrant(s)*, Sunday, March 11, 2018 at 3pm at Sanders Theatre, 45 Quincy Street, Cambridge, MA.

Coro Allegro continues their celebration of David Hodgkins’ 25<sup>th</sup> season as Artistic Director with a concert of world and Boston premieres, building upon their tradition praised by *Gramophone* magazine, of introducing “meaningful additions to the choral repertoire.”

In keeping with that commitment, March’s concert “We Will Rise” features the world premiere in his hometown of a major new work by the internationally acclaimed Syrian American composer Kareem Roustom. Based on street chants of the “Arab Spring” uprisings and Arab American poetry, Roustom’s *Rage Against the tyrant(s)* meditates on the human cost of tyranny and war that have driven so many refugees from their homelands. It is paired with the East Coast premiere of Shawn Kirchner’s *Songs of Ascent*, whose lyrical settings of pilgrimage psalms resonate with longing for the refuge of peace.

Founded in 1990, under the direction of David Hodgkins, Coro Allegro has blossomed into a nationally recognized LGBTQ+ and allied classical chorus, known for award-winning programming, eclectic commissions and critically acclaimed performances and recordings of works by diverse classical and contemporary composers.

“In preparing for my 25<sup>th</sup> season as Artistic Director of Coro Allegro,” says Hodgkins, “I have been reflecting on the evocative, groundbreaking performances that have become Coro’s trademark. In a world of increasing turmoil, the artist’s voice has become an indispensable vehicle to elucidate the questions of our time, while offering solace, inspiration, and sometimes, answers.”

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“Coro’s commitment to tackling cutting-edge issues through compelling music is one of the many aspects of the organization that makes me most proud,” says Hodgkins, “I invite you to experience that pride for yourself.”

## **Concert Description**

Coro Allegro’s March concert, “We Will Rise” opens with the world premiere of *Rage Against the tyrant(s)* by Syrian American composer Kareem Roustom. As Roustom describes, “this is a multi-movement work that meditates on the so called ‘Arab Spring’ and the resulting consequences. The work is at once specific to the awakening of the Arab populace and the subsequent destruction of cities like Aleppo, but also aims towards the broader and more universal goal of standing witness to tyranny; both foreign and domestic.”

The work opens with street chants from the 2011 uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria, and elsewhere in the Arab world. Their cries for basic human rights should resonate “with all societies that aspire to be pluralistic, democratic, and open,” according to Roustom. “It is not at all different from what people were asking for on the streets of Ferguson, Missouri.”

Settings of Arab American poets follow: a haunting meditation on the devastation of the endless cycles of war ripping through the Middle East by Iraqi American writer Sinan Antoon, and a list poem by Syrian American poet Mohja Kahf, whose necklace of words evokes the city of Aleppo as it is broken apart. A Syriac liturgical hymn from Syria’s Christian minority, describing Christ washing the feet of those who will betray him, seems to ask: after atrocity, is forgiveness possible? The closing poem, by Roustom’s brother and fellow Syrian expat Elias Roustom, is a lament for a homeland, “shattered by the unraveling of a stability whose price was a complicit silence towards a criminal regime.” For refugees, adds Roustom, “when there is nothing left, the only thing you have to hang onto is love; love still remains, otherwise it is very hard to be human.”

The work “calls us to reflect on these things together in ways that only music can do,” says Roustom, “For people who share these values, it gives us a moment to consider and really connect the dots that our struggle here in the United States, which is nowhere as bad for us as it is for others, is nonetheless, the same struggle. We have to fight all the time and never take all our rights for granted.”

Roustom’s music has been praised by *BBC Radio 3* as “among the most distinctive to have emerged from the Middle East,” and by *The New York Times* as “propulsive, colorful and immediately appealing.” Commissioned for Coro Allegro by members of the chorus, Roustom’s *Rage Against the tyrant(s)* is also supported by an Alfred Nash Patterson Grant awarded by Choral Arts New England.

Coro Allegro and Roustom share a rich history of groundbreaking collaboration. In 2012, Coro Allegro won the prestigious Chorus America ASCAP/Alice Parker Award for the world premiere of Roustom’s oratorio *Son of Man*, praised by the *Boston Globe* as “stellar ... The music ... is pitched toward the impassioned, adapting Arabic-derived scales into a rich, heavily perfumed chromaticism, affording both eerie atmosphere and high-impact drama. Moment to moment,

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[Roustorm's] invention is prolific ... The performance was excellent. Under conductor David Hodgkins, the combined choruses realized the score's demands with confidence and stamina."

Coro Allegro is also proud to invite audiences to experience the Boston premiere of Los Angeles composer Shawn Kirchner's *Songs of Ascent*, lyrical settings of pilgrimage psalms once sung on the ascending road to Jerusalem. Born from the joy of singing praise song together, tempered by the consciousness of Jerusalem's history of sectarian strife as "a city of two peoples and three faiths," Kirchner's work celebrates music's rare ability to lift us on occasion "beyond our religious divisions to find peace." Praised for its "enchanted" melodic lines, fugues, and expressive orchestral colors, the ten-movement piece outlines "an arc based on the movement from estrangement to reconciliation, and from anticipation to arrival." Coro Allegro is thrilled to welcome back acclaimed soprano Dana Varga for this piece, along with tenor Jonas Budris and baritone Sumner Thompson.

The 11th annual Daniel Pinkham Award, created by Coro Allegro to recognize outstanding contributors to classical choral music and the LGBTQ+ community, will be presented to Robin Godfrey, Executive Director of the international LGBTQ+ choral organization, GALA Choruses.

### **Concert Details**

**Title:** Coro Allegro presents "We Will Rise"

**Date:** Sunday, March 11, 2018, 3:00 p.m.

**Location:** Sanders Theatre, 45 Quincy Street, Cambridge

### **Repertoire:**

Kareem Roustorm, *Rage Against the tyrant(s)* [World Premiere]

Shawn Kirchner, *Songs of Ascent* [Boston Premiere]

Dana Varga, soprano

Jonas Budris, tenor

Sumner Thompson, baritone

### **Ticket Information:**

Tickets to "We Will Rise" are (A) \$65, (B) \$45, and (C) \$25, with 20% off for seniors and students, and a student special ticket for \$15.

Tickets can be purchased online at [coroallegro.org](http://coroallegro.org) or by calling (617) 236-4011.

**Sponsors:** The concert is sponsored by Leigh Smith and supported in part by an Alfred Nash Patterson Grant from Choral Arts New England. Coro Allegro is supported in part by the Boston Cultural Council, a local agency funded by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, administered by the Mayor's Office of Arts and Culture. Additional support provided by the Equality Fund at the Boston Foundation. Coro Allegro is a proud member of ArtsBoston.

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## **Artist Profiles:**

### **David Hodgkins, Artistic Director**

Artistic Director David Hodgkins has delighted audiences in the greater Boston area for over 25 years with "creative programs, sung with enthusiasm and tonal beauty" (Ed Tapper, *Bay Windows*). Mr. Hodgkins is the Artistic Director of Coro Allegro in Boston, which *Boston Globe* critic Michael Manning deemed "one of Boston's most accomplished choruses," Artistic Director of The New England Classical Singers in Andover, Director of Music at the Commonwealth School in Boston, advanced conducting instructor at the Kodály Music Institute, and serves on the advisory boards of The Boston City Singers and the UMass/Amherst Music Department.

Mr. Hodgkins has performed with Coro Allegro at the ACDA and GALA music festivals, served as guest conductor with Chorus Pro Musica, Masterworks Chorale, and Emmanuel Music, and has made numerous festival appearances as guest conductor and clinician. His ensembles have collaborated with the Boston Celebrity Series, Boston Cecilia, Handel and Haydn Society, Pro Arte Chamber Orchestra, The New England String Ensemble, and the Boston Landmarks Orchestra.

Mr. Hodgkins has conducted numerous world and Boston premiere performances of works ranging from Marianne Martinez to Arvo Pärt. Mr. Hodgkins with Coro Allegro received the 2012 Chorus America Alice Parker/ASCAP Award for their collaborative premiere performance of Kareem Roustom's oratorio *Son of Man*, with The United Parish Church of Brookline and Music Director Susan DeSelms, a work commissioned by United Parish. That same year, Mr. Hodgkins with Coro Allegro released the critically acclaimed CDs *Awakenings* and *In Paradisum* on the Navona label, which feature contemporary composers Robert Stern, Ronald Perera, and Patricia Van Ness and soloists Sanford Sylvan and Ruth Cunningham.

Mr. Hodgkins has been featured in Choral Director Magazine, The Voice of Chorus America, UMass Amherst Magazine, and Haverhill Life. He has served as producer for three award-winning CDs by La Donna Musicale, Laury Gutiérrez, Artistic Director, In the Style of... for Terry Everson, trumpet, and Shiela Kibbe, piano on Albany Records, and a CD of trumpet concerti for the Boston University Wind Ensemble and Terry Everson, directed by David Martins.

Mr. Hodgkins received his Bachelor of Music in voice, piano, and harpsichord from UMass/Amherst, a Masters in Choral Conducting from Temple University, and fellowships in choral and orchestral conducting at the Aspen and Sandpoint music festivals. His mentors include Wayne Abercrombie, Fiora Contino, Alan Harler, James Roth, Gunther Schuller, and Paul Vermel. Mr. Hodgkins has served on the faculties of the New England Conservatory, UMass/Amherst, Temple University, and Clark University.

### **Kareem Roustom, Composer**

Syrian-American Kareem Roustom (b. 1971) is an Emmy-nominated composer whose genre crossing collaborations include music commissioned for the Kronos Quartet, conductor Daniel Barenboim & the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, and others. Roustom's music has been

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performed by the Pittsburgh Symphony, the Philadelphia Orchestra, Grand Tetons Music Festival Orchestra (Jackson Hole, WY), the Grant Park Festival Orchestra (Chicago), the Boston Landmarks Orchestra, the Boston Children's Chorus, and at the BBC Proms, the Salzburg Festival, the Lucerne Festivals, the Verbier Festival, the Pierre Boulez Saal in Berlin, the Teatro Colon in Buenos Aires, and from the Far East to the Near East. *The Chicago Tribune* wrote that Roustom is "a gifted and accomplished artist...one of the most prominent active Arab-American composers," *BBC Radio 3* described Roustom's music as "among the most distinctive to have emerged from the Middle East", and *The New York Times* described it as "propulsive, colorful and immediately appealing." *The Guardian* (London) wrote that Roustom's *Ramal* for orchestra is "arrestingly quirky and postmodern...music with lots of personality." In addition to his numerous independent film scores Roustom has collaborated with pop-artists such as Shakira, Beyonce, Tina Turner and others. Upcoming projects include the world-premiere recording of his *Clarinet Concerto: Adrift on the Wine-Dark Sea* with the Deutsches Symphony Orchestra (Berlin). Roustom holds the position of Professor of the Practice at Tufts University's department of music. For more information please visit [www.kr-music.com](http://www.kr-music.com)

### **Shawn Kirchner, Composer**

Shawn Kirchner (b. 1970) is a composer and songwriter active in the musical circles of Los Angeles whose choral works are performed throughout the world. In 2012, he was appointed Swan Family Composer in Residence of the Los Angeles Master Chorale. His three-year term was marked by the premieres of *Plath Songs* (2013), *Inscapes* (2014), and *Songs of Ascent* (2015). The Los Angeles Master Chorale has often presented Kirchner's choral works in concerts at LA's Walt Disney Concert Hall, and first commissioned him in 2007 to write *Tu voz*, a setting of a Pablo Neruda sonnet. Other LAMC commissions include *Memorare* (2009) and *Behold New Joy: Ancient Carols of Christmas* (2011). The Master Chorale's final concert of the 2009/2010 season featured the world premiere of his "bluegrass triptych," *Heavenly Home: Three American Songs*, which received praise in the LA Times as "effectively" written works of "sophistication." He is best known world-wide for his setting of the Kenyan song *Wana Baraka*, which was featured in a performance by the Nairobi Chamber Choir in Diamond Jubilee celebration for Her Majesty Elizabeth II at Windsor Castle in 2012. Kirchner's pieces are published by Boosey & Hawkes, Oxford University Press, Santa Barbara Music Publishing, and Shawn Kirchner Publishing.

In addition to composing, songwriting has become a career focus for Kirchner in recent years. His songs combine emotional warmth with carefully crafted lyrics, and are written in a range of styles including bluegrass, folk, country, gospel and jazz. Kirchner's bluegrass and country songs can be heard on the CD *Meet Me on the Mountain*, and his original jazz tunes are featured in club and concert performances of the Shawn Kirchner Quartet.

Kirchner also maintains an active performing career as a singer and pianist. A tenor with the Los Angeles Master Chorale, he sings regularly with the Chorale and the Los Angeles Philharmonic at Disney Hall and at the Hollywood Bowl in collaborations with the world's leading conductors and composers. In 2013, he was part of the LA Philharmonic's tour to London, Lucerne, Paris, and New York that presented John Adams' staged oratorio "The Gospel According to the Other Mary," conducted by Gustavo Dudamel and directed by Peter Sellars. Under the Master

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Chorale's music director Grant Gershon, he has sung in several Steve Reich projects, including two recordings for Nonesuch Records and a performance at Lincoln Center in honor of the composer's 70th birthday. Kirchner's solo work with the Master Chorale include singing in a small ensemble with Meredith Monk, as well as solo work in Ariel Ramirez' *Missa Criolla*, Arvo Part's *Miserere* and Perotin's *Sederunt principes*. Kirchner's work as a pianist includes many appearances with the Master Chorale at Disney Hall and on tour as well as free-lance work in recitals, concerts, and studio sessions. Before moving to the Los Angeles area, he was a vocal coach/pianist in Chicago, and played for Neil Rosenshein's studio at the Lyric Opera's Center for American Artists. Initially trained in classical music, his improvisational skills now encompass many styles.

Kirchner's growing list of TV/Film credits includes his work as music director/arranger for the 2004 CBS Christmas Eve special *Enter the Light of Life*, and his singing on more than two dozen recent feature film soundtracks, including *Avatar*, *Frozen*, *The Lorax*, *Horton Hears a Who*, *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*, *X-Men: First Class*, *Lady in the Water*, and *License to Wed*.

Long active as a church musician, Kirchner is pianist/organist/composer-in-residence at the La Verne Church of the Brethren in La Verne, CA where he shares music leadership of a thriving program with fellow LA Master Chorale singer, conductor, and music educator, Nike St. Clair. He has served as music coordinator for several National Youth Conferences as well as providing leadership for many other Church of the Brethren national and regional events.

Kirchner was raised with his triplet brother and sister in Cedar Falls, Iowa. His principal piano teachers were Joan Smalley and George Katz, and Susan Beasley and Graeme Cowen were his mentors in choral music. He studied at Manchester College, where he earned a BA in Peace Studies under Kenneth Brown, and was mentored in songwriting by the poet/songwriter Steve Kinzie. He spent his junior year abroad, studying Chinese language, literature, history and music at the Dalian Foreign Language Institute in Dalian, China. He earned an MA in Choral Conducting from the University of Iowa, where he studied with William Hatcher and Richard Bloesch. In recent years, Kirchner has been mentored in choral arranging and music philosophy by Alice Parker.

### **Dana Varga, Soprano**

Praised for her "stunning voice", soprano Dana Lynne Varga was the first place winner in the 2016 Classical Singer National Vocal Competition. Dana continues to amass accolades for her numerous operatic roles that include Musetta in *La bohème*, Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte*, Anna Murrant in *Street Scene*, Rosalinda in *Die Fledermaus*, Micaëla in *Carmen*, Alcina in *Alcina*, Hanna Glawari in *The Merry Widow*, First Lady in *The Magic Flute* and Giannetta (/Adina cover) in *L'elisir d'amore*, the latter performed at the prestigious Caramoor Festival in New York. Ms. Varga sings regularly with Boston Lyric Opera, and has performed with Opera Boston, Connecticut Lyric Opera, the Aldeburgh (Britten-Pears) Festival, PORTopera, Boston Opera Collaborative, PANopera, Commonwealth Opera and Boston Baroque, amongst others.

An avid concert soloist, highlights of Dana Varga's recent concert and oratorio performances include the Beethoven *Mass in C* in Tanglewood's Ozawa Hall, the Dvořák *Te Deum* in NEC's

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Jordan Hall, the Fauré *Requiem* and Nielsen's *Symphony No. 3* with the Springfield Symphony, Handel's *Messiah* and the Bach *B Minor Mass* with the Rhode Island Civic Chorale and Orchestra and Dubois' *Seven Last Words* with Coro Allegro. She has performed the Vaughan Williams' *Sea Symphony* and *Dona Nobis Pacem* as well as the Brahms *Requiem* with the Metropolitan Chorale, Beethoven's *Mass in C* and Handel's *Israel in Egypt* with the Newton Choral Society, the Vivaldi *Gloria* and Handel's *Messiah* with the New England Classical Singers and the Bach *Magnificat*, Mozart *Requiem* and Mendelssohn *St. Paul* with the Choral Art Society.

In addition to her recent Classical Singer Competition win, Dana won second place in the 2016 Rochester Oratorio Society Classical Idol Competition and was a semifinalist in the 2016 Oratorio Society of New York Competition. She was awarded the 2012 St. Botolph Emerging Artist Grant for excellence in music. Dana was a finalist in the lieder division of the 2009 Liederkrantz Competition and winner of the Arlington Philharmonic Competition, and was among the winners in the Boston Regional Auditions of the Metropolitan National Council Auditions. She won first place in the National Association of Teachers of Singing Competition, Boston, in both 2004 and 2005. Dana has attended several young artist programs including the Caramoor Bel Canto Young Artists Program, PORTopera Emerging Artists Program, the Britten-Pears Young Artist Programme, and the Brevard Music Center/Janiec Opera Company.

Recent engagements include the solos in Bach's *Christmas Oratorio* with the Rhode Island Civic Chorale and Orchestra and Schubert's *Mirjam Siegesgesang* with the Commonwealth Chorale, as well as professional ensemble in Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* with Boston Lyric Opera.

### **Jonas Budris, Tenor**

Tenor Jonas Budris is a versatile soloist and ensemble musician, engaging new works and early music with equal passion.

He is a featured soloist in Boston Baroque's Grammy-nominated recording of Monteverdi's opera *Il ritorno d'Ulisse in patria*. He appears frequently in concert with the Handel and Haydn Society as a soloist and choral singer. Mr. Budris also performs in more intimate musical settings; he particularly enjoys singing with such groups as Blue Heron, Cut Circle, Spire, and the Skylark Vocal Ensemble.

Mr. Budris is a Lorraine Hunt Lieberson Fellow at Emmanuel Music, where he performs regularly in the Bach Cantata and evening concert series.

On the opera stage, he has performed principal and supporting roles with numerous musical organizations, including Opera Boston, OperaHub, Guerilla Opera, and Odyssey Opera, originating such roles as John in *Giver of Light* and the title role of *Chrononhotonthologos*.

Originally from Martha's Vineyard, Mr. Budris holds a degree in Environmental Sciences & Engineering from Harvard College.

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## **Sumner Thompson, Baritone**

Baritone Sumner Thompson has been hailed as “the real thing” (*Cleveland Plain Dealer*) and praised for his “elegant style” (*Boston Globe*). He has appeared on operatic stages from Boston to Copenhagen, including the Boston Early Music Festival’s productions of Conradi’s *Ariadne* and Lully’s *Psyché* and in the title role of Monteverdi’s *L’Orfeo* with Contemporary Opera Denmark. He has performed as a concert soloist with many leading ensembles, including the Handel and Haydn Society, Britten-Pears Orchestra, the National Symphony, the Boston Early Music Festival, Apollo’s Fire, Pacific Baroque Orchestra, Les Boréades de Montréal, Mercury Baroque, Les Voix Baroques, Boston Baroque, and Tafelmusik. A noted recitalist, Mr. Thompson has sung in Stuttgart, Amsterdam, Regensburg, and at London’s famed Wigmore Hall.

Recent engagements included Handel’s *Messiah* with the Handel and Haydn Society (recorded on the CORO label), Bach’s *St. John Passion* with Orchestra Iowa and Switzerland’s Gli Angeli Genève, and a return to Early Music Vancouver’s summer festival with Les Voix Baroques. Thompson can also be heard on the Boston Early Music Festival’s Grammy-nominated recording of Lully’s *Psyché* on the CPO label and with Les Voix Baroques on the ATMA label.

## **Robin Godfrey, Pinkham Award Recipient**

Robin Godfrey has served as the Executive Director of GALA Choruses, an international organization of LGBTQ+ choruses representing over 10,000 singers and 190 member choruses from North America, Europe, South America, Africa, and Australia since 2007. Major achievements during her tenure at GALA have included the redesign of the quadrennial festival to expand delegate performance opportunities and allow member choruses to present more of their most innovative work at the event, the introduction of the 411 consulting program which provides access to experienced arts organization consultants as a benefit of membership and expansion of the programs for the support of queer youth.

Godfrey’s 25 years of experience in accounting and finance was primarily in the electric power and related industries prior to beginning her work in arts management with the Renaissance City Choirs in 2002. She also serves as president of the board of Dreams of Hope – a Pittsburgh queer youth arts organization. Robin maintains a private accounting practice and resides in Pittsburgh with her golden retriever, Kelsey.

## **About Coro Allegro**

Now entering its second quarter century, Coro Allegro is Boston’s LGBTQ+ and allied classical chorus. In 1991, David Cutler founded a Gay and Lesbian choir with a dual purpose - to build bridges between disparate communities while striving for the highest of artistic standards. From this Coro Allegro was born.

Under the baton of David Hodgkins, who celebrates his 25th anniversary as Artistic Director this season, Coro Allegro has blossomed into a nationally recognized LGBTQ+ and allied classical

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chorus. Known for award-winning programming, eclectic commissions and critically acclaimed performances and recordings of works by diverse classical and contemporary composers, Coro Allegro also is proud to offer a welcoming, affirming and supportive environment for performers and audiences alike.

Each year Coro Allegro offers a subscription series that includes three concerts at venues such as the Church of the Covenant and Sanders Theater at Harvard University. Coro Allegro also reaches national and international audiences through broadcasts on WGBH “Classical Performances,” and performances at the International LGBTQ GALA Choruses Festivals, and the Eastern Division Convention of the American Choral Directors Association. In 2015, Coro Allegro was chosen to perform Arvo Pärt’s *Te Deum* at the prestigious Chorus America Conference in Boston.

In 2008, Coro Allegro established the [Daniel Pinkham Award](#) in memory of the late Boston composer and conductor. The award is given annually in recognition of outstanding contributions to classical music and the LGBT community.

An advocate of contemporary music, Coro Allegro received the prestigious [Chorus America/ASCAP Alice Parker Award](#) in 2012 for its world premiere performance of Kareem Roustom’s *The Son of Man*. This award recognizes a chorus for programming recently-composed music that expands the mission of the chorus and challenges the chorus’s audience in new ways.

With Artistic Director David Hodgkins, Coro Allegro has released four critically acclaimed commercial recordings: *In Paradisum* and *Awakenings* on the Navona Records label, as well as *In the Clearing* and *somewhere i have never traveled*. Gramophone magazine noted of *Awakenings*: “These are deeply affecting pieces and meaningful additions to the choral repertoire. ... The Boston-based Coro Allegro, led by David Hodgkins, performs each score with fine balance and interplay.”

Coro Allegro is supported in part by the Boston Cultural Council, a local agency funded by the Massachusetts Cultural Council, administered by the Mayor’s Office of Arts and Culture. Additional support provided by the Equality Fund at the Boston Foundation. Coro Allegro is a proud member of ArtsBoston.

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For more information, electronic images, and interviews with composer Kareem Roustom or Artistic Director David Hodgkins, please contact: Yoshi Campbell at 978-239-4131 or [press@coroallegro.org](mailto:press@coroallegro.org)

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