SONGS OF THANKS EIVING

"Grom Hope, Gratitude"



November 22, 2025 | 7:30 p.m. November 23, 2025 | 4 p.m.

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Welcome to today's performance by the Firelands Symphony Orchestra Chorale!

We are delighted to share this program with you as we present "From Hope, Gratitude"—a concert that celebrates the resilience of the human spirit and the healing power of community.

This season, we are reminded how music allows us to pause and reflect on what truly matters: the gratitude we hold for one another, and the hope that carries us forward. Each piece you'll hear tonight has been carefully chosen to express these timeless emotions; from quiet moments of reflection to powerful harmonies that lift our hearts toward brighter days.

We are deeply grateful to our patrons, donors, and community partners whose generosity and belief in the arts make concerts like this possible. Your continued support ensures that live music thrives here in North Central Ohio, inspiring joy and connection for all generations.

As the Chorale's voices rise together this evening, may you find your own moments of gratitude and hope renewed. Thank you for joining us, and for being a vital part of the FSO family.

Ron Brooker, FSO Executive Director

PODIUM NOTES



This weekend's concert is truly one of my favorite programs of the year. Thanksgiving is always a time for reflection and taking a moment to set aside differences and embrace our commonalities as we appreciate the wonderful things to be grateful for in our lives. When life becomes filled with complexities, it is often music that serves as the reminder of those oh-so-simple things in life that defines our humanity, nurtures our gratitude, and enriches our soul.

This year's theme, *From Hope, Gratitude* is based on stories where gratitude is given, and hope is found when we least expect it. We are excited to have these narratives shared by our chorale members and joined with the Firelands String Quartet and organist Bryan McGookey. We are also thrilled to continue our tradition of introducing new choral works at this annual concert. This year we present two premiers, "Weren't They Just Here?" written by our own chorale member and composer Marilyn Forster, and our collaboration with composer Matthew Kennedy to his setting of the Walt Whitman text, "The Question."

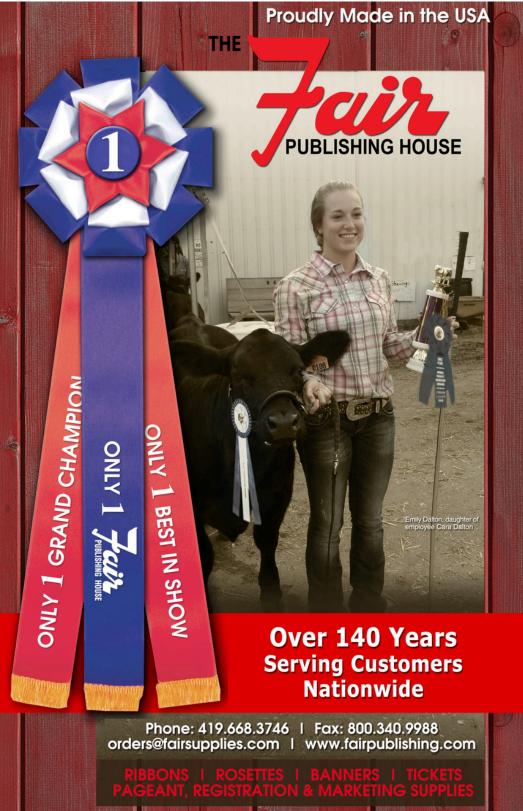
One of my favored quotes by poet Maya Angelou is, "Let gratitude be the pillow upon which you kneel to say your nightly prayer. And let faith be the bridge you build to overcome evil and welcome good."

When those things all work in concert together, I believe we find the greatest gift of all...hope. Thanksgiving begins that journey through the holidays where we celebrate giving, joy, love, peace, forgiveness, and goodwill among all men. The music in this program we hope reflects those silent personal thoughts, melodic shouts of joy among friends, and the beautiful sounds of community found in the connection of harmony. Whatever darkness there may be shadowing around us, we hope that this concert is the bridge to clear the gray clouds and open the blues skies, reminding us of all that welcomed good...a celebration of gratitude and hope.

Thank you to Sts. Peter & Paul Catholic Church and all who have helped in presenting this weekend's concert. We wish you a wonderful Thanksqiving filled with gratitude, hope, and love.

Happy Thanksgiving!

Michael Shirtz, Chorale Director and Conductor







MICHAEL SHIRTZ



Michael Shirtz is a performer, educator, composer, and conductor, recognized for his versatility in jazz, contemporary, and classical music genres. He is an affiliated artist with the Prima Music Foundation NY, The Musical Theatre Project, and leads the Michael Shirtz Quartet. As a music director and producer, Shirtz has collaborated with such artists

as Melissa Manchester, Elizabeth von Trapp, Evelyn Wright, Ellen Winters, and long-time association with Maureen McGovern. His album *Blue Skies*, along with other original works, is available through Shirtz Music and online platforms.

Shirtz's conducting and composing credits span festival choruses, musical theatre productions, masterworks, commercial projects, and pops concerts, including his extended works such as *Gift of Generation*, *The Solemn Blessings*, and *To Rise Above: The Journey of a Tuskegee Airman*. He has held faculty positions at Capital University, American Music Academy, Terra State Community College, Heidelberg University, and director-in-residence at Pellissippi State College-Knoxville. He currently serves on the voice faculty at The Ohio State University School of Music. His leadership experience included roles as Associate Director for Tri-C JazzFest & Performing Arts Series at Playhouse Square and Associate Producer for the Jazz Network. Shirtz is the conductor of The Symphony Chorale with the Firelands Symphony Orchestra and serves as music director at Lakeside Chautauqua.

An advocate for mental health awareness and creative innovation, Shirtz is a member of ASCAP, African American Jazz Caucus, American Choral Directors Association, Jazz Education Network, National Association of Teachers of Singing, and partner with S&S Strategies. He holds degrees in jazz studies and conducting from Capital University Conservatory of Music and California State University, Los Angeles.















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CUEST ARTISTS

FIRELANDS STRING QUARTET



The Firelands String Quartet is a local ensemble group that performs at weddings, special events, and local concerts throughout the region. Members of this ensemble are also members of the Firelands Symphony Orchestra. Today's special performance includes FSO Concertmaster Ron Brooker on violin, Wendy Hayberger on violin, Jacob Campbell on viola, and Brian Shifflet on cello.



BRYAN MCGOOKEY, ORGAN

Bryan McGookey serves as Director of Music and Liturgy at Saints Peter and Paul Catholic Church in Sandusky, Ohio. A proud Sandusky native and graduate of Capital University with a Bachelor of Music, Bryan is passionate about helping others encounter God through the beauty of sacred music. He lives in Sandusky with his wife, Katherine, and their two sons, and feels blessed to share his faith and love of music with his home parish community.









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Songs of Thanksgiving | November 22-23, 2025

The Firelands Symphony Orchestra Chorale

Michael Shirtz, Chorale Director & Conductor

Welcome - Ron Brooker

A Thanksgiving Gathering..... Come Ye Thankful People Comearr. Joseph Graham We Gather Together

A Call to Thanksgiving - Sandy Giangrande

Hymn: Come Ye Thankful People Come (Please join us in singing!)

Come, ye thankful people, come, raise the song of harvest home; all is safely gathered in, ere the winter storms begin. God our Maker doth provide for our wants to be supplied; come to God's own temple, come, raise the song of harvest home.

All the world is God's own field, fruit as praise to God we yield; wheat and tares together sown are to joy or sorrow grown;

first the blade and then the ear, then the full corn shall appear, Lord of harvest, grant that we wholesome grain and pure may be.

Even so, Lord, quickly come, bring thy final harvest home; gather thou thy people in, free from sorrow, free from sin. there, forever purified, in thy presence to abide; come, with all thine angels, come, raise the glorious harvest home.

Sing unto God and high affections raise, to crown his conquest with unmeasured praise.

Our Gifts - Marianne Weaver

Simple Gifts.....Shaker Melody, Joseph Brackett, Jr. / arr. Darmen Meader

Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free tis the gift to come down where you ought to be And when we find ourselves in the place just right Twill be in the valley of love and delight.

When true simplicity is gained To bow and to bend we shan't be ashamed

To turn, turn will be our delight Till by turning, turning we come round right.

Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free 'tis the gift to come down where you ought to be And when we find ourselves in the place just right Twill be in the valley of love and delight.

All Good Gifts (from Godspell).....

.....Schwartz, Claudius, Campbell / arr. Leavitt Gary Jónes, vocal soloist | Jody Chaffee, flute

We plow the fields and scatter the good seed on the land... But it is fed and watered by God's almighty hand.. He sends us snow in winter, the warmth to swell the grain... The breezes and the sunshine, and soft refreshing rain...

We thank thee then. O Father, for all things bright and good. The seedtime and the harvest, our life our health our food, No gifts have we to offer for all thy love imparts But that which thou desirest, our humble thankful hearts!

All good gifts around us Are sent from Heaven above So thank the Lord, oh thank the Lord for all his love...

All good gifts around us Are sent from Heaven above.. So thank the Lord, oh thank the Lord for all his love..

NCERT PROCER

Firelands String Quartet

And Still I Rise - Deb Lovins

Of the empty and useless years of the rest, with the rest me

Of the endless trains of the faithless, of cities fill'd with the foolish,

Of myself forever representations must be

(for who more foolish than I, and who more faithless?) Of eyes that vainly crave the light, of the objects mean,

around me.

The Question (Premiere)......Walt Whitman / Matthew Kennedv

What good amid these, O me, O life?

Answer.

of the struggle ever renew'd,

That you are here—that life exists and identity,

Of the poor results of all, of the plodding and sordid crowds I see

That the powerful play goes on, and you may contribute a verse.

Still I Rise......Rosephanye Powell Hannah Mathias, Kaitlyn Bryant, Samantha Davis, soloists

Though I have been wounded, aching heart, full of pain Just like a budding rose, my bloom is nourished by rain

Haven't time to wonder why, though fearful I strive My prayer and faith uphold me 'til my courage arrives

Refrain:

Still I rise, as an eagle, soaring above every fear. With each day I succeed I grow strong and believe That it's all within my reach, I'm reaching for the skies Bolstered by courage, yes, still I rise.

Yes, it's all within my reach, I'm reaching for the skies. Yes still I rise.

As my heart grows heavy, and my confidence dies, Pure strength is in my tears and healing rains in my cries Plunging depths of anguish, I determine to strive My prayer and faith uphold me 'til my courage arrives

[Refrain]

Though you see me slump with heartache; Heart so heavy that it breaks

Be not deceived I fly on birds' wings, rising sun, its healing rays. Look at me, I'm getting stronger, I'm determined to survive. Though I get tired an I get weary, I won't give up I'm still alive.

[Refrain]

Loved Ones - Fiona Floyd

What do I do with this hollow feeling? How do I fill this empty space? Empty space that was their place? Where have they gone? Weren't they just here? How did their rapture for life disappear? Ouestions, queries I can't explain Will echo in dreams where their answers remain?

Searching for truth, telling me why I must discover my path to the sky With gentle persuasion of one who is kind, Who now will be guiding the me I must find.

Just in their being, so easily free Telling their stories written for me. Can these adventures, each better than last Live in my treasure chest, holding my past.

I must remember them, strong and complete. Humble and fearless their lives bittersweet. Then forgiving, softly, quietly so. Anger forgotten, love to bestow.

My heroes will love in the warmth of the sun, Their light to be cherished new journeys begun. But, I must forever hold back the tear, That answers the question: "Weren't they just here?"

Always keep this close and you'll never need more, your world is here with the familiar voices that linger in the air and all those hearts that have learned to beat in time with each other.

You make more than music here. No notes are as connected as the souls that sing them and no soul is happier than when she is surrounded by her sisters.

Always Keep This Close......Colleen Carhuff / Zachary J. Moore

Even when you leave this does not leave you. when you are lost just listen and you will always find your way home.

It is impossible for something to go from your life without first becoming part of who you are. You are another, I am you, we are one.

ONCERT PROCERY

The Sea Grants New Hope - Sandy Kimmel

The Prayer......David Foster / arr. Dave Prudon

Firelands String Quartet

Bells in Remembrance

Courage My Soul......Rollo Dilworth [Refrain]

Courage, my soul, and let us journey on, tho' the night is dark it won't be very long. Thanks be to God, the morning light appears, and the storm is passing over, hallelujah!

Refrain:

Halleluiah! Halleluiah! The storm is passing over, hallelujah!

Billows rolling high, and thunder shakes the ground, lightning's flash and tempest all around. Jesus walks the sea and calms the angry waves, and the storm is passing over, hallelujah!

The stars have disappeared, and distant lights are dim, my soul is filled with fears, the seas are breaking in. I hear the Master cry, "Be not afraid, 'tis I," and the storm will soon be over, hallelujah!

[Refrain]

Soon we shall reach the distant shining shore, free from all the storms we'll rest forevermore. Safe within the veil, we'll furl the riven sail, and the storms will all be over, hallelujah!

Finding Hope - Carrie Jo Wahl

Hope......Pamela Stewart / Greg Gilben

It takes a breath and comes to life with every newborn cry. and echoes in the laughter of the children running by. It promises the morning when the nightbirds start to sing, and dreams beneath the winter show of giving birth to spring.

It reaches out and touches you; it takes you by surprise. It rises from the ashes where the fire of love had died. It beats within the frailest heart, with gentle wings unfurled, to be set free and fly into each corner of the world.

The quiet comfort of a dream you cling to in the dark may kindle and awaken it, this candle of the heart. The starry flame within your soul illuminates the way and leads you through the deepest night into the light of day.

Hope is not lost; hope is not gone. It is still not dead; it still loves on though winds of fear and storms of doubt may try to drive or drown it out.

For in the place where nothing thrives. against all odd, hope will survive. and thought all else around me dies. hope will live on; hope will arise!

A Thanksgiving Blessing - Karen Gerold

Somedays we forget To look around us Somedays we can't see The joy that surrounds us So caught up inside ourselves We take when we should give.

So for tonight we pray for What we know can be. And on this day we hope for What we still can't see. It's up to us to be the change And even though we all can still do more There's so much to be thankful for.

Look bevond ourselves There's so much sorrow It's way too late to say I'll crv tomorrow Each of us must find our truth It's so long overdue

So for tonight we pray for What we know can be And every day we hope for What we still can't see It's up to us to be the change

Thankful......Sager, Forster & Page / arr. Hayes

And even though we all can still do more There's so much to be thankful for. Even with our differences There is a place we're all connected Each of us can find each other's light

So for tonight we pray for What we know can be And on this day we hope for What we still can't see It's up to us to be the change And even though this world needs so much more There's so much to be thankful for.





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Michael Shirtz, Chorale Director & Conductor | Wendy Brown, Accompanist

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Karen Bacni Kaitlyn Bryant Melissa Cullen

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Betsy Dupler Marilyn Forster

Bev Hart

Virginia Mamere

Jo Pankow

Arlene Strohl

Victoria Wheeler

Kelly Wonder

MEZZO-SOPRANO

Karen Abbott Mindy Bahnsen

Stephanie Dupler-Rhodes

Fiona Floyd

Mary Foland

Susan Fritz

Alyna Hinsch

Megan Kaufman

Lindsey Lemons

Glenda Lindquist

Cynthia Mira

Carol Phillips

Tina Showalter

Angela Young

ALTO

Deb Agee

Pam Benedict Deborah Billow

Patricia Breault

Sheryl Cawrse

Sarah Christophel

Karen Demangos Karen Gerold

Karen Gerola

Sandy Giangrande

Judy Hoffman Sari Kelley

Sandra Kimmel

Cynthia Klein

Brenda Knipp

Deb Lovins

Hannah Mathias

Beverly Mendoza

Deborah Randall Yvette Rash

anda Dahinaa

Fonda Robinson Heidi Sarvis-Sapp

Candace Seaman

Candace Seaman

Mary Trout

Olga Trumpower

Carrie Jo Wahl

Terri Wilhelm

TENOR

Ron Brooker

LouAnn Cebull Carol Fleming

Gary Jones

Sandy Kilko Larry McCormack

Robin Mygrant

Pamela Sayre

William Shannon Fritz Shepperd

Tom Thorbahn

Marianne Weaver

BASS

Ron Blake

Mark Bogen

Warren Brown

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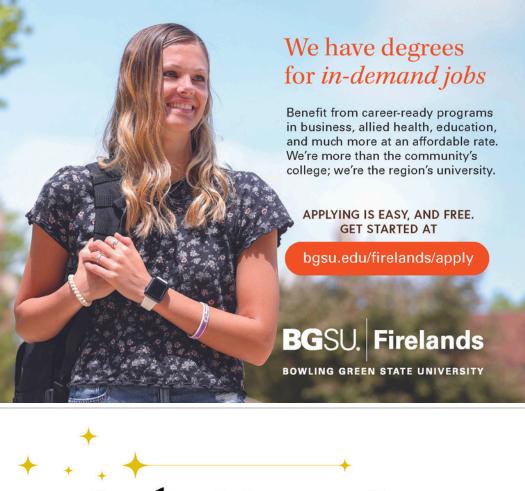
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