

# FROSTIANA

Text by Robert Frost  
Music by Randall Thompson  
Conducted by Dr. Alyssa Cossey

## **General Information:**

Performance Date: Sunday April 28, 2019, at 4:30pm  
Venue: Crowder Hall, 1017 North Olive Rd, Tucson, AZ, 85721-0004  
Description: This spring, the University Community Chorus will combine with the Wildcat Outreach Choir, as well as other local community and school choirs throughout Arizona, to perform great choral works set to poetry in a concert entitled, *Words and Music*. The highlight of the concert will be a mass choir performance of Randall Thompson's idyllic 20th-century work, "Frostiana," featuring the poems of beloved American poet, Robert Frost.

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## **Preliminary Conceptual and Artistic Ideas**

By Steven James Higginbotham

### Concept Statement for *Frostiana*:

WITH WORDS, WE COMPEL IMAGES. WITH POETRY, WE COMPEL OUR SENSES.

As Dr. Cossey shared with me, Robert Frost was concerned that musical settings of his poetry would force the listening audience into a very singular and specific interpretation of his poems. Frost wanted the audience's imagination to be engaged by the poetry, causing their senses of wonderment to be heightened and their creativity to flow. In this performance of *Frostiana*, the goal is to immerse the audience in *experiencing* the words and music, exploring the images they compel, and investigating the ways our senses can be engaged.

### Artistic Vision Statement:

As words link with words, our minds visualize and build complex images. Often, this is not a static process but one which evolves as each word is spoken and a context is devised. As such, is it important that the artistic interpretations of the poems involve some kind of evolution, growth, animation, or change. They also will need to transition smoothly from one to the next in order to provide *Frostiana* with a sense of forward visual motion and momentum. As images and experiences are constructed, we want the audience to remain totally immersed and engaged, without breaking away during the moments in between songs/movements.

Just a lingering thought: Powerful shared experiences connect us and can heighten our sense of community.

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### The Road Less Traveled

- Targeted Format: Split Screen Video
- Suggested Content: The split screen video will share the artist's vision of two options where the subject could go on their life's path. These options will be projected simultaneously, side-by-side. One path should not be "better" than the other; instead, they should simply be different and offer unique opportunities and challenges. At the conclusion of this video story, we will need to find an artistic transition directly into the next piece, *The Pasture*.
- Examples:
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-9tyle-iEo>
  - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWM\\_kBYrlZs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xWM_kBYrlZs)

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### The Pasture

- Possible Formats: Painting/Drawing/Photography
- Suggested Content: A series of images of pastures will be projected on the screen and fade into and out of one another. This imagery will provide the backdrop and landscape for an experiential activity being undertaken by the audience at the same time. They will have a small potpourri bag of items to smell (which probably will be cards on which various scents have been sprayed, including grass, flowers, rain, leaves, etc.) At the conclusion of this song, we will need to find an artistic transition for the projections to move directly into the next piece, *Come In*.



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### Come In

- Possible Formats: Digital Animation/Recorded Shadow Art/Recorded Sand Art
- Suggested Content: This piece is about a thrush (bird), and the targeted artistic interpretation would show the evolution of the animation of a bird in movement and in flight. It might start as a line or pencil drawing that becomes a full animation of the bird throughout the course of the song. If possible or preferred, this animation could be in the form of a digital animation, recorded shadow art performance, or recorded sand art creation. I have included some samples of these performance techniques below. At the end of this piece, an artistic transition will be needed to set the background for the Animated Word Cloud to follow.
- Examples:
  - Shadow Art (could be people, puppets, or art pieces): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6AKMSUd4urg>
  - Sand Art: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zvA3GgRbJlg>
  - Digital Bird Animation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=53WiQfpBYzo>

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### **Telephone**

- Targeted Format: Animated Word Cloud
- Suggested Content: The chorus members will provide words and phrases in response to the following prompt: “What words might you say to someone you love?” The artist will take these words and phrases and turn them into an animated word cloud which will be created during the course of the song, word by word. The artist might consider having the words unite to create an overall image, shape, or pattern. Again, an artistic transition will be needed at the end of this piece to prepare for the next one.

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### **A Girl’s Garden**

- Targeted Format: Digital Flip Book
- Suggested Content: Dr. Cossey would like to see this piece represented by a digital flip book. This digital flip book could artistically interpret the action of the poem, including the girl’s deal with her father, wheeling dung, hiding from passersby, planting seeds, growing vegetables, and more. The last few lines of the poem read, “And she never sins by telling the tale To the same person twice.” There is an obvious sense of exaggeration in the way this girl tells her story, and that exaggerated manner should be reflected in the style of the drawing and animation. While watching this video animation, the audience will be eating garden-flavored jelly beans. ☺ Again, an artistic transition will be needed at the end of this piece to prepare for the next one.
- Examples of flip books:
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SGw6VREYkLE>

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### **Stopping by the Woods**

- Possible Format: Dance (lyrical/contemporary)
- Suggested Content: The subject is deciding whether or not to stop along his/her journey in the woods. The last few lines of this poem read, “The woods are lovely, dark and deep, But I have promises to keep, And miles to go before I sleep, And miles to go before I sleep.” There is a sense of attraction to the woods but a faithfulness to the journey at hand. The traveler chooses to adhere to his/her promise to keep moving forward. This should be explored in the contemporary dance between two or three people. If possible, it will snow onstage or in the projections surrounding the dancers. The snow will fade into darkness as the dancers complete their sequence.

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### **Choose Something Like a Star**

- Possible Format: Painting, Drawing, 3D Sculpture, or Digital Animation
- Suggested Content: In the beginning of the piece, Dr. Cossey would like for a star to ascend. This will become the focal point of the song (and its text), as the star provides a steady guide for the subject. This star image will remain throughout the piece while another experiential activity is undertaken by the audience. The choir and/or audience members will be using flashlights and glow-in-the-dark items to create a flickering starscape

while singing in darkness. We are waiting on a few small logistical details to know which medium will work best for this particular piece. I will share them with you soon!