

M. E. Valverde

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**B e f o r e S p r i n g**  
*for TTBB chorus a cappella*

## About the Poet

Amir Rabiya is a queer, trans, mixed race, disabled poet, educator, and librarian currently living in Central Pennsylvania. They are the author of *Prayers for My 17th Chromosome*, published by Sibling Rivalry Press in November 2017, and co-editor of *Writing the Walls Down: A Convergence of LGBTQ Voices*, published by Trans-Genre Press in October 2015. Amir writes about living with chronic pain and illness, war, trauma, spirituality, healing, redemption—and speaks on silenced places. Their other works have been published in *Mizna*, *580 Split*, *Flicker and Spark: A Contemporary Queer Anthology of Spoken Word and Poetry*, *Enizagam*, *Troubling the Line: Trans and Genderqueer Poetry and Poetics*, *The Asian American Literary Review*, *Kweli Journal*, *Sukoon*, *Collective Brightness: LGBTQ Poets on Faith, Religion and Spirituality* and more. Amir is a three-time VONA (Voices of our Nations) fellow. They were a finalist in the 2008 Joy Harjo Poetry contest, the 2012 Enizagam poetry contest, and the Atlanta Review's 2013 poetry contest.

Amir has travelled extensively all over the United States leading workshops and sharing their stories and poems. In 2009, Amir had the privilege of being an STP with June Jordan's Poetry for the People program at UC Berkeley where they supported emerging poets develop their craft and deepen their voice. Amir has participated in residencies at the Kimmel Nelson Harding Center in Nebraska, the Guapamacáto Center for Art and Ecology in Michoacán, Mexico, and more. For more information or to contact Amir, visit [www.AmirRabiya.com](http://www.AmirRabiya.com).

*Two lovers, splayed across the grass  
light streaked rivers  
Or bones of boats caressing the water  
Moaning towards the shore*

*Conjugating kisses  
Mouths blessing one another's necks  
into wet vowels, pressing  
their hands into folds of the giving earth*

*Two lovers, their bodies' edges blurred by sweat  
& a quickening desire—lose time and let go  
And the trees, the trees,  
shake the last of the frost*

*Before the coming of Spring*

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## Composer's Notes

Commissioned in 2021 for the acclaimed men's ensemble Cantus, "Before Spring" was premiered on their concert tour "Song of the Universal" beginning in October 2022. This work is a setting of an original poem by Amir Rabiya and serves as one of three in a choral set, representing creation. The other two works "Vida, Tú" ("You Are Life"), by Cuban composer Yosvany Estepe, and "The Gates," by Ukrainian composer Mariana Sadovska, represent life and afterlife, respectively.

Given the collaboration of transgender composer and transgender poet, the narrative of the song depicts sex as something restorative, creative, and beautiful. Rabiya's words, crafted with vivid images of nascent spring, are notably gender indefinite, encouraging interpretations that reject prejudices of body shame, trans- and queer- phobias, and sex-negativity. As the melodic lines unfold in duets, individually, and in ensemble, they encounter various tonal areas, carrying the listener continuous invitations to mend parts of themselves broken from their humanity, but natural as the earth.

dur. = ca. 3'

Commissioned for Cantus

# Before Spring

for TTBB chorus a cappella

**Amir Rabiya**

b. 1978

**Mari Esabel Valverde**

b. 1987

**Playfully, poco largo** ♩ = ca. 54  
*mf* *mp*

Tenor 1  
8  
Two lov-ers, splayed a-cross the grass, light streaked

Tenor 2  
8  
Two lov-ers, splayed a-cross the grass, light streaked

Bass 1  
*mf* *mp*  
Two lov-ers, splayed a-cross the grass, light streaked

Bass 2  
*mf* *mp*  
Two lov-ers, splayed a-cross the grass, light streaked

Piano  
(for rehearsal only)

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T 1  
8 riv - ers Or bones of boats ca - ress - ing the wa - ter

T 2  
8 riv - ers Or bones of boats ca - ress - ing the wa - ter

B 1  
riv - ers Or bones of boats ca - ress - ing the wa - ter

B 2  
riv - ers Or bones of boats ca - ress - ing the wa - ter

*poco a poco cresc.*

7

T 1  
8 Moan - ing Moan - ing Moan - ing towards the

T 2  
8 Moan - ing Moan - ing Moan - ing towards the

B 1  
Moan - ing Moan - ing Moan - ing towards the

B 2  
Moan - ing Moan - ing Moan - ing towards the

*poco a poco cresc.*

*poco a poco cresc.*

*poco a poco cresc.*

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**rall.** *f* *mf* **A tempo** *f*

T 1  
8 shore Be - fore the com - ing of Spring Be -

T 2  
8 shore Be - fore the com - ing of Spring Be -

B 1  
shore Be - fore the com - ing of Spring Be -

B 2  
shore Be - fore the com - ing of Spring

**Poco più mosso**  $\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 60$   
*p* tenderly

T 1  
12 fore the com - ing of Spring Con - ju - gat - ing

T 2  
8 fore the com - ing of Spring

B 1  
fore Spring

B 2  
Be - fore Spring

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15

T 1  
8  
kiss - es Mouths bless - ing one an - oth - er's necks in - to

*p tenderly*

T 2  
8  
Con - ju - gat - ing kiss - es Mouths bless - ing one an -

*\* p tenderly*

B 1  
Con - ju - gat - ing kiss - es Mouths

*p tenderly*

B 2  
Con - ju - gat - ing kiss -

18

T 1  
8  
wet \_\_\_\_\_ vowels, \_\_\_\_\_

T 2  
8  
oth - er's necks in - to wet \_\_\_\_\_ vowels, \_\_\_\_\_

B 1  
bless ing one an - oth er's necks in - to wet \_\_\_\_\_ vowels, \_\_\_\_\_

B 2  
es Mouths bless - ing one an - oth - er's necks in - to wet \_\_\_\_\_

\*At the discretion of the singers, it may be advisable to split the repeated melodic lines into even parts. For example, starting in m. 14, have each melodic line sung with an equal number of first tenors, second tenors, and baritones on the first tenor part, the second tenor part, and the baritone part. Or, have baritones sing with the basses from m. 16 through m. 21 and have an equal number of tenors sing the top three parts.

21 *mp* *poco dim.*

T 1  
8 press - ing their hands in - to folds press - ing their

T 2  
8 press - ing their hands in - to folds press - ing their

B 1  
*mp* press - ing their hands in - to folds

B 2  
*mp* vowels, press - ing their hands in - to folds

24 *p* *mf*

T 1  
8 hands in - to folds of the giv - ing earth

T 2  
8 hands in - to folds of the giv - ing earth

B 1  
*p* in - to folds of the giv - ing earth

B 2  
*p* in - to the giv - ing earth

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**Tempo Primo** ♩ = ca. 54

27 *mp*

T 1  
8 Two [lov - ers'] bod - ies' ed - ges blurred by sweat [and] a

T 2  
8 Two [lov - ers'] bod - ies' ed - ges blurred by sweat [and] a

B 1  
*mp* Two [lov - ers'] bod - ies' ed - ges blurred by sweat [and] a

B 2  
*mp* Two [lov - ers'] bod - ies' ed - ges blurred by sweat [and] a

30

T 1  
8 quick' - ning de - sire— lose time lose time and let go And

T 2  
8 quick' - ning de - sire— lose time lose time and let go And

B 1  
quick' - ning de - sire— lose time lose time and let go

B 2  
quick' - ning de - sire— lose time lose time and let go

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33 *poco a poco cresc.*

T 1  
8 — the trees, the trees, the trees shake the

T 2  
8 — the trees, the trees, the trees shake the

B 1  
the trees, the trees, the trees — shake the

B 2  
the trees, the trees, the trees — shake the

35 *rall.* *f* *mf* *A tempo* *f*

T 1  
last of the frost Be - fore the com - ing of Spring Be -

T 2  
last of the frost Be - fore the com - ing of Spring Be -

B 1  
last of the frost Be - fore the com - ing of Spring Be -

B 2  
last of the frost Be - fore the com - ing of Spring

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38  
T 1 fore the com - ing of Spring  
T 2 fore the com - ing of Spring  
B 1 fore Spring  
B 2 Be - fore Spring

*mp* *mf* *mp* *mf* *mp* *mf*