

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

World Premiere of New Soprano and Organ Song Cycle *Through the Flames* Coming to Minneapolis

MINNEAPOLIS, MN — The **world premiere** of a new song cycle for soprano and organ exploring courage, sacrifice, and hope through the stories of extraordinary individuals throughout history will take place on Sunday, November 1, 2026, at 3:00 p.m. at Holy Cross Catholic Church in Minneapolis.

Through the Flames, by composer Samuel Backman, was created in collaboration with poet and soprano Elena Zolnick. The work presents six musical portraits inspired by the lives of Joan of Arc, Maximilian Kolbe, Little Li, Perpetua, Miguel Pro, and Maria Goretti—figures whose lives span different cultures, centuries, and continents, yet share a remarkable story of conviction, resilience, and hope.

Although rooted in the Christian tradition of martyrdom, *Through the Flames* explores timeless human questions: What gives people the courage to remain faithful to their deepest convictions? How does hope endure in the face of suffering? What inspires individuals to sacrifice themselves for something greater than themselves?

The work's title comes from its opening movement portraying Joan of Arc's execution by fire. Throughout the cycle, the image of fire serves both a literal and symbolic purpose, representing the trials faced by those who choose courage over fear and hope over despair.

"*Through the Flames* is ultimately about the strength of love in the face of suffering," says composer Samuel Backman. "The saints portrayed in this cycle lived in vastly different circumstances, but their stories reveal a shared human experience: the search for meaning, the struggle for courage, and the hope that carries people through adversity."

Works conceived as extended song cycles specifically for soprano and organ remain remarkably rare within today's concert repertoire. *Through the Flames* explores the expressive possibilities of this distinctive pairing, with the organ serving as a full dramatic partner capable of both delicate intimacy and immense power.

The collaboration between Backman and Zolnick unites music and poetry in a work of broad emotional scope.

"I became fascinated by the idea of martyrdom as I began to realize that martyrs are not simply figures of the distant past," says Zolnick. "Their witness is very real today, and, sadly, will continue to be in the future."

The premiere has been intentionally scheduled for All Saints Day, a Christian feast honoring the lives of saints throughout history. Through music and poetry, the performance invites audiences to encounter these stories as reflections on courage, sacrifice, and the enduring human search for hope.

Premiere Information

World Premiere of *Through the Flames*

Sunday, November 1, 2026

3:00 p.m.

Holy Cross Catholic Church

1621 University Avenue NE

Minneapolis, Minnesota

About the Creators

Samuel Backman is a composer, conductor, organist, and Director of Sacred Music at Holy Cross Catholic Church in Minneapolis. His work explores the intersection of sacred tradition and contemporary musical expression. More information is available at www.samuelbackman.com.

Elena Zolnick is a conductor, soprano, and poet, serving as Director of the University of Saint Thomas Liturgical Choir and Director of Sacred Music at The Saint Paul Seminary and School of Divinity. More information is available at www.elenatbird.com.