Singing in the Easter Choir beside My Enemy

*Michael Hicks*

A sustained tone, our conductor says, must narrate our belief: begin, develop, then patiently subside. That’s what she learned in the Welsh choirs of her youth, whose memory lifts and lowers her arms today. And memory is what music is, after all, braiding strands of tone into a language we almost understand, mistaking it, perhaps, for the Orient or an inland sea. Beyond that, she says, is a moment, one drop on a page that could land anywhere in the story of a voice. And that’s the instant that scares me, startles my tongue: that wire of unison, of tuning my throat to another’s for fellowship. Like the pulse of crickets at night: they might know better but can’t find a syllable worthier to plant in their wings. They sing that a night has many lives, and vice versa, and no one voice will do for all of them.

Outside the chapel, the aspens rise up, shaking their best music from the branches. Inside, I and the man beside me tune our voices into the cadence, which ends in silence, which is the sound of forgetting, the sound of grief cancelled.