

LETTERS FROM THE FRONT

(1776—2026)

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Composed by Patrick Zimmerli with libretto by Mirabelle Ordinaire, *Letters From The Front* is a new work for four voices and piano based on letters sent by American service members and their loved ones during wartime.

Each piece on the program is based on an actual letter written during one of our nation's most crucial wars, including the American Revolution, the Civil War, World War I, World War II, Vietnam, and the Gulf War.

This music is a tribute to the men and women who made the sacrifice of service over the course of 250 years. Each piece represents not only history, but also the hope that their duty was done for a greater purpose – for their families, friends, neighbors, communities, and country.

Read more on our website at lettersfromthefront.net

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Overture

I'll Live For Your Letters



**Based on Hattie Reinauer's letter to her son, Richard,
as he was preparing to serve in World War II**

There never will be a day or night
that my thoughts, my hopes, my prayers will not be with you.

If you're lonely
embrace me in your thoughts—
for I'll always be there.
I'll live for your letters.
I'll live for your letters,
your letters.

No detail will be too small.
It will help me be close to your life.

Remember,
nothing is ever too much
for your mother who loves you.



Ian Gindes, Pianist



Angela Born

I Set Myself Down This Moment



Based on a letter from James Davenport to his brother during the American Revolution

Dear Brother,

I set myself down this moment to write to you,
but my pen was not willing to write!

It told me it was very sorry—

I would use it for nothing
when I had used it up to the stump

a-writing letters to people
and they made no return.

They made no return.
I told it I would write this once
as perhaps you had no opportunity,
and if you had,

I would do according to the old saying,
“Do as you would be done by,
not as you are done by.”

I have no news to write to you,
only there is a talk
of the war being almost all over;
I think they must mean all over the world.

I am something in haste, so I conclude.
I am, dear brother, with sentiments and esteem,

Your loving brother



John Riesen, tenor

Tonite Two Fellows Got Together



**Based on a letter from Joe Denov to his wife,
Tess, during World War II**

Tonite two fellows got together
to play waltzes on a violin
and an accordion.

It brought back memories
of the most pleasant moments
that we have spent together.

Waltzing together
around the dance floor,
oblivious to everyone else
giving ourselves freely to the pleasure of the dance.

The ache of missing you was so great,
and I felt so alone
and lost,
I nearly broke down and cried.

Luckily, I have this paper,
and in writing this
lost some of that alone feeling.

A Minute Doesn't Go By



Based on a letter by Colonel Bill Logel to his grandson during the Gulf War

A minute doesn't go by when I don't think of you.
A day doesn't go by
when I don't wish we were walking together.
Some day when you grow older
you will understand
what it means to be an American.

Hopefully you won't have to defend your country, but if you do,
your country is worth defending.

And I look into the eyes
of all the American Soldiers
knowing that some of them will die here
for their country
and I know
that if my work
can keep one, even just one, alive,
then it is worth my sacrifice to be here.

I wish I were there with you.

Love,
Poppie



David Govertsen, bass-baritone

Preparation For Battle



James Davenport writing to his brother during the American Revolution

We expect ev'ry day to meet our enemy.
Great preparations are making for an attack.

We marched
and it was so extreme hot

that a great many of our men
dropped down in the road.

We had been without any sort of meat
for four days.

The cannon keep firing now down below.



Vietnam War Song



Based on a letter from Vietnam War veteran Fred Leo Brown to his mother

Dear Ma:

The men say
you just scare the people at home
when you tell them everything.

You sounded like
you would rather have it said than hid.

I feel better when I do,
but what I about to say,
when it happened,
and how, was ghastly!

An artillery round blew.
Cabal! The whole mountain shook.
Mortars!
Medic! Medic!
I can't breathe.
Someone, please help me, help me!
I can't give him respiration—
Help!

On the Chopper
Two men laying there dead.
On the Chopper
Two other men hurt—
Bad enough they would never return.

On the Chopper
He died
and he died.
He died.

Everyone shielded me from the blast.
That is why I am here to write these words.

Well, that's all in the past.
I am facing today and tomorrow now.

I am 19 and one of the oldest men here.
Most of them have been killed or wounded.

Now I know sorrow.

Fred

Poem For Irving F. Diamond



Based on a World War II letter from Howard T. Harwood honoring the memory of his friend, Irving F. Diamond

Although we never saw
The bright-eyed look
Nor felt the hand-clasp firm,
God made it so
In His own way
That we should meet at Anzio today.

The quiet of the night
Was shattered by
The man-made light
Of death;
And your bright eyes were dulled,
And ended was your breath.

The guns thundered bravely
And rising tracers red
Met the challenge gravely
While hearts ashore were bled.

I didn't know then,
Fraternal friend,
How near you were.
And yet the bomb that hit the ship
And flamed the sky
Caused an inner, anguished sigh.

'Twas later, Irv,
When I first heard
The sad black news;
A dear, old pal
Was close to you.

And what I saw
Was your last view
Gone before dawn
Could welcome you;

But this I know,
By sun and star
And earthly sod,
That where you are—
There is God.

I'll Live For Your Letters (Reprise)



**Based on Hattie Reinauer's letter to her son, Richard,
as he was preparing to serve in World War II**

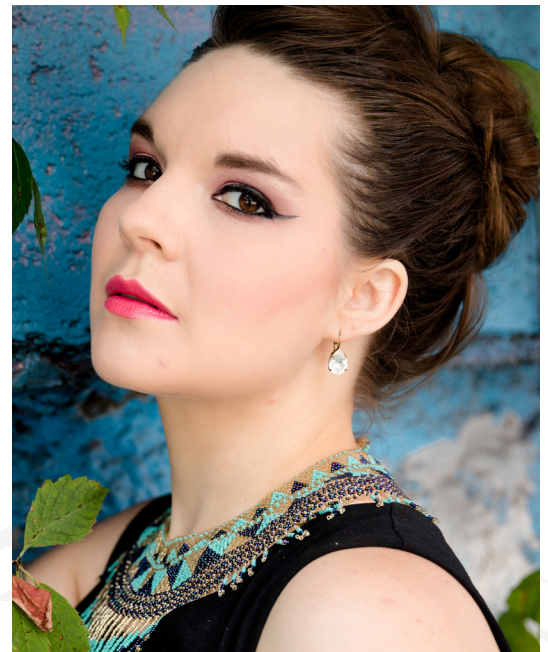
There never, never, never will be a day or night
that my thoughts, my hopes,
my thoughts, my hopes,
my prayers will not be with you.

If you're lonely
embrace me in your thoughts—
for I'll always be there.

Wear your uniform proudly,
and your country
will honor you.

I'll live for your letters.
I'll live for your letters,
your letters.

No detail, no detail will be too small.
It will help me be close to your life.
Remember,
nothing is ever too much
for your mother who loves you.



Angela Born, mezzo-soprano

Where Are You Tonight?



**Based on the letters of CPT Jacob Ritner and his wife,
Emeline, during the Civil War**

Soprano

Where are you tonight,
and what are you doing?
Oh I would so like to know.

I have got the blues
most horribly tonight
and the wind is blowing
a perfect streak.

Oh how gloomy
everything seems tonight!

How I wish you were with us
to chase away the melancholies,
but where are you tonight,
and what are you doing...

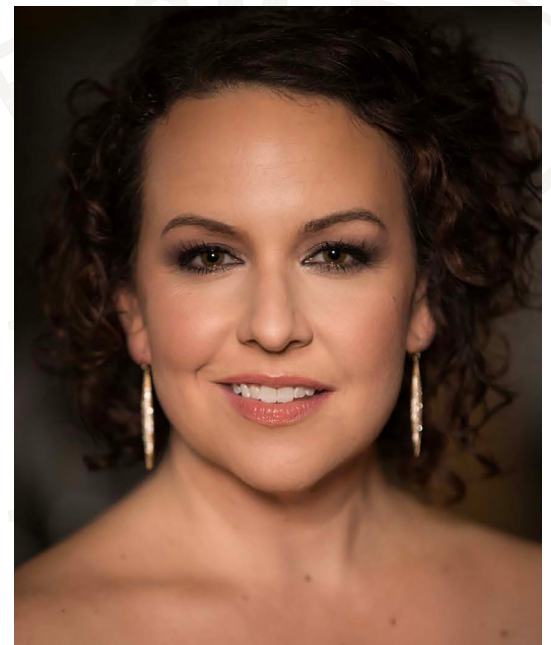
Tenor

I often lie awake at night
looking at the moon and stars
and thinking that they are the same moon and stars
that shine on you.

And then I think
that maybe you are sitting
in the door at the same time
and looking at the same objects,
or perhaps the same stars I am looking at,
and then I feel very near you.

And then I think again
that we have the same kind Providence
to watch over and protect us both,
and the same Heavenly Father
to call upon for help in time of need.

I feel grateful
that I have a dear wife
and kind friends at home
who remember me in their prayers.



Desirée Hassler, soprano

All Greasy And Salty



Based on a letter from Emeline Ritner during the Civil War

Dear Jake,

I received a letter from you today,
and it found me with my hands
all greasy and salty
for I had just finished
salting away the meat.

All greasy and salty, for
I had just finished salting away the meat.
We got the pig killed yesterday
And they brought it home
So we cut it up ourselves.

Don't you laugh!
We done it up just right.
There was not a man we could get;
we just had to do it.

All greasy and salty, for
I had just finished salting away the meat.
And I wish you were here to help eat it.



Emeline Ritner

This Is A Most Horrible War



**Based on the letters of CPT Jacob Ritner and his wife,
Emeline, during the Civil War**

Tenor

My Dear Wife:

This is a most horrible war.
Is it not, dear,
to take me away from you
for so long a time?

But you must not think
I regret that I entered the army.
I must count my past suffering
and shattered health
as only the small dust
compared with the priceless blessings
of peace, freedom, and national unity.

Only to have contributed something, however little,
for the peace,
for the glory,
will be a joy through life
and a consolation in death.

Soprano

Where are you tonight and what are you doing?
Where are you tonight and what are you doing?
Have you contributed something, however little,
for the peace,
for the glory?

Where
to have contributed something, however little,
for the peace, for the glory,
for the peace, for the glory.



Emeline and Jacob Ritner

Engagement Letter



Based on a letter from Irving Koidin, written from Australia, during World War II

Bass-baritone

Okay, I'm a meanie.
There shouldn't be any excuse whatsoever
making my sugar
wait for her "sugar report."

However— I've been busy
but you will forgive me—
wait and see, but keep on reading.

I guess my face is red
because I don't know how to start this paragraph.
But Cupid insists on prompting me;
I can be quite stubborn, you know.
Well—well, I got to get this over with!

Well, honey,
as I'm terribly much in love with you,
I've decided
to cut out the "preliminaries"
and be engaged to you.

I want and need you
more than anything in the world, darling.
I want and need you
more than anything in the world.

They say it takes an engagement ring
to be engaged.
As I can't get it here,
hard as I try,
I'm writing home to ask Etta,
And Syl, if she so desires,
to go with you
and help you select it.

Please let the engagement ring
symbolize my love for you.
"If I come home."

And then,
let's pray that the time will come again
when we can make another trip
to the "ol'" park bench
and I can ask you to be
Mrs. Irv Koidin.
(Even looks good on paper, doesn't it?)

There is a story "behind the scenes"
of our engagement, darling.
It was at the battle in New Guinea
that it was decided.

(Continued on the next page)

Engagement Letter (Continued)



Based on a letter from Irving Koidin, written from Australia, during World War II

It was in those half-flooded,
stinking,
muddy foxholes and slit trenches
where danger was always prominent
that I knew our love was real.

Somehow, darling,
I was able to see your face before me
and the earth didn't shield its brightness.
Somehow it seemed that God was bringing me your
messages
and the messages seemed to read:

Soprano

"Please God, Please God direct his actions
so as to spare him for me—
and—
Please God, I love him and need him—
Protect him."

Soprano, Mezzo-soprano, and Tenor chorus

"Please God, Please God, direct his actions
so as to spare him for me —
Please God,
I love him and need him—
Protect him."

Bass-baritone

I knew that you were praying for me darling, And I did
too,
every night, and our prayers worked miracles.
I was inspired,
fought harder to live
if not for myself but for you.

If prayers helped when I was in trouble, honey,
there is no unearthly reason
why we shouldn't pray
just the same
when I'm safe.
Besides, the war isn't over yet.
Let's hope God brings victory to the free world soon.

A Baby At Home



Based on a letter from Herman Gresik to his wife during World War II

I got the cablegram late last night.
Write and tell me what she looks like.
How much does she weigh?
What color hair and eyes?
Does she look like you?
I hope so.

How do you feel?
Let me know everything that happens.
I can't believe I have a baby back home.
Tell the little shrimp hello from me.

I think I will have to become
a serious old married man
and not go out with the boys
and raise hell all the time
and save my money
for wife and baby back home.

Don't forget that I am over here,
and now that you have
a baby to love,
don't give her all your love
but save a little for me
when I get home.



I Have A Rendezvous With Death



Based on "I Have a Rendezvous with Death" by American World War I Soldier and poet Alan Seeger

A rendezvous, a rendezvous,
A rendezvous, a rendezvous

I have a rendezvous with Death
At some disputed barricade,
When Spring comes back with rustling shade
And apple-blossoms fill the air—
I have a rendezvous with Death
When Spring brings back blue days and fair.

I have a rendezvous with Death
That he shall take me
A rendezvous with Death
That he shall lead me
That he shall lead me

It may be he shall take my hand
And lead me into his dark land
And close my eyes and quench my breath —
It may be I shall pass him still.

I have a rendezvous with Death
On some scarred slope of battered hill,
When Spring comes round again this year
And the first meadow-flowers appear.

I have a rendezvous with Death
I have a rendezvous with Death
God knows
God knows
God knows 'twere better to be deep

Pillowed in silk and scented down,
Where love throbs out in blissful sleep,
Pulse nigh to pulse, and breath to breath,
Where hushed awakenings are dear...

But I have a rendezvous with Death
At midnight in some flaming town,
When Spring trips north again this year,
And I to my pledged word am true,
I shall not fail that rendezvous.

I shall not fail that rendezvous with Death.
I have a rendezvous with Death.



Alan Seeger

Now There Will Be Stories To Tell



Based on a letter from George Freedman to his brother, Maurice, sent during World War II

Now there will be stories to tell.

Stories of bombing, shelling, snipers;
Stories of being under fire
from 4:30 in the morning
until 2 in the afternoon
and counting the 4100 dead around.

Stories of working days and nights
until your head swims
and your feet give out.

Chased around at sea,
chased around on land,
moving up,
moving back,
moving up,
stench, stink, smell,
flies, mosquitoes, brambles, ruins,
the living, the wounded, the dead—
makes me feel like an old man.

Yes, now there will be stories to tell.



It Won't Be Long Now



Based on a letter by Helen Strzelczyk as she returned home from her service as a nurse in the Pacific during World War II

It won't be long now
and I'll be seeing the old country.
Just thinking about it
stir up the butterflies in my stomach,
and the days just can't go fast enough.

Honestly, I just can't believe it —
I'm in the good ol' USA again.
Everything looks so good.

The lights,
the homes,
the skyscrapers,
left me speechless.
It is still hard to believe.

Even writing now
I feel a lump in my throat
and my eyes keep filling.
My eyes keep filling.
There is no place like it.

Until we meet again,
I always remain,

Helen

Finale



Bass-baritone

Now there will be stories to tell.
There will be stories to tell.

Soprano

Where are you tonight, and what are you doing?
Oh I would so like to know.

Tenor

Luckily, I have this paper,
and in writing this
lost some of that alone feeling.

I often think that maybe you are sitting in the door
at the same time
and looking at the same objects or perhaps the same
stars
I am looking at.

Mezzo-soprano

There never will be a day or night
that my thoughts, my hopes, my prayers
will not be with you.

There will be stories.
I would so like to know.

All

I'm in the good ol' USA again.

Soprano

Greetings to all of you, direct from the States.

All

There is no place like it. The good ol' USA.