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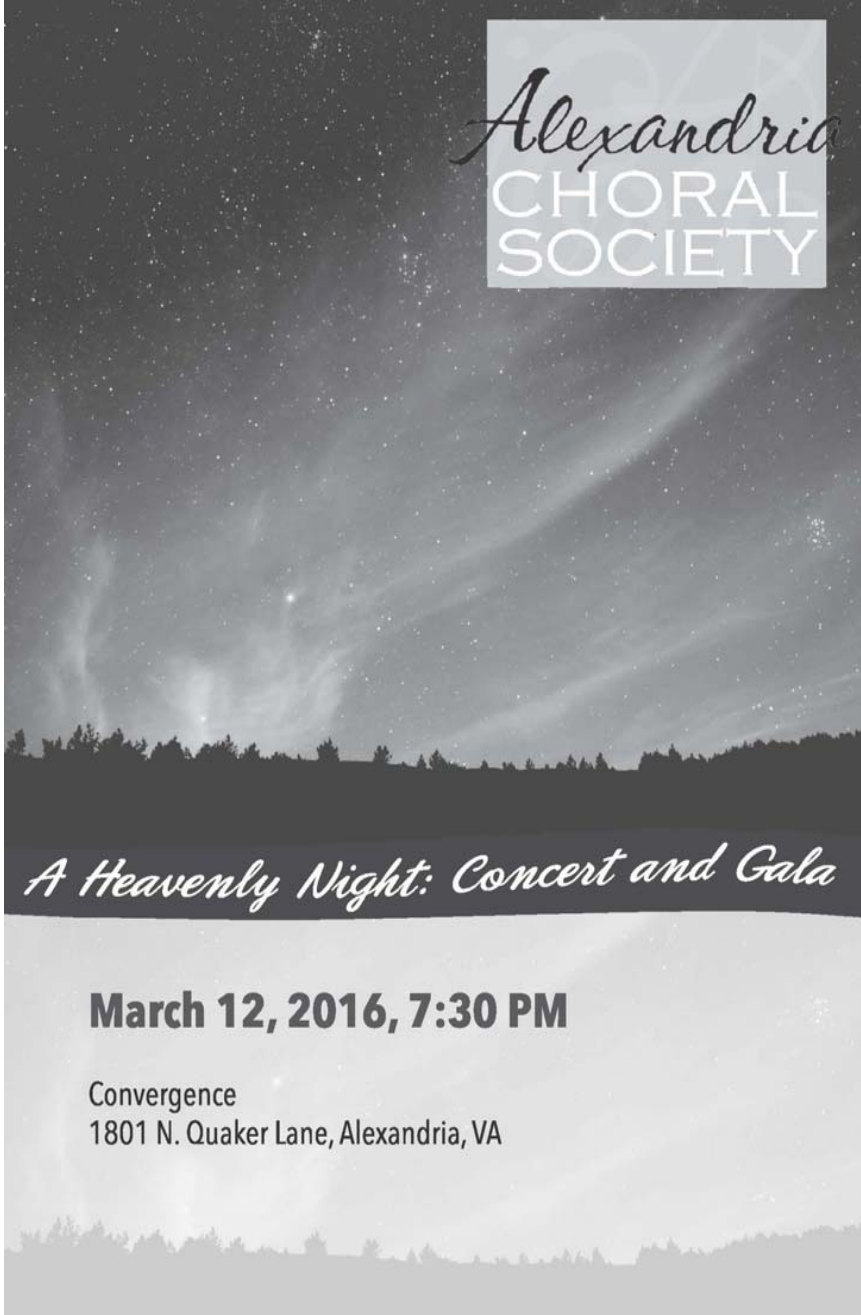
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Alexandria
**CHORAL
SOCIETY**

A Heavenly Night: Concert and Gala

March 12, 2016, 7:30 PM

Convergence
1801 N. Quaker Lane, Alexandria, VA

A Heavenly Night

Alexandria Choral Society

and

Pro Coro Alexandria

Brian Gendron, conductor

Robin Beckman, keyboards

Rorate coeli

Alexandria Choral Society

Jacob Handl (1550-1591)

Begin, my tongue

Pro Coro Alexandria

William Billings (1746-1800)

And I saw a new heaven

Edgar L. Bainton (1880-1956)

Alexandria Choral Society

Zwei Motetten

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

I. Warum ist das Licht gegeben dem Mühseligen?

1. Warum ist das Licht gegeben
2. Lasset uns unser Herz samt den Händen
3. Siehe, wir preisen selig
4. Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin

II. O Heiland, rei die Himmel auf

Sing me to heaven

Daniel Gawthrop (b. 1949)

City called heaven

arr. Josephine Poelinitz (b. 1942)

Carla McDonald, *soloist*

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TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS

RORATE COELI

from Isaiah 45:8

Rorate coeli desuper,
et nubes pluant justum:
aperiatur terra,
et germinet Salvatorem.

Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above,
and let the clouds rain down righteousness:
that the earth may be opened,
and bring forth salvation.

BEGIN, MY TONGUE

Isaac Watts (Hymn 69)

Begin, my tongue, some heavenly theme, and speak some boundless thing;
the mighty works or mightier name of our eternal King.
Tell of His wondrous faithfulness, and sound His power abroad,
Sing the sweet promise of His grace, and the performing God.

He that can dash whole worlds to death, and make them when He please;
He speaks, and that Almighty breath fulfils His great decrees.
His very word of grace is strong, as that which built the skies,
The voice that rolls the stars along speaks all the promises.

O might I hear that heavenly tongue but whisper, "Thou art mine!"
Those gentle words should raise my song to notes almost divine.
How would my leaping heart rejoice, and think my heaven secure!
I trust the all-creating voice and faith deserves no more.

AND I SAW A NEW HEAVEN

Revelations 21:1-4

And I saw a new heaven and a new earth:
For the first heaven and the first earth were passed away;
and there was no more sea.
And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem,
coming down from God out of heaven,
prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.
And I heard a great voice out of heaven, saying,
Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men,
and he will dwell with them and they shall be his people,
and God himself shall be with them and be their God.
God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes;
And there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying,
neither shall there be any more pain,
for the former things are passed away.

ZWEI MOTETTEN

Warum ist das Licht gegeben dem Mühseligen?

1. Job 3:20-23
 Warum ist das Licht gegeben dem Mühseligen,
Why is light given to those in misery,
 und das Leben den betrübten Herzen
and life to afflicted souls
 (die des Todes warten und kommt nicht,
(who wait for death, and it comes not;
 und grüben ihn wohl aus dem Verborgenen,
who dig for it secretly
 die sich fast freuen und sind fröhlich,
who nearly rejoice and are glad
 daß sie das Grab bekommen), *that they have found the grave),*
 Und dem Manne, des Weg verborgen ist,
And to the one whose way is hidden
 und Gott vor ihm denselben bedeckt?
and from whom God has hidden himself?

2. Lamentations 3:41
 Lasset uns unser Herz samt den Händen
Let us lift up our hearts and our hands
 aufheben zu Gott im Himmel.
to God in heaven.

3. James 5:11
 Siehe, wir preisen selig,
Behold, we call them blessed,
 die erduldet haben. *those who have endured.*
 Die Geduld Hiob habt ihr gehört, *You have heard of the patience of Job*
 und das Ende des Herrn habt ihr gesehen;
and you have seen the purpose of the Lord;
 denn der Herr ist barmherzig,
for the Lord is compassionate,
 und ein Erbarmer. *and a merciful God.*

4. Martin Luther
 Mit Fried und Freud ich fahr dahin *In peace and joy I now depart*
 In Gottes Willen; *according to God's will;*
 Getrost ist mir mein Herz und Sinn *my heart and mind are comforted,*
 Sanft und stille. *calm, and still.*
 Wie Gott mir verheißen hat: *as God has promised me,*
 Der Tod ist mir Schlaf worden. *death has become my sleep.*



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Sunday, December 6, 2015, at 4:00 p.m.

Handel: Messiah

with orchestra
 and

Esther Heideman, Soprano
 Laura Zuiderveen, Alto
 Issachah Savage, Tenor
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Sunday, May 1, 2016, at 4:00 p.m.

Orff: Carmina Burana

Brahms: Liebeslieder (selections)

Beveridge:

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O Heiland, reiß die Himmel auf

Friedrich Spee von Langenfeld (1591-1635)

O Heiland, reiß die Himmel auf, Herab, herauf vom Himmel lauf, Reiß ab vom Himmel Tor und Tür, Reiß ab, was Schloß und Riegel für.	<i>O Savior, tear open the heavens, flow down to us from heaven above, tear off heaven's gate and door, tear off every lock and bar.</i>
O Gott, ein' Tau vom Himmel gieß, Im Tau herab O Heiland fließ, Ihr Wolken, brecht und regnet aus Den König über Jakobs Haus.	<i>O God, a dew from heaven pour; in the dew, O Savior, downward flow. Break, you clouds, and rain down the king of Jacob's house.</i>
O Erd, schlag aus, schlag aus, O Erd, Daß Berg und Tal grün alles werd,	<i>O earth, burst forth; burst forth, O earth, So that mountain and valley all become green;</i>
O Erd, herfür dies Blümlein bring, O Heiland, aus der Erden spring.	<i>O earth, bring forth this little flower; O Savior, spring forth out of the earth.</i>
Hie leiden wir die größte Not, Vor Augen steht der bitter Tod, Ach komm, für uns mit starker Hand	<i>Here we suffer the greatest distress; before our eyes stands bitter death.</i>
Von Elend zu dem Vaterland.	<i>Ah, come lead us with your powerful hand From this misery to our Father's land.</i>
Da wollen wir all' danken dir, Unserm Erlöser für und für, Da wollen wir all loben dich, Je allzeit immer und ewiglich. Amen.	<i>Therefore we all want to thank you, our redeemer, for ever and ever. Therefore we also want to praise you at all times, always and forever. Amen.</i>

SING ME TO HEAVEN

Jane Griner

In my heart's sequestered chambers lie truths stripped of poet's gloss.
Words alone are vain and vacant and my heart is mute.
In response to aching silence memory summons half-heard voices,
and my soul finds primal eloquence and wraps me in song.

If you would comfort me, sing me a lullaby,
If you would win my heart, sing me a love song.
If you would mourn me and bring me to God,
sing me a requiem, sing me to heaven.

Touch in me all love and passion, pain and pleasure,
Touch in me grief and comfort, love and passion, pain and pleasure.

Sing me a lullaby, a love song, a requiem.
Love me, comfort me, bring me to God:
Sing me a love song.
Sing me to heaven.

CITY CALLED HEAVEN

I am a poor pilgrim, a poor pilgrim of sorrow,
I'm left in this old wide world, this old wide world alone!
Oh I ain't got no hope, got no hope for tomorrow
I'm trying to make it, make heaven my home.

Sometimes I'm tossed and I'm driven, Lord.
Sometimes I just don't know which way to turn.
Oh, I heard of a city, of a city called heaven
I'm trying to make it, make heaven my home.

PROGRAM NOTES

The title of tonight's program, *A Heavenly Night*, conjures up images of a starry sky: witness the artwork on the inner program cover. But the "heaven" referred to in the musical works which you will hear is for the most part the heaven we think of when we picture a better afterlife. Or, if the skies are the heavens mentioned, there is still a connection to the heaven also called paradise.

The program opens with the Alexandria Choral Society performing a setting of a text from the book of Isaiah which is frequently sung as a plainsong at Mass and in the Divine Office during Advent. *Rorate coeli* commands the skies to drop down dew, and the clouds to send rain. Yet this is metaphoric, as the second line of the text calls for a Savior to be brought forth from the earth, which presumably has been sufficiently watered.

Also known as Jacobus Gallus, **Jacob Handl** may originally have been called Petelin, meaning "rooster," of which "Handl" is the German diminutive and "Gallus" the Latin equivalent. He was actually Slovenian by birth, but left his homeland for Austria when he was about fifteen. After serving for a time as a singer in the imperial chapel of Maximilian II, he left the emperor's service in 1575 to travel extensively in many parts of Europe. His last years were spent in Prague.

Handl has set *Rorate coeli* for six voices, with melismatic polyphony throughout most of the work. Frequently alternating between women's and men's voices, the texture becomes briefly homophonic on the words "et germinet" and then returns to the previous style on the word "Salvatorem" which follows. His music shows the influence of the Netherlands school, with a particularly good ear for choral sonorities.

Two selections by Pro Coro Alexandria follow. The first, *Begin my tongue*, is an early American hymn tune by **William Billings**, with words by the English hymnodist Isaac Watts, who specialized in metric, rhyming versions of scriptural passages.

Billings was largely self-taught in music. He worked as a tanner but in 1769 began a second career as a teacher of choral singing. The first published collection of wholly American music and the first tune book produced by a

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single American composer, *The New England Psalm Singer*, was published in 1770. It was in this book that Billings wrote, "I don't think myself confin'd to any Rules for Composition . . . it is best for every *Composer* to be his own *Carver*." Billings' most popular collection, *The Singing Master's Assistant*, appeared in 1778. His published music was confined almost exclusively to unaccompanied choral works, usually for four voices. *Bellingham*, which is the name of the tune for this hymn, was published in the collection *Continental Harmony* in 1794.

Because there were few instruments in the wilds of the New England colonies, singing was taught by using shaped note-heads to denote the different intervals. The melody appeared in the "lead" part, which was sung by the tenor voices, though sometimes some "treble" voices might join them in the higher octave. Though Billings is generally regarded today as the outstanding American-born composer of the 18th century, and much of his music has been kept alive by singers in the shape-note tradition, his popularity waned toward the end of his life, and even the site of his grave remains unknown.

The Book of Revelations is the source for the text of the anthem *And I saw a new heaven* by the English (and later Australian) composer **Edgar L. Bainton**. Written for four-part chorus with organ accompaniment, it is his best-known composition.

Bainton was born in London, but his family moved to Coventry during his childhood. Showing early signs of musical ability, at the age of 16 he won an open scholarship to the Royal College of Music, and three years later was awarded a scholarship to study composition with Sir Charles Villiers Stanford.

His career path was primarily as an educator, first as a professor and then as Principal at the Newcastle upon Tyne Conservatory of Music. Traveling to Germany in 1914, he was arrested and spent the next four years in a civilian detention camp, where he was in charge of all musical activity. Returning to England after the Armistice, he resumed his position at the Conservatory. In 1934 he took over the directorship of the New South Wales Conservatorium of Music, and spent the remainder of his life in Australia. His compositions, though not numerous, included church music and other choral, vocal, and instrumental works. *And I saw a new heaven* was completed in 1928.

The major work on tonight's program is the Opus 74 of **Johannes Brahms**, *Zwei Motetten*. Brahms was a prolific composer in many musical media, but probably his best known choral work is his Requiem. On a much smaller scale, the motet *Warum ist das Licht gegeben?* (op. 74, no. 1) still celebrates the fact that faith brings peace at the end of life.

Born in Hamburg in 1833, Brahms gave his first solo concert as a pianist at the age of 15, by which time he was already composing extensively. His life was spent as both a performer and a composer; he was also dedicated to research in the field of early music. The large quantity of a cappella music he wrote is undoubtedly the outcome of his study of and research in the music of the early Baroque. At one point he wrote to Clara Schumann that he had mastered all types of canonic technique.

Brahms used the motet form throughout his creative life, although it changed in character over time. *Warum ist das Licht gegeben?* was first performed in Vienna in 1878, and contains fine examples of his mastery of canonic technique, though in this work the canons are less strict and the parts are treated freely. He had a sensitive feeling for the intrinsic value of each voice, and used a polyphonically fragmented style like that of the early Baroque madrigal.

The first movement, using text from the Book of Job, reflects the “misery” of the questioner with chromatic motion in all voices. The four voices come together homophonically only in the repeated “Warum?”

The serene setting of the verse from Lamentations which forms the second movement uses a rising melodic line in canon to reiterate musically the theme of the text. In the third movement, the madrigal style is particularly evident with the six voices intertwining and combining in different groupings. The final movement has the voicing reduced to four parts, setting the familiar text by Martin Luther (whose translation of the Bible was used for the other three movements) in the style of a traditional chorale.

O Heiland, reiß die Himmel auf (op. 74, no.2) was probably written at least twenty years earlier, during the time when Brahms was immersed in the study of earlier counterpoint. Brahms uses five of the seven verses of a hymn by Friedrich Spee which was first published in 1622, part of a small body of sacred poetry written by Catholics of the time in German instead of Latin. Spee was a Jesuit priest who was working for the restitution of the Catholic church in the region of northwestern Germany where he lived. He survived an assassination attempt in 1629, but died in the plague epidemic of 1635.

The first verse of the hymn is based on Isaiah 64:1; the second and third verses are paraphrases of the text from Isaiah which was heard in Latin at the beginning of our program: “Rorate coeli desuper, et nubes pluant justum: aperiatur terra et germinet Salvatorem.” The remaining two verses reflect the contrasting emotions of the first motet: the suffering expressed in its first movement, and the joyful peace of the final chorale.

For something completely different, we next hear what may well be the best-known and best-loved of the many choral works of **Daniel Gawthrop**. Alexandria Choral Society is proud to have been one of the numerous groups to have commissioned a work by this semi-local composer.

Gawthrop was born in Indiana. Though he originally planned a career in electrical engineering, as a senior in high school he decided to study music instead. He began by majoring in organ at Michigan State University, and continued his organ studies in northern Germany while serving in the Navy. Subsequently while at Brigham Young University he changed his major to composition. He graduated there with a Bachelor of Music degree in 1988.

He has worked in many music-related fields – as an organizer of high school and college band and choir tours, assistant to an organ builder, and as a radio announcer, among others – to “support his habit” of composition. At the time he wrote *Night, Sleep, Death and the Stars* for the Alexandria Choral

Pro Coro Alexandria

Sopranos

Erin Barnett
Cienna Breen
Katie Grainey
Kyle Jennings
Karen Minatelli
Teal Thompson

Altos

Jennifer Anvari
Sarah Coster
Emily Goodell
Kristi Meacham

Tenors

Cameron Farley
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Basses

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Society's 1991-92 season, he was Composer-in-Residence for the Fairfax Symphony Orchestra and was working as a broadcaster for WETA-FM. Today composition is doing a better job of supporting him.

In 1991 he established his own music publishing company, Dunstan House. He comments: "I get to control what pieces are published, which ones stay in print, how they are marketed and what their price will be. The cons are that owning it all means funding it all, risking it all, mastering it all and endlessly worrying about it all."

I had the privilege of interviewing him for program notes when we performed his commissioned work in 1992. He told me that his philosophy of choral composition is firmly rooted in a belief that the words themselves must contain music. *Sing me to heaven* has the added advantage that the poet Jane Griner is his wife. It is a best-selling choral anthem, and is frequently sung for memorial services or as comfort for the terminally ill. Is it a religious song? Is it a love song? Maybe the answer is "both."

City called heaven is a gospel song or spiritual, with no known composer or single source. This type of music is generally learned by oral imitation, and published choral arrangements are not always easy to find. Fortunately, a music publisher heard this piece performed by the All-City Youth Chorus of the Chicago Public Schools. At the time it did not exist in written form. **Josephine Poelinitz**, an Elementary Music Resource Specialist for the Chicago Public Schools, who has composed and arranged music for schools, churches and the community, was persuaded to create a publishable arrangement. She holds a Bachelor's degree from DePaul University and a Master's degree from National Louis University, and serves on the Music Education Advisory Board of Northeastern University. Her arrangement gave Alexandria Choral Society a fine song about heaven with which to end the program.

~ Mimi Stevens



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ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Founded in 1970, the **Alexandria Choral Society** aspires to enhance the cultural life of the city of Alexandria and surrounding communities by presenting diverse and engaging musical programs at the highest artistic level. ACS ensembles consistently offer meaningful and exciting musical experiences to both singers and audiences through diverse repertoire, education, community outreach, and performance excellence.



Brian Gendron serves as Artistic Director of Alexandria Choral Society. Since joining the organization in 2009, the choir has shared the stage with the Alexandria Symphony Orchestra for Mozart's *Requiem*, Orff's *Carmina Burana*, Verdi's *Messa da Requiem*, Holst's *The Planets*, and the world premiere of Kim Allen

Kluge's *River Poem*. They have presented Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9*, Brahms' *Schicksalslied*, Haydn's *The Creation*, Pärt's *Berliner Messe*, and Vivaldi's *Gloria*, and have led Handel's *Messiah* at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Pro Coro Alexandria, a chamber choir founded in 2012 as the organization's outreach ensemble, premiered Truman Harris and David Teie's *...again and ever again* with Eclipse Chamber Orchestra. They have also collaborated with Virginia Chamber Orchestra and performed at the National Gallery of Art.

With a great passion for choral-orchestral repertoire, Gendron was on the podium for Brahms' *Ein deutsches Requiem*, Beethoven's *Mass in C*, Haydn's *Lord Nelson Mass*, and Mozart's *Coronation Mass*. He prepared Stravinsky's *Symphony of Psalms* for the Roanoke Symphony Orchestra and Vaughan Williams' *Dona Nobis Pacem* for the New River Valley Symphony. Gendron conducted the Kansas City Baroque Consortium in a performance of Handel's *Dixit Dominus*, and led a series of concerts featuring the cantatas of J.S. Bach, as well as his *Mass in B minor*.

Previously, Gendron served as Artistic Director of the Grammy Award winning Maryland Boy Choir, who appeared at the Music Center at Strathmore and Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center, as well as in concert performances of Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* with Mariinsky Opera and Puccini's *La Bohème* with Baltimore Concert Opera. His previous teaching appointments include Conductor-in-Residence at Hollins University and Director of Choral Activities at Virginia Tech. His university ensembles appeared in Carnegie Hall, Brooklyn Academy of Music's Howard Gilman Opera Theater, and the Washington National Cathedral.

Gendron served as Chorus Master for Opera Roanoke productions of Handel's *Acis and Galatea*, Britten's *Noye's Fludde*, Verdi's *Macbeth* and *Otello*, and Beethoven's *Fidelio*. He also joined the American Opera Theater team for Charpentier's *David et Jonathas*, Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*, Blow's

Venus and Adonis, and a staged production of Handel's *Messiah*. Gendron conducted the world premiere of Sean Pflueger's *Children in the Mist* for Riverbend Opera and was Music Director for Michael Gordon's *Lightning at Our Feet*, which was co-produced by Virginia Tech Theater Arts and New York City's Ridge Theater.

Gendron earned degrees from Central Michigan University and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He has presented interest sessions and conducted invitational performances for the American Choral Directors Association, Virginia Music Educators Association, and Virginia Music Teachers Association. Gendron currently leads the choirs at St. James Catholic Church in Falls Church, Virginia.



Robin Beckman enjoys a versatile career as a pianist and singer working as a soloist, chamber ensemble singer, piano teacher and accompanist. With a voice that "gently glides into heaven" (*Washington Examiner*), she has performed with the Bach Consort, the Boston Early Music Fringe Festival, Washington Master Chorale, at the National Cathedral, and in the quartet Third Practice, which got rave reviews in both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* for its performance of Andriessen's *La Commedia* with the Great Noise Ensemble. You can also hear her on the

Dorian Sono Luminus label singing the Bach Motets and Carissimi's *Jephthe*, in which she is a soloist. As a pianist, she also accompanies Six Degree Singers, a choir based in Silver Spring, MD. She studied at Shenandoah University where she accompanied several ensembles, master classes and recitals.



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