



presents

THE TCU CONCERT CHORALE



PORTRAITS OF AMERICA

SATURDAY, APRIL 25TH
VAN CLIBURN CONCERT HALL AT TCU AT 7:00PM

PROGRAM

You are welcome

Gather at the River Robert Lowry, arr. Stacey Gibbs
Ambe Cory Campbell, arr. Andrew Balfour
My Lord, What a Morning arr. Harry T. Burleigh

The Struggle

When Thunder Comes Mari Esabel Valverde
Haley Bruns, Joseph Donohue, Logan Scott, *percussionists*

My Plea Michael Momohara
Nathan Hoang, *cellist*

Now We Can Begin Arianne Abela

Visions of Liberty: Past, Present, and Future

Colossus: Mother of Exiles Christopher Aspaas
1. Mother of Exiles
2. Liberty Enlightening
3. From her beacon-hand
4. Star Colossus
5. Give me your tired
Gwendolyn Alfred, *soprano* & James Rodriguez, *baritone*

We Are the People

Lift Every Voice Johnson & Chea, arr. Geiger
We the People Christopher Aspaas

PORTRAITS OF AMERICA

This concept for this program emerged from the need to select pieces for a 'patriotic' event I conducted in Carnegie Hall in March for the 250th anniversary of the United States of America. When I received this charge, I was not in a very patriotic spirit, and wrestled with what words and music I could select that would fulfill the requirements and express my feelings (and also be excellently prepared in four rehearsals with high school students from across the country).

As I searched and began to assemble that program, I decided to design a program for the Concert Chorale with the same intention: to celebrate America with musical portraits that tell a story of this nation. You will experience works by African American, Japanese American, Mexican American, and First Nations composers and arrangers as well as music and lyrics inspired by the Suffrage movement in addition to several works I have recently composed.

My hope is that we can together experience a more expansive understanding of who "We the People" are through this program, and enter into the celebration of our nation's anniversary with a spirit of welcome towards all who have made this nation what it is today and what it may become.

Gather at the River is a proclamation of welcome to all.

We open with a virtuosic jazz and Gospel-inspired setting of the well-known American hymn, *Shall We Gather at the River*. Gibbs opens with a group of soloists singing portions of *Deep River* combined with *Shall We Gather*. The choir then enters with scintillating harmonies followed by a more traditional rendering of the hymn with hints of the musical excitement to come later in the piece.

Gather at the River

Shall we gather at the river,
Where bright angel feet have trod;
With its crystal tide forever
Flowing by the throne of God?

[*Refrain*] *Yes, we'll gather at the river,
The beautiful, the beautiful river;
Gather with the saints at the river
That flows by the throne of God.*

On the margin of the river,
Washing up its silver spray,
We will walk and worship ever,
All the happy golden day.

Refrain

Soon we'll reach the shining river,
Soon our pilgrimage will cease;
Soon our happy hearts will quiver
With the melody of peace.

Refrain

From the composer:

This piece is based on an original song in Ojibwe that was gifted by traditional drummer and singer Cory Campbell to Andrew Balfour and the University of Manitoba Concert Choir. Cory describes the song as “a call to the people to the ceremonial way of life or to the red road or, quite frankly, to whatever we have going on, because everything happens with spirit and in spirit.”

Andrew has created an original composition inspired by Cory’s song which uses the same text and echoes the steady rhythm of the drum, unifying the piece. The melodies of Andrew’s piece are all original but hints of Cory’s song remain. For Andrew, the steady beat throughout represents the heartbeat of Mother Earth and the lyrical first soprano melody that emerges from this rhythmic texture at measure seven conveys the powerful totem of the eagle which represents the teaching of love, wisdom, and strength.

Ambe

*Ambe Anishinaabeg
biindigeg Anishinaabeg
Mino-bimaadiziwin omaa
Ambe*

Come in
Come in, two-legged beings
come in all people
There is good life here
Come in!

Hymnals usually print this nineteenth-century African American spiritual the way James Weldon Johnson and *Evangelical Worship* do, but Erskine Peters spells “morning” as “mourning.” The *African American Heritage Hymnal*, which uses the spelling “morning,” gives Matthew 24:29 as the biblical reference - “Immediately after the suffering of those days the sun will be darkened...and the stars will fall from heaven” - which fits the hymn’s refrain quite closely. As is typical of African American hymnody, a number of biblical passages attend this hymn...among them 1 Corinthians 15:52 and Revelation 6:13.

-Paul Westermeyer, *Hymnal Companion to ELW*

Harry T. Burleigh (1866-1949) is one of the first African Americans lauded for his concert arrangements of the Spiritual for the solo voice and choir. This work, *My Lord, What a Morning*, though simple in its ‘hymn-like’ structure, contains brilliant colors and dramatic moments throughout.

My Lord, What a Morning

My Lord, what a morning,
When the stars begin to fall.

Done quite all my worldly ways,
Join that heavenly band.

My Lord, what a morning,
When the stars begin to fall.

—*Traditional Spiritual*

From the composer:

"When Thunder Comes" is a celebration of American civil rights heroes: Sylvia Méndez, who challenged California's justice system in a fight for racial desegregation of schools; Helen Zia, Chinese-American lesbian feminist author, journalist, Fulbright scholar, and activist for peace; Harvey Milk, the first openly gay elected official in California's history, remembered as a vocal gay rights advocate; and Freedom Summer's "soldiers," who risked their lives in their movement to enfranchise black voters in Mississippi of the 1960's.

Calling attention to our history's systemic erasure of the stories of marginalized human beings in the United States, Lewis' sonnet presents a powerful model for patriotism. The drums, a figurative representation of a grass roots revolution, provide thunder, and the singing relays the message that, once unified, our individual voices can come together and "drown out fear."

Award-winning transgender Mexican-American composer Mari Esabel Valverde has been commissioned by the American Choral Directors Association, Boston Choral Ensemble, Cantus, the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses, Los Angeles Master Chorale, One Voice Mixed Chorus, Portland's Resonance Ensemble, Seattle Men's and Women's Choruses, the Texas Music Educators Association, and the University of Michigan Men's Glee Club. A native of North Texas, she holds degrees from St. Olaf College, the European American Musical Alliance in Paris, France, and San Francisco Conservatory of Music. She is a member of ASCAP and the American Choral Directors Association.

When Thunder Comes

The poor and dispossessed take up the drums
For civil rights—freedoms to think and speak,
Petition, pray, and vote. When thunder comes,
The civil righteous are finished being meek.

Why Sylvia Méndez bet against long odds,
How Harvey Milk turned hatred on its head,
Why Helen Zia railed against tin gods,
How Freedom Summer's soldiers faced the dread
Are tales of thunder that I hope to tell
From my thin bag of verse for you to hear
In miniature, like ringing a small bell,
And know a million bells can drown out fear.
For history was mute witness when such crimes
Discolored and discredited our times.

—*J. Patrick Lewis (b. 1942)*

From the composer:

The internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II caused the suffering and fragmentation of many families. One internee, Mary T. Matsuzawa, authored a prayerful poem entitled “My Plea” that I see as expressing her thoughts on freedom, equality, and servitude as a “cross-bearer” for the Japanese-American people. Musical imagery, text painting, and historical context are used to craft a choral setting of Matsuzawa’s poem, scored for SATB mixed choir and cello. The purpose of this work is both to draw attention to the Japanese-American internment and to portray Matsuzawa’s suffering and longing while displaying the hope and comfort she had as a result of her faith in God.

Prior to composing, I studied historical context. Matsuzawa lived in Pasadena, California, but was interned in Gila River War Relocation Center in Rivers, Arizona. She attended the center’s Butte High School. Her poem was published, with poems by others from this school, in the collection *Cactus Blossoms 1945*. Although Gila was one of the less-oppressive internment camps, having for examples only a single watchtower and no barbed wire, overcrowding and harsh desert climates caused water shortages and heatstroke/hypothermia. Other concerns included exposure to poisonous wildlife such as rattlesnakes and scorpions. Knowledge of these conditions was important in guiding my interpretation of Matsuzawa’s poem and ultimately served as a foundation upon which I shaped the musical atmosphere.

To see the poetry collection, click the following link:
<https://digicoll.lib.berkeley.edu/record/173902?v=pdf>

MY PLEA

by Mary Matsuzawa

Oh God, I pray that I may bear a cross
To set my people free,
That I may help to take good-will across
An understanding sea.

Oh God, I pray that someday every race
May stand on equal plane
And prejudice will find no dwelling place
In a peace that all may gain.



My Plea

Oh God, I pray that I may bear a cross
To set my people free,
That I may help to take good-will across
An understanding sea.
Oh, God, I pray that someday every race
May stand on equal plane
And prejudice will find no dwelling place
In a peace that all may gain.

—*Mary T. Matsuzawa*

This work by composer Arianne Abela and poet Ruthie Prillman was inspired by the words and work of Suffragist, Crystal Eastman (1881-1928).

"Most women will agree that August 23, the day when the Tennessee legislature finally enacted the Federal suffrage amendment, is a day to begin with, not a day to end with. Men are saying perhaps "Thank God, this everlasting woman's fight is over!" But women, if I know them, are saying, "Now at last we can begin." In fighting for the right to vote most women have tried to be either non-committal or thoroughly respectable on every other subject. Now they can say what they are really after; and what they are after, in common with all the rest of the struggling world, is freedom."

- *Crystal Eastman, 1920*

Now We Can Begin

Part, oh clouds, and rise, oh sun!

Now we can begin!

Praise the work so bravely done.

Now we can begin!

Every triumph, every win,
brings the light more brightly in.

Let it shine for everyone,

now we can begin!

Flourish spirit! Echo song!

Now we can begin!

Let our passion keep us strong!

Now we can begin!

Every triumph, every win,
brings the light more brightly in.

Let it light us from within.

Now we can begin!

—*Ruthie Prillman*

From the composer:

The idea of this work began many years ago, and in recent months and years has continued to increase in relevancy and importance. Portions of Emma Lazarus' *The New Colossus*, inscribed at the base of the Statue of Liberty, once resonated loudly among the American people. Sadly, in 2024, this is longer the case for many as immigrants are vilified in the media and by political pundits.

This work is an amalgam of the original poem, *The New Colossus*, as well as contemporary contributions to the American Jewish Historical Society's Emma Lazarus Project and Poetry Contest. The first additional poem, *Liberty Enlightening*, speaks from the voice of Emma Lazarus as if she were alive today to see the current state of affairs for immigrants seeking refuge in our borders. The second poem, *Star Colossus*, brings to life the voice of Lady Liberty. She acknowledges the struggles that face liberty and freedom today, and also offers up the invitation: "If you are not welcome in the new world, you are still welcome in the sky with me."

Colossus: Mother of Exiles

1. A Mighty Woman (Chorus)

*Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame,
With conquering limbs astride from land to land;
Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand
A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame
Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name
Mother of Exiles.*

2. Liberty Enlightening (Baritone)

Mother of Exiles—conceived in abolitionist dream
but still barely rid of the shackle and chain at your feet—
you struggle to stand erect; this vision you’ve yet to meet.
Your torch, raised as welcome beacon, is now dim in its gleam.

I inscribed your legacy: Pledge cover, offer refuge!
Today you are a lightning rod against their fueled terrors.
The engineers of your future fear more than their error;
they are steeled in defense,

bracing against the deluge of the world’s yearning,
turning you from guardian to guard of the wretched.

These days the battered come through other ways
no longer at Ellis but at Rio Grande or Otay.

In your stead, uniformed CBP at borders
have barred the paths to hope,
blocked off these passages stained with tears,
leaving only mirage and the verdigris of your years.

“Liberty Enlightening” Copyright © 2021 A. Thu Ngo. Used by permission.

3. From her beacon-hand (Chorus)

*From her beacon-hand
Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command
The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame.
“Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!” cries she
With silent lips.*

*“Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”*

4. Star Colossus (Soprano)

I was born a giant. I held fire
in one hand, the book of justice
in the other. I was born to metal
and flame, the rain and sea
cooled me, I greened as a forest
as the water rose. It is not enough
to pull into my harbor. Now
I stand at a locked door
without gold. The waters will rise
and rise and my fire cannot burn
underwater. Instead
each joint and joist of me
will rise in a constellation.

I will burn among the stars, visible
from any ocean. If you are not welcome
in the new world, you are still
welcome in the sky with me.

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5. Give me your tired (Chorus, Baritone, Soprano)

Give me your tired, give me your poor.

Baritone:

*A mighty woman with a torch,
whose flame
is the imprisoned lightning*

Soprano:

I lift my lamp beside the golden door.

*From her beacon-hand
Glows the world-wide welcome.*

And her name Mother of Exiles.

*Give me your tired, your poor,
the wretched refuse.
Send these, the tempest-tost to me.*

*Give me,
Send these,
the homeless,
the huddled masses,
yearning,
yearning.*

Breathe free.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, some African American men wanted to honor Abraham Lincoln and his Emancipation Proclamation, so they asked James Weldon Johnson to write something. He wrote this text, and in 1900, on February 12, Lincoln's birthday, a chorus of school children at the all-black Stanton School in Jacksonville, Florida, sang it at an assembly honoring Lincoln. School children elsewhere in Florida picked it up, it spread beyond that state, and by mid-century it had become known as the "Negro National Anthem." It is poetry that celebrates liberty without neglecting the reality of the "stony road" and the "blood of the slaughtered." Remarkably, it moves with hope through the "silent tears" without the fury that could easily be expected.

-Paul Westermeyer, Hymnal Companion to ELW

Lift Every Voice

Lift every voice and sing,
'til earth and heaven ring!
Ring with the harmonies of liberty!
Let our rejoicing rise
high as the listening skies;
let it resound loud as the rolling sea!
Sing a song full of the faith
that the dark past has taught us.
Sing a song full of the hope
that the present has brought us.
Facing the rising sun
of our new day begun,
let us march on
'til victory is won!

From the composer:

As the 250th anniversary of the United States approaches, the nation finds itself deeply divided. Creating and celebrating music for this moment has been both urgent and challenging. In search of inspiration, I turned to the words of the country's founding documents and voices—reading letters and texts from before and during the American Revolution and found renewed comfort in the ideals they articulate.

This choral work weaves together adapted texts from the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, and Emma Lazarus's *The New Colossus*, affirming a shared identity that embraces difference while insisting on common humanity. My hope is that musicians preparing and performing this piece will feel a deeper connection to the principles upon which the United States was founded, and to one another as *We the People*.

We the People

We the People

We are the People.

—*The Constitution of the United States*

We are the young,

We are the old,

We are the rich,

We are the poor,

We are parents, fathers, mothers,

We are siblings, sisters, brothers,

sons, and daughters,

We are the People.

We are learners,

We are leaders,

We are neighbors,

We are strangers,

the wretched refuse yearning to breathe free,

—*Emma Lazarus, The New Colossus, alt.*

We are the same,

We are different,

We are.

We hold these Truths:

That We are created equal,

That We are endowed with certain absolute Rights,

Life, Liberty,

and the Pursuit of Happiness.

—*The Declaration of Independence, alt.*

We the People.

We are the People.

CONCERT CHORALE

Christopher Aspaas, *conductor*

Rashaad Calaham & Sarah Gould, *assistant conductors*

Cecilia Lo-Chien Kao, *collaborative pianist*

Mary Grace Abney

Giri Anup

Adam Arntson

Elliot Banks

Rashaad Calaham

Casey Caldwell

Kolby Carpenter

Kimy Coe

Hannah Chapman

Telvin Culberson

Kaylyn Davis

Kai Diamond

Ahmed Elghazali

Karolina Flores

Jordana Garcia

Sarah Gould

Zach Harlow

Owen Harvey

Samantha Irvin

TJ Kuon

Kaylynn Langham

Sara Lwin

Cate McCorquodale

Golda Marcello

Adrian Martinez

Tim McCracken

David McDaniel

Dory McDonald

Ethan McGregor

Danna Melendez

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