

43RD SEASON

connections



Sacred & Profane, a chamber chorus presents

Make Our World Anew: Black Voices Matter

Virtual Concert Broadcast | Saturday, March 20, 2021 | 6pm

PROGRAM

To Sit and Dream

Rosephanye Dunn Powell

Til Ungdommen

Nordahl Grieg and Otto Mortensen; Arr. Henning Sommerro

Martyrs

Trevor Weston

Emergence in Four Parts

Kim Fowler

We Are

Ysaÿe Barnwell



PROGRAM NOTES & TEXTS

From Artistic Director, Rebecca P.N. Seeman:

It's been a year since the world went into lockdown, and a year since Sacred and Profane decided to face the moment head-on and forge a new ambitious path. This second concert in our remote season includes new virtual choir videos (compilations of singers' individual videos woven together by my partner Pete Gontier to tell beautiful cinematic stories) and a remarkable new commission from Trevor Weston – a remote piece where we sing together in real time online, embracing the latency, or lag time, that comes with making music on Zoom. While we still desperately miss singing together in the same space, we're grateful for the opportunity to come together on Monday nights as we always have to talk, connect, and sing.

In addition to the current health pandemic caused by the Coronavirus, this past year has made it all too clear that we are in the throes of another pandemic that has raged in our country for over four hundred years – that of slavery and its ugly offspring, racism in both institutional and personal forms. As a choral ensemble in one of the most diverse regions in the world, Sacred and Profane could not remain silent. In June, I signed the Black Voices Matter pledge that calls on choral musicians to program music by Black and Brown composers throughout our seasons. In our December concert, we brought you *Frè O*, a cry for healing from Haiti, and Stacey Gibbs' profound arrangement of *There is a Balm in Gilead*. In this concert – ***Make Our World Anew: Black Voices Matter*** – we amplify the voices of composers who are addressing issues of racism and violence in their music.

We recognize that this is just the beginning of our commitment to anti-racism and that we have much work to do. We acknowledge that we have failed to fully realize our mission to be dedicated to diversity by not considering the diversity of our own community in our selection of music, our choice of musical collaborations, and our care for those around us. We are committed to doing better going forward, beginning with this concert.

Please visit our website sacredandprofane.org/equity to read our new statement and plan of action for ongoing access, diversity, equity, and inclusion. Read the full Black Voices Matter Pledge blackvoicesmatterpledge.org.



Rosephanye Dunn Powell: *To Sit and Dream* (2010)

Text: Langston Hughes

Original Poem Title: "To You"

*To sit and dream, to sit and read
To sit and learn about the world
Outside our world of here and now –
Our problem world –
To dream of vast horizons of the soul
Through dreams made whole,
Unfettered free – help me!
All you who are dreamers, too,
Help me to make our world anew.
I reach out my dreams to you.*

When I was researching music for this concert last summer, I asked my friend and colleague, La Nell Martin, Artistic Director of the Oakland Youth Choir, for suggestions for Black and Brown composers. She sent me several names, including that of Rosephanye Dunn Powell. I logged into Dr. Powell's website and discovered a gifted composer, scholar, and singer who had produced a treasure trove that spans several genres and styles of choral music. I fell in love with her evocative setting of Langston Hughes poem *To You*, in which he returns to the idea of dreaming as a vehicle for imagining an alternative, better world wherein people of color enjoy the same access to happiness, success, and security that White people take for granted. Unlike his better known poem and call to action *I Dream a World*, which was the inspiration for Dr. King's famous speech, *To You* considers the interior intellectual life of a man who is safe and comfortable in his own home, surrounded by his books and the written reports in the news about current events and civil unrest .

When Dr. Powell joined our rehearsal to discuss her piece, we were inspired by her commitment to Hughes' message and personality, including a piano part that plays tribute to Hughes mastery as a jazz pianist and member of the vibrant Harlem jazz scene in the 1950s and 60s. Dr. Powell also spoke about how she approached the sense of wandering in a dream-space with her wafting melodies and the way those melodies intertwine to evoke coming together in a struggle for justice for which the poem implores. Many thanks to our Jeremy Davidson for leading a detailed discussion of Hughes' life and work.



Til Ungdommen (To Youth), Arr. Henning Sommerro (1988)

Original Music: Otto Mortensen (1951)

Text: Nordahl Grieg (1936)

Kringsatt av fiender, gå inn i din tid! Besieged by enemies, your time has come!
Under en blodig storm, vi dig till strid. In this bloody storm, take up the fight!
Kanskje du spør i angst, Perhaps you are fearful,
udekket, åpen: out in the open and with no cover.
hva skal jeg kjempe med, What will I fight with,
hva er mitt våpen? what is my weapon?

Her er ditt vern mot vold, This is your shield against violence,
her er ditt sverd: this is your sword:
troen på livet vårt, the belief in life
menneskets verd. and in the worth of humankind.

For all vår fremtids skyld, For the sake of our future,
søk det og dyrk det, seek it and nurture it,
dø om du må - men die if you must, but
øk det og styrk det! make it grow and make it strong.

Stilt går granatenes Steadily down the line
glidende bånd. the canon shells surge on.
Stans deres drift mot død, Stop their deadly drive.
stans dem med ånd! Stop them with your spirit!
Krig er forakt for liv. War is contempt for life.
Fred er å skape. Peace is creative.
Kast dine krefter inn: Throw all your strengths into it.
døden skal tape! Death shall not prevail!

Edelt er mennesket, The human race is noble,
jorden er rik! and the earth is rich!
Finnes her nød og sult, If there is want and hunger,
skyldes det svik. blame treachery.
Knus det! I livets navn Stamp it out! In the name of life
skal urett falle. injustice shall fall.
Solskinn og brød og ånd Sunshine and bread and spirit
eies av alle. belong to all of us.

Da synker våpnene Then weapons will sink
maktesløs ned! powerlessly down!
Skaper vi menneskeverd, If we build respect for humanity
skaper vi fred. we build peace.
Den som med høyre arm He who with a raised hand
bærer en byrde, carries a burden,
dyr og umistelig, sacred and inalienable

kan ikke myrde. can not kill.

*Dette er løftet vårt This is our promise
fra bror til bror: from brother to brother:
vi vil bli gode mot we will be good to
menneskes jord. our earth.
Vi vil ta vare på We will take care of
skjønnheten, varmen - beauty, warmth –
som om vi bar et barn as if we gently carry
varsomt på armen! a child in our arms!*

Sacred and Profane has been bringing you the music of Scandinavia for years, but I don't believe we've introduced a discussion about the Scandinavian socio-political experiment to create a society that supports the basic needs of its citizens. The Norwegian poet and musician Nordahl Grieg's 1936 poem *Til Ungdommen (To Youth)* calls for a world that banishes war and instead embraces care and love for our fellow humans and the earth that we inhabit. Written when the threat of fascism was very real in Europe and set in 1951 to music by Otto Mortensen, the poem evokes the motivation for the Scandinavian socialist-democratic political system that was adopted soon thereafter, a system to which many people in the United States are now turning for a more positive example of what government can be.

On July 22, 2011, Anders Behring Breivik, a thirty-two-year-old Norwegian right-wing terrorist, led a violent crusade against people he considered supportive of Islam and a feminist European society. He set off a car bomb outside government buildings in Oslo, killing eight of his fellow countrymen. Dressed as a policeman, he then managed to evade police, traveled twenty-five miles by car, crossed a river by ferry, and arrived on the small island of Utøya where the Norwegian Workers' Youth League was holding a summer camp. There he shot and killed sixty-nine more people, some of them at point blank range. His victims included fifty-five teenagers, one of whom was fourteen. Following Breivik's attack, people in Norway flocked to the streets to sing *Til Ungdommen* to affirm their support for the values that threaten and frighten people like Breivik.

Every time I think about the day the news of this attack spread across the world, tears overcome me. As a Swede, I have always been proud that my mother's country, along with other Scandinavian and European countries, has chosen a more positive, humanity-affirming path than seen in many other parts of the world, including our own country. To see right-wing extremist ideals reemerge in Scandinavia (because we cannot turn a blind eye to that region's own flirtation with fascism in the past) has been enormously upsetting to me. Sacred and Profane is bringing you *Til Ungdommen* in this concert not only to commemorate the 10th-anniversary of the

massacre, but to proclaim our commitment to anti-racism and our rejection of violence as a means to assert dominance over others.

Many thanks to our resident Swede Tomas Hallin for leading our discussion of *Til Ungdommen*.



Trevor Weston: *Martyrs* (2020)

Text: Anonymous, from the isorhythmic motet by Guillaume Dufay, Psalm 39, Trevor Weston

(Anonymous, from the isorhythmic motet by Guillaume Dufay):

O saint Sebastian

Protect and preserve me

And keep away from me,

The evil illness called epidemic.

O saint Sebastian

Protect and preserve me

And keep away from me,

The evil illness called epidemic.

(Psalm 39):

I held my tongue, and spake nothing,

I kept silence, but it was pain and grief to me.

My heart was hot within me, and while I was thus

Musing the fire kindled, and at last I spake with my tongue:

(Trevor Weston):

“I can’t breathe!”

(Psalm 39):

Lord, let me know mine end. Take thy plague

Away from me, make me not a rebuke unto the foolish.

O Saint Sebastian

In their suffering you used to console the martyrs and promise them eternal life and the life due to martyrs.

Amen.

In the past year, many conductors have turned to Marques L.A. Garrett’s remarkable list of idiomatic and non-idiomatic music by African and African Diaspora composers. Last summer, I

relished examining the music of the many composers Dr. Garrett includes. Toward the end of this alphabetical list I arrived at the name Trevor Weston and I started to investigate. I am still left with a gaping question – why was this the first time I was hearing about this composer? Not only had he been engaged in his master’s and Ph.D. studies in composition at UC Berkeley around the same time I was a music student at UC Santa Cruz, but his work had been championed by Marika Kuzma, who was UC Berkeley’s Director of Choral Activities for many years, a former conductor of Sacred and Profane, and the close friend of our one original S&P singer George-Ann Bowers. More importantly, Trevor’s is the kind of choral music that I relish – deeply moving and emotional and at the same time unabashedly intellectual and unafraid to take risks and explore the edges of what choral music can be. I encourage you all to view our Composer Connections series installment on Dr. Weston and his music, which you can link to on our website at sacredprofane.org/trevor-weston.

Since Trevor’s existing choral music is too demanding for a virtual choir video, I reached out to him to see if he would consider a commission from S&P for a work that could be rehearsed and performed remotely, ideally a piece that addresses the call for meaningful and lasting action regarding police violence against African Americans. He responded that he was working on a similar commission for C4 Ensemble, a consortium of triple-threat composer-singer-conductors, and suggested that C4 might agree to a co-commission. Little did he know that S&P performed C4’s Karen Siegel’s *Ana El Na* in our December 2020 concert and joined a consortium commission project for her *Meditation* that will be included in our June 2021 concert, and that I have relied on her innovation and support regarding remote singing since this new reality began last spring. Happily, C4 agreed to a co-commission, and Trevor proceeded to compose two versions of *Martyrs* that consider each ensemble’s technical requirements. Learning this powerful piece has been an exciting challenge that has stretched us and that we’ve been longing for since we went remote. I am grateful to Trevor for speaking with me at length about music in general and his music in particular and for attending an entire Pacific Standard Time evening Zoom rehearsal all the way from his home in New York City (the same day that the American Academy of Arts and Letters Announced Trevor as a 2021 recipient of its Awards in Music) to coach *Martyrs* and help us arrive at a more authentic performance of this trailblazing work.

Trevor writes about *Martyrs*:

Years ago, I gave a lecture on early Renaissance music and played *O Sainte Sebastian* by Guillaume Dufay. The words summoned the saint to spare the population from the bubonic plague. What struck me about the piece, beyond its beauty, was the use of the most formal and complex form of choral composition at the time, an isorhythmic motet, to comment on an important contemporary concern. In essence, Dufay used his strongest compositional tools to address an important societal problem.

In the past, I have looked to the *Psalms of David* when I wanted text to communicate individual human despair. The summer of 2020 combined the COVID plague with numerous examples of African Americans dying as a result of excessive police actions. The fear associated with both issues seemed similar to me; fear that, in the course of going about your day, you could be “caught” by a life-ending intrusion. The inability to breathe is a symptom of both afflictions. The words used too often by those suffering from excessive police force, “I can’t breathe” was also the common complaint of those suffering from COVID-19. I inserted this phrase in the excerpt from Psalm 39 that I used for *Martyrs*.

The deaths of most people afflicted by both plagues during the summer of 2020 could have been avoided. A similar response to both situations was disbelief of the severity of the problem or a disbelief in the veracity of the problem. For this reason, I consider the now 210,000+ COVID deaths in the US and the deaths of Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Elijah McClain, et al. as unnecessary and easily avoided. Martyrs have always been a warning to the living to act before and not after the loss of life. I composed *Martyrs* to honor their lives and hopefully encourage the rest of us to stop future senseless deaths.



Kim Fowler: *Emergence in Four Parts* (2020)
Poem and performance by Kim Fowler

I.

*I am brittle
as shale
Constant pounding
shards me into
cuts
of history
that singe
choke
slice
drown.
Tear-blind
I plummet
through
400 years of
appropriation
brutality*

*defiance
drubbing
until
my fall is broken by
the unyielding resistance
of beloved family stories.
I clutch each fragment
like a baby discovering its
finger strength.
I suckle
and am lulled by
memories that soothe,
then
cry out
in startled agony
in swallowing a scrap
a bit
that
scorches
and burns.*

II.

*The earth hears my need for easing,
cool water bubbles up to meet my hands.
Within its shallow running are reflected back to me
ancestors, unknown and known.
Yvonne the mother of my body and heart
Josephine my mother's mother, a brilliant beauty, and her sister Margaret,
both dying too young
Mama Hadley, my great grandmother, born at the end of slavery
Claude the plantation owners' son and my great grandfather
Mabel the enterprising who birthed my father
and my aunt Dorothy, who loved me like a daughter
George my father, who protected me with fearful love
Great grandfather Anthony, the wealthy and creative narcissist
Herman my Grand-Pere, the "Sarge" who warred with everyone but me
They surround me, hold me, knit me up, restore me.
They sing to me songs of Virginia and Illinois, of Missouri and Cameroon,
of Nigeria and Wales.
They crack Black jokes that Claude doesn't get.
They sing pub tunes from the Lake District in England.
They dance jigs and the Ekombi and swing.
They tell me they are my strength
and that the land will always save us,
the land will always save me.*

*They lay me down in love by the spring
in which float and swirl mementos
I'm never to forget
and never to let them harm me.
In time my ancestors dissolve into themselves
so that I may awake.*

III.

*I am raw
my skin
separated from my body.
I have laid myself down on the sacrificial stone
and handed the knife
to the gentle white women
who
unconsciously
flay me.
They wrap my skin in a
gift bag.
Smiling
they hand it back to me
then leave.
The fire of the pain
cannot be wailed or moaned away
it can only
burn
and
burn
and
burn
until it
tires,
until it
hisses into
air.
My ancestors cradle me
and I sigh into their arms.
I open the bag
and a sudden brilliance plays upon my face.
Gently
softly
my relations
reach in, then
piece by beautiful piece
place my skin,*

*brown with tones of red
like the scored bark of a Sequoia,
like southwestern dirt,
upon my smoldering body.
They blow cool breath
to quiet the embers
and still my heart.
I slip slowly into sleep
dreaming of sweet home Chicago
the place of my birth.*

IV.

*I am a gardener.
Collards and cucumber
tomato and tomatillo
rosemary and kale
tiny and tender
grow
under my gaze.
Their lives are in my hands
and mine is restored through their
glorious
burst from
seed.*

One advantage of rehearsing remotely is that singers are able to join us from great distances, and we've been able to connect with musicians from Canada to the Southwest, where alto Kim Fowler—one of our newest members—resides. Our weekly online rehearsals create a space for members to express thoughts and feelings, engage in critical discussions of our repertoire's texts and histories, and digest our tumultuous world together in a format that celebrates each member's unique talents. Kim, an accomplished author, shared a performance of her powerful poem *Emergence in Four Parts* that she wrote while processing the national trauma following George Floyd's death this summer. Her beautifully crafted words touched us deeply, and her description of the creative process as an act of healing resonated with our ethos for this season's programming: that music and art are expressions of our shared humanity that connect, empower, inspire, and heal us.

Kim writes:

I am pulled to write about the beauty in the land and in the spirit of humans struggling, celebrating their movement through this life. In my writing and my coaching I want to get to know what breathes below the surface that is waiting to be heard, that offers us riddles to be deciphered through dreams and visions. There is power in transparency.

Emergence in Four Parts was published in the [Winter 2021 issue of *Reinventing Home*](#), a digital magazine exploring the concept of home through a wide variety of cultural and creative lenses, from psychology to storytelling. We're proud to share this impactful work in our program, and amplify her voice and experiences. Many thanks to Kim Fowler for sharing this moving performance.

Learn more about Kim and her work at kimfowlerauthor.com



Ysaÿe Maria Barnwell: *We Are* (1991)

Performance in collaboration with Oakland Youth Chorus Chamber Singers

*For each child that's born
a morning star rises
and sings to the universe
who we are.*

*We are our grandmothers' prayers.
We are our grandfathers' dreamings.
We are the breath of our ancestors.
We are the spirit of God.*

*We are
Mothers of courage
Fathers of time
Daughters of dust
Sons of great vision.
We are
Sisters of mercy
Brothers of love
Lovers of life and
the builders of nations.
We are
Seekers of truth
Keepers of faith
Makers of peace and
the wisdom of ages.*

*We are our grandmothers' prayers.
We are our grandfathers' dreamings.
We are the breath of our ancestors.
We are the spirit of God.*

*For each child that's born
a morning star rises
and sings to the universe
who we are.*

WE ARE ONE.

In normal times, I often arrive at First Unitarian Church of Oakland around 6:30 on Monday evenings to prepare the space and my head for that night's Sacred and Profane rehearsal. If I'm lucky, I arrive early enough to hear the end of La Nell Martin's rehearsal with her Oakland Youth Chorus Chamber Singers. I'm always impressed by her spirited and supportive leadership that inspires her singers to produce a sound bigger and more powerful than I would expect from a group of young singers. La Nell has recently informed me that she then often stays late working in the OYC offices upstairs and takes in S&P's rehearsal later on those same evenings. We have gotten to know each other in the space between our respective rehearsals in our talks about the local choral music scene and our lives as women conductors. I've been thrilled to know La Nell on the sidelines as the California choral community has discovered her gifts and skills in the past few years and sought her out for multiple presentations at California Choral Directors Associations conferences and events.

La Nell and I have mused about an OYC-S&P collaboration for a few years and the current remote-choir reality in which we now live presented a perfect opportunity to create a virtual choir video together. I suggested Ysaÿe Barnwell's *We Are*, and La Nell revealed to me that OYC has a storied past with that now-popular work, as the group was one of the first to perform it and worked closely with Dr. Barnwell.

Some of you may remember Ysaÿe Barnwell as the female bass in the African American women's a cappella ensemble Sweet Honey in the Rock, which was active from 1979 to 2013. I vividly remember discovering Sweet Honey when I was an undergraduate at UCSC and couldn't stop playing their records. Dr. Barnwell is also a prolific composer – in addition to writing many of the Sweet Honey's songs, she has also been commissioned to create music for dance, film, and stage productions, as well as many popular choral works. Dr. Barnwell conducts music workshops, including a workshop she created called "Building a Vocal Community: Singing in the African American Tradition." Her piece *We Are* was written for the Oakland-based Redwood Cultural Work, a nonprofit organization that supported the LGBTQ+ community, as well as for the Boy's Choir of Harlem and the Cincinnati-based women's choir, MUSE.

In our preparation of *We Are*, S&P discussed the meaning of the text, in particular the idea that we are all imbued with the promise to fulfill our ancestor's wish for a better world. Our alto Kim Fowler, who we are fortunate to have join our remote rehearsals from her home in Santa Fe, shared with us her four-part poem about her connection to her ancestry that she wrote in the wake of George Lloyd's murder. Discussions led by Kim, her good friend and our longtime alto Dyana Vukovich, and La Nell about the significance of the text and music deepened our

connection to the work and to our own pasts – the photographs you see in our video are of our ancestors. I loved meeting the OYC singers in their Zoom rehearsal a few weeks ago. Each of the singers chose a word to describe what they’re feeling at this time in response to the many things Dr. Barnwell suggests that “we are” in her piece. Singers offered words like “hopeful,” “apprehensive,” and “determined.” Perhaps most striking was when one singer shared that she feels “tired” – tired of spending her school days on Zoom and tired of being placed in the impossible position of representing the Black experience to her mostly white and frequently insensitive classmates. This is an eye-opening lesson to all of us as we delve into this critical work to right the wrongs of the past four hundred years.

About Oakland Youth Chorus Chamber Singers:

Founded in 1974, the Oakland Youth Chorus (OYC) is the longest running youth chorus in the East Bay. Serving nearly 3000 singers and music students in East Bay programs each year, we focus on creating and sustaining programs of high educational and artistic merit that are accessible to and supportive of children and youth from all backgrounds. OYC welcomes all children and youth, celebrates their cultures and unique strengths, and connects them to each other, amplifying voices for changes needed to bring harmony to our world through music education and community performance. OYC Chamber Singers are made of young musicians grades 6–12, directed by La Nell Martin.

Learn more about Oakland Youth Chorus online at oaklandyouthchorus.org



We are grateful for the continued support of our audiences and donors during this difficult year without income from traditional ticket sales, and hope you’ll continue to support us in the future. But at this moment, we want to recognize the economic violence that has denied African American communities the same advantages afforded to white people. Rather than contributions to Sacred and Profane, we encourage you instead contribute to one of the four worthy local and national organizations below:

Oakland Youth Chorus, with whom we are excited to collaborate tonight, that makes music education and community engagement accessible to East Bay youth of all backgrounds.

<https://oaklandyouthchorus.org/>

The Sphinx Organization, a social justice organization dedicated to transforming lives through the power of diversity in the arts.

<https://www.sphinxmusic.org/>

Bay Rising, an Oakland-based organization that supports the political aspirations of young people of color.

<https://bayrising.org/>

Black Lives Matter, an organization that we are proud has its roots in the East Bay's Black Panther movement.

<https://blacklivesmatter.com/>



Sacred & Profane, A Chamber Chorus is an a cappella chamber choir founded in 1977 committed to enriching and inspiring its members and the broader community by exploring the breadth of traditional and emerging choral repertoire through authentic and exemplary performances.

WWW.SACREDPROFANE.ORG