

## **I Dream a World – Notes by Robert Gehrenbeck**

Much of this concert features the poetry of **Langston Hughes** (1902-1967), one of the leading figures of the Harlem Renaissance. Over the course of his career, Hughes worked as a journalist, essayist, novelist, poet, playwright, and librettist. Born in Joplin, Missouri, he was raised by his grandmother, a widow whose first husband had died in John Brown's raid at Harper's Ferry. She and her second husband, Hughes's grandfather, were committed abolitionists and, later, voting rights activists. His ancestors thus planted the seeds of Langston Hughes's later activism. As a young man, Hughes travelled extensively in Africa, Europe, and throughout the US and Mexico. From 1929 on, his home was Harlem. His 1951 suite of poems, *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, memorialized the New York City neighborhood and the strivings, frustrations, quotidian details, and deep pride of its inhabitants. Hughes's direct, accessible style, his unflinching engagement with social issues, and the sheer musicality of his poetry have made his works a favorite source of inspiration for composers working in a wide variety of styles, genres, and traditions.

In the early 1930s, Hughes began working with composer William Grant Still (1895-1978) on the libretto for *Troubled Island*, an opera about the Haitian Revolution. One of Hughes' most famous poems, *I Dream a World*, was originally an aria in *Troubled Island* (see below). Hughes often ended his own poetry readings with this poem, which many observers consider a source of Martin Luther King's 1961 *I Have a Dream* speech. Hughes's poem has been set to music countless times, but rarely more compellingly than by **Rosephanye Powell** (b. 1962), whose 2002 setting begins with joyful piano cascades before evolving into a more rhythmic, layered texture reminiscent of gospel music, but in a dark, agitated mood. According to the composer, the piece depicts "Mr Hughes's juxtaposition of the world that is and the world that could be." Powell is professor of voice at Auburn University in Alabama, and one of the most frequently commissioned choral composers in the US today.

Hughes's first major success as a poet came in 1921, with the publication of the poem, *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*, in *The Crisis*, the official magazine of the NAACP, founded by sociologist and civil rights leader, W.E.B. Du Bois. The poem's proud depiction of Black history was a revelation to readers at the time. The 1955 setting by **John Wesley Work, III** (1901-1967) is structured like a Renaissance motet, with each line of text receiving its own musical treatment in imitative counterpoint. Unlike other musical versions, in Work's setting, the line "I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went down to New Orleans..." is emphasized and prolonged in music that is surprisingly melancholy. The background of this line explains why: Hughes is referencing Lincoln's early trips down the Mississippi via flatboat, from Illinois to New Orleans, where the future president first witnessed large plantations and markets for the exchange of enslaved people. As the main transportation artery in the United States at the time, the Mississippi bore countless ships carrying both goods and human cargo. Whereas Hughes ends his poem with a restatement of "My soul has grown deep like the rivers," Work continues with a vigorous restatement of each river's name, leading to one final, heart-wrenching mention of "the Mississippi" in the deepest bass voices.

Besides being a prolific composer, Work was an influential ethnomusicologist specializing in spirituals, early gospel music, and blues. He was also a third-generation choral conductor, succeeding his father as the conductor of the famed Fisk Jubilee Singers at Fisk University in Nashville. He earned degrees from Fisk, Columbia, and Yale, and pursued additional studies at the Institute of Musical Arts in New York, which later became the Juilliard School.

During her lifetime, **Undine Smith Moore** (1904-1989) was known as the Dean of Black Women Composers. Her *On Imagination* sets a poem by **Phillis Wheatley** (1753-1784), a former enslaved Black who became the first published African American poet. Moore's composition was commissioned in 1981 by conductor James Kinchen, who is currently Director of Choral Activities at UW-Parkside. Her music matches Wheatley's visionary words with textures that alternate between impressionistic piano figurations and boldly juxtaposed harmonies in the chorus.

A widely respected composer and teacher, Moore was known for her strikingly original choral works, spiritual settings, instrumental music, and an oratorio on the life and legacy of Martin Luther King, *Scenes from the Life of a Martyr*. She earned degrees from Fisk University and Columbia, with additional studies at Juilliard, Eastman, and the Manhattan School of Music. Moore taught for over 60 years at Virginia State University, Petersburg, where she co-founded the university's Black Music Center. This institute served as a model for similar institutions across the US. Her students included jazz pianist Billy Taylor and operatic soprano Camilla Williams. Towards the end of her life, Moore summed up her career in words that resonate in the work of many of her fellow African American composers and performers: "In retrospect, it seems I have often been concerned with aspiration, the emotional intensity associated with the life of Black people as expressed in the various rites of the church and Black life in general—the desire for abundant, full expression as one might anticipate or expect from an oppressed people determined to survive."

*Two Dunbar Lyrics* by **Ulysses Kay** (1917-1995) pay homage to the poetry of **Paul Lawrence Dunbar** (1872-1906). The son of enslaved Blacks, Dunbar achieved widespread fame as a poet and novelist, writing in both Standard English and in African American Vernacular English. His works appeared frequently in *Harper's Weekly*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, and other journals. During a literary tour to England he befriended Afro-British composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (see below). The poems chosen by Ulysses Kay are typical of Dunbar's lyrics in their succinct depictions of natural scenes and human emotions. In Kay's first movement, "A Starry Night," a serene melody in the sopranos floats over undulating cross rhythms in the lower voices. "A Madrigal" is more involved. The cheerful opening harmonies gradually yield to increasingly dark and chromatic music as the poem becomes obsessed with thoughts of the lover's absence. Just when all seems lost, the cheerful opening music returns as the poem's final stanza confidently embraces love itself as the poet's ultimate solace.

Born in Tucson, Arizona, Kay was the nephew of jazz cornet player and bandleader Joe "King" Oliver, but he rarely alluded to jazz music in his own compositions. During his college years at the University of Arizona, he was mentored by William Grant Still. Kay's later teachers included Howard Hanson and Paul Hindemith, whose neoclassical style is evident in much of Kay's multifaceted output. He

taught for 20 years at the City University of New York, and composed in a wide variety of vocal and instrumental genres, including five operas, the last of which was *Frederick Douglass*. He was a two-time winner of the prestigious international composition prize, the Prix de Rome, along with many other accolades.

As mentioned above, Langston Hughes's poem *I Dream a World* began life as an aria in the opera *Troubled Island* by **William Grant Still**. The scene performed here is a dialogue between Jean-Jacques Dessalines, the first black leader of Haiti, and Martel, his aged advisor. Martel encourages Dessalines to enlarge his vision of freedom beyond the bounds of Haiti, the former French plantation colony newly liberated by Dessalines and his fellow revolutionary general, Toussaint Louverture.

Although Still completed *Troubled Island* in 1939, the opera was not performed until 1949, despite promised performances by multiple companies and conductors (including Leopold Stokowski), and a fund-raising campaign on behalf of the production led by Eleanor Roosevelt and New York mayor, Fiorello La Guardia during the intervening decade. At its premiere by New York City Opera, the opera received 22 curtain calls, but it was largely panned by the critics, some of whom conspired to intentionally write bad reviews to keep Still in his place, as one critic later admitted. The New York production closed after only three performances, and the opera was not revived until 2013. Still's orchestral works have enjoyed a measure success in the ensuing decades, achieving widespread popularity within the last few years. Performances of his eight operas have yet to keep pace, however.

By her own description, **Mary Watkins** (b. 1939) "is an eclectic composer and pianist of the classical and jazz traditions, often incorporating one with the other or bringing the various styles of ethnic, blues, gospel, country, folk and pop music into her original works." Her six-movement choral cycle, *We Are One*, composed in 1992, is a case in point: jazz, gospel, and contemporary a cappella styles come together to deliver cogent messages about persevering in the face of adversity, and strength in unity.

Born in Denver, Watkins attended Howard University in Washington, D.C. and worked as a jazz pianist and music director in the D.C. area before moving to Oakland, California in 1977. In Oakland she joined the staff of Olivia Records, a label devoted to promoting women's music and known for its lesbian feminist activism. Watkins released a string of well received jazz albums on Olivia, and also worked as an arranger for other Olivia artists, shaping the sound of folk music icons Cris Williamson and Meg Christian, as well as Holly Near (who had her own label). Beginning in the mid 1980s, Watkins began to devote more time to composing concert music, accepting commissions for jazz-based works as well as numerous orchestral, theatrical, and film scores. Since 2000, opera has been a major focus, resulting in a series of works centered on historical figures: *Queen Clara* (about Clara Barton, the Civil War nurse who founded the American Red Cross); *Dark River* (about voting rights activist and civil rights leader Fanny Lou Hamer); and *Universal Child: the Emmett Till Story*.

In the prologue to his suite of poems, *Montage of a Dream Deferred*, Langston Hughes embraced the influence of jazz music on his poetry while grounding his modernist literary aesthetic in the lived experience of his fellow Harlem residents:

This poem on contemporary Harlem, like be-bop, is marked by conflicting changes, sudden nuances, sharp and impudent interjections, broken rhythms, and passages sometimes in the manner of the jam session, sometimes the popular song, punctuated by the riffs, runs, breaks, and distortions of the music of a community in transition.

Composers who have set poems from this collection to music have often responded with works that feature unexpected interruptions, jarring juxtapositions, and a wide variety of jazz-influenced material.

Jazz performer, pedagogue, and composer **David N. Baker** (1931-2016) often drew on Hughes's poetry in his vocal and choral compositions. Baker's setting of the poem *Dream Boogie*, the opening poem in Hughes's *Montage*, is from an emotionally intense choral suite titled *Five Songs to the Survival of Black Children*, commissioned in 1970 by the Fisk Jubilee Singers. The remaining four movements are written in an astringent, modernist harmonic style, setting texts by other poets with more overtly political themes. Somewhat surprisingly, "Dream Boogie" is the only movement that betrays Baker's jazz credentials. But here, too, Baker does not shy away from highlighting the social criticism inherent in Hughes's poem, capturing Hughes's "conflicting changes, sudden nuances, sharp and impudent interjections" in music that is at once playful, subversive, and irreverent.

Baker's biography itself embodies the "conflicting changes" identified by Hughes. A native of Indianapolis and a highly proficient trombonist in both classical and jazz genres, during the 1950s Baker auditioned for an open position with the Indianapolis Symphony, only to be told that, even though he played better than any of the other contenders, the orchestra would not hire him because their racially exclusivist policies. As a jazz artist, Baker performed with Slide Hampton, Wes Montgomery, Lionel Hampton, George Russel, Quincy Jones, and many other jazz luminaries over the course of his career. Due to an earlier accident, Baker was forced to give up the trombone in 1962, the same year that he won the New Star Award from *DownBeat Magazine*. Undaunted, he became a jazz cellist and formed his own group, David Baker's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Bebop Band. Given the lack of jazz charts featuring cello, he began to devote more energy to composition, which had always been an interest, but which now assumed greater importance in his musical life.

In 1966, Baker was recruited by his alma mater, Indiana University, to inaugurate the first jazz studies program in the nation, at a time when many music schools expressly forbade the playing of jazz in their buildings. As one of the founders of the academic study of jazz, Baker influenced thousands of aspiring musicians through his teaching, his publications, and the work of his students—jazz performers and teachers who now span the globe. During his 46-year tenure at Indiana University, Baker was also tapped to lead the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra, founded in 1991. Throughout his teaching career, he remained active as a composer as well, penning hundreds of works for a wide variety of jazz performers and ensembles, but also classical concert works, ranging from solo instrumental and vocal pieces to large choral-orchestral works, which have been performed by the leading classical musicians of our time.

Composer **H. Leslie Adams** (b. 1932) is best known for art songs, choral music, and solo piano works, reflecting his own training as a singer, choral conductor, and pianist. His 1969 setting of the poem *Juke*

*Box Love Song* from Hughes's *Montage* is typical of Adams's style, featuring soaring, lyrical melodies and jazz-inflected harmonies. At the words "Put it on a record / let it whirl" Adams spins a web of counterpoint that seems almost improvisational, but which is, in fact, carefully planned out. The overall impression is one of tender beauty in the midst of a bustling urban landscape—"passages sometimes in the manner of a jam session, sometimes the popular song," to quote Hughes's prologue once again. A Cleveland native, Adams earned degrees from Oberlin Conservatory (where he studied voice with Robert Fountain, who later directed the choral program at UW-Madison); Cal State Long Beach; and Ohio State. In addition to the intimate vocal works which are his trademark, he has also composed large-scale instrumental works and an opera.

The most famous poem from Hughes' *Montage* is called, simply, "Harlem." In addition to many musical versions, the lines "Does it dry up / like a raisin in the sun?" inspired the award-winning 1959 play by Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*. One of the most recent settings of "Harlem" is by **Joel Thompson** (b. 1988), a composer, pianist, and conductor based in Atlanta. He is best known for his 2015 work for chorus and orchestra, *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed*, whose libretto is loosely modeled on Joseph Haydn's *Seven Last Words of Christ*. The text for each movement of Thompson's work consists of the last words of an unarmed Black man before he was killed: Kenneth Chamberlain, Trayvon Martin, Amadou Diallo, Michael Brown, Oscar Grant, John Crawford, and Eric Garner. One year later, in 2016, in response to a commission for a piece about Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, Thompson paired Hughes' "Harlem" with "Dreams," a poem from *The Dream Keeper*, a 1932 collection by Hughes. The result was a powerful choral anthem, *Hold Fast to Dreams*, which Thompson dedicated to the memory of three new Black victims of gun violence killed in 2016: MarShawn McCarrell II, a Black Lives Matter activist who committed suicide in Columbus, Ohio; and Alton Sterling and Philando Castile, who were shot by police one day apart in Baton Rouge, Louisiana and in Falcon Heights, Minnesota. The composer elaborates:

These words of Langston Hughes have proven their immortality this year in American history, and not in the way one would hope. The 1951 poem, *Harlem*, still captures the essence of disillusionment in a deceptively simple series of vivid questions. *Dreams*, a lesser-known poem, charges the reader to "hold fast to dreams" while making plain the misery of a life without them. One poem summarizes the pain of broken promises and the other encourages faith that things will get better because the alternative is absolute despair. Today's rampant cynicism casts Hughes' words in a tired light—these sentiments seem to be the stuff of childhood and naiveté—but my hope is that all who experience this piece will put aside our jaded lenses of fear and choose to be vulnerable and continue to dream.

Our concert's second half begins with three pieces by classical composers from the first half of the twentieth century. The choral miniature, *Poem of Praise*, by **Florence Price** (1888-1953) displays salient characteristics of her late Romantic style: a lyrical approach to melody, harmonic shifts that are striking but never jarring, and a naturalistic, rhythmically nuanced declamation of the text. The poem is by Elizabeth Coatsworth (1893-1986), a white New England poet.

Price's life exemplifies both the achievements and challenges that African American composers experienced in the mid-twentieth century within the US classical music establishment. Born in Little Rock, Arkansas, she studied music first with her mother and then at New England Conservatory in Boston. The Conservatory was one of the few music schools that admitted Black students at that time, but she nevertheless experienced racial prejudice to such an extent that she self-identified as Mexican during her later years there, to avoid further harassment. After graduating with degrees in organ and piano, she returned to Little Rock to teach music, and, soon thereafter, became head of the music department at Clark University in Atlanta, where she married Thomas Price, a lawyer. Back in Little Rock, the couple had two daughters, but in 1927, the family decided to move to Chicago to escape escalating racial violence in the South. Price studied composition and orchestration with leading teachers in the city, and she took on her own students, including Margaret Bonds, who became a life-long friend and a successful composer in her own right. In the early 1930s, Price achieved resounding success when the Chicago Symphony Orchestra premiered her Symphony in E minor at the 1933 World's Fair, making Price the first Black woman to have an orchestral work performed by a major American orchestra. However, this milestone did not lead to ongoing widespread acclaim for Price. Ten years later, she was still struggling to get her orchestral works performed. In a 1943 letter to Boston Symphony Orchestra conductor Serge Koussevitsky, Price wrote, "I have an unwavering and compelling faith that a national music very beautiful and very American can come from the melting pot just as the nation itself has done." Maddeningly, Koussevitsky never replied to Price about the scores she sent him to examine. She continued to compose and was especially prolific in the field of art songs and choral works.

After her death, Price's music fell into obscurity, and many of her works were nearly lost before being accidentally discovered in 2009 in a dilapidated house south of Chicago that had served as Price's summer home. Much of the current interest in Price's music stems from the work of musicologist Rae Linda Brown, who edited many of Price's works for publication, and who wrote a ground-breaking biography of the composer. In 2018, G. Schirmer purchased the rights to Price's entire catalogue of works, but the publisher has only released a small portion of her unpublished music to date, leaving two thirds of her works unavailable for performance. Fortunately, Price's music will enter in the public domain on January 1, 2024, when Price enthusiasts can expect many new editions and performances to begin appearing.

*Summer Is Gone* and *The Lee Shore* by **Samuel Coleridge-Taylor** (1875-1912) exemplify the high point of the English Romantic partsong around the turn of the twentieth century. Like similar works by his friend, Edward Elgar, as well as those by his teacher, Charles Villiers Stanford, Coleridge-Taylor's partsongs distill the emotional substance of their lyrics down to one or two overarching moods, while painting the individual words in broad brush strokes. The sweep of a phrase, an unexpected change of direction of the harmony, and the dramatic use of musical dynamics (crescendos, diminuendos, and sudden shifts between soft and loud) are the favored means of musical expression in this repertoire. The literary sources are major nineteenth-century British authors. Christina Rossetti's poem, *Bitter for Sweet*, despairs of winter's onset in eight compact lines whose emotional intensity is matched by Coleridge-Taylor's sighing melodies and heart-wrenching harmonies in *Summer is Gone*. In *The Lee*

*Shore*, a popular poem by Thomas Hood, the dangers of sailing too close to the shore during a storm become a metaphor for the precariousness of human existence. Coleridge-Taylor responded with stormy, rhythmic music in the first half of his setting, with a sudden shift to deathly still blocks of minor triads in the second half.

Coleridge-Taylor's father was a black, London-educated medical doctor from Sierra Leone, and his mother, an Englishwoman from Croydon, near London. After his father returned to West Africa to work as a surgeon, Samuel was raised by his mother's extended family. His grandfather, a blacksmith, gave him his first lessons on violin, after which Samuel received further music lessons from local professionals. He entered the Royal College of Music at age 15 and studied composition with Stanford. His first published work, a church anthem, appeared in print in 1891, testifying to the 16-year-old composer's precocity. A steady stream of works in a variety of genres followed, leading up to the large-scale cantata, *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast* of 1898. This work, based on an epic poem by Longfellow, rapidly became the most popular English oratorio of its time, and the composer soon expanded it into a trilogy known as *Scenes from the Song of Hiawatha*. The complete trilogy received hundreds of performances during the next few years, earning Coleridge-Taylor widespread acclaim on both sides of the Atlantic. Prestigious conducting and teaching positions followed, including as permanent conductor of the London Handel Society from 1904 until Coleridge-Taylor's death.

Between 1904 and 1910, Coleridge-Taylor accepted three separate invitations to tour the US as a conductor, where he became known as the "black Mahler." His 1904 performance of *Hiawatha* in Washington, D.C. featured the Samuel Coleridge-Taylor Choral Society, an all-Black chorus, accompanied by the United States Marine Band, performing to an audience of 3000. Several members of President Theodore Roosevelt's cabinet attended, and the President himself met with Coleridge-Taylor at the White House several days later. On subsequent US tours, the composer traveled as far west as Chicago, St. Louis, and Milwaukee.

Already in 1897, Coleridge-Taylor had met African American poet Paul Lawrence Dunbar in England, who strongly influenced the composer's interest in his African heritage. He also heard spirituals performed by the Fisk Jubilee Singers on several of their European tours, and he befriended African American singer/composers Henry T. Burleigh and J. Rosemund Johnson. Inspired further by the writings of Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, and W.E.B. Du Bois, Coleridge-Taylor often incorporated African themes into his compositions in a conscious effort to pay homage to the dignity of his race. About his *24 Negro Melodies, op. 59* for solo piano, the composer wrote: "What Brahms has done for the Hungarian folk music, Dvořák for the Bohemian, and Grieg for the Norwegian, I have tried to do for these Negro Melodies."

In 1912, Coleridge-Taylor died at the age of 37 from pneumonia, his health already compromised from overwork. Despite the widespread commercial success of his compositions—the publisher Novello sold hundreds of thousands of copies of the *Song of Hiawatha*, making it the most commercially successful oratorio since Mendelssohn's *Elijah*—British composers of that time rarely earned royalties. Coleridge-Taylor was forced to submit to a grueling schedule of conducting and teaching to support

his family. By the mid-twentieth century, his works passed into obscurity, but they are currently experiencing renewed attention.

Besides the inherent quality of his music, perhaps the most important aspect of Coleridge-Taylor's legacy is his influence on African American musicians and other Black cultural leaders in the US. His international artistic triumphs were a source of deep pride and inspiration for his African American contemporaries, including Burleigh, whom a critic later called "the American Coleridge-Taylor." In advance of his first US tour, Coleridge-Taylor wrote about his invitation from the Samuel Coleridge-Taylor Choral Society:

I don't think anything else would have induced me to visit America, excepting the fact of an established society of coloured singers; it is for that, first and foremost, that I am coming, and all other engagements are secondary. I am a great believer in my race, and I never lose an opportunity of letting my white friends here [in England] know it.

This commitment to racial pride also resonated with Du Bois, who initially met Coleridge-Taylor in London, when both were delegates to the 1900 Pan-African Conference there. Later, Du Bois devoted a chapter to the composer in his 1920 collection of poems, essays, and social criticism, *Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil*. In an extended essay about the importance of education for all children called "The Immortal Child," Du Bois noted that the Coleridge-Taylor's English family were of very modest means, and that they could have ignored the talent and aspirations of their mixed-race child due to widespread prejudice at the time. The fact that Coleridge-Taylor flourished in English society prompted Du Bois to ask:

What is the real lesson of the life of Coleridge-Taylor? It is this: humanly speaking it was sheer accident that this boy developed his genius. We have a right to assume that hundreds and thousands of boys and girls today are missing the chance of developing unusual talents because the chances have been against them; and that indeed the majority of the children of the world are not being systematically fitted for their life work and for life itself.

At the end of the essay, Du Bois concluded,

All children are the children of all and not of individuals and families and races. The whole generation must be trained and guided, and out of it as out of a huge reservoir must be lifted all genius, talent, and intelligence to serve all the world.

The poem "Gospel" is from the Pulitzer Prize-winning collection, *Thomas and Beulah* by US Poet Laureate, **Rita Dove** (b. 1956). Written as a tribute to the poet's grandparents, the two halves of the collection are each devoted to one grandparent. In the opening poem, "The Event," we learn that, as a young man, Dove's grandfather Thomas migrated north from Tennessee to Ohio on a riverboat with his best friend, Lem. A night of singing and drinking ended in tragedy when Lem jumped overboard to try to swim to a nearby island and drowned. Lem's absence haunted the remainder of Thomas's life, and many of the ensuing poems in his section of the book refer to Lem's tragic death in some way. The poem "Gospel" meditates on middle-aged Thomas's experience singing tenor in the gospel choir of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church in Akron, Ohio. Dove employs water imagery—beginning with the "humming ship of voices" and ending with the tenor "swimming heavenward, warbling" as painful reminders of the lives of Thomas's ancestors and the death of his friend.



Composer **Alvin Singleton** (b. 1940) has set many of Dove's poems to music, including in *Gospel*, commissioned by Minneapolis-based Vocalessence in 1988. This work exhibits features common to Singleton's music across many genres, including his flexible approach to rhythm, textures featuring interlocking ostinatos, and an unabashedly expressive harmonic language. Born in Brooklyn, Singleton lived and worked in Europe for 14 years before returning to the US, where he has worked closely with several American orchestras and numerous other ensembles. His choral ballet *Truth*, based on the life of nineteenth-century abolitionist, Sojourner Truth, premiered in 2006.

Rita Dove is also a trained musician, and much of her poetry alludes to music and musicians in various ways. In "Gospel," the "single contralto / settling deeper / into her watery furs" evokes opera singer Marian Anderson's legendary 1939 performance (in a fur coat) in front of the Lincoln Memorial, after the world-famous opera star was denied permission by the Daughters of the American Revolution to perform in Washington's Constitution Hall. In front of an outdoor crowd of seventy-five thousand people, Anderson performed a set of patriotic songs, opera arias, and spirituals. A spiritual underlies Rita Dove's "Gospel" as well: *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*, which we present as a coda to Singleton's *Gospel*. Although there are many moving, affecting, and even virtuoso choral settings of *Swing Low* to choose from, a simple version seemed to be called for. The most straightforward choral version to be found was a 1958 arrangement by **Alice Parker** (b. 1925), one of the most respected white scholars and arrangers of spirituals.

Gospel singer and composer **O'Landa Draper** (1963-1998) was born in Memphis, where he founded the Associates, one of the leading gospel ensembles of the 1990s. The choir performed with a wide range of artists including Billy Joel and B. B. King, and was nominated for five Grammy Awards. Draper's final album with the Associates, *Reflections*, recorded shortly before his death, won a Grammy in 1999.

In 1977, gospel pianist **Thomas Whitfield** (1954-1992) founded The Thomas Whitfield Company in Detroit, one of the most influential gospel ensembles in the history of the genre. The Whitfield company pioneered a new style of gospel music with its "inventive blending of gospel, jazz, and classical harmonies, progressions, and forms," according to composer, conductor, and Whitfield scholar, Brandon Christian Waddles. The Whitfield Company's choral sound was praised for its warmth, precision, nuance, and dramatic power, making it the perfect vehicle to realize Whitfield's new focus on emotional connection in gospel lyrics. Waddles continues, "Whitfield's art-song-like interpretation of lyricism unveiled the intimacy of gospel music, setting the stage for [the] Black praise and worship [movement]." As an arranger and producer, Whitfield introduced elaborate, orchestral textures into the gospel genre. Besides his own recordings, he arranged and produced early recordings by Vanessa Bell Armstrong and Yolanda Adams, effectively launching the careers of these contemporary gospel superstars. His arrangements for Aretha Franklin resulted in multiple Grammy awards, in addition to those he won with his own ensemble.

A biography of gospel pianist and arranger **Leotha Stanley** appears in the printed program for this concert.

Special thanks to Eileen M. Hayes of the UW-Whitewater College of Arts and Communication, for numerous enlightening conversations about this repertoire; to James Kinchen for introducing me to Undine Smith Moore's *On Imagination*; and to my former student, tenor Darius Sanders, for kindling my interest in the poetry of Langston Hughes through his moving performances of Hughes settings by Margaret Bonds.