

Today's concert brings our attention to the fifth anniversary of the George Floyd tragedy ... an event that shook America. . . an event that ignited one of the largest protest movements in American history.

The anniversary is not only a remembrance but also a reaffirmation of our collective hope: to build a society rooted in compassion, equity, and accountability. New conversations about race began for most of us. For many, deeper thoughts about how to resolve centuries of systemic racism propelled us to look inside ourselves for what we could personally do to improve our world. And to think: what does justice really look like?

Although a single incident ... Floyd's death represents a symbol of the importance of human dignity and the impact on us all continues.

Our concert this afternoon is in two parts – in the first, we premiere the edition of Rollo Dilworth's *Weather: Stand the Storm* for treble voices. In the second, through the power of music, dialogue and community by way of our guest artist, Melanie DeMore, we lead the charge in moving closer to a world where justice is not the exception, but the standard.

Weather: Stand the Storm

George Floyd's murder was a "wake up" call to many—confirming that much work still needs to be done if America is to live up to its creed that proclaims, "all are created equal," and its promise of "liberty and justice for all."

Historically, the arts have always fulfilled the dual roles of responding to change while at the same time creating change. *Weather* is a poem that gives voice to the voiceless, especially those who have been and continue to be marginalized because of difference. It responds to and reflects realities that are both culturally specific and humanly universal. Professor Claudia Rankine, author of the poem, challenges all of us (no matter your background or lived experience) to know better, to do better, to take action, and to become agents of social justice and social change.

Everyone has a role to play in building and sustaining communities that are fair and just for all. Therefore, *Weather* is a learning opportunity for all of us. All persons are invited to tell this story and learn from it. The words and music are not to be taken lightly.

When I was presented the opportunity to set Professor Claudia Rankine's poem *Weather* to music, I immediately found resonance with the words. "Weather" is a contranym (a word with contradictory meanings). It could mean "to withstand," and it can also mean "to wear away."

After spending many hours studying the poem, I had to think very carefully about how I could employ tonal, rhythmic, stylistic, and expressive elements that would amplify (and not detract from) such a powerful and multi-dimensional sequencing of words. I sincerely hope the resulting composition, bearing same title as the poem, will serve as a meaningful, musical manifestation of Rankine's important and timely message to the world.

Dr. Rollo Dilworth

The second half of today's concert provides an opportunity to call upon us, the community, to "be the change we wish to see in the world." What is it that we hope for? In what kind of world do we want to live? What is our responsibility for change?

Andrea Ramsey's *Long Overdue* is composed in a deliberately earthy vocal register, to portray a sense of strength that is deeply rooted in the passion of the singers who give it voice. It is a call toward doing – a plea for action to move us toward a better, more just society.

The gospel spiritual, *I Know I've Been Changed*, serves as a means of expressing faith, hope and resilience in the face of hardship. Sharing a similar theme and refrain with other spirituals, this piece is believed to have emerged in the early 20th century, with the earliest known printed version appearing in the 1915 National Jubilee Melodies spiritual collection. Set with repeated verse and chorus, Stacey V. Gibbs' arrangement begins in the lower register and ascends to a final chord conveying a message of personal transformation and spiritual rebirth.

Caldwell and Ivory's *Hope Is the Thing With Feathers* was commissioned by the Sing a Mile High Choral Festival and dedicated to those who face cancer with bravery and grace. This Emily Dickinson text portrays hope as a constant and enduring force, even in the face of adversity. The lush harmonies evoke the image of a bird taking flight, symbolizing hope, an ever-present companion which has the ability to uplift and inspire no matter the challenges ahead.

Moirá Smiley says that her composition, *Sing the World Awake*, begins with a "dawn-like" set of chords which give way to a rhythmic ostinato (repeated pattern) that sends the phrase "Sing the World Awake" sweeping across the piece, offering a sense of beginning again. This leads to the rising, simple truth that no matter who, where and how stuck we think we are, we are always just a new beginning.

The famous text of Langston Hughes is set to a gorgeous melody by Joan Szymko in *I Dream a World*. Originally written for Szymko's women's choir, Aurora, this piece was featured in a 2005 concert entitled "The Beauty of Your Dreams." The melody, sung initially by the altos and then repeated by the sopranos, develops into a dramatic build

up emphasizing the power of our dream for a world where “black and white, whatever race you be, will share the bounties of the earth, and every man is free.”

We close our concert with Kevin Phillip Johnson's *A Choice to Change the World*. This call to action reminds us that each of us holds the power to effect change—whether through small, everyday decisions or grand, transformative acts. The piece encourages reflection, urging us to consider how our choices can shape the world we leave for future generations. Through its compelling rhythms, intricate harmonies, and emotional depth, this work serves as both a musical journey and a contemplation on the profound responsibility we all share in creating the future.

Dr. Iris S. Levine