



WEATHER THE STORM

Sunday, June 8, 2025 at 4pm First Congregational Church of Los Angeles

VOX FEMINA LOS ANGELES

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Sara Austin
August Barringer
Lesili Beard
Emma Benatar
Zellie Berry-Owen
Gillian Bieler
Casey Burgess
Evi Desser
Eileen Dorn
Brianna Estrada
Saira Grewal

Jolie Hughes
Mika Jain
Morgan Bailey Keaton
Helen Mendoza
Missy Nieto
Marcela Pan
Angelica Rowell
Erin Rye
Luka Schellenbach
Ashley Sheagley
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*Choral Scholars

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Welcome to the final concert of VOX's 28th season!

As we come to the end of this season, we find ourselves in a very different place from where we started, and yet much remains the same, including VOX's commitment to social justice and to 'giving women voice.' We kicked off our 2024-2025 season with a powerful reminder to make our voices heard, both on tour and in our home of Los Angeles, with our concert, My Voice Be Brave. In March, we shone a light on texts that have been banned across the country in a concert that included everything from the ridiculous to the sublime. This afternoon's concert serves to honor the memory of George Floyd and the fifth anniversary of his murder on May 25th, 2020, a defining moment in the conversation on systemic racism, and one that sparked one of the largest mass protest movements since the Civil Rights movement of the 1960's.

While many things seem to be changing in the world, one thing this season has confirmed for VOX is that we continue to find inspirational collaborators and partners in our work for social justice. Whether that's composer Andrea Ramsey and the students and faculty at universities in Arizona and Nevada who collaborated with us to perform her "Suffrage Cantata," or Chevalier's Books, LA's oldest independent bookstore, who brought banned books to share with our audience members in March. Today we are incredibly proud to share our stage with two more collaborators: Rollo Dilworth, whose piece, "Weather: Stand the Storm," receives its treble choir premier today, and GRAMMY-nominated vocal activist Melanie DeMore who, in her own words, uses music as a "weapon of mass connection."

As our 28th season comes to a close, we look to a future that is not just about creating music, but about building a movement. For nearly three decades, VOX Femina Los Angeles has done exactly that. We've been a voice for women, a voice for justice, and a voice for change. We do this through powerful choral music, thoughtful storytelling, and unwavering advocacy. And yet, we know that this dedication to our values has already led to a loss of funding and will likely continue to do so in the future. This is a scary time for non-profit arts organizations across the country and a time where building community and collaborating is more important than ever.

We are so grateful to you all for being here today, for helping VOX not only survive, but thrive. You are part of something enduring. Something exceptional. And together, we can ensure that women's voices are not only heard but celebrated.

With gratitude,

Iris S. Levine Founding Artistic Director Rebecca Wink Executive Director

Dr. Iris S. Levine, Founding Artistic Director



Nationally recognized for her excellence in choral conducting, Dr. Iris S. Levine is founder and artistic director of VOX Femina Los Angeles, L.A.'s premier women's chorus. Through her extensive experience with women's choral literature, and innovative concert programming, Dr. Levine has charted VOX Femina on an impressive journey, building its prominence in the choral community by way of numerous appearances at ACDA (American Choral Directors Association) conventions, Chorus America conferences, GALA Chorus conferences, and over 300 appearances throughout the United States, Mexico. and Canada.

Dr. Levine is faculty emerita at California Polytechnic University in Pomona where she served as the Interim Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs. Dr. Levine previously served as Dean of the College of Letters, Arts, and Social Sciences, Interim Dean of the College of Education and Integrative Studies, and Department Chair and Professor of Music at Cal Poly Pomona. As faculty, she conducted the Kellogg Chamber Singers, taught Beginning Conducting, Choral Conducting and Music Education courses. Dr. Levine earned her Doctorate in Choral Music from the University of Southern California under the tutelage of Rod Eichenberger and James Vail, and she holds a Masters degree in Choral Conducting from Temple University in Philadelphia, where she studied with Alan Harler.

Dr. Levine is an active member of ACDA where she has served the organization in many leadership roles, including state, regional, and national Repertoire and Standards chairs for Women's Choruses. She currently serves on the California Choral Directors Association board. Dr. Levine has presented at numerous regional and national conferences.

Dr. Levine is the editor for the Iris S. Levine Treble Choral Series with Pavane Publishing. She authored the chapter on "Working with the Women's Community Choir" in the GIA publication: Conducting Women's Choirs: Strategies for Success and she is a contributing author in Choral Reflections: Insights from American Choral Conductor-Teachers. Dr. Levine is highly sought as guest clinician and adjudicator for choral festivals throughout the country.

Lori Marie Rios, Associate Conductor



Lori Marie Rios is a highly accomplished conductor, soloist, educator and voice teacher. She currently serves as Associate Professor of Music at College of the Canyons, Valencia where she is the music director of the Chamber Singers and Voices of the Canyons Community Chorus. She also teaches voice and administrates the applied music program. Prior to her appointment at COC, she directed the choral program at La Cañada High School. Ensembles under her direction have sung all over the United States. Her choirs have appeared at the American Choral Directors Association Regional

Convention in Las Vegas in 2004 and in 2007 were selected to appear at the ACDA National Convention in Miami. The choirs at La Cañada also performed at the California Music Educators Conference. Lori Marie also is an adjunct professor at Pasadena City College where she conducts the Concert Choir. She is also on faculty at California State University, Los Angeles Summer Graduate Program where she teaches voice and graduate level conducting. Lori Marie is on the choral-vocal faculty of the Idyllwild Arts Summer Program where she serves as Assistant Director.

Ms. Rios has presented workshops for the American Choral Directors Association and this past year presented three workshops for the Nevada Music Educators Association. She is in much demand as a clinician and adjudicator. She has conducted district and state wide honor choirs. She also sits on the Los Angeles Bach Festival Board of Directors. She made her Walt Disney Concert Hall debut in 2006 as the soprano soloist in Mozart's Requiem.

Lisa Edwards, Collaborative Pianist



Following her undergraduate studies in piano performance at University of North Texas, Lisa Edwards earned her Master of Music degree in the Keyboard Collaborative Arts program at the University of Southern California with honors. While at USC, she was awarded the Gwendolyn Koldofsky Scholarship.

Currently, Ms. Edwards is the pianist/music assistant for the Los Angeles Master Chorale, under the direction of Grant Gershon and performs regularly on stage at the Walt Disney Concert Hall. Her concert credits include performances with

the Los Angeles Master Chorale, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra and the Santa Barbara Symphony. On disc, Lisa can be heard on two Nonesuch recordings of Steve Reich's music – "You Are (Variations)" and "Daniel Variations".

Previous faculty positions include California State University Long Beach, Glendale Community College, and Pasadena Community College. In addition to being the pianist for VOX Femina Los Angeles, Ms. Edwards holds positions with San Marino Community Church, Stephen S. Wise Temple in Bel Air, and Congregation Kol Ami in West Hollywood. Lisa travels throughout the United States as a vocal/chamber music pianist.

Melanie DeMore



Melanie DeMore is a three time Grammy-nominated singer/composer, choral conductor, music director, and vocal activist who believes in the power of voices raised together. In her presentations, DeMore beautifully brings her participants together through her music and commentary. DeMore facilitates vocal and stick-pounding workshops for professional choirs and community groups, as well as directing numerous choral organizations across the U.S, Canada, and beyond. She is a featured presenter of SpeakOut!, The Institute for Social and Cultural Change, the Master Teaching Artist for Music at UC

Berkeley/CalPerformances; works with everyone from Baptists to Buddhists, and was a founding member of the Grammy-nominated ensemble Linda Tillery and the Cultural Heritage Choir. She is the music director for Obeah Opera by Nicole Brooks and will be touring South Africa and Barbados with the company. She is a charter member of Threshold Choir, founded by Kate Munger, a mentor to the Jerusalem Youth Chorus, and conducts song circles with an emphasis on the voice as a vessel for healing. In her own words: "A song can hold you up when there seems to be no ground beneath you."

Rollo Dillworth



More than 150 of Rollo Dilworth's choral compositions and arrangements have been published—many of which are a part of the Henry Leck Creating Artistry Choral Series with Hal Leonard Corporation. Dilworth is a contributing author for the Essential Elements for Choir and the Experiencing Choral Music textbook series, both published by the Hal Leonard Corporation/Glencoe/McGraw-Hill Publications, and has authored three books of choral warm up exercises intended for elementary and secondary choral ensembles.

A frequent presenter at local, state, regional and national conferences, Dilworth has conducted 43 all-state choirs at various levels (elementary, middle school, high school), six regional honor choirs, and four national honor choirs (ADCA, OAKE and NafME). He has most recently appeared as guest conductor for international choral festivals and master classes in Australia, Canada, Taiwan, Ireland, and China as well as all-state choirs in North Carolina, Oklahoma, Ohio, Arizona and Massachusetts. He has also led honor choirs for the Central and Southwest regions of the American Choral Directors Association. International festival and clinic invitations include Canada, Singapore, Austria and France.

Dilworth is currently National Board Chair for Chorus America. He is an active life member of the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA). He also holds memberships with several other organizations, including the National Association for Music Education (NafME), the National Association of Negro Musicians (NANM) and the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers (ASCAP). In 2017, he received the Temple University Faculty Award for Research and Creative Achievement.

WEATHER THE STORM

Dr. Iris S. Levine, Founding Artistic Director Lisa Edwards, Collaborative Pianist June 8, 2025

Weather: Stand the Storm

Rollo Dilworth Text by Claudia Rankine

Premiere performance of SSAA edition Lesili Beard, narrator Jennifer Leitham, bass Eliza Kinney, Lauren Kosty, Scott Babcock, bass

INTERMISSION

Long Overdue Andrea Ramsey

I Know that I've Been Changed

arr. Stacey V. Gibbs

Commissioned by VOX Femina Los Angeles
Premiere performance

Womankind

Emily Drum Text by Taylee Heldt

Desiree Balfour, Jessica Rau, Lesili Beard, Sonia Ohan, Mika Jain, Sumana Cooppan Wolf, Missy Nieto, Angelica Rowell

"Hope" Is the Thing with Feathers

Sean Ivory and Paul Caldwell Text by Emily Dickinson

Lori Marie Rios, Associate Conductor

l Dream a World

Joan Szymko Text by Langston Hughes

Sing the World Awake

Moira Smiley

Guest Artist - Melanie DeMore

A Choice to Change the World

Kevin Phillip Johnson

Shannon Fish, Missy Nieto, Erin Rye, Sumana Cooppan Wolf, Jessica Rau, soloists

PROGRAM NOTES

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. 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 that 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.

The text and essence of Emily Drum's *Womankind* arise from 17-year-old Taylee Heldt's profound reflection on the multifaceted strength and resilience of women. The piece is rich with vivid nature metaphors, portraying women as a powerful and unstoppable force. Both the lyrics and the music aim to capture the diverse and dynamic nature of feminine strength.

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.

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."

Moira 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.

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

PROGRAM TEXTS

Weather: Stand the Storm by Rollo Dilworth from the poem by Claudia Rankine

On a scrap of paper in the archive is written I have forgotten my umbrella. Turns out in a pandemic everyone, not just the philosopher, is without. We scramble in the drought of information held back by inside traders. Drop by drop. Face covering? No, yes. Social distancing? Six feet under for underlying conditions. Black. Just us and the blues kneeling on a neck with the full weight of a man in blue. Eight minutes and forty-six seconds. In extremis, I can't breathe gives way to asphyxiation, to giving up this world, and then mama, called to. a call to protest, fire, glass, say their names, say their names, white silence equals violence, the violence of again, a militarized police force teargassing, bullets ricochet, and civil unrest taking it, burning it down. Whatever contracts keep us social compel us now to disorder the disorder. Peace. We're out to repair the future. There's an umbrella by the door, not for yesterday but for the weather that's here. I say weather but I mean a form of governing that deals out death and names it living. I say weather but I mean a November that won't be held off. This time nothing, no one forgotten. We are here for the storm that's storming because what's taken matters.

Long Overdue by Andrea Ramsey

Got a plan for myself,
Gonna straighten my spine,
Got a plan for myself,
Gonna let my light shine.
Got a plan for myself,
you, come, too,
And together we'll stand up tall
and shape a new world,
me and you.

Long Overdue (continued)

Got a dream in my heart,
Gonna see a new day,
Got a dream in my heart,
Can't scare it away,
Got a dream in my heart,
You do, too?
So why would we wait any longer
to make this dream come true?

If we're all bound up together as one great humanity,
Let us build a world
where everyone has opportunity.
If we dream of something better,
If we're seeking equity,
May our hope give way to action,
May we be the change we need.

Got a fire in my bones and a spirit that's strong, Got a fire in my bones, we've gotta right wrongs Got a fire in my bones, buns clean through 'cause we can't heal the pain if we won't look at the truth.

If you wanna see change, it comes from you,
If you wanna see change, there's work we can do.
If you wanna see change,
I do, too
so let's go do our part
'cause change is long overdue.

If we're all bound up together as one great humanity,
Let us build a world
where everyone has opportunity.
If we dream of something better,
If we're seeking equity,
May our hope give way to action,
May we be the change we need.
Be the change.

I Know that I've Been Changed Arr. by Stacey V. Gibbs

I know. I know. I know that I been changed 'cause the angels done signed mv name. If you don't believe that I been redeemed, de angels in heaven done signed my name, iust follow me down to de Jerdan Stream. De angels in heaven done signed my name. I know. I know I know that I been changed, de angels in heaven done signed my name.

Womankind by Emily Drum Text by Taylee Heldt

I am the breeze bearing life and shaking color from the trees I am the hum that fills your ears and the buzzing of the bees I am the stream that cools your feet and washes away your fears I am the sun that gives you warmth and dries up all your tears I am the moon that tires your eyes the keeper of your dreams I am the tide that ebbs and flows pushing and pulling with ease I am the hills that roll about gifting you miles of green I am the stars that glimmer in your eyes and sprinkle the sky with a sheen

But if you dare disrespect my name or treat me like I am yours to claim I will be the eye of the hurricane that swallows you whole I will be the tsunami of emotion that holds a mirror to your soul I will be the earthquake crumbling the pedestal beneath your feet I will be the landslide dragging you down as you wallow in defeat.

Womankind (continued)

For I am the strongest, most resilient force no man could ever match I am not a game to win or a treasure you can catch I am the mothers, the sisters, the partners, the daughters I am queen to the highest land and to the deepest of the waters I am womankind.

"Hope" is the Thing with Feathers by Paul Caldwell and Sean Ivory Text by Emily Dickinson

"Hope" is the thing with feathers -That perches in the soul -And sings the tune without the words -And never stops - at all, And never stops at all.

And sweetest in the Gale is heard -And sore must be the storm -That could abash the little Bird That kept so many warm, That kept so many warm.

I've heard it in the chillest land -And on the strangest Sea -Yet never, in Extremity, It asked a crumb of me.

"Hope" is the thing with feathers -That perches in the soul -And sings the tune without the words -And never stops - at all, And never stops at all.

I Dream a World by Joan Szymko Text by Langston Hughes

I dream,
I dream a world,
I dream a world where man
No other man will scorn,
Where love will bless the earth
And peace its paths adorn.

I dream,
I dream a world,
I dream a world where all will know
sweet freedom's way,
Where greed no longer saps the soul
Nor avarice blights our day.

PROGRAM TEXTS

I Dream a World (continued)

A world I dream,
A world I dream where black or white,
Whatever race you be,
Will share the bounties of the earth
And every man is free,
Where wretchedness will hang its head
And joy,
Attends the needs of all
Of such I dream, my world!

I dream,
I dream a world,
I dream a world where man
No other man will scorn,
Where love will bless the earth
And peace its paths adorn.

Sing the World Awake by Moira Smiley

Sing the world awake, awake! Sing the world awake, my love! We are not done here. We are just begun here.

A Choice to Change the World by Kevin Phillip Johnson

It's my choice and I choose to change the world. It's my voice and I speak with pride and courage. I'll be the change I want to see, I'll scream out loud and say, It's my choice and I choose to change the world.

Why put off for tomorrow what I can do today?
Why wait for another when I can pave the way?
No matter how young or old,
I hold the power of change.
Whether large or small, few or all, my choice remains the same!

It's my choice and I choose to change the world. It's my voice and I speak with pride and courage. I'll be the change I want to see

A Choice to Change the World (continued)

I'll scream out loud and say, It's my choice and I choose to change the world.

Since the founding of our nation we've been people of change Some shoulders that we stand upon never receive applause or fame. But in their honor I will live each day better than before to show just how it takes a choice to change yourself and so much more.

It's my choice and I choose to change the world. It's my voice and I speak with pride and courage. I'll be the change I want to see I'll scream out loud and say, It's my choice and I choose to change the world.

The change begins today with every choice that we make Let us look around and see where the changes need to be. Let's end poverty, fighting overseas, another dies from a disease. Let's end hypocrisy, starving on the streets, and no one does a single thing!

It's my choice and I choose to change the world.
It's my voice and I speak with pride and courage.
I'll be the change I want to see I'll scream out loud and say,
It's my choice and I choose to change the world.

It's my choice!
Make a choice!
What's your choice?
It's my choice
and I choose
to change the world!
Be the change.



SEASON 29

Where the Light Begins

Sunday, November 2, 2025 | 4PM First Congregational Church of Los Angeles

Creation: Her Hands Made the Stars

Sunday, March 1, 2026 | 4PM First Congregational Church of Los Angeles

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Thank you to all the volunteers this afternoon who are ushering, assisting with Box Office, and making this concert a stellar experience for our audience, and to all the friends and family members who volunteer their services to support VOX throughout the year.

This concert is supported in part by California Arts Council, LA County Department of Arts and Culture, Perechio Foundation, The Ralph M. Parsons Foundation.







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Congratulations to VOX Femina Los Angeles on the 24-25 season!

Wolf Wallenstein is proud to support VOX Femina's 28th season filled with powerful performances that inspire courage, challenge the status quo, and honor resilience, reminding us of the strength of community and the power of music to drive change.

