



Concert for Youth

Study Guide

About the Choir

Mission

VOX Femina Los Angeles gives women voice through the performance of quality choral literature. Diverse in culture, age, race, belief and sexual identity, we are a chorus committed to commissioning new works and raising awareness about issues that affect us as a family of women. Through music, we aim to create a world that affirms the worth and dignity of every person.



Biography

Founded in January 1997, VOX Femina Los Angeles gives women voice through the performance of quality choral literature. Diverse in culture, age, race, belief, and sexual identity, we are dedicated to commissioning new works and raising awareness about issues that affect us as a family of women. Through our music, we seek to create a world which affirms the worth and dignity of every person.

Since our debut, VOX has performed a catalogue of music exemplifying diverse musical styles and repertoire. In keeping with our mission, VOX has commissioned over 50 new works for women's voices, and collaborated with over 35 contemporary composers. In addition to our season schedule, VOX has been active in community outreach, performing and participating in over 200 community events and collaborating with other arts organizations such as the LA Philharmonic, LA Master Chorale, Gay Men's Chorus of Los Angeles, Trans Chorus of Los Angeles, and VOX Dance Theatre.

VOX Femina Los Angeles is honored to have received grants from the California Arts Council; the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs; the City of West Hollywood; the City of Culver City; the Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture; the National Endowment for the Arts; AIDS Healthcare Foundation; the David Bohnett Foundation; California Community Foundation – Brody Arts Fund; the Colburn Foundation; the Confidence Foundation; the Ella Fitzgerald Foundation; GALA Choruses; the James Irvine Foundation; The Music Man Foundation; Open Meadows Foundation; the Ralph M. Parsons Foundation; and Pasadena Showcase for the Arts.

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 and Chorus America conferences, and over 300 appearances throughout the United States, Mexico and Canada.

Dr. Levine is the Interim Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs at California State Polytechnic University in Pomona. Dr. Levine 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 authored the chapter on "Working with the Women's Community Choir" in the 2012 GIA publication: *Conducting Women's Choirs: Strategies for Success*. Dr. Levine is the editor for the Iris S. Levine Treble Choral Series with Pavane Publishing and is highly sought as guest clinician and adjudicator for choral festivals throughout the country.

Assistant Conductor:



Assistant Conductor, **Lori Marie Rios**, leads VOX Femina's Youth Outreach programs. She is an Associate Professor of Music at College of the Canyons and an adjunct professor at California State Fullerton Music Education Department, where she is a founding instructor of their Choral Education Workshop. Lori Marie is also a faculty member and Assistant Director of the choral-vocal faculty of the Idyllwild Arts Summer Program and has taught voice and graduate-level conducting at CSU Los Angeles' summer graduate program. Prior to her appointment at COC, she directed the choral program at La Cañada High School, and from 1991 – 1999 she was Director of Children's Music at St. Margaret Mary Parish School. She is the Vice President of the California chapter of the American Choral Directors Association.

Facts about choral music:

What is a chorus?

A chorus or choir is a musical ensemble of singers. Choruses may perform music from the classical music repertoire, which spans from the medieval era to the present, or popular music repertoire. Most choruses are led by a conductor, who leads the performances with arm and face gestures. Most often choruses consist of four sections intended to sing in four-part harmony.



What are the different singing parts of a mixed voice chorus vs. a women's chorus?

A mixed chorus (with male and female voices) is perhaps the most common type, usually consisting of soprano, alto, tenor, and bass voices, often abbreviated as SATB. Often one or more voices is divided into two, e.g., SSAATTBB, where each voice is divided into two parts.

A women's chorus (like VOX Femina Los Angeles) is a chorus of adult women, high voices only, usually consisting of soprano and alto voices, two parts in each, or as soprano I, soprano II, and alto I, alto II, abbreviated SSAA.

What is Harmony?

The combination of different musical notes played or sung at the same time to produce a pleasing sound; a pleasing combination or arrangement of different things. Harmony is often said to refer to the "vertical" aspect of music, as distinguished from melodic line, or the "horizontal" aspect.

What is Rhythm?

A strong, regular, repeated pattern of movement or sound. The systematic arrangement of musical sounds, principally according to duration and periodic stress.

What are "dynamics" in music

In music, the dynamics of a piece are the variation in loudness between notes or phrases. Dynamics give the music peaks and valleys. The quiet moments make the louder moments pop, which adds excitement to a song.

What is a music "commission"?

To commission music is to pay a composer to write a particular composition for a specific purpose or event. Anyone can commission music, and any type of music can be commissioned. Two of the pieces in this year's Concert for Youth were commissioned by VOX. For "The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci," VOX was part of "consortium" (or group) of 11 choruses who commissioned the piece composed by Jocelyn Hagen, in honor of the 500th anniversary of Leonardo da Vinci's death. "We are Home," by Jenni Brandon, was commissioned VOX in 2014.

About the Composers



Roger Bourland

Roger Bourland received his education from the University of Wisconsin/Madison (B.Mus), the New England Conservatory of Music (M.M.), and Harvard University (A.M., Ph.D.). He received the Koussevitzky Prize in Composition at Tanglewood, the John Knowles Paine Fellowship at Harvard, two ASCAP Grants to Young Composers, numerous Meet the Composers grants, and was a co-founder of the Boston-based consortium “Composers in Red Sneakers.” Bourland has composed over one hundred works for all media: solo, instrumental, chamber, vocal and choral music, electro-acoustic music, and music for orchestra, wind ensemble, and other large ensembles, which are published by Yelton Rhodes Music, ECS Publishing, Dorn Publications, Inc. and Associated Music Publishers, Inc. His works have been recorded on Northeastern Records, 1750 Arch, OpenLoop, Cambria, and GM Recordings.



B.E. Boykin

B.E. (Brittney Elizabeth) Boykin is a native of Alexandria, Virginia and comes from a musical family. At the age of 7, she began piano lessons and continued her studies through high school under the tutelage of Mrs. Alma Sanford. Boykin then pursued her classical piano studies at Spelman College under the leadership of Dr. Rachel Chung. After graduating Spelman College in 2011 with a B.A. in Music, Boykin continued her studies at Westminster Choir College of Rider University in Princeton, New Jersey. During her time at Westminster, she was awarded the R and R Young Composition Prize just a few months shy of graduating with her M.M. in Sacred Music with a concentration in choral studies in May, 2013. Boykin has been commissioned and collaborated with several organizations, including a number of ACDA divisions, the Minnesota Opera and the Kennedy Center. She obtained her PhD from Georgia State University with an emphasis in Music Education and is currently an Assistant Professor of Music at the Georgia Institute of Technology.



Pablo Casals

Pablo Casals was a Spanish and Puerto Rican cellist, composer, and conductor. He is generally regarded as the pre-eminent cellist of the first half of the 20th century and one of the greatest cellists of all time. He made many recordings throughout his career of solo, chamber, and orchestral music, including some as conductor, but he is perhaps best remembered for the recordings of the Bach Cello Suites he made from 1936 to 1939. He was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1963 by President John F. Kennedy (though the ceremony was presided over by Lyndon B. Johnson).



The Highwomen

The Highwomen is a country music group composed of Brandi Carlile, Natalie Hemby, Maren Morris, and Amanda Shires, formed in 2019. The group's self-titled debut album was released on September 6, 2019, by Elektra Records and was produced by Dave Cobb. The group made their live debut on April 1, 2019 at Loretta Lynn's 87th birthday concert held at the Bridgestone Arena in Nashville. Their debut single, "Redesigning Women", and its associated music video

featuring female artists including Tanya Tucker, Cam, Lauren Alaina, Cassadee Pope and Wynonna Judd was released on 19 July 2019, with their self-titled debut album (set for release on September 6) becoming available for pre-order on the same day. Their second single, "Crowded Table", written by band member Hemby and Lori McKenna, was released on July 26, 2019.



Isabella Leonarda

Isabella Leonarda was an Italian composer from Novara. At the age of 16, she entered the Collegio di Sant'Orsola, an Ursuline convent, where she stayed for the remainder of her life. Leonarda is most renowned for the numerous compositions that she created during her time at the convent, making her one of the most productive female composers of her time.



Stephen Sondheim

Stephen Sondheim was an American composer, songwriter and lyricist. One of the most important figures in twentieth-century musical theater, Sondheim was credited for having "reinvented the American musical." He began his career by writing the lyrics for *West Side Story* (1957) and *Gypsy* (1959), before eventually devoting himself solely to writing both music and lyrics. His best-known works include *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* (1962), *Company* (1970), *Follies* (1971), *A Little Night Music* (1973), *Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street* (1979), *Sunday in the Park with George* (1984), and *Into the Woods* (1987). Sondheim's numerous accolades include eight Tony Awards (including a Lifetime Achievement Tony in 2008), an Academy Award, eight Grammy Awards, a Laurence Olivier Award, a Pulitzer Prize, a

Kennedy Center Honor, and a Presidential Medal of Freedom. He has a theater named for him both on Broadway and in the West End of London.



Christina Whitten Thomas

Christina Whitten Thomas's works have been performed throughout the United States including premieres at Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, and Disney Concert Hall. Christina has received commissions from the Los Angeles Master Chorale Chamber Singers, the Golden Bridge, the Seraphim Singers of Boston, the Denver Women's Chorus, VOX Femina Los Angeles, the Esoterics of Seattle, Melodia Women's Choir of NYC, the Middlebury College Choir, the Apollo Men's Chorus of USC, and the Vermont Choral Union. Her awards include 1st place in the NDSU Edwin Fissinger composition competition, 1st place in the Indianapolis Symphonic Choir competition, 1st place in the Los Robles Master Chorale competition, 1st place in the Park Avenue Christian Church competition, 2nd place in the NATS Art Song Composition Award, the Sorel Conductor's

Choice award, and the Sorel Medallion. She is particularly committed to writing for the voice and is passionate about working with contemporary poets and original texts.

Program

Music of Life

B.E. Boykin

Lamentario

from Alarcon Madrigals, Book 3

Roger Bourland

Nigra sum

Pablo Casals

Ave Regina Caelorum

Iasbella Leonarda

Soloists: Sonia Ohanian and Merced Stratton

Cello: Leah Metzler

Resilient Voices

Movement 1: Belonging

Christina Whitten Thomas

Text by Marian Partee

Cello: Leah Metzler

Everybody Says Don't

Stephen Sondheim

Arr. Mark Hayes

The Glamorous Life

Stephen Sondheim

Soloist: Bethany Encina

Sunday

Stephen Sondheim

Arr. by Mac Huff

Crowded Table

Arr. by Andrea Ramsey

Program Notes

We start the concert with a piece that celebrates the life-affirming power of music. *Music of Life*, written by composer B.E. Boykin with text by 19th century American poet George Parsons Lathrop, weaves a meditative mood around the imagery with piano ostinato and a chant-like melody for the voices that grows along with the text as the poet senses the vast and profound in consideration of Nature's most miniscule.

Our next piece, *Lamentario*, comes from Roger Bourland's *Alarcón Madrigals, Book 3* which was commissioned by VOX Femina Los Angeles and premiered in 2007. The texts are by poet Francisco X. Alarcón, who was born in Los Angeles, and lived in both Mexico and the United States as a child. Alarcón's grandmother, who helped care for him and his six siblings as his parents worked in a cannery, sang songs to him that he later tried to transcribe, and when he would forget lines he would make up his own – setting him on his path to becoming a poet. *Lamentario* is lyrical and meditative in style, dwelling on the themes of love, partnership, courage, and community.

Nigra Sum, by renowned 20th century cellist Pablo Casals, is a beautiful meditation on the passing of a difficult season and the promise of renewal to come, using text taken from the Song of Solomon in the Bible.

Dr. Christoph Bull, organist in residence at First Congregational Church of Los Angeles, will perform on the Great Organs, one of the largest pipe organs in the world with 18,094 speaking pipes. An instrument appreciated by organ aficionados around the world for its complexity, grandeur, and remarkable sound, it is actually comprised of several organs joined together. The original instrument was installed by the noted American organ builder, Ernest M. Skinner when First Congregational Church of Los Angeles erected their fifth church building at the corner of 6th Street and Commonwealth Avenue in 1931, during the depths of the Great Depression. Updates were made in 1969, 1984, 1992, with the final divisions added between 1998 and 2001.

We welcome a small group of VOX singers back to the stage to perform Isabella Leonarda's *Ave Regina Caelorum*. Leonarda came from a wealthy family and studied music as a child and then took her vows as a teenager, becoming a nun at an Ursuline convent in Novara. *Ave Regina Caelorum* was written for the nuns to sing during Compline, a service of prayers at the end of the day. The nuns would perform this music from behind an iron grate or wall so the congregation could not see them, thus preserving the modesty expected from them. Though the nuns of these convents were concealed from the public eye, their musical abilities were well known and a source of local pride.

Resilient Voices is a brand new commission by composer Christina Whitten Thomas and lyricist Marian Partee in celebration of VOX Femina's 25th Anniversary. Honoring female artists past, present, and future, the piece portrays the journey of the artist – from the realization that she has something to say and share with the world, through the struggles that bring the artist to a point of self-actualization as an artistic voice in a community. The first movement, "Belonging," is the artist unashamed: proud, bold, and resilient. She recognizes that she belongs to a history of great artists, and that through her art she can share her story, and that others will relate to her struggle, her pain, her joy and her dreams for a more just world. The movement includes a slide show of works by female visual artists, including, but not limited to the images in Appendix A.

We now celebrate one of the most important figures of American musical theatre. Taken from "Anyone Can Whistle," one of the less well-known musicals by Stephen Sondheim, *Everybody Says Don't* is a restless protest against the fear of failure. The frantic, muttering lines of the chorus -- cataloging the kinds of things that good-intentioned folks tell you to avoid for your safety and ease -- give way to a soaring resistance to the status-quo: "well I say *do!*"

Sunday, from Stephen Sondheim's "Sunday in the Park with George," closes the first act of the musical, based on the life of artist George Seurat and his painting, *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*. While the lyrics highlight Seurat's famous pointillist style, using small dots of many different colors to create an image, the slow build to the final chorus reflects the literal assembling of the final tableau of the painting as the artist completes his work, and in the larger sense, the necessary hard work and dedication of completing any kind of art.

We close today's concert with *Crowded Table*, arranged for choir by Andrea Ramsey, which includes imagery of communal strength and belonging, offering the hope that with some effort, and by working together, we can create a place of comfort and rest for everyone.

Texts & Translations

Ave Regina Caelorum

Hail, O Queen of Heaven. Hail, O Lady of Angels
Hail! Thou root, hail! Thou gate from whom unto the world a light has arisen.
Rejoice, O glorious Virgin, lovely beyond all others,
Farewell, most beautiful maiden, and pray for us to Christ.

Nigra Sum

I am black but comely, O daughters of Jerusalem, therefore have I pleased the Lord, and he hath brought me into his chamber, and hath said unto me:
Arise my love, my fair one, and come away,
For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone,
The flowers have appeared in our land, the time of pruning is come. Alleluia.

Music of Life

Text by George Parsons Lathrop

Music is in all growing things; and underneath the silky wings
Of smallest insects there is stirred a pulse of air that must be heard. Earth's silence lives, and throbs, and sings.
If poet from the vibrant strings of his poor heart a measure flings, Laugh not, that he no trumpet blows:
It may be that heaven hears and knows his language of low listenings.
Music is in all living things.

Lamentario

Text by Francisco X. Alarcón

How sad to be a glass that never gets filled – a door that stays forever locked
A bed that feels like a casket not a bedstead – how sad to be one and never add one to two
A bird without a nest – a saint with no candlelight
To be alone and live on dreaming up embrace

Resilient Voices

Text by Marian Partee

Movement I. Belonging

Her grandmother kept the house and filled the little mouths and never dreamed of more.

Her mother kept the house and filled the little mouths and never asked for more.

Yet she, she knew that if she kept the house and filled the little mouths she would need more.

She took her paintbrush and captured her self-image: Her passion, Her beauty, Her pain.

Unashamed, she proclaimed, "This is who I am. Art is my gift. Art is my calling. I belong here."

She took her chisel and sculpted her desires: For freedom, For justice, For peace.

Through the stone, she made known all that she had lost... Loss of her son. Loss of her lover. Loss of her homeland.

Denied the common roads, she shaped her own path and strode onward.

She sought friends, She found mentors who embraced her genius.

After years of toil, after years of hardship, at last, she was an artist of renown.

She took her camera and snapped a potent image... Of hunger, Of warfare, Of love.

With one shot, she had caught how the world should be.

Look at our strength. Look at our courage. We belong here.

She told her daughters, "There is always More within you to discover,

More boundaries to redefine, More alliances to build, More injustice to defy.

I urge you, my daughters: Search for more."

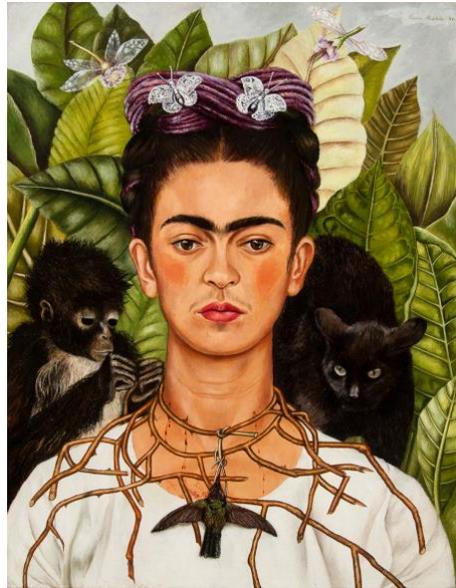
Discussion Questions

- What is the importance of repetitive phrases in music and what is the name for that?
- What techniques do the composers use to help tell their stories? (i.e., use of tempo, dynamics, repetition, etc.)
- Name one thing specifically in the music/text that touched you or that you connected with and why?
- How many different styles of music did you identify in this concert?
- Several of these pieces celebrated visual artists, how do you think different
- Who are some women today that you find inspirational? (in politics, arts, entertainment, science/technology, etc.)
- How do you think things have changed for female composers and musicians since Isabella Leonarda was alive?

Appendix



**Self-Portrait by Sofonisba Anguissola
1566, Italian**



**Self-Portrait with Thorn Necklace and
Hummingbird by Frida Kahlo, 1940,
Mexican**



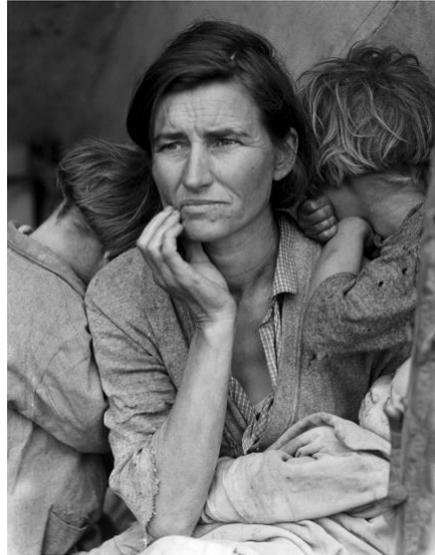
**Self-Portrait by Lois Mailou Jones
1940, African-American**



**Hagar by Edmonia Lewis
1875, African-American/Chippewa**



**The Wretched by Meta Vaux Warrick Fuller
1902, African-American**



**Migrant Mother by Dorothea Lange
1936, American**



**... in a trench during World War I...
Helen Johns Kirtland
c.1918, American**



**Ladder to the Moon by Georgia O'Keeffe,
1958, American**