



I, Too Sing America

Sunday, July 4, 2021

Sunday, July 11, 2021

Sunday, July 18, 2021

All performances air at 4:00pm

MaKayla M. McDonald, Soprano

Charles Williamson, Tenor

Dana Whiteside, Baritone

Julia Scott Carey, Piano

Artistic Director: **Megan Roth**

Administrative Director: **Evangelia Leontis**

Director of Public Relations: **Edward Vogel**

Technical Director: **Nathan Roth**

A Message from the Artistic Director



Welcome to *I, Too Sing America*, a special virtual festival of art song that amplifies Black voices in song. As an organization that seeks to uplift underrepresented voices in the genre of art song, we turn that focus now to the poetry and prose of Black authors. Our program includes the powerful and timeless words of Langston Hughes, Georgia Douglas Johnson, Clarissa Scott Delaney, James Weldon Johnson, Leslie Morgan Collins, and Claude McKay, all from the Harlem Renaissance, alongside beloved poets Maya Angelou and Paul Laurence Dunbar, and contemporary poets Tyehimba Jess, Del’Shawn Taylor, Dudley Randall, and Marcus Amaker. One cannot mention the names of these poets and not acknowledge their work as activists, for it is one and the same. These writers, through their art, bared their souls, sharing their heartache, hopes, and dreams for their fellow Black brothers and sisters to be safe, loved, respected, and celebrated in our country. Their words and the stories they weave are at times deeply troubling, but we cannot shy away from facing these truths, for they reflect the sad truth of our country, both past and present.

Our festival is comprised of three mini-concerts that will be rounded out with two Roundtable Discussions over Zoom featuring many of the composers of the music presented. In the first mini-concert, we honor America on her birthday with “I Am America.” “The Poet’s Voice” celebrates the rich tradition of verse from Black writers in America. Finally, we will end with “Seeking Justice,” which recounts tragic, historical events from our nation’s past, alongside pieces that cry out for justice and peace. Featured on each mini-concert are winners from our 2021 Call for Scores Competition. These composers, like the poets of the past, dedicate their unique and beautiful voices to inspire unity through compassion. Anthony Philpott’s “America,” on the powerful text by Claude McKay, opens the festival. Conceived just before the pandemic, Philpott was moved to complete his work following the horrific and violent murder of George Floyd. Jeremiah Evan’s “April Rain Song” on text by Langston Hughes, is a beautifully lyrical celebration of spring rain. Of Hughes’ poem and the Harlem Renaissance poets in general, Evan’s writes “In spite of facing unassailable bigotry these poets chose to communicate the beauty they found throughout their lives and culture, which we are all richer for today.” Composer George Tsz Kwan-Lam composed a stirring account of the first African-American singer to perform at Carnegie Hall, Sissieretta Jones, in a collaboration with Pulitzer-prize winning poet Tyehimba Jess. Finally, we’ll share two works by Del’Shawn Taylor in the final concert that weave together texts from the 19th century and today, creating a powerful statement about the Black experience in America.

Our featured pianist for the festival, Julia Carey, will perform two rousing piano solos in our opening program. “To Anacreon in the U.S.” by Anthony R. Green takes the U.S. national anthem and applies quotations from Debussy’s *Le Marseillaise*. “Battle of Manassas,” written by the slave Blind Tom, will immediately follow and will be accompanied by a reading of a poem about Blind Tom, written by Tyehimba Jess. A piece well ahead of its time, this piece quotes multiple patriotic songs and uses tone clusters and vocalizing by the pianist to create a musical description of a Civil War battle. We are also thrilled to share the monumental work, “Two Black Churches” by award-winning composer, Shawn Okpebholo, which depicts of two tragic events that occurred at black churches by the hands of white supremacists.

This past year has illuminated the urgency with which we must act in the fight against racism, as our nation’s deep-seated racial divisions were brought to the forefront in the national dialogue. Art song is a wonderful space to spark discussion and invite reflection between music lovers and music makers, and our hope in presenting this festival is to elevate the incredible Black musicians and writers in our country who bravely call us all to action in this important fight against hatred.

~ Megan Roth, Founder & Artistic Director

I, Too Sing America

~Programs~

I Am America

July 4, 2021

*America

Anthony Philpott

She sat down....for Freedom

Jacqueline Hairston

Battle of Manassas

Blind Tom

To Anacreon in the U.S.

Anthony R. Green

*Sissieretta Jones, Carnegie Hall, 1902 *O Patria mia*

George Tsz-Kwan Lam

Three Dream Portraits

Margaret Bonds

Minstrel Man

Dream Variation

I, too, Sing America

The Poet's Voice

July 11, 2021

*April Rain Song

Jeremiah Evans

Moments in Sonder

B.E. Boykin

Tears

Greyday

Passing Time

Sounds like Pearls

Nightsongs

H. Leslie Adams

Prayer

Drums of Tragedy

The Heart of a Woman

Night Song

Senec You Went Away

Creole Girl

Seeking Justice

July 18, 2021

*We Wear the Mask

Del'Shawn Taylor

Two Black Churches

Shawn Okpebholo

Ballad of Birmingham

The Rain

*How Much Longer

Del'Shawn Taylor

**Indicates a winning composition from our Call for Scores*

America (Claude McKay)

Although she feeds me bread of bitterness,
And sinks into my throat her tiger's tooth,
Stealing my breath of life,
I will confess I love this cultured hell that tests my youth.
Her vigor flows like tides into my blood,
Giving me strength erect against her hate,
Her bigness weeps my being like a flood.
Yes, as a rebel fronts a king in state,
I stand within her walls with not a shred
Of terror, malice, not a word of jeer.
Darkly I gaze into the days ahead,
And see her might and granite wonders there,
Beneath the touch of Time's unerring hand,
Like priceless treasures sinking in the sand.

I have long been a fan of Claude McKay's poetry because of the honesty and activism in his words. My setting of his poem, "America," was conceived on March 6, 2020. I was reading this particular poem during a break at work, and immediately heard a melody while I read the first verse. Excited by this random and almost "divine" inspiration, I took out my phone and recorded myself humming the melody I heard. Around this time, the COVID pandemic was beginning to hit the country hard, and in navigating life afterwards, my creativity, and this possibility of a song, was put on hold. A few short months later, the country faced another crisis: yet another killing of an unarmed Black man—this time, George Floyd. The consequent outrage sparked nationwide protests, some of which devolved into riots and cities literally being on fire. As I grappled with the reality of the moment, I recalled McKay's poem, and it perfectly gave voice to some of my frustrations. I also recalled my recorded melody and decided to bring that musical idea to fruition. Sonically, I aimed to match the intensity, urgency, and poignancy of McKay's words. -Anthony Philpott

She sat down...for Freedom (in Memoriam for Rosa Parks)

She sat down for Freedom! Yes! Freedom!
Not seeing what this would lead to, she sat down 'cause she was simply tired,
Tired in body, tired in mind, but not tired in Spirit.
Her faith was strong!
Did she even know what she started?
She must have sensed that it was time to make a change.
And little did she know what that change would bring about.
O Freedom!
O Freedom over me!
Oh, I ain't weary yet; 'cause there's no time for me to fret!
I'll not rest 'til I know all are free.
Who is this Pioneer of Freedom, who fought the good fight?
Rosa Louise McCauley Parks!
Has she died in vain? I think not!
For There is a Balm in Gilead for Rosa Parks.
She'll always be an Icon Mother of Civil Rights! Rosa Parks!
She will always be a lasting legacy, for now and forevermore!
Evermore!

Battle of Manassas / Blind Tom Plays for Confederate Troops, 1863 (Tyehimba Jess)

The slave's hands dance free, unfettered, flying
across ivory, feet stomping toward
a crescendo that fills the forest pine,
reminding the Rebs what they're fighting for—
black, captive labor. Tom, slick with sweat, shows
a new trick: Back turned to his piano,
he leans like a runner about to throw
himself to freedom through forest bramble-
until he spreads his hands behind him. He
hitches fingertips to keys, hauls Dixie
slowly out of the battered upright's teeth
like a worksong dragged across cotton fields,
like a plow, weighted and dirty, ringing
with a slaver's song a master's bidding.

Sissieretta Jones, Carnegie Hall, 1902 O Patria mia (Tyehimba Jess)

Aida, buried in the darkness of her fate.
Aida, singing in the tomb of her lover.
Her lover a notion pale as the aria circling from her mouth.
Aida, lowered into the pit cloaked in breath's ocean, a war inside her voice.
A battle of tongues sung *doloroso*, the husk of shadow on air.
With the soar of her father's sermon for truth.
With the burn of nigger heaven.
With the hum of oceans wrapped in bone.
With the legacy of bones wrapped in ocean.
With a national healing hogtied to song.
Let me hum it to you sweet with *vivace*;
Let me scrape it into our hist'ry.
Let my voice turn its scarred back on you.
Let my skin disappear to cover you whole.
Let my molten song be your blessing of ash.
Let the ash cover all our faces.
Let ash be the secret that masters itself.
Let the curtain rise upon the hidden face.
Let the spotlight burn to purify need.
Nail down the lockbox of spirituals inside my throat.
Bury them in opera's echos of grandeur.
Resurrect the holy grind of *tremolo* and tradition.
Let the key be infinite.
Let the coon song scatter.
Let each mouth be envy.
Let the bloodlines be muddied.
I stand solo in this country of concert.
I am multitudes of broken chains.
I am Aida with war on her lips.
I am Aida against drowning in all that summons her alive.
I bear the crescendo of ocean inside me.
I carry its bones inside my attack.
I am a wave reaching beyond this shore.
Let this belting be our unbinding.
Let *o* bring the sound of all our wanting.
Let *patria* speak the names of all my fathers.

Let the curtain rise to show the face that is known.

Let the country be mine.

Sissieretta Jones, Carnegie Hall, 1902: O Patria Mia (2018) is a song for soprano and piano, on the poem by Tyehimba Jess, from his book *Olio*. The work received its world premiere on June 28, 2018 at the Chautauqua Institution, with Kayla White (soprano) and Emily Jarrell-Urbaneck (piano), and was commissioned by The American Opera Project for the 2018 Chautauqua Opera. Jess's book focuses on the African-American experience at the turn of the 20th century, and Sissieretta Jones (1868-1933), also known as "Black Patti", was the first African American artist to sing at Carnegie Hall. This poem imagines Jones as the defiant character of Aida, a role which Jones - even though she was of African-American descent - would not have been able to perform in the major opera houses because of her skin color. In this piece, I highlight the musicality of the spoken poem by using an overall recitative style, giving the singer the liberty to push and pull the tempo and rhythm, with the pianist following and adjusting to the singer's rubato throughout the song. -George Tsz-Kwan Lam

Three Dream Portraits (Langston Hughes)

Minstrel Man

Because my mouth
Is wide with laughter
And my throat
Is deep with song,
kitchen
You do not think
I suffer after
I have held my pain
So long?

Because my mouth
Is wide with laughter,
You do not hear
My inner cry?
Because my feet
Are gay with dancing,
You do not know
I die?

Dream Variations

To fling my arms wide
In some place of the sun,
To whirl and to dance
Till the white day is done.

Then rest at cool evening
Beneath a tall tree
While night comes on gently,
Dark like me-
That is my dream!

To fling my arms wide
In the face of the sun,
Dance! Whirl! Whirl!
Till the quick day is done.
Rest at pale evening...
A tall, slim tree...
Night coming tenderly
Black like me.

I, Too

I, too, sing America.

I am the darker brother.
They send me to eat in the

When company comes,
But I laugh,
And eat well,
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,
I'll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody'll dare
Say to me,
"Eat in the kitchen,"
Then.

Besides,
They'll see how beautiful I am
And be ashamed—

I, too, am America

April Rain Song (Langston Hughes)

Let the rain kiss you
Let the rain beat upon your head with silver liquid drops
Let the rain sing you a lullaby
The rain makes still pools on the sidewalk
The rain makes running pools in the gutter
The rain plays a little sleep song on our roof at night
And I love the rain.

Three Selected Songs (from *24 American Songs*) features settings of poetry by three different generations of African-American poets: Langston Hughes, Paul Laurence Dunbar and George Moses Horton. The first, *April Rain Song* (text by Langston Hughes), is a simple, lyrical celebration of spring rain. The rich and varied expressions of the African-American race were later represented in Langston Hughes' (b.1901-d.1967) work during the Harlem Renaissance. In spite of facing unassailable bigotry these poets chose to communicate the beauty they found throughout their lives and culture which we are all richer for today. All Americans must endeavor to honor the contributions of African-Americans to the complex tapestry of the American cultural fabric. We must also recognize their continued struggle for artistic inclusion across all genres of art as well as their quest for social justice and equality. -Jeremiah Evans

Moments in Sonder (Maya Angelou)

Tears

Tears,
The crystal rags
Viscous tatters
Of a worn-through soul.
Moans,
Deep swan song
Blue farewell
Of a dying dream.

Greyday

The day hangs heavy
loose and grey
when you're away.
A crown of thorns
A shirt of hair
Is what I wear.
No one knows
My lonely heart
When we're apart.

Passing Time

Your skin like dawn
Mine like musk
One paints the beginning
Of a certain end.
The other, the end of a
Sure beginning.

Sounds like Pearls

Sounds
like pearls
Roll off your tongue
To grace their eager ebon ear.
Doubt and fear,
Ungainly things,
With blushings
Disappear.

Nightsongs

Prayer (Langston Hughes)

I ask you this:
Which way to go?
I ask you this:
Which sin to bear?
Which crown to put
Upon my hair?
I do not know,
Lord God,
I do not know.

The Heart of a Woman (Georgia Douglas Johnson)

The heart of a woman goes forth with the dawn,
As a lone bird, soft winging, so restlessly on,
Afar o'er life's turrets and vales does it roam
In the wake of those echoes the heart calls home.
The heart of a woman falls back with the night,
And enters some alien cage in its plight,
And tries to forget it has dreamed of the stars
While it breaks, breaks, breaks on the sheltering bars.

Sence You Went Away (James Weldon Johnson)

Seems lak to me de stars don't shine so bright,
Seems lak to me de sun done loss his light,
Seems lak to me der's nothin' goin' right,
Sence you went away.
Seems lak to me de sky ain't half so blue,
Seems lak to me dat ev'rything wants you,
Seems lak to me I don't know what to do,
Sence you went away.
Oh ev'ything is wrong.
De day's jes twice as long,
De bird's forgot his song
Sence you went away.
Seems lak to me I jes can't he'p but sigh,
Seems lak to me ma th' oat keeps gittin dry,
Seems lak to me a tear stays in my eye
Sence you went away.

Drums of Tragedy (Langston Hughes)

Beat the drums of tragedy for me.
Beat the drums of tragedy and death.
And let the choir sing a stormy song
To drown out the rattle of my dying breath.
Beat the drums of tragedy for me.
And let the white violins whirl thin and slow,
But blow one blaring trumpet note of sun
To go with me to the darkness where I go.

Night Song (Clarissa Scott Delany)

The night was made for rest and sleep,
For winds that softly sigh;
It was not made for grief and tears;
So then why do I cry?
The wind that blows through leafy trees
Is soft and warm and sweet;
For me the night is a gracious cloak
To hide my soul's defeat.
Just one dark hour of shaken depths,
Of bitter black despair-
Another day will find me brave,
And not afraid to dare!

Creole Girl (Leslie Morgan Collins)

When you dance, do you think of Spain,
Purple skirts and clipping castanets,
Creole Girl?
When you laugh, do you think of France,
Golden wine and mincing minuets,
Creole Girl?
When you sing, do you think of young America,
Grey guns and battling bayonets?
When you cry, do you think of Africa,
Blue nights and casual canzonets?
When you dance, do you think of Spain,
Purple skirts and clipping castanets,
Creole Girl?

We Wear the Mask (Paul Laurence Dunbar)

Additional text by Parris Lewis and Del'Shawn Taylor

We wear the mask that grins and lies.
It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes.
We wear it while we walk the mile, cloaked in our dismay.
This debt we pay to human guile;
With torn, bleeding hearts we smile.
Why should the world be over-wise in counting all our tears sighs?
Let them only see us while we wear the mask.
We smile, but O great Christ, our cries to thee from tortured souls arise.
We sing, but oh the clay is vile beneath our feet, and long the mile.
But the world dreams otherwise, but let them dream no more!
Let them dream no longer!
I stand before you masked no more.
Your truth is set ablaze.
The life you left for me to live has seen its final days.

How Much Longer (Del'Shawn Taylor)

How much longer must we wait for your progress?
How much longer must we wait to hear freedom's song?
How much longer must we wait?
How much more can our heart take?
How much longer must we wait? Oh Lord
How much longer must we wait for your progress?
How much longer must we wait to see justice roll?
How much longer must we wait?
How much more can our hearts take?
How much longer must we wait? Oh, my Lord!
We've waited our mother's time, our father's time, our brother's and sister's too.
We've been emancipated by a proclamation, had amendments passed,
But you find a way to make our oppression last.
How many more of us have to die before your progress?
How much longer must we be beaten and trodden upon?
How much longer must we wait til you won't judge us by our race, but look in our hearts.
How much longer?
No longer.

As an African American composer, I believe that it is my mission to use my platform as a composer to give a voice to the unsung stories of African American history. It is not just the history of those who identify as Black or African American, but world history. My works primarily focus on the elevation of these stories and the unbridled telling of the Black experience from love to oppression. I will add that it is not just the Black experience but the experiences of other minorities, such as the Holocaust or women's rights. With every opportunity I have, I make it my mission to empower another minority artist through collaboration whether it be through song or word. There are so many stories to tell and what better way to tell them than together through music. -*Del'Shawn Taylor*

Two Black Churches

Ballad of Birmingham (Dudley Randall)

(On the bombing of a church in Birmingham, Alabama, 1963)

“Mother dear, may I go downtown
Instead of out to play
And march the streets of Birmingham
In a Freedom March today?”

“No, baby, no, you may not go,
For the dogs are fierce and wild,
And clubs and hoses, guns and jails
Aren’t good for a little child.”

“But, mother, I won’t be alone.
Other children will go with me,
And march the streets of Birmingham
To make our country free.”

“No, baby, no, you may not go,
For I fear those guns will fire.
But you may go to church instead
And sing in the children’s choir.”

She has combed and brushed her night-dark hair,
And bathed rose petal sweet,
And drawn white gloves on her small brown hands,
And white shoes on her feet.

The mother smiled to know her child
Was in the sacred place,
But that smile was the last smile
To come upon her face.

For when she heard the explosion,
Her eyes grew wet and wild.
She raced through the streets of Birmingham
Calling for her child.

She clawed through bits of glass and brick,
Then lifted out a shoe.
“O, here’s the shoe my baby wore,
But baby, where are you?”

The Rain (Marcus Amaker)

When the reality
of racism returns,
all joy treads water
in oceans of buried
emotion.

Charleston
is doing
everything it can
to only swim
In a colorless liquid
of calm sea
and blind faith.

But the Lowcountry
Is a terrain
of ancient tears,
suffocating through
floods of
segregation.

When a murderer’s gunshots
made waves
at Emanuel AME Church,
we closed our eyes,
held our breath
and went under.

And we are still
trying not to
taste the salt
of our surrounding blues
or face the rising tide
of black pain.

About the Artists

Julia Scott Carey is the Minister of Music at the Central Square Congregational Church in Bridgewater, where she leads the adult and children's choirs from the keyboard. She is one of the accompanists for the Tanglewood Festival Chorus and the Boston Symphony Children's Choir. She also serves as the accompanist for the Metropolitan Chorale, the Dedham Choral Society, the Boston College University Chorale, and the Boston Saengerfest Men's Chorus. Julia teaches musicianship at the Suzuki School in Newton. She is also a founder and core ensemble member of Juventas New Music Ensemble.

As a composer, her orchestral works have been performed by numerous orchestras, including the Boston Symphony and the Boston Pops, and have been broadcast on national TV and radio in the U.S. and in Russia. She was the youngest composer ever published by the Theodore Presser Company. She was also chosen to arrange a folk song for Yo-Yo Ma and Lynn Chang to play at Deval Patrick's inaugural ball. Julia Scott Carey received a master's degree in composition from the Harvard-New England Conservatory joint degree program, as well as a master's degree in collaborative piano from Boston University.

With a strong passion for studying and performing new music, soprano **MaKayla McDonald** has premiered various contemporary works. She has collaborated most recently with New Camerata Opera on their exciting operatic film, *Julie*, which is an official selection at the 2020 Concepción Independent Film Awards in Concepción, Chile.

MaKayla was set to sing as a soprano ringer with Manhattan Concert Production's performance of *Symphony Chaco* at Lincoln Center and Micaëla in *Carmen* with Utopia Opera this past spring, unfortunately these engagements were put on hold due to the ongoing struggle with COVID-19. Additional roles include: Princess Ursula in the new opera *Princess Maleine*, Peep-Bo in *The Mikado* with Bronx Opera, Harriet Tubman in the New York premiere of Thea Musgrave's *The Story of Harriet Tubman* with Utopia Opera, Frasquita in scenes from *Carmen* with City Lyric Opera, & Gretel in *Hansel and Gretel* with Old Capitol Opera. Off stage, MaKayla works for the music department at the Borough of Manhattan Community College, cantors regularly, & has a small private voice studio. When she isn't working, you can find MaKayla out exploring the city, searching for dumplings, or reading a book on a blanket in Prospect Park! MaKayla is a graduate of the University of Northern Iowa, where she has received both a Master & Bachelor of Music degrees in Voice Performance.

Baritone, **Dana Whiteside** has crafted a life in music that encompasses being a soloist in concert/oratorio, recital performances and work with professional ensemble. Educated at College of the Holy Cross, the Longy School of Music, New England Conservatory and the Tanglewood Music Center, Mr. Whiteside has received critical acclaim for his voice of "noble clarity throughout powerful and resonant" (The Washington Post). He enjoys affiliation with Handel & Haydn Society Emmanuel Music, the Cantata Singers, Boston Baroque and Skylark Vocal Ensemble on whose recordings "Winters Night" and "Seven Words from the Cross" he appears as a featured soloist. Art song recital performances have included offerings at the Societe Francaise (Boston French Library), Boston University, University of Oregon in offerings of lieder and art songs of Schumann, Beethoven, Poulenc, Hahn, Debussy, Musto, Barber and Copland including *Shadow of the Blues: Langston Hughes Songs, Songs on Texts of Emily Dickinson, Liederkreis, Op. 24, Banalites, and Telle Jour, Telle Nuit*. Among recent season highlights were *The Magic Flute* with Boston Baroque; the role of Count Carl Magnus in Stephen Sondheim's *A Little Night Music*; *Carmina Burana* at Mechanics Hall; the Verdi *Requiem*; and a *Sea Symphony* at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

Tenor, **Charles Williamson** opened his 2020-21 season with a return to the NYC recital stage in the *Fourth Annual Recital for Refugees*, which from its inception has raised over \$9,000 for the International Rescue Committee. Last season, Charles made his Metropolitan Opera house debut as an ensemble member of The Met Opera Chorus in their 2019 new production of Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*. Other ensemble career highlights include performances in The Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater's signature choreographic work, *Revelations*. A consummate recitalist, Charles works to program traditional classical repertoire alongside lesser known and contemporary classical masterworks composed by woman and composers of color. Concert highlights include *Resilient Heart*, a recital combining the European romanticism of 19th century lieder with the contemporary compositions of African American composers H. Leslie Adams and Damien Sneed. *L'invitation au Voyage*, which included *mélodie* by Henri Duparc and *spirituals composed by women of color, Songs of Love and Justice*, a program highlighting the musical achievements of prominent musicians and poets working during the Harlem Renaissance, and *Poetic Passions, a recital celebrating piano vocal music from three composers spanning 170 years*. Mr. Williamson is thrilled to join Calliope's Call in support of their mission to promote the genre of art song as well as raise awareness surrounding issues of social justice. Mr. Williamson is a native of Passaic, New Jersey and is a graduate of North Carolina Central University and the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Calliope's Call 2019-2021 Donors

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