

“Embracing Coretta: A Celebration of Singer,
Activist, Wife and Mother Coretta Scott King”

First Parish of Milton, 535 Canton Avenue

October 28, 2023, 7:00pm

Sarah Joyce Cooper, soprano

Melissa Joseph, soprano

Daon Drisdorn, tenor

Neil Nelson, bass-baritone

Timothy Steele, pianist

Cynthia Harmon, narrator

This event is being presented in collaboration with the New England Conservatory Office of Cultural Equity and Belonging, Embrace Boston, Courageous Conversations Towards Racial Justice, and the Racial Justice Task Force at First Parish as a celebration of the 70th anniversary of Coretta Scott King’s graduation from NEC. Through narration and song Coretta’s life story will be shared in a program featuring primarily African American composers.

PROGRAM

“Balm in Gilead”, spiritual arranged by Shelton Becton (born 1953), Ensemble

[“There is a Balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole. There is a Balm in Gilead to heal the sinsick soul.”]

“Poor Wayfaring Stranger”, American folk ballad arranged by Jay Althouse (born 1951), sung by Daon Drisdorn

[“I’m just a poor wayfaring stranger trav’ling through this world of woe. But there’s no sickness, toil, nor danger in that fair land to which I go.”]

“We Have Tomorrow” by Florence Price (1887-1953), text by Langston Hughes, sung by Sarah Joyce Cooper

[“We have tomorrow, bright before us like a flame. Yesterday, a night-gone thing, a sun-down name. And dawn today, broad arch above the road we came.”]

“Thanks Be to Thee” by George Frideric Handel (1685-1759), English text by Willis Wager, sung by Neil Nelson

[“Thanks be to Thee! Thou hast led forth Thy chosen folk, Israel, safe through the sea. As a good shepherd leads forth his flock, Lord , Thine own hand tended them; yea, in Thy goodness gave them Thy grace.”]

“Justice” from SONGS OF LOVE AND JUSTICE, by Adolphus Hailstork (born 1941), texts by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., sung by Melissa Joseph

[“When evil men plot, good men must plan. When evil men burn and bomb, good men must build and bind. When evil men shout ugly words of hatred, good men must commit themselves to the glories of love. When evil men would seek to perpetuate an unjust status quo, good men must seek to bring into being a real order of justice.”]

“Romance” by Claude Debussy (1862-1918), text by Paul Bourget, sung by Daon Drisdorn

["The fleeting and suffering soul, the gentle soul, the soul fragrant with divine lilies which I have gathered in the garden; where have the winds driven that adorable soul of the lilies? Is there any remaining fragrance of the heavenly loveliness of those days when you enveloped me in a celestial haze, days made of hope, faithful love, of blessedness and peace?"]

Three Songs from MOTIVOS DE SON, by Cuban composer Amadeo Roldan (1900-1939), sung by Sarah Joyce Cooper

- I. Negro Bembon ["Why do you get so upset when they call you 'black bembon'? Bembon, Carida supports you and gives you everything. You still complain!"]
- II. Aye Me Dijeron Negro ["Yesterday they called me 'negro' to make me fight, but the one who said it was a black man like me. You see yourself as white, but I know your grandma. Take her out of the kitchen! Mama Ine, I know you very well."]
- III. Sigue ["Keep going, walker, and don't stop. When you pass by her house, keep going and don't look at her. Remember that she is bad!"]

“Your Eyes So Deep” by H.T. Burleigh (1866-1949),
text by James Weldon Johnson, sung by Melissa
Joseph

[“Your eyes so deep and tender are; soft with the
glamor of a star; bright with the gentle light that lies
in placid streams and sunny skies. Your eyes so
tender are, and yet those melting, smiling eyes from
out their depths so sweet have lanced a crucial,
piercing dart, and now my wounded, bleeding heart
lies captive at your feet. Your lips are like a sweet
red rose that in some scented garden grows; a dewy
rose, so sweet and red that blooms amidst a lily
bed. Your lips are like a rose: and yet those velvet-
petal’d lips, a honey’d poison brew that through my
veins has run like fire, and filled my soul with love’s
desire, and left me mad for you!”]

“God Gives Me You: A Wedding Song” by Florence
Price (1887-1953), text by Nora Connelly, sung by
Neil Nelson

[“Because you hold my hand and say “I do”, before
love’s altar I pledge my soul to you. All through my

life this promise will hold true, because within this hour God gives me you. Thy spirit soars on wings of visions fair; from out the space of life you called to me there. With gifts of love I came endowed anew, because within this hour God gives me you. Love's conquering peace becalms my restless soul, and angels sing as our hearts they enroll. Throughout life's day my vows I will hold true, because within this hour God gave me you.”]

“Compensation” by Charles Lloyd, Jr. (born 1938), sung by Sarah Joyce Cooper

[“Because I had loved so deeply, because I had loved so long, God gave, in His great compassion, the gift of song.”]

“If I Can Help Somebody”, by Alma Androzzo (1912-2001), arranged by Geo. L. Salva, sung by Daon Drisdorn

[“If I can help somebody as I pass along, if I can cheer somebody with a word or song, if I can show somebody He is trav'ling wrong, then my living shall not be in vain. If I can do my duty as a Christian

ought, if I can bring back beauty to a world
upwrought, if I can spread love's message that the
Master taught, then my living shall not be in vain.”]

INTERMISSION

“Balm in Gilead”, spiritual sung by Ensemble

[“There is a Balm in Gilead to make the wounded
whole. There is a Balm in Gilead to heal the sinsick
soul. Sometimes I feel discouraged and think my
work's in vain, but then the Holy Spirit review my
sould again.”]

“She Sat Down For Freedom” by Jacqueline Hairston
(dates unknown), sung by Sarah Joyce Cooper

[“She sat down for 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. Oh Freedom
over me! Oh, I ain't weary yet, ‘cause there's no
time for me to fret. I'll not rest till 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!"]

"Love" from SONGS OF LOVE AND JUSTICE, by Adolphus Hailstork (born 1941), sung by Melissa Joseph

["Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend."]

"He Came To Alabama", by Lena McLin (1928-2023), sung by Neil Nelson

["He came to Alabama one strong to right a wrong. He led in Alabama thousands strong to right a wrong. They prayed in Alabama thousands strong to right a wrong, marching and hoping for freedom and justice for all. As they knelt, inclined in single thought, they cried: 'Holy, Holy, oh God, hear our prayer!' Then came southern law, clothed in justice garb: 'Get them! Bash their heads in! Strike them as

they kneel! Turn on the fire hose! Use the billy club!
Let the gun butts pound! Fill the jails to the brim!
But they stood with heads unbowed, led by a man
unafraid, and said: 'We shall not be moved. Jails
cannot hold us; liberty enfolds us. With prayer we
will go on. The Lord is on our side. Standing in
silence we fear no violence. We shall not be
moved.' Marching and hoping for freedom and
justice for all, he led from Alabama the nation
strong to right its wrong."]

"Honor, Honor", spiritual arranged by Hall Johnson
(1888-1970), sung by Daon Drisdorn

["King Jesus lit the candle by the waterside to see
the little children when they're truly baptized.
Honor, honor unto the dyin' Lamb."]

"Free At Last", traditional melody, arranged by Julia
Perry (1924-1979), sung by Ensemble

["Free at last, free at last, I thank God I'm free at
last! Serve you Lord while I have breath; see my
Jesus after death, I thank God I'm free at last!"]

“Hold On”, spiritual, arranged by Margaret Bonds (1913-1972), sung by Neil Nelson

[“Noah, let me come in; door’s all fastened and the window’s pinned. Keep your hand on the plow; hold on, hold on.”]

“Sweet Little Jesus Boy”, words and music by Robert MacGimsey (1898-1979), sung by Melissa Joseph

[“Sweet Little Jesus Boy, they made you be born in a manger. Sweet Little Holy Child, didn’t know who was. Didn’t know you’d come to save us, Lord! To take our sins away. Our eyes was blind; we couldn’t see. We didn’t know who you was. Long time ago you was born in a manger low. The world treat you mean, Lord; treat me mean, too. But that’s how things is down here. We don’t know who you is. You done told us how; we is a tryin’. Master, you done showed us how, even when you’s dyin’. Just seems like we can’t do right; look how we treated you. But please, sir, forgive us, Lord. We didn’t know ‘twas you.”]

“Witness”, spiritual, arranged by Hall Johnson (1888-1970), sung by Daon Drisdorn

[“Oh Lord, what manner of man is this? All nations in Him are blest. All things are done by His will. He spoke to the sea and the sea stood still. Now ain’t that a witness for my Lord? My soul is a witness for my Lord.”]

“Oh, Freedom!”, spiritual, arranged by Roland Carter (born 1942), sung by Melissa Joseph and Sarah Joyce Cooper

[“Oh freedom! Oh freedom over me! And before I’d be a slave, I’ll be buried in my grave, and go home to my Lord, and be free! No more mourning over me.”]

“Precious Lord”, inspirational song, by Thomas A. Dorsey, sung by Ensemble

[“Precious Lord, take my hand. Lead me on, let me stand. I am tired, I am weak, I am worn. Through the storm, through the night, lead me on to the light. Take my hand, precious Lord, lead me home.”]

“Martin Luther King, Jr.” by Dave Ragland (dates unknown), text by Gwendolyn Brooks, sung by Sarah Joyce Cooper

[“A man went forth with gifts. He was a prose poem. He was a tragic grace. He was a warm music. He tried to heal the vivid volcanoes. His ashes are reading the world. His dream still wishes to anoint the barricades of faith and control. His word still burns the center of the sun. Above the thousands, the hundred thousands, the word was Justice. It was spoken. So it shall be spoken. So it shall be done.”]

“Sence You Went Away”, by H. Leslie Adams (born 1932), text by NEC graduate James Weldon Johnson, sung by Neil Nelson

[“Seems like to me the stars don’t shine so bright. Seems like to me the sun done lost his light. Seems like to me there’s nothin’ going’ right sence you went away. Seems like to me the sky ain’t half so blue. Seems like to me that everything wants you. Seems like to me I don’t know what to do sence you went away. Oh, everything is wrong. the day’s just

twice as long. The bird's forgot his song sence you went away. Seems like to me I just can't help but sigh. Seems like to me my throat keeps gettin' dry. Seems like to me a tear stays in my eye sence you went away.”]

“Dear Coretta” by J. Jakari Rush (born 1990), based on a love letter from Martin Luther King, Jr., sung by Daon Drisdorn, World Premiere performance

[“Coretta, my love for you is based on a solid foundation that the stormy winds of anger cannot blow it asunder. Love is such a dynamic force, inexplicable, and yet the most beautiful force. Oh, how joyous it is! My life without you is like a year without a springtime, giving illumination from the dark cold of winter. Imagine a King without a throne. Such would be if I could not reign at the throne of Coretta.”]

“He's Got the Whole World in His Hands”, spiritual, arranged by Moses Hogan (1957-2003), sung by Ensemble

["He's got the whole world in His hands. He's got you an' me, brother, in His hands. He's got you an' me, sister in His hands. He's got the little bitty baby in His hands. He's got the whole world in His hands."]

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