

Milton Community Concerts and Courageous Conversations
Toward Racial Justice presents:

LIFTING OUR VOICES: SONGS OF STRUGGLE AND
HOPE BY AFRICAN AMERICAN COMPOSERS

Sunday, April 11, 2021 at 3:00pm (streaming through 5/11)
Sparrow Live (sparrowlive.com/miltoncommunityconcerts)

Narrator: Brother Dennis Slaughter

Pianist: Timothy Steele

Recording engineers: Eric Miller and Madeleine Miller

Welcome: Brother Dennis Slaughter

“Song Without Words”, by Charles Brown Melissa
Joseph, soprano; Photo montage by Gabriel Raines

“The Foundling”, by Hall Johnson Ron Williams,
baritone [performed live]

[NOTE: In a huge Los Angeles supermarket crowded with pre-Thanksgiving Day shoppers, this foundling was suddenly discovered – in a telephone booth.

“Left on a doorstep, hungry and cold, young as your birthday,
already so old; nothing to know you by; nameless, alone; who
brought you here to stay? Who are our own?

Who is your father? Who is your mother? Poor little stranger,
fresh from above? Who could not want you? Who could not
love you, poor little stranger seeking for love?

Rosebuds for fingers and diamonds for eyes, what are you telling me, looking so wise? Clutching my fingertip, holding my eyes, tell me this mystery straight from the skies. ‘I know my Father; I know my Mother. I am no stranger, here or above. God is my Father; Life is my Mother. I am no stranger; I’m at home now in Love!’”]

“In the Beginning God”, by Duke Ellington Ron Williams, baritone [performed live]

[“In the beginning God. No heaven, no earth, no nothing. No mountains, no valleys, no main street, no back alleys . . .”]

“Sympathy” by Florence B. Price, text by Paul Laurence Dunbar
Brianna Robinson, soprano

[“I know what the caged bird feels, alas, when the sun is bright on the upland slopes; when the wind stirs soft through the springing grass and the river flows like a stream of glass; when the first bird sings and the first bud opes, and the faint perfume from its chalice steals. I know what the caged bird feels.

I know why the caged bird beats his wing till the blood is red on the cruel bars, for he must fly back to his perch and cling when he fain would be on the bough a-swing. And the pain still throbs in the old, old scars, and they pulse again with a keener sting. I know why he beats his wing; I know why the caged bird sings, ah me. When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore, when he beats his bars and he would be free, it is not a carol of joy or glee, but a prayer that he sends from his heart’s deep core; but a plea that upward to Heaven he flings. I know why the caged bird sings!”]

“A Song For the Heroes”, by Byron Motley, arranged by
Barbara Sherrill, text by Andy Razaf Jermaine Smith,
tenor

[NOTE: A tribute to the players of the Negro Baseball Leagues,
text written in 1940. “Play ball! Get in there and go to town. Bat
those Jim Crow fences down! Demonstrate what you can do;
prove you’re big-time players, too. Put your heart in every play,
for Sunday is your judgement day. Every word and act of yours
may either close or open doors.

Is the Negro player fit? Can he pitch, field, think, and hit? Has
he guts and dignity? And does he use diplomacy? Get in there
and go to town . . . Can he smile and do his stuff when he finds
the going rough? To these questions you hold the key. Boys,
what will your answer be?”]

“Soliloquy”, by John W. Work, text by Myrtle Vorst Sheppard
Davron Monroe, tenor

[“If death be only half as sweet as life, I will not fear; I’ll shed
no tear; nor will I ask my friends to weep, but quietly go, like
melting snow upon a mountains steep gray height, Or wafted
gently on a breeze I’ll drift among the trees like lovers’ laughter
echoing down a lane. Or I will follow willingly the soft spring
rain around the river’s bend.

If death be only half as sweet as life, I will not fear to go. I love
life so!”]

ADDRESS BY CONGRESSWOMAN AYANNA PRESSLEY

“Worth While” by H.T. Burleigh, text by Laurence Hope
Michelle Johnson, soprano

["I asked my desolate shipwreck'd soul, 'Would'st thou rather never have met the one whom thou lovedst beyond control, and whom thou adorest yet?' Back from senses, the heart, the brain, came the answer swiftly thrown: 'What matter the price? We would pay it again. We have had, we have lov'd; we have known!"]

"I, Too", by Margaret Bonds, text by Langston Hughes
Yazid Gray, tenor

["I, too, sing America. I am the darker brother. They send me to eat in the kitchen when company comes. But I laugh and eat well and grow strong. Tomorrow I'll sit 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."]

"Love, Let the Wind Cry . . . How I Adore Thee", by Undine S. Moore, poem by Sappho, based on the prose translation by H. T. Wharton
Symone Harcum, soprano

["Love, let the wind cry on the dark mountain, bending the ash trees and the tall hemlocks with the great voice of thunderous legions, How I adore thee.

Let the hoarse torrent in the blue canyon murmuring mightily out of the gray mist of primal chaos cease not proclaiming How I adore thee.

Let the long rhythm of crunching rollers breaking and bursting on the white seaboard, titan and tireless tell, while the world stands, How I adore thee.

Love, let the clear call of the tree cricket, frailest of creatures, green as the young grass, mark with his trilling resonant bell-note How I adore thee.

But, more than all sounds surer, serener, fuller of passion and exultation, let the hushed whisper in thine own heart say, How I adore thee.”]

“Prayer”, by Leslie Adams Brian Major, baritone
[“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.”]

“Creole Girl” from NIGHTSONGS, by Leslie Adams
Melissa Joseph, soprano
[“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? Creole girl!”]

“Death of an Old Seaman”, by Cecil Cohen, text by Langston Hughes Neil Nelson, bass-baritone
[“We buried him high on a windy hill, but his soul went out to sea. I know for I heard, when all is still, his sea soul say to me: ‘Put no tombstone at my head, for here I do not make my bed. Strew no flowers on my grave; I’ve gone back to the wind and wave. Weep not, weep not for me, for I am happy, happy with my sea!”]

Karen Groce-Horan -- Neponset Neighbors Together Fund

“What Does It All Mean?”, by Roy J. Cotton, II, text by Roy J. Cotton, II and Sharon B. Griffin Daon Drisdom, tenor
[performed live]

[NOTE: This text reflects the thoughts and feelings of the composer after hearing the tragic news of a tsunami soon after the events of 9/11.

“Sometimes I feel myself dreaming in the day. My mind will wander off from reality. I reminisce on how things used to be. But then my mind bounces back, and I see times have changed. Ever since 9/11 my perspective changed. The war on terror died; Sam needs one to blame. I stopped watching the news. The war just bothered me. But something told me, ‘You’d better watch the news today.’ I turned on CNN. There was breaking news. Tsunami, -nami, -nami. We need to know. What does it all mean?

So many nights I cannot sleep. Rumors of war, but not of peace. Mudslides, tsunamis, and earthquakes, these things are keeping me awake. What sense, Lord, does it really make? I need to know. What does it all mean?”]

“I Dream a World”, by Uzee Brown, Jr., text by Langston Hughes Daon Drisdom, tenor [performed live]

[“I dream a world where man no other will scorn, where love will bless the earth, and peace its path adorn. I dream a world where all will know sweet freedom’s way, where greed no longer saps the soul, nor avarice blights our day. 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 like a pearl attend the needs of all mankind. Of such I dream, our world!”]

This concert is presented with the support of generous grants by Celebrate Milton! and the Milton Cultural Council, a part of the Massachusetts Cultural Council.

The net proceeds for this concert will go to support Neponset Neighbors Together Fund through the United Way (a COVID-19 fund to support neighbors of Milton, Mattapan, Hyde Park, and Dorchester who are adversely impacted by the current health crisis, with a focus on our most economically vulnerable neighbors). Additional donations can be made by using the “donate” button on the Sparrow Live ticket page or by visiting miltoncommunityconcerts.com.

This livestream concert takes place at First Parish Church of Milton, Milton, MA, 535 Canton Avenue, Rev. Lisa Ward, minister.

Milton Community Concerts, Timothy Steele, producer
(miltoncommunityconcerts.com)

