

Pair of choral concerts feature women and Black composers

South Holland Master Chorale will celebrate 20th and 21st-century American composers who are creating today's masterworks in a pair of concerts titled "Of Hope, Healing and Discovery". Female and African-American composers will be featured prominently in the concerts October 8 in South Holland and October 15 in Tinley Park.

Works by African-American composers Margaret Bonds, Rosephanye Powell and Barbara Baker and other leading women composers Carol Barnett, Gwyneth Walker and Susan LaBarr will be featured along with renowned composers of Art Music such as Dan Forrest, Christopher Tin, Frank Tichelli and Stephen Paulus.

Authors e.e. cummings, Emily Dickenson, Langston Hughes, W.E.B. DuBois, the Old and New Testaments and others offer inspiring texts for these contemporary American composers.

Audiences will "discover the award-winning, masterful composers of today (whose works) explore themes of hope, healing, joyfulness, spirituality, reflection and nature," said South Holland Master Chorale Music Director Philip J. Bauman. "Together, we will experience the rich traditions of spirituals and feel the music down in our souls."

"We will be taking the audience on a journey of discovery," Bauman added. "Many of the selections we are presenting are not as well known as they should be and not often performed at today's choral concerts. Our audiences certainly will hear something new, touching and delightful."

The October 8 performance will be at 4 p.m. at Christ Our Savior Parish church, 880 E. 154th Street, South Holland. The hour-long concert will be repeated October 15 at 3 p.m. at St. Julie Billiart Church, 7399 W. 159th Street, Tinley Park.

Admission to both concerts is free; donations will be accepted. For more information, visit the Chorale website, southhollandmasterchorale.org, phone 708-210-2913 or email info@southhollandmasterchorale.org.

Two works on the program were composed by Margaret Bonds. Born in Chicago in 1913, she received bachelor's and master's degrees from Northwestern University and is considered one of the more remarkable composers in 20th century American music. Her "St. Francis' Prayer" uses the text attributed to Francis of Assisi, "Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace." Written by Bonds in 1968, it was not published until 2020, nearly 50 years after her death.

The second work by Bonds, "Especially Do I Believe in the Negro Race," is the second movement of her cantata "Credo" (I Believe). Completed in 1967, it is based on the social-

justice manifesto of the same name that was written in 1904 by African-American educator, poet and sociologist W.E.B DuBois. The text of this movement reflects DuBois's determination to affirm the inherent beauty, dignity and humanity of Blackness.

This work is still being performed, Bauman noted. It was most recently presented earlier this year by Opera Philadelphia.

"It is a work of historical significance," he said. "While its lyrics may be outdated and perhaps troubling for some based on current conditions, it is steeped with deep historical significance in today's world, calling for recognition of the social injustices forced upon Blacks."

Another work that is based on a text by DuBois is "God Bless the Young Folk," arranged by Carol Barnett. The text, written in the first decade of the 20th century, proclaims, "God bless the young folk, they that seek and seldom find and yet ceaselessly do seek some Truer, Better Thing," adding the warning, "If you do not lift them up, they will pull you down."

A centerpiece of the concerts is a work by contemporary American composer Dan Forrest based on a poem by e.e. cummings, "i thank You God for most this amazing day," in which the natural world triggers an awakening to Truth, which, for cummings, is a person, a "You".

Among other works on the program are "Hope Is the Thing With Feathers," a setting of a poem by Emily Dickinson with music by Christopher Tin; and "We Remember Them," adapted from the Jewish "New Union Prayerbook" by Susan LaBarr.

The program also includes three settings of traditional African-American spirituals: "Let Us Break Bread Together," by Gwyneth Walker; "Music Down in My Soul," by Moses Hogan; and "The Storm Is Passing Over," by Barbara W. Baker.

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South Holland Master Chorale, directed by Philip J. Bauman (right), will perform works of women and Black composers, among others, in concerts Oct. 8 in South Holland and Oct. 15 in Tinley Park. Michael Cierski for South Holland Master Chorale