



Presents

*Cry of Jeremiah*  
A Doctoral Conducting Recital

Emorja Roberson, *Conductor*  
with  
Concordia & Friends

*Choral Triptych*

Prayer Fixes Things  
Campfire Prayer  
In Need of You

Jason Max Ferdinand  
(b. 1977)

*The Cry of Jeremiah*

Is Not His Word Like a Fire?  
Oh Lord, You Have Deceived Me  
Cursed be the Day  
Hallelujah!

Rosephayne Powell  
(b. 1962)

LaRob Payton, narrator

*He'll Be with You*

Emorja Roberson  
(b. 1991)

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St. Mary's College, O'Laughlin Hall  
Friday, November 13, 2020, 8:00PM

This is a degree recital for the Doctor of Musical Arts.  
*Sacred Music at Notre Dame prohibits the unauthorized recording, publication, and streaming of live performances.  
Please silence all electronic devices.*

## Personnel

Emorja Roberson, *Conductor*  
Concordia  
Dr. Junghwa Lee, *Collaborative Pianist*

### Concordia

#### Sopranos

Martha Barth  
Christina Beasley  
Jeron Burney  
Faith Fleming\*  
Maya Nyachae  
Alissa Plenzler\*  
Gaye Johnson\*

#### Tenors

Dallin Baldwin  
Howard Eckdahl  
Jude Nwankwo

#### Altos

Carlee Baldwin\*  
Molly Burnham\*  
Lauren Lundy  
Venita Roberts\*  
Suze Villano\*  
Lynda Davis\*  
Gaye Johnson\*

#### Basses

Kent Beck\*  
Stephen Drendall\*  
Preston Harrell  
David Marshall  
Adrian Volovets

\* = South Bend Community Singers

### Recital Instrumentalists

Tyrus Tucker, *timpani*<sup>+</sup>  
Ben Runkel, *percussionist*<sup>+</sup>  
Denton Sutherlin, *percussionist*<sup>+</sup>  
Turrell O'Neal, *keyboard*<sup>+</sup>\*\*  
Khamron Diggins, *drums*<sup>+</sup>\*\*  
Khalin Diggins, *bass*<sup>+</sup>\*\*

Dr. Junghwa Lee, *Collaborative Pianist*

<sup>+</sup> = *Cry of Jeremiah*

\*\* = *He'll Be with You*

Emorja Roberson is a student of Dr. Mark Doerries.

## Program Notes

As the first African American to graduate with a Master of Sacred Music in Vocal Performance ('17) from the University of Notre Dame and the first to pursue a Doctor of Musical Arts in Choral Conducting ('22), my mission is to uncover the compositions that have been omitted from the classical canon as taught by Predominantly White Institutions. The music of Black composers is the manifestation of the Black experience in the United States. *Choral Triptych* and the *The Cry of Jeremiah* seek to enlighten our community with the ways Black composers have fused the Western European common practice tradition with the stylings of spirituals, gospel, and blues.

Due to the pandemic, for months our world was shut down and we were forced to reconfigure our lives; many were left homebound and without resources. This tragedy inevitably led to numerous COVID-related deaths. During the worldwide shutdown, violent atrocities committed upon the Black community were unavoidably visible. Our nation, once again, struggles to reconcile its original sin of slavery and its lasting institutionalized legacy, racism. On May 25, 2020, George Floyd, an African-American man, was murdered before the eyes of America; asphyxiated at the hands of those sworn to protect and serve. He screamed, he suffered, he cried; he was Jeremiah.

Jason Max Ferdinand is a Full Professor, Chair of the Music Department, and Director of Choral Activities at Oakwood University, a Historically Black College-University, where he conducts the Aeolians choral ensemble. While earning his master's degree at Morgan State University, Ferdinand was privileged to study with the late Dr. Nathan Carter. Under Ferdinand's direction, the Aeolians won the coveted "2017 Choir of the World" award along with the event's first ever "Most Outstanding Director" award. In 2018, the choir won three gold medals in the 10th World Choir Games held in South Africa.

In Ferdinand's *Choral Triptych*, the first movement, "Prayer Fixes Things," is a familiar quote that is used within the black church, and in most cases, is the foundational idea that the Black church was built upon. In the African Methodist Episcopal Church it is common during an altar call to hear a statement similar to, "Trust God and know He's answering your prayers." The text of "Prayer Fixes Things," "when you're distressed, He sure can bless," reaffirms of the power of prayer. "Campfire Prayer," a verse and chorus composition, resembles the stylings of a spiritual. In this unaccompanied, homophonic arrangement, its minor key illustrates the sorrowful text, "the weight of this life brings mystery and strife. There has to be more to this earthly life." In the subsequent section, Ferdinand through the lens of freedom, and says, "Twas lost, now I'm found, I'm no longer bound...I'm wounded no' mo." The final movement, "In Need of You," the text is inspired by Psalm 121, "I will lift up mine eyes to the hills, from whence cometh my help." This movement serves as a reminder to all that we need God as comforter and guide.

Dr. Rosephayne Powell's *The Cry of Jeremiah* is a four-movement work based upon text from the 20<sup>th</sup> chapter of Jeremiah. The prophet Jeremiah, having experienced ridicule and imprisonment because of the prophecies bestowed upon him by God, laments his sordid state. Jeremiah's journey traverses the emotional states of righteousness ("Is Not His Word Like a Fire"), abandonment ("Oh Lord, You Have Deceived Me"), despair and rage ("Cursed be the Day"), and redemption ("Hallelujah").

“Is Not His Word Like a Fire” is a proclamation that Jeremiah is ordered to prophesy. Powell suggests that in this movement, the listener witnesses the inner struggle within the prophet. To her, Jeremiah is self righteous, yet not without doubt, confident, yet insecure; doubtful yet resolved. Powell uses an ABA form to depict Jeremiah swaying the urgency of his holding in the prophecy from God and an inner sense of peace at the thought of speaking aloud this portent. This serene and contracting B section enters with a melancholy, chant-like recitative texture that reflects the weary prophet who fights with himself to keep silent about his projected task. The movement’s jazz harmonies and rhythmic vitality are dispersed throughout the energetic and fiery piano introduction that compels the power of the Almighty God to drive Jeremiah onward. The coda (“I must declare it”) exposes Jeremiah’s resolve to persevere.

George Floyd’s life is most exemplified through “Oh Lord, You Have Deceived Me” and “Cursed be the Day.” Jeremiah went against his fears and proclaimed God’s word, but the people rejected and mocked him. As Floyd utters his last words, “I can’t breathe,” his cries for help and for his deceased mother are dismissed by those in authority. He is abandoned by those sworn to protect him. As Jeremiah curses the day he was born, he becomes upset with God whom he feels has abandoned him. Jeremiah and George Floyd experience loneliness and betrayal, but only Jeremiah was afforded the chance to sing, “Hallelujah,” a song of redemption.

*He’ll Be With You* was originally written for a pilgrimage to East Africa with the Notre Dame Folk Choir, yet the song has taken on new meaning and relevance as the coronavirus spreads and its impact exponentially grows. In *He’ll Be With You*, I share a message of faith and hope, that through the darkness comes a great light. This sentiment was shared by Tina Knowles, Beyonce’s mother, who commented, “This [song] lifts me up.” It is my hope that this song serves as a mantra for the healing of our divided States of America. We are stronger than any pandemic, political, or racial divide and we will overcome.