



Sacred Music
at Notre Dame

Presents

And They Lynched Him on a Tree
A Doctoral Conducting Recital

Emorja Roberson, *Conductor*
with
Concordia

Choral Triptych

Give Ear to My Words, O Lord
How Long Wilt Thou Forget Me?
Alleluia

Ulysses Kay
(1917-1995)

We Shall Walk Through the Valley

Undine Smith Moore
(1904-1989)

And They Lynched Him on a Tree

We've Swung Him Higher
Look Dere
Oh, Sorrow
He Was Her Baby
They Took Away His Freedom
They Left Him Hanging

William Grant Still
(1895-1978)

Fatima Anyekema, contralto
Julius Miller, narrator

University of Notre Dame, Leighton Concert Hall
Saturday, April 10, 2021, 11:30PM

This is a degree recital for the Doctor of Musical Arts.
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Personnel

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

Concordia Choir

Sopranos

Mary Katherine Bucko
Jessica Roberts
Maya Nyachae
Margaret Foster

Tenors

Raj Das
Howard Eckdahl
Jude Nwankwo

Altos

Christina Hera
Margaret Werth
Eleni Taluzek
Lorraine Mihaliak

Basses

Thomas Valle-Hoag
Emmanuel de Leon Jr.
Adrian Volovets

Recital Instrumentalists

Evan Fojtik, *flute*
Jennett Ingle, *oboe/english horn*
Jason Gresl, *clarinet*
Emma Sepmeier, *french horn*
Steve Ingle, *bassoon*

Emorja Roberson is a student of Dr. Mark Doerries.

Choral Triptych

Movement I

“Give Ear to My Words, O Lord”

Give ear to my words, O Lord,
consider my meditation.
Hearken unto the voice of my cry,
my King, and my God:
for unto thee will I pray

My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord
In the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee,
For thou art not a God that hath
pleasure in wickedness:
neither shall evil dwell with thee

The foolish shall not stand in thy sight:
Thou hatest all workers of iniquity.
Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing:
The Lord will abhor
the bloody and deceitful man.

But as for me, I will come into thy house
in the multitude of thy mercy
And in thy fear will I worship
toward thy holy temple

Movement III

“Alleluia”

Alleluia

Movement II

“How Long Wilt Thou Forget Me, O Lord”

How long wilt thou forget me,
O Lord for ever?
How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?
How long shall I take counsel in my soul,
having sorrow in my heart daily?

How long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?
Consider and hear me, O Lord, my God:
lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death;
Lest mine enemy say, I have prevailed against
him;
and those that trouble me rejoice when I am
moved.

But I have trusted in thy mercy;
my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation.
I will sing unto the Lord,
because he hath dealt bountifully with me.

We Shall Walk in the Valley

Lord, we shall walk in peace,
We shall walk through the valley in peace
If Jesus, himself shall be our lead
We shall walk through the valley in peace

There will be no trials there
If Jesus, himself shall be our lead
We shall walk through the valley in peace

And They Lynched Him on a Tree
“We’ve Swung Him Higher”

We’ve swung him higher
than the tallest pine.
We’ve cut his throat
so he ain’t goin’ter whine.
Come along, fellers,
Come along home.
Start up the car.
Gee, but I’m thirsty,
and I’ll bet that you are.

The moon’s gone out,
and so have the stars.
Come along fellers,
Start the cars.

Narrator

Start those cars, it’s mighty dark. Headlights
showing where you parked. It’s mighty dark and
it’s growing cold. Better go home now the night’s
growing old.

Chorus

Come along fellers,
Come along home.
We’ve swung him higher than the tallest pine.
“I’m glad he’s no son of mine!”
Come along home.

“Look dere”

Look dere! look dere,
is dat a shadow?
Look dere! look dere,
is they all gone?

Creep softly, de dawgs are in the meadow
Creep softly, de dawgs have just gone along

Creep softly, watch where you step,
dere ain’t no darkness
We can’t get through yet
Here’s de limb
And he’s de tree
Oh my God,
have mercy on me.

“Oh, Sorrow,” Mother’s Aria

Oh sorry, oh sorrow,
You’ve taken my hand.
Oh sorrow, I must walk with you
To de Promised Land!

Oh sorrow, oh sorrow,
Oh my son!
Oh Jesus, my Jesus,
What have they done!

I can remember the day he was born,
and the pains tore me.
He was such a man child.
And the day he left me,
Goin’ down the road to a man’s world.
And him creeping home,
Running from the men,
and the dogs baying in the pine woods,
and I remember the flies buzzing in the
courtroom and the judge saying over and over
again, “For the rest of your life, for the rest of
your life”

“He Was Her Baby”

He was her baby
At her breast, he drew his life
Be her hand, he learned to walk
In her love, she sheltered him

He was a man
His proud head,
he carried high
He was a man,
Quick with a gun,
quick with love
He passed by
Now he swing highs

He was a man,
Strong with an ax
He was a man
Sharp with a gun.
Ready to laugh,
Strength in his loins,
Sweated with sun,
Close to the earth.
He was a man, Lawd! He was a man.

Narrator

He was a man, quick with a gun, he fell on evil days. Trouble was after him, trouble followed his ways. Trouble lay behind the edge of his smile. Trouble got him in the end, trouble was waiting all the while.

Women all loved him, women came at his call. They stood in the doorways, they watched from the fence, They waved from the windows. He was strong and tall, Women all loved him, but he had no sense.

So he ended in jail, and they gave him "life," Took away his name and his coppers and his knife. Took away his name, in the name of the law, But justice was a slow thing to be waiting for!

Chorus

He was a man, Lawd
Strong with love,
He passed by.
He was a man, Lawd.
Quick an ax,
Strength in his loins,
He was a man.

"They Took Away His Freedom"

They took away his freedom
in the name of the law,
but justice was a slow thing
to be waiting for!

Justice was too slow
the white men said –
So they got together
when the sun was high.
They marched to the jail,
and broke into the cell
And roped the prisoner
to drag him out to die.
They dragged him on his knees,
And they lynched him on a tree.

And they left him hanging
for the world to see.

Justice was a slow thing
to be waiting for.
In the false name of justice
they broke the law!

Mother's Arioso

Oh, ma Jesus,
Where is your hand, ma Lawd?
They've taken this boy
To a dark land.
He did wrong,
But couldn't they let him be,
Not die like this
on a roadside tree

"They Left Him Hanging"

They left him hanging
for the world to pass by,
but a bloody sun will rise
in a blood sky.
A bloody sun will
shine across this sand.
And a long, dark shadow
will fall on the land

Cut him down from the gallows tree.
Cut him down for the world to see.

Call on justice and take a stand
But a long, dark shadow
will fall across your land
A long, dark shadow.

An evil shadow will defame your land.
A long, dark shadow
will fall across your land!

Program Notes

William Grant Still, born in Woodville, Mississippi, is known as the “Dean of African-American Composers” for the racial, social, and humanitarian contributions his music made to American culture in the early 20th century.^[1] While attending Wilberforce University, he conducted the band and began his journey of composing and orchestrating. Shortly after, he studied at Oberlin Conservatory of Music, and New England Conservatory of Music. In 1931, Still became the first African-American to have a major orchestra play one of his compositions when the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra performed *Afro-American Symphony*. In 1936, he conducted the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra in a performance of his own compositions at the Hollywood Bowl, and became the first Black man to conduct a major White orchestra in the United States. Still would go on to perform with the New Orleans Philharmonic Orchestra and the New York Symphony Orchestra. He was later awarded with several honorary degrees: Master of Music from Wilberforce (1936), Doctor of Music from Howard University (1941), Doctor of Laws from University of Arkansas (1971), and a Doctor of Musical from New England Conservatory.^[2]

The Harlem Renaissance was a cultural movement in the 1920s that highlighted the reinvention and manifestation of Black creative and performing arts. From this era were artists such as Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Duke Ellington, and W.E.B. Du Bois, who were educated and influential figures in multiethnic communities. Alain Locke, a leading Black intellectual of the early 20th century, coined this era as the “New Negro Movement.” It was Locke who was sent a poem by Katherine Garrison Chapin, who then introduced it to William Grant Still; it would become the text for Still’s monumental *And They Lynched Him On A Tree*. Still collaborated with Chapin on a vision of a choral ballad that included a racially mixed choral ensemble with an African-American contralto, Marian Anderson, to transfigure the melodramatic story into one of tragic depth and beauty.

And They Lynched Him on a Tree contains four large sections and is scored for contralto soloist, male narrator, two choruses (White chorus and Black chorus), and a medium-sized orchestra. The White chorus sings the role of the departing lynch mob, while the Black chorus discovers the lynched young man and describes the “false justice” enacted upon him. As an act of unity, both choruses return in the finale with a prophetic of warning.

The opening movement, “We’ve Swung Him Higher,” is built on two motifs. The “Excitement” motif, short bursts of churning chromaticism that occur in the orchestra, reflects the emotions of those who just performed the lynching. The second motif, “The Wounding Power of Prejudice,” is introduced as hammer strokes by the horn and oboe that are quickly echoed by the flute and piccolo.^[3] The opening movement’s text, “We’ve swung him higher than the tallest pine. We’ve cut his throat so he ain’t goin’ ter while,” is performed by the White chorus and describes the blood thirsty lynching by the mob. Participants of the mob leisurely depart the recent hanging: “Come along fellers, come along home!” The narrator contemptuously warns the lynchers to flee. The opening atmosphere of the second movement is described by Locke: “The stridency fades out into the still and fitfully romantic atmosphere of the Southern night, with occasional hints of somber and ominous silence.” As the mob departs, the Negro chorus slowly appears to find their hanging family member and friend.

Movement three consists of a heart wrenching aria, “Oh, Sorrow,” sung by the contralto soloist. It is the mother’s grief-filled visceral response to her son’s death. The spiritual-like section, “He Was Her Baby,” is a wake for the victim as the community collectively reflects on his life and death. It is performed from the perspective of the Negro chorus that sings of his manly attributes and is reinforced by the outraged narrator.

In movement four, the White chorus returns to join with the Negro chorus as they march to the jail to protest and demand justice for those who broke law! Out of the uproar, the mother returns with her aria as she continues her sorrowful melody in a plea to the Lord. Verna Avery, William Grant Still’s wife, describes the finale as “if this chain of events could only lead to doom.” Chapin’s dark text declares that a “bloody sun will rise” should the genocide of lynching continue; it is a reference to Revelations 6:12, “lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood.” The final musical gesture of the composition, performed by the horn, is left unresolved just as lynchings in the United States, now witnessed in the form of police violence, remain a threat to the Black community.

Undine Smith Moore, Dean of Black Women Composers, is most known for her choral works, including *Scenes in the Life of a Martyr*, based on Martin Luther King, Jr., which was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. Moore’s arrangement of *We Shall Walk Through the Valley* (text by A.L. Hatter) will function as the midpoint of the performance; it envisions a hopeful future as America strives for equality among all citizens.

Ulysses Kay, born in Tucson, AZ, was from a musical family and at an early age he began playing classical piano sonatas by Chopin and Rachmaninoff as well as popular songs of the day. He was one of the first African American composers to establish himself in the white cultural mainstream with music that did not include jazz, blues, or pictorialism, such as, William Grant Still. Kay believed that a composer is a product of his extraction, environment, and political and ethnic interests. Kay was a modernist composer and a contemporary of Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Copland, and Ives.

In his early career, Kay was known for his choral composition *Song of Jeremiah* (1945), many unaccompanied choral works, and his two one-act operas, *The Boor* (1955) and *The Juggler of Our Lady* (1956). *Choral Triptych* (1967) is a three-movement work composed for string orchestra, or piano, and medium sized chorus. The work was commissioned by a grant from the Ford Foundation and was premiered by King’s Chapel of Boston and the Cambridge Festival Arts Orchestra under the direction of Daniel Pinkham.

“Give Ear To My Words, O Lord” (Psalm 5:1-7) begins with an urgency in the accompaniment that abruptly slows with the entrance of the chorus, “Give ear to my words, O Lord,” which is sung as a prayer in unison. The subsequent motif, “My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O Lord,” suggests an upside down waltz that places the weak text syllables on long notes and stressed syllables on shorter notes. This is followed by the declaration, “For thou art not a God...,” which is underlined by the piano’s incessant eighth-note triplets. The middle section of the work begins with verse 6 (Thou shalt destroy them...) and is performed in duets by sopranos/tenors and altos/basses while sustained by the accompaniment’s octave eighth-note motif. In the final section, Kay returns to the 12/8 meter singing, “I will come unto thy house, O Lord,” before ending as he began with, “Give ear to my words, O Lord.”

“How Long Wilt Thou Forget Me, O Lord (Psalm 13)” begins with an eighth-note motif that emits a sense of an unsettling loss of direction. The mostmodernist of the three movements with vocal and piano parts that feel incongruent, the opening statement calls upon the Lord for His presence in the wilderness. This movement, unlike the first and third, is composed of a melodic spiral, that begins with a small interval that expands outward encompassing an octave. While listening to this movement it is important to note that Kay’s continuous eighth-note pattern in the accompaniment evades any sense of cadence. Like the Black community, our lives resemble the wandering eighth-note motifs as we continuously search for answers while simultaneously walking the path created for us: faith.

The third movement of *Choral Tryptich* punctuates the end of the cycle with its rejoiceful “Alleluia.” After a short piano introduction, the unaccompanied choir sings the first “alleluia” motif. Kay builds the counterpoint into a polyphonic exclamation of “alleluia.”

[1] Lippey, Joyce. “WILLIAM GRANT STILL.” *Music Journal* 21, no. 8 (1963): 34–34. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/740704820/>.

[2] “William Grant Still: Biographical Notes,” *William Grant Still*, accessed March 28, 2021, [Biographical Notes \(williamgrantstillmusic.com\)](http://williamgrantstillmusic.com)

[3] Shirley, Wayne D. "William Grant Still's Choral Ballad and They Lynched Him on a Tree." *American Music* 12, no. 4 (1994): 425-61. Accessed April 9, 2021. doi:10.2307/3052342.