



**Martin Luther King Jr. Concert:
Words & Music from the Harlem Renaissance
Saturday, January 22, 2022 ~ South Church, New Britain**

**Chris Shepard, Conductor
Allan Conway, Piano
Spectrum in Motion Dance Ensemble
Lucy Anne Hurston, Guest Emcee**

Five By Langston Ricky Ian Gordon
New Moon * Harlem Night Song * Prayer * Luck * Joy

Songs with Dance
Spectrum in Motion Dance Theater Ensemble
Choreography by Olivia Ilano Davis
Dancers: Henry Seth, Jr. and Thulani Paz Davis

Songs from *Only Heaven* Ricky Ian Gordon
Angel Wings, Mary DiRoberts
Stars, Jennifer Ferrand-Kelly
In Time of Silver Rain, Louise Fauteux
He's Got the Whole World in His Hand arr. Margaret Bonds
Stacey Grimaldi, Soprano

Dry Bones arr. Margaret Bonds
Jermaine Woodard, Baritone

The Ballad of the Brown King Margaret Bonds
Of the Three Wise Men
They Brought Fine Gifts
Sing Alleluia
Mary Had a Little Baby
Now When Jesus Was Born
Could He Have Been an Ethiope?
Oh, Sing of the King
That Was a Christmas Long Ago
Alleluia

Jermaine Woodard, Baritone
Stacey Grimaldi, Soprano
Mary DiRoberts, Soprano & Kelly Kelley, Alto

*After the performance, audience members are encouraged to stay for a talk-back with the artists and special guests.
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affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities.*

Program Notes

The Harlem Renaissance

A people may become great through many means, but there is only one measure by which its greatness is recognized and acknowledged. The final measure of the greatness of all peoples is the amount and standard of the literature and art they have produced. The world does not know that a people is great until that people produces great literature and art. No people that has produced great literature and art has ever been looked upon by the world as distinctly inferior.

— James Weldon Johnson, lyricist of “Lift Every Voice and Sing”, 1922.

Spanning from 1920 to the early 1930s, the Harlem Renaissance had a major impact on American art, literature, music, and sociology that continues to this day. In many ways, it was the first truly American artistic movement: a movement that sought to express a distinctly American voice, reaching beyond solely its European roots for inspiration. The writers, artists and musicians of the Harlem Renaissance also sought to grapple with what it meant to be Black in early twentieth-century America, encompassing three centuries’ experience from bondage to an often ambiguous freedom—and the ways in which, as Langston Hughes so elegantly expressed, the American dream had been “a dream deferred” for an entire group of Americans.

This movement, made possible by the Great Migration from the rural south to northern cities like New York, included some of the greatest minds in American history. This included civil rights leaders James Weldon Johnson, WEB DuBois, and Marcus Garvey; musicians Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong and Margaret Bonds; authors Langston Hughes, Nora Zeale Hurston, and WEB Dubois; and visual artists Jacob Lawrence, Lois Mailou Jones, and Aaron Douglas. In music, the movement coincided with the meteoric rise of blues and jazz, two art forms that were deeply rooted in Black culture, but which were ultimately recognized as America’s greatest original musical genre. The emergence of this repertoire also inspired a renewed interest in the origin of blues and jazz—the Black spiritual. Another New York resident, Harry T. Burleigh, contributed greatly to the rediscovery of this foundational repertoire, performing and publishing many arrangements of African-American spirituals.

Langston Hughes

In this afternoon’s concert, we look at the work of two important figures of the Harlem Renaissance: Langston Hughes (1901-67), whose profoundly moving poetry has made him perhaps the most indelible figure of the movement; and his friend and collaborator, the composer Margaret Bonds (1913-72). Perhaps the most salient feature of Hughes’ poetry was its *honesty*. He described what he saw in his community, both the beautiful and the confronting, writing in his essay *The Negro and the Racial Mountain*: “We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, it doesn’t matter. We know we are beautiful. And ugly too.” Such honesty came at a price; white readers didn’t always accept Hughes’ Black pride and self-celebration, and Black readers didn’t always appreciate Hughes’ inclusion of the less attractive aspects of their lives shared so widely. But a century later, it is Hughes’ honesty that has made him such a seminal figure in the history of American art. As early as 1940, Richard Wright, the author of *Native Son*, could write that Hughes’ clear-eyed realism had become the “dominant outlook of all those Negro writers who have something to say.”

In addition to the clarity of his poetic voice, Hughes’ poems often crackle with a jazz-like rhythm and cadence that all but demand that they be set to music. One of the most prolific setters of Hughes’ poetry in recent years is the New York composer Ricky Ian Gordon, whose music sits comfortably between the worlds of art song, cabaret, opera, and musical theater. In a recent *Gramophone* review of a new recording of the music of Ricky Ian Gordon, David Rosenberg wrote, “Every phrase in a song by Ricky Ian Gordon is wedded so seamlessly to the text that the result

sounds natural and inevitable... [his songs] are gems of concision and emotional directness.” That is certainly true of his song cycle *Only Heaven*, a setting of twenty-nine poems by Langston Hughes that was first produced at the Dayton Art Institute in 2002. Gordon created choral versions of three of the *Only Heaven* songs in *Three by Langston*. In 2012, the Dessoiff Choirs invited him to create two more choral pieces to make a new set, *Five by Langston*, which adds “Harlem Night Song” and “Prayer” to the original three. In addition to those choral works, CONCOR soloists present three other songs from the cycle.

Margaret Bonds

One of the joys of the recent emphasis on non-white (and non-male) composers has been the rediscovery of the works of Margaret Bonds. A native of Chicago, Bonds studied piano and composition at Northwestern University and Juilliard, moving to New York City in 1939. A very fine pianist, Bonds was the first Black musician to perform as a soloist with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. In New York, she formed the Margaret Bonds Chamber Society, a group of Black musicians that focused on the music of Black composers. She is best remembered as a composer of vocal and choral music, including settings of many spirituals. Of these, her setting of *He’s Got the Whole World in His Hand* is perhaps the best known, made famous by a Leontyne Price recording. This spiritual setting, as well as Bonds’ 1946 original song based on the traditional spiritual “Dry Bones,” sit squarely in the Burleigh tradition of mining the Black spiritual for musical inspiration.

Hughes/Bonds Collaboration: *The Ballad of the Brown King*

In their collaborative work *The Ballad of the Brown King*, Hughes and Bond invite the listener to view the story of the nativity through the eyes of the “brown King”—Balthazar, the Wise Man who is thought to have come from Africa. This was a powerful metaphor for the Black community in the midst of the Civil Rights movement, and Bonds herself saw the piece as a way for young Black choral singers to find pride in their identity. The 1960 revision of the 1954 original work was dedicated to Martin Luther King, Jr; its premiere performance was a benefit concert for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. In addition to her own distinctive, modern-classical compositional voice, Bonds explores a number of traditional Black musical styles, including the spiritual, calypso, and jazz. It might seem a bit out-of-season to present *The Ballad of the Brown King* two weeks after Epiphany. However, for this concert, we wanted to place the Hughes-Bond work within the context of the Harlem Renaissance, and as part of the celebration of the life of Martin Luther King, Jr.

It is, however, at its heart, something of a Christmas pageant, and for several years, the *Ballad* was an annual feature of the Christmas season in Black church services and concerts. Sadly, the work subsequently all but disappeared from view. The last few years have seen a number of revival performances, with all indications that this outstanding work will take its rightful place in the choral repertoire. No modern conductor has been a greater advocate for the piece than Malcolm Merriweather, who appeared as a soloist with CONCOR in 2016. Dr. Merriweather edited Bonds’ score and recorded the work with the Dessoiff Choirs in New York—a highly-recommended recording commercially available on the Avie label.

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We express heartfelt gratitude to our many funders and donors for their generosity which has sustained us in these very challenging years of the pandemic.

The poetry of Langston Hughes set to music by Ricky Ian Gordon

New Moon

There's a new young
moon
Riding the hills tonight

There's a sprightly
young moon
Exploring the clouds

There's a half-shy young
moon
Veiling her face like a
virgin

Waiting for a lover

Harlem Night Song

Come
Let us roam the night
together
Singing

I love you

Across
The Harlem roof-tops
Moon is shining
Night sky is blue
Stars are great drops
Of Golden dew

Down the street
A band is playing

I love you

Come
Let us roam the night
together
Singing

Prayer

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

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

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

Luck

Sometimes a crumb falls
From the tables of joy
Sometimes a bone
Is flung

To some people
Love is given
To others
Only heaven

Joy

I went to look for Joy
Slim, dancing Joy
Gay, laughing Joy
Bright-eyed Joy—
And I found her
Driving the butcher's
cart
In the arms of the

butcher boy!
Such company, such
company
As keeps this young
nymph, Joy!
Such company, such
company
As keeps this young
nymph, Joy!

I went to look for Joy
Slim, dancing Joy
Gay, laughing Joy
Bright-eyed Joy—
And I found her
Driving the butcher's
cart

In the arms of the
butcher boy!
Such company, such
company
As keeps this young
nymph, Joy!
Such company, such
company
As keeps this young
nymph, Joy!

Angel Wings

The angel's wings is
white as snow
O, white as snow
White
As
Snow
The angel's wings is
white as snow
But I drug ma wings
In the dirty mire
O, I drug ma wings
All through the fire
But the angel's wings is
white as snow
White
As
Snow

Stars

O, sweep of stars over
Harlem streets
O, little breath of
oblivion that is night
A city building
To a mother's song
A city dreaming
To a lullaby
Reach up your hand,
dark boy, and take a star
Out of the little breath
of oblivion
That is night
Take just
One star

In time of silver rain

In time of silver rain
The earth
Puts forth new life again
Green grasses grow
And flowers lift their
heads
And over all the plain
The wonder spreads
Of life
Of life
Of life!

In time of silver rain
The butterflies
Lift silken wings
To catch a rainbow cry
And trees put forth
New leaves to sing
In joy beneath the sky
As down the roadway
Passing boys and girls
Go singing, too
In time of silver rain
When spring
And life
Are new

Allan Conway, Pianist

Allan Conway is in constant demand as a pianist, organist and accompanist, with extensive experience in the choral, vocal, operatic, and instrumental literature. After nearly thirty years, he is retiring as Principal Pianist for the UCONN Music Department, where he has accompanied the Concert Choir and served as rehearsal and performance pianist for UCONN Opera Theater. He has worked with numerous singers for lessons, Master Classes, recitals, competitions and auditions, and has accompanied auditions for prospective voice students. He has also frequently collaborated with student and faculty instrumentalists in recital, recording, and for juries. He has served as accompanist for the Greater Middletown Chorale since 1998; other choral ensembles Mr Conway has performed with include Arts Alive!, GodSong, New England Chamber Choir, Hartford Chorale and CONCORA. He currently serves two congregations, as Minister of Music at the United Congregational Church of Tolland, CT, and Organist and Choir Director at Emanuel Synagogue in West Hartford, CT, a position he has held since 1977. In the summer of 2016, he inaugurated *Beethoven on the Green* in Tolland, CT with performances of the 32 Piano Sonatas, and has continued to present the piano music of Beethoven, both solo and in collaboration with guest artists each summer since. Mr. Conway received his Bachelor of Music Degree in Piano Performance from Hartt School of Music where he studied with Raymond Hanson.

Lucy Anne Hurston, Guest Emcee

Lucy Anne Hurston, acclaimed sociologist, biographer, ethnographer, professor and niece of major 20th-century writer Zora Neale Hurston, has spent her life as an educator. She taught at Manchester Community College for more than 20 years, covering subjects from sociology to social inequality and contemporary social issues. Her work as an academic sociologist, with field research in Jamaica and St. Kitts, provides her with a unique connection to her aunt's perspective and life.

Only three years old when her aunt died in relative obscurity, Lucy Anne Hurston has compiled a detailed knowledge of her aunt's life and work with an historian's observant eye. She is the author of *Speak, So You Can Speak Again: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston*. The work consists of text, photographs, and various pieces of memorabilia related to her aunt's life.

Zora Neale Hurston was raised in Eatonville, Florida, the first all-Black community to be incorporated into the United States. After some time at Howard University, she went on to Barnard College in New York City and worked under the pioneer anthropologist Franz Boas. A major figure of the Harlem Renaissance, she published work as a poet, novelist, essayist, playwright, travel writer, and leading scholar of African-American folklore. Her most famous novel, the 1937 *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, enriched by her use of African-American dialect, is required reading in high schools and colleges throughout the country.

On Thursday, February 3rd at 6:00 pm, Lucy Anne Hurston will present

“Zora Neale Hurston: My Aunt’s Life & Work” - a virtual talk hosted by

New Britain Public Library. For details, visit <http://www.concora.org/programs--talks.html>

Spectrum in Motion

Founded in Western Massachusetts by Artistic Director Olivia Ilano-Davis. Spectrum in Motion has made Hartford its home for nearly three decades. Its mission is to create, perform, and present the highest quality original, professional, contemporary dance that celebrates the music and movement of the world's cultures. Equally important is our vision: to celebrate our cultural diversity and tell life stories using music and dance to transcend the barriers that divide us: race, language, gender, economics, and the very notion of “neighborhood” that often separates us one from another. We have been Making Dances! Raising Dancers! and Building Community since 1982! Spectrum provides exemplary dance education for Hartford's young adults and children aged 4 yrs+ for those who can least afford it. The ensemble has performed regionally and mounts its own productions following our mission and vision.

A Smith graduate with graduate work in education from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, Ms. Davis studied and danced at The Alvin Ailey American Dance Center, The Clarke Center for the Performing Arts and Henry Street Settlement. She began teaching as an adjunct instructor at the University of Massachusetts presenting a course entitled Third World Dance Theater Workshop, a response to affirmative action. She is the former Director of Dance Programs for City Youth at Dance Connecticut and The School of Hartford Ballet.

Aishah Jenkins Stovall, Professor of English, Central CT State University (CCSU)

A native of New Haven, Aishah Jenkins Stovall graduated from Hopkins School and received her undergraduate degree in English at Morgan State University in Baltimore. After receiving her master's degree, also in English, from CCSU in 2019, she began work at Tunxis Community College as an adjunct professor. The following year Aishah was offered the opportunity to teach her master's thesis on intersectionality as a course at her alma mater, CCSU, where she continues to teach cross-listed courses that incorporate intersectionality and critical race theory.

