

Songs of the Slave

Frederick Douglass is the central figure in this suite based on material from Mechem's opera, *John Brown*. Douglass, an escaped slave, became the greatest African-American leader of the nineteenth century; he was Brown's friend for many years.

I. Blow ye the Trumpet (Chorus)

These are the words of John Brown's favorite hymn, prophesying both the day of jubilee and the martyr's death which Brown knew would hasten the destruction of slavery. What tune Brown knew for this hymn is unknown; the composer has written a new melody in the style of early American folk music.

II. The Songs of the Slave (Bass-baitone solo: Frederick Douglas)

Recitative and aria. The composer has adapted the words from Douglass's autobiography.

III. Dan-u-el (Bass-baritone solo and Chorus)

The solo singer now represents an escaped slave. The scene is based on a real incident. In December, 1858, John Brown helped a slave family escape to Kansas from Missouri, then led them to safety in Canada. During that time, the mother gave birth to a boy whom she and her husband (the solo singer in this scene) named after John Brown. Some of the words come from the spiritual, "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel?", others from the composer's libretto. The music is original but has the flavor of the great spiritual tradition.

IV. Dear Husband (Soprano solo)

The text is an actual letter written by a slave mother, Harriet Newby, to her husband Dangerfield, one of John Brown's raiders at Harpers Ferry. Dangerfield was killed in the raid; his wife was sold to a slave dealer in Louisiana.

V. A Speech by Frederick Douglass (Bass-baritone solo)

Douglass was one of the great orators of his time. This scene takes place at a gathering of John Brown's family and friends, who have asked their newly-arrived guest, Douglass, to let them hear "the famous speech you made in England." Douglass was, in fact, enormously successful in raising anti-slavery funds in England. He was "a consummate actor who used all his powers of ridicule, pathos, mimicry and change of pace."

Most of the words in this "speech" are his own, but the composer has compressed and edited them from Douglass's speeches and writings spanning many years. The music is a dramatic combination of recitative, arioso and aria.

VI. Declaration (Douglass and Chorus)

Douglass's speech leads directly into this setting of a portion of the Declaration of Independence. Brown's family and friends join Douglass, singing his words antiphonally, all coming together at the repetition of "All men are created equal."

Brandon Brown has a passion for music that shines throughout his performances. He has been a featured soloist and conductor with the Celestial Evangel Choir in Kumasi and Accra, Ghana, and Prague. In addition to opera roles, Mr. Brown has performed the baritone solos in Beethoven's 9th Symphony, and Mass in C Major, Parker's A Sermon from the Mountain, Verdi's Requiem, Brahms' Requiem, Dubois' Seven Last Words, Handel's Messiah, Mendelssohn's Elijah, Linda Twine's Changed My Name, and Fauré's Requiem. Brandon has performed with the Beloit Janesville Symphony Orchestra, the Chicago Modern Orchestra Project, College of DuPage, the South Shore Opera Company of Chicago, American Chamber Opera, Main Street Opera, Katydid Opera Productions, and chorus master for Show-Me Opera. He served as the Music Director and Project Manager of the Chicago Community Chorus, and is currently President of the Chicago Music Association, Br. No. 1 of the National Association of Negro Musicians, Secretary of the United Church of Christ Musicians' Association, and Music Coordinator at Columbia United Church of Christ. Brandon has studied and coached with Jonita Lattimore, David Holloway, Scott Gilmore, Dana Brown, and Giulio Favario. Brandon is pursuing a Master's in Choral Conducting from the University of Missouri, and earned his degree as a Bachelor of Music in Vocal Performance from Eastern Illinois University and his Master's in Voice Performance from CCPA at Roosevelt University. He is also a member of Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia.

Dr. R. Paul Crabb serves as Director of Choral Activities and Graduate Choral Studies at the University of Missouri. His choirs have been invited to perform at state, regional, and national conventions. International conducting and lecturing has taken him to Japan, Taiwan, China, Brazil, Poland, Russia, Sweden, Estonia, and throughout Western and Central Europe. He was the first American to serve as a Visiting Professor at the Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest, Hungary, and at the University of Vienna's *Universität für Musik und Darstellende Kunst* choral department. In 2017 he was guest professor at music conservatories in Malmö, Luleå, and Stockholm, Sweden. His frequent invitations overseas have led to multiple performances for his choral ensembles and graduate students. In December of 2017 Crabb organized a series of seminars and performances in Italy for graduate conducting students. Crabb has also been recognized for his teaching, receiving the Missouri Professor of the Year, and the Kemper Fellowship Award at the University of Missouri.

L. Amelia Lufkin, soprano, is from Knoxville, Tennessee. She is a current Graduate Student at the University of Missouri with a completed Masters in Choral Conducting and will complete her Masters in Voice Performance in Spring 2022. Her previous studies were done at Middle Tennessee State University with a Bachelors in Voice Performance. Her collegiate voice instructors include Dr. Christine Isley-Farmer from 2015-2019 at MTSU and she currently studies with Dr. Steven Jepson at the University of Missouri. Amelia worked and studied as a Graduate Teaching Assistant at the University of Missouri under Dr. R. Paul Crabb and Professor Emily Edgington-Andrews. She helped organize and direct in University Singers, University Treble choir, and Concert Chorale. As a Scholarship student at Missouri United Methodist Church, she often solos and assists in rehearsals as a section leader and assistant director. She currently teaches private voice through the Community Music Program (CMP).

Her previous operatic roles include: Mademoiselle Silberklang in *Der Schauspieldirektor*, Phyllis in *Iolanthe*, she covered the role of Alice in *Falstaff*, and most recently played the role of Susanna in *Le nozze di Figaro*. She has also portrayed notable roles in scene works such as: Yum Yum in *The Mikado*, Fiordiligi in *Così fan tutte*, the title role in *Susannah*, Rosalinda in *Die Fledermaus*, Ilia in *Idomeneo*, and Jeannette in *L'amant anonyme*. Amelia has placed third in NATS under the category of Senior Women in 2019 and placed in Semi-finals for Regional NATS 2021 under the category of Advanced Classical Treble. Amelia has placed first in MMTA under the category of Collegiate Voice-Graduate in 2020. In the Fall of 2021, she placed first as Missouri's MTNA state winner and was the overall runner-up in the competition. Amelia aims to continue her musicianship by directing, teaching, and performing.

Rachel Misner, mezzo-soprano, is pursuing a B.M. in Vocal Performance at the University of Missouri. She is originally from Chesterfield, Missouri. She studies voice with Professor Steven Tharp and has been a member of University Singers with Dr. R. Paul Crabb for the past two years. She also participates in the Show-Me-Opera program under Professor Christine Seitz, and has recently sung the roles of Meg Page in *Falstaff* and Cherubino in *Le Nozze di Figaro*. She has been involved in many other ensembles with the university, such as Concert Chorale, Hitt St Harmony, Ars Nova, and Canticum Novum. During Summer 2021, Rachel was cast in Mizzou's Larry D. Clark Summer Repertory Theater, her first musical theater endeavor. Through this experience, she performed as Private and Mort in *Madagascar: A Musical Adventure*, as well as various roles in the *Blame It On the Summer Night Benefit Concert*.

American bass-baritone and conductor **Marques Jerrell Ruff** has performed across the globe, including at the Walt Disney Hall in Los Angeles, California, the Weiner Musikverein in Vienna, Austria, the Rudolfinum in Prague, Czech Republic, and the Mariinsky Theater in St. Petersburg, Russia. The Hartford Courant marveled, "Ruff has a voice that has power, clarity and brilliant shades of color." As a former member of the Grammy® award-winning ensemble, Chanticleer, Mr. Ruff has traveled to dozens of countries concertizing with the ensemble and has given vocal and conducting masterclasses worldwide. Mr. Ruff has distinguished himself as a versatile, dynamic performer who excels in oratorio, musical theater, Black music, as well as choral conducting. Following an international debut at the National Concert Hall in Dublin, Ireland, GoldenPlec Music Magazine wrote, "Ruff steps out front, his voice powerful, acrobatic, and full of soul." Mr. Ruff has been the featured soloist on several recordings, including a world premiere by famed American composer, Nico Muhly, entitled 'Three Moon Songs.' In addition to a 2010 recording of the song cycle, 'Guided Imagery,' composed by Sergeant First Class Daniel J. Campolietta, Marques also appears on the album 'Sure on this Shining Night' with Morten Lauridsen. Mr. Ruff holds degrees from Central Connecticut State University, the University of Missouri-Columbia, and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Music Education at Florida State University. He is a member of ACDA, Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia, and Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. He can be found @marquesjruff on all social media.

Singer, Songwriter, Actor, Performer, Servant, Lover, Human. **Symonne SPARKS**, originally from St. Louis, MO, had her talents cultivated by Pleasant Grove Church starting at the age of 7. She trained first on a professional level with the Opera Theatre of St. Louis, then studied Music with an Emphasis in Vocal Performance at The University of Missouri pursuing her Masters in the Arts. Miss Sparks has used her gifts to assist in many genres, including Gospel, Opera, Jazz, R&B, Pop, and her current focus, Musical Theatre. Symonne has been involved with a plethora of organizations in her time at the University and she is still very active in the Columbia community. Symonne is a board member with the Michael A. Middleton Center of Race, Justice and Citizenship and also an advisory board member with Big Brother Big Sister Central Missouri. She is currently working closely with the MU Theatre Department in various ways. Symonne has even performed several times for the NFL, with the most recent engagement being in December of 2021 performing a halftime show for the Kansas City Chiefs. Symonne hopes to continue working closely within the music and theatre realm as well as other creative arts facets and eventually use her voice - through songs original or covered, through Theatre and performance of all types, through writings and spoken word, and even through the voice and the presence of music in movement and dance- to impact not just this nation, but the world at large.

Samuel Wright, Baritone, hails from St. Louis, Missouri, and regularly performs with companies and organizations in Missouri and its neighbors, including the Show-Me Opera, Columbia Civic Orchestra, Opera in the Ozarks, Cedar Rapids Opera Theatre, Union Avenue Opera, Missouri Symphony, Jefferson City Symphony Orchestra, Napa Valley College, and The Choral Arts Alliance of Missouri. Wright began his career in 2015, making his professional debut with Cedar Rapids Opera Theatre performing the role of Masetto in Don Giovanni. His other highlights include fifteen different roles from masterpieces in the operatic repertoire by composers such as Verdi, Puccini, Mozart, and Bizet. He has also premiered a number of new operatic works by Missouri composers. Wright is also a regular performer of concert works including Brahms' Ein Deutsches Requiem, Mendelssohn's Elijah, and Orff's Carmina Burana.