



MENDELSSOHN
CHORUS
OF
PHILADELPHIA

~EST. 1874~

150th Anniversary Season
As We Live and Breathe

Mendelssohn Chorus of Philadelphia
Dominick DiOrio, Artistic Director & Conductor

We Reply to Violence

Dominick DiOrio, conductor
The Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia
Ting Ting Wong, piano

Missa in tempore belli (Mass in Time of War)

Joseph Haydn (1732–1809)

1. Kyrie
2. Gloria
3. Credo
4. Sanctus
5. Benedictus
6. Agnus Dei

Rachael Lipson, soprano
Julia Bokunewicz, alto
Michael Robert Smith, tenor
Lucas DeJesus, bass

Intermission

Seven Last Words of the Unarmed*

Joel Thompson (b. 1988)

1. Kenneth Chamberlain
2. Trayvon Martin
3. Amadou Diallo
Ian Martin, tenor
4. Michael Brown
5. Oscar Grant
6. John Crawford
7. Eric Garner

We Reply

Dominick DiOrio (b. 1984)

This concert is sponsored in part by Teri Gemberling-Johnson and Jay Johnson.

**This work is a choral recreation of the final words spoken by seven Black men who were killed. Please be advised that it contains specific language, gestures, and sounds that may trigger a response in those who have experienced similar or adjacent experiences. Please know that you have agency and you are welcome to come and go during the concert as you need based upon your own processing of these potentially triggering experiences. Thank you.*



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On November 23, 1963, one day after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, Leonard Bernstein spoke these words in tribute: "This will be our reply to violence: to make music more intensely, more beautifully, more devotedly than ever before." Music has power. It reflects and responds to its own time. It can stand as testimony of war, violence and hatred, but also as a beacon of compassion, hope and resolve. The three works in this concert each provide their own unique musical response to war and violence.

Missa in tempore belli (Mass in Time of War)

Joseph Haydn (1732–1809)

Haydn was one of the truly innovative composers, credited with the invention of the string quartet and the modern four-movement symphony, and at age 65 reimagined the oratorio with his stunningly original *The Creation*. His musical career began as a boy soprano at St. Stephen's Cathedral in Vienna, where he stayed for nine years until being dismissed at age 17 for a practical joke gone awry. Haydn cobbled together a precarious, ten-year career as a freelance singer, organist, violinist, piano teacher and composer for Vienna's famous pop-up ensembles. He had an uncanny knack for turning chance encounters to his favor, and had the good fortune to live in one of Vienna's vertically stratified buildings (where social status and wealth was inversely proportional to one's floor), which facilitated those chance meetings. Imperial court poet Pietro Metastasio heard Haydn's clavier playing wafting down from the garret and engaged him as a teacher of his young protégé Marianne Martines, who would become a highly regarded pianist, composer and duet partner of Mozart. Marianne's playing attracted the attention of Nicola Porpora, an opera composer and voice teacher, who took Haydn on as an assistant in return for instruction in Italian and composition. And it was through Porpora that Haydn was introduced to the Dowager Princess Esterházy, who persuaded her son Paul Anton to hire him as assistant to their aging *kappelmeister* in 1760. Haydn became full *kappelmeister* the next year, and Nicolas I succeeded his brother Paul Anton as Prince the following year. It would become a fortunate 28-year pairing for both men.

Nicolas quickly learned to appreciate Haydn's musical genius. He expanded and improved the court orchestra. He entertained lavishly, where he featured his ever more famous *kapellmeister* prominently. In an unusual move, he allowed Haydn to accept outside commissions and to publish his music. By the 1780s, Haydn was the most famous and highly regarded composer in the empire. Nicolas died in 1790 and his successor drastically reduced the musical establishment, retaining Haydn as *kappelmeister* but with no duties. Haydn took the opportunity to accept impresario Johann Peter Salomon's offer to take him to London. Haydn was met with adoring crowds, the elite from the Prince of Wales on down vied to fête him, his concerts were packed, and Oxford University awarded him an honorary doctorate. He felt himself rejuvenated as a composer, and the twelve symphonies he wrote for his two extended stays in London were his greatest achievements in that genre.

The *Missa in tempore belli* was the first of six name day masses written between 1796 and 1802 for the wife of Nicolas II, his fourth and final Esterházy, who had restored the court's musical establishment. It was first performed in September of 1796 at the family palace in Eisenstadt and scored for the available instrumentation. A public performance was given in Vienna in December of that year, and Haydn took the opportunity to expand the orchestration. The leaner Eisenstadt orchestration is being used in this afternoon's concert.

Haydn had not written a mass in fourteen years, so he had ample time to rethink the genre. Compared to his earlier aria masses, the *Missa in tempore belli* is more concise and unified. While he employs a solo quartet, there are no individual arias and the solo and choral music are intertwined. The Mass comes from that expansive period which saw his last symphonies, and there is a symphonic character to the Mass which even extends to the choral writing. Like a symphony, the Kyrie opens with a slow, stately introduction before moving to the main thematic material. The opening also marks the first appearance of the timpani, which reappears throughout the mass like the sound of distant cannon. Haydn ignores the three-part symmetry of the underlying prayer, dispensing with the *Christe eleison* in a mere five measures.

The Gloria unfolds like an Italian sinfonia, in allegro–adagio–allegro sections that generally follow the character of the text. Haydn foregoes the customary “cum sancto spiritu” fugue, instead closing the movement with an brilliant and elaborate “Amen.” In the Credo, after the opening line each voice enters on a different line of text. This compression allows Haydn to quickly dispense with the more didactic text and lavish more attention and musical color on the more dramatic text related to Christ’s incarnation, death and resurrection. Haydn begins the traditional fugue on the text “et vitam venturi” but it never gets a chance to develop, being interrupted by the magnificent “Amen” stretto which concludes the movement.

The rather stately Sanctus is interrupted by the timpani and an ominous forte like a trumpet call on the text “pleni sunt cœli.” The Benedictus is set for the solo quartet until the chorus joins in on the Osanna, unexpectedly set to a different melody here than in the Sanctus. The sense of foreboding continues into the Agnus Dei, with ominous timpani rolls under the text “miserere nobis,” a heartfelt plea for mercy. The music brightens with military sounding fanfares for both orchestra and chorus, leading into the joyful, dance-like “dona nobis pacem” which concludes the Mass.

in 1796, Austria had been at war with France for four years, and Haydn himself inscribed the manuscript with the title *Missa in tempore belli*. If the upbeat ending of the Mass reflected Haydn’s faith in the Austrian army, he was to be disappointed. The conflict would drag on for another 20 years, and Vienna was shelled and occupied by the French in 1805 and 1809.

Seven Last Words of the Unarmed

Joel Thompson (b. 1988)

Joel Thompson is a composer, conductor, pianist and educator. He holds a B.A. in Music and an M. M. in Choral Conducting from Emory University, and an M. M. in Composition from the Yale School of Music, where he is currently in the doctoral program. His choral and instrumental compositions have been performed by organizations including the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Seattle Symphony Orchestra, Albany Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra, Atlanta Master Chorale, Los Angeles Master Chorale, the San Francisco Gay Men’s Chorus, and EXIGENCE – a Sphinx Vocal Ensemble.

Thompson is best known for his cantata *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed*, which was premiered in 2015 by the University of Michigan Men’s Glee Club under the direction of Dr. Eugene Rogers, and which won the 2018 American Prize for Composition. The work was inspired by Shirin Barghi’s #LastWords pictogram series on Twitter, which captured the last words of Black victims of police violence, and is modeled on Haydn’s *Seven Last Words of Our Savior on the Cross*, originally commissioned as a set of instrumental meditations on the seven last words and later arranged as an oratorio. The emotional impetus for composing the work was a grand jury decision not to indict the officer whose actions led to the death of Eric Garner. It evoked a deeply personal response, and the resulting composition not only provided some resolution of his feelings as a Black man in America, but also humanized these seven men.

Thompson initially did not intend the piece for performance because of the politically charged nature of the material. He changed his mind after an initial sight read. He explains, “I called some people together for the read, people of different races, ethnicities, and backgrounds. And I could feel them all connecting to this struggle that was outside their own. Music provides an opportunity for people to do that. And I was encouraged to share the work and put it onstage with the permission of the families of the seven men. With each performance, I feel that there has been a similar emotion in the room; it creates a space for empathy.”

Thompson sent the work to Rogers, who serves as Director of Choral Activities and Associate Professor of Choral Conducting at the University of Michigan. Rogers agonized over performing the work. “I loved it and it resonated with me. But I didn’t know how I was going to do it with an historic group of mostly non-African American singers. I worried how it might be received by this community....The idea of focusing on a universal theme – of love, loss, and humanity ... helped me figure out a way to get my students to consider

the piece as not just a political piece of music, because it never was intended to be political. Whatever you thought about the different cases surrounding these seven individuals, we could all come together and unite around the value of human life.”

Kenneth Chamberlain

“Why do you have your guns out?”

“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” – Luke 23:34

Trayvon Martin

“What are you following me for?”

“Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise.” – Luke 23:43

Amadou Diallo

“Mom, I’m going to college.”

“Mother, here is your son; son, here is your mother.” – John 19:26-27 (paraphrase)

Michael Brown

“I don’t have a gun. Stop shooting.”

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” – Matthew 27:46 (quoting Psalm 22:1)

Oscar Grant

“You shot me! You shot me!”

“I am thirsty.” – John 19:28

John Crawford

“It’s not real.”

“It is finished.” – John 19:30

Eric Garner

“I can’t breathe.”

“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.” – Luke 23:46

We Reply

Dominick DiOrio (b. 1984)

Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990) was not only an amazing composer, conductor and pianist, but he was a deeply committed social activist and humanitarian. He was an early civil rights activist and an outspoken opponent of the Vietnam War. He believed that music had the power to change people’s lives for the better, and gave concerts in support of everything from AIDS research to Amnesty International. As part of the celebration of Bernstein’s centenary, Brett Karlin and the Master Chorale of South Florida commissioned a piece from Dominick DiOrio, inspired by Bernstein’s famous quote about making art in the face of adversity. When DiOrio was unable to secure the rights to Bernstein’s actual words, Karlin suggested a text incorporating words from the Jewish prayers Shema Yisrael and Hashkiveinu. DiOrio’s beautiful and moving text is a wonderful complement to Bernstein’s inspiring words. In describing the work, DiOrio says, “I composed a music that bursts forth with rhythmic energy and momentum. Its harmonies clash with the threat of violence, but also surge with an inevitable optimism, propulsion, and joy. Yes, we shall make music unabashedly, even when the walls seem to be closing in all around us. And our song will echo on long after we are gone.”

– Michael Moore