

2019/20 Program: For Justice and Peace

In his *Elegy*, a Black British composer, Philip Herbert, looks to solace when justice could not be served for an 18-year-old Stephen Lawrence, whose life was lost to a tragic incident of violence. Justice and Peace find their way into music without regard to time and place: on this program, we offer Jessie Montgomery's *Source Code*, which pays homage to African American artists prominent during the peak of the Civil Rights era in the United States. Even Schubert's *Death and the Maiden*, written only a few short years after the composer's arrest due to rebellious behavior toward the authorities, suggest the most unlikely use of power and protest. Bela Bartok, who was destined to leave Europe for America was looking for peace and solace during a challenging time for his homeland Hungary, as World War II approached. As we reflect on the historical and current challenges of Venezuela, we chose the music of Romero, who invoked traditional dance and improvisatory qualities to entice his audiences. Xavier Foley's new work pays tribute to some of the divisiveness of our days, while also offering light and hope. Abels' *Global Warming* speaks to not only the well-being of our earth, but expresses a hopeful outlook he had upon global relations and transcending cultural difference. In the end, as a listener, you must decide the role both artists and citizens can play in propelling peace and positivity.

Sphinx Virtuosi 2019/20 Program: For Justice and Peace

Repertoire to be selected from

Fuga con Pajarillo

Aldemaro Romero

Aldemaro Romero was born in Venezuela. The country has been on our minds, as many friends, family members, and colleagues anguish over life and conditions there today. It is also a country with a rich history in social impact through rigorous music education, a movement that has swept and spread itself throughout the world, called *El Sistema*. Through this piece, we celebrate the beauty and intricacy of one of the most popular dance forms, Pajarillo. While we hope that Justice and Peace prevail in this beautiful country, we also pay tribute to the superb music-making that remains an admirable tradition.

Divertimento for String Orchestra

Béla Bartók

I. Allegro non troppo

II. Molto adagio

III. Allegro assai

We were drawn to choose this beloved work for this program, not only because Bartok is arguably one of the most important composers of the 20th century, but because of his life story and how it reflects the ethos of our program theme. Bela Bartok is a Hungarian composer. He is also an immigrant, who came to America in search of Justice and Peace. He is also most certainly a rebel, who put his own career and safety on the line by refusing to remain in his country under the Nazi regime, or to work with a German publisher to memorialize his work. While Bela did escape to the United States, as an immigrant, he never felt quite at home, nor was able to find his peace with parting with his own home. This work, written shortly before

his arrival in US, is a moment of respite, forthright lightness and beauty. He wrote in in 15 days and stylistically, paid homage to an earlier time, perhaps, as an expression of nostalgia.

Global Warming

Michael Abels

Michael is one of our most beloved composers. We have had the joy of collaborating with him a number of times: in fact, his celebrated work *Delights and Dances*, became something of a theme song for the ensemble!! We chose this work not only because of Michael's recent fantastic success in Hollywood (he wrote the soundtracks for the films *Get Out* (2017) and *Us* (2019), directed by Jordan Peele!), but because *Global Warming* has deep resonance with where we feel our society finds itself today. We loved the work so much that we asked Michael to arrange it for us as a string orchestra! The full original score for this work was created in 1991 for the Phoenix Youth Symphony and blends traditional Irish music with Middle-Eastern tones. Composed at the end of the Cold War, after the Berlin Wall came down, *Global Warming* is a celebration of divergent cultures through their own folk music, and was one of the first works from an African-American composer to be performed by the National Symphony of South Africa after the election of Nelson Mandela. Talk about the themes of peace, justice and hope! When Michael wrote it, he was manifesting a deep sense of hopefulness about the planet and global relations. In some ways, by performing it today, we hope to revive that sense, through our common humanity.

Elegy: In Memoriam – Stephen Lawrence

Philip Herbert

Stephen Lawrence was a black British teenager from Plumstead, South East London. He was murdered in a racially motivated attack while waiting for bus. The fallout for the case included cultural changes of attitudes on racism and the police, and to the law and police practice. It also led to the partial revocation of the rule against double jeopardy. After a lengthy, arduous process, two of the perpetrators were convicted of murder in 2012. The occasion has been recorded as one of the most important moments in Britain's history of criminal justice and one of the highest-profile unsolved racially motivated murders. The theme is all too painfully relevant and familiar today, as racially motivated crime continues to trouble our society. We perform this work in remembrance of Stephen and so many others who have been taken from this world unjustly.

For Justice and Peace

Xavier Foley

One of our own, Xavier Foley, is this year's composer-in-residence. He is also a spectacular double bass player and the first one of his instrument to have won the Sphinx Competition! We asked him to create a work that pays tribute to theme and in spirit, conveys the dramatic combination of his writing and himself as a soloist, paired with one of our amazing violinists.

Thus was born the title work of this program, For Justice and Peace. Here is a note from the composer himself: "I was immediately moved by how relevant and urgent the theme was to the issues of our time. On this program, Philip Herbert, looked to solace when justice could not be served for an 18-year-old Stephen Lawrence, whose life was lost to a tragic incident of violence. Other works on this program bring back the issues dating from slavery, Civil Right era to the modern-day echoes from Venezuela and beyond. I felt that it was my job to then illustrate how the issues of Justice and Peace remain critical to our society today. It is a divisive world, with much unrest throughout our communities. Of course, there is no better way to illustrate the spirit of that than through new musical expression. I envisioned some special effects and an array of techniques which can be employed by the soloists as well as the orchestra, depicting the sound of a gavel hitting and other similar ideas to draw attention to the justice system and certain challenges it faces. My vision for this work is also to involve the various voices in our society, some heard more often, some more subdominant and therefore, subtle. You may hear influences from spirituals and other mediums to give voice to communities of color, often most adversely affected by the injustices. In the end, the music will also offer light and hope, as we all ultimately strive toward peaceful solutions."

Source Code

Jessie Montgomery

Whenever possible, we love to collaborate with and play music by our colleagues and friends. We feel that their voices resonate more deeply with the issues of current times, keeping our music fresh, relevant and live. In this case, our own Jessie Montgomery, a violinist-composer extraordinaire, has toured with and led our ensemble many times. We felt that this piece pays tribute to a musical element that was the soundtrack of one of the most abhorrent periods of American history. We've asked her to share her inspiration behind this unique work. "The first sketches of Source Code began as transcriptions of various sources from African American artists prominent during the peak of the Civil Rights era in the United States. I experimented by re-interpreting gestures, sentences, ...by choreographer Alvin Ailey, poets Langston Hughes and Rita Dove, and the great jazz songstress Ella Fitzgerald...Ultimately, this exercise of listening, re-imagining, and transcribing led me back to the black spiritual as a common musical source across all three genres. The spiritual is a significant part of the DNA of black folk music, and subsequently most (arguably all,) American pop music forms that have developed to the present day....

Death and the Maiden
IV. Presto

Franz Schubert

To close the program, we bring you one of the most beloved works in the chamber music canon. By now, you might wonder how this work relates to the theme? Well, even famous composers sometimes got in trouble with authority. Heads of state weren't exactly relaxed in 1820. Ideas of protest, war and revolution were often the hot topics of conversation among

artists. So, when Austrian secret police observed Franz Schubert and his friends “inveighing against [officials] with insulting and opprobrious language,” young Franz and his friends were arrested. Not only was he reprimanded, but in a society where the police approved everything, his record was a hindrance to his activities and daily life. Both poetic, lyrical and often dark in much of his writing, Schubert pays tribute in this work to Greek poetry. As the name suggests, Death teases and lures the Maiden and aims to take her life. The music is beautiful, energetic, furious and unrelenting, all at once.