

Gospel Mass

North Carolina Master Chorale
Alfred E. Sturgis, Music Director

Rozlyn Sorrell, Soprano | Jeremy Herring, Tenor | Chamber Orchestra

Friday, October 26 at 7:30pm
Hayes Barton Baptist Church

Program

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| Lux Aeterna | Morten Lauridsen (b. 1943) |
| Illumine – <i>World premiere</i> | Daniel Elder (b. 1986) |

INTERMISSION

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| Gospel Mass | Robert Ray (b. 1946) |
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Notes

Lux Aeterna – Morten Lauridsen

Morten Lauridsen was born in Colfax, WA and spent time as a fire fighter and lookout in an isolated tower near Mt. St. Helens before beginning his education and subsequent career at the University of Southern California as Distinguished Professor of Composition. At USC's Thornton School of Music, he founded the Advanced Studies Program in Film Scoring, and he has won several awards for documentary film scores. Lauridsen is a National Medal of Arts recipient and has been described as, "...the only American composer in history who can be called a mystic."

Less well-known to the American general public than John Rutter, Lauridsen's tonal, neo-Romantic style can be compared to that of his British colleague. Apart from his film scores, his music is primarily choral, often based on secular poetry rather than on liturgical texts.

Lauridsen composed *Lux Aeterna* (1997) as an elegy for his mother. It has been compared to Brahms' *Ein deutsches Requiem*, which he wrote as a memorial for his own mother. Brahms ignored the terrifying model of the Catholic

Requiem Mass that had so inspired the dramatic interpretation of Mozart – and later, Verdi. Instead, he offered a somber, but gentle musical meditation on the passing of time, the exigencies of life, and unspecified final respite.

Lauridsen's work is also a requiem – but not a Requiem Mass; he brings together Catholic liturgical texts that all reference the end of life, two from the Requiem itself and one – tellingly – the verse *In Te Domine speravi* (In thee, O Lord, do I put my trust) from the *Te Deum*, a hymn of thanksgiving. Each of the five sections refers to the promise of eternal rest and salvation, without any hint of punishment or damnation. These movements are held together by the image of light (*lux aeterna*). All the texts contain the word "*lux*," which is highlighted in musical tone painting.

In addition, Lauridsen creates a musical metaphor of the idea of eternity. Musically and stylistically, the piece journeys through the history of Western Christian music, including passages integrating Catholic chant, Renaissance polyphony, a quote from a Lutheran songbook

from 1677, and gentle modern dissonance within an emotive, “neo-Romantic” context.

Illumine – Daniel Elder

As a prolific writer of vocal and instrumental music, Daniel Elder ties these genres together to create forms and aesthetics that are at once lyrical and textural, drawing its roots particularly from the impressionist movement. Critics have hailed his works as “deeply affecting” and “without peer,” with emotional evocations ranging from lush lyricism to jagged polyphony.

A world premiere, commissioned by the North Carolina Master Chorale. “*Illumine* sets two works of Bengali poet Rabindranath Tagore (1868-1941) together into a single dramatic narrative,” Elder writes.

In an overarching theme of light, Tagore describes an ecstatic vision of it in his first poem, only to dive into a chasm of despair in the second as light is sought, but not found. The way these two poems work together (an unintended combination in their original publications) paints a poignant tapestry mirroring the unending struggle of humanity. Especially in today's world, as darkness encroaches from all directions, humans look for light but, in failing to find it, constantly fight against despair. Tagore's words seem to outline an idealistic worship of pure, radiant light, and then strip bare the most honest, bleak diagnoses of its absence in so much of the world. But humans seem unable to let go of one belief throughout their shared cultural history in art: The light of hope, however frail, is inextinguishable. Tagore seems to harbor this belief himself as the final lines emerge Phoenix-like from the bleakest darkness, ‘Let not the hours pass by in the dark. Kindle the lamp of love with thy life.’ This musical setting seeks humbly to uplift the purity of Tagore's mystical visions; the darkest dark and the lightest light, and everything of life in between.

Perhaps a few words about Tagore, the Bengali poet, novelist, playwright, artist, composer, philosopher and social activist, are in order here. The first non-westerner to be

awarded the Nobel Prize (Literature 1913) in any field, Tagore and his works were celebrated worldwide. As India (the Raj) was a British territory, among Tagore's goals were to adapt, preserve and recreate ancient and traditional Bengali poetry. There remains, however, the gap in time and cultural context that renders his work somewhat opaque for today's Western readers; but we can still immerse ourselves in his rich imagery and metaphor.

Elder taps into Tagore's imagery with tone painting: A little trill motive opens the piece and recurs as a flickering flame; and the two poems are characterized by different harmonic approaches. The second poem is significantly darker than the first, with harsher dissonances and an emphasis on the tritone (the medieval “devil in music”). The choral parts are declamatory in style, employing the speech rhythms that mirror Tagore's irregular verse.

Gospel Mass – Robert Ray

Composed in 1979, Robert Ray's *Gospel Mass* has become a classic in concert halls and in black Catholic services. Its composition was inspired by two seminal events: The decision of the Second Vatican Council to hold the Mass in the language of the congregation, rather than in the traditional liturgical Latin, and Martin Luther King's message of Black cultural pride and identity. The growing popularity of Gospel music with white audiences influenced the decision as well.

Ray sets the English translation of the Mass to the rhythm, harmony and performing style of the African-American musical tradition he grew up with in the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

The initial idea came from The Rev. Clarence Rivers, the first black priest in the archdiocese of Cincinnati, who traveled around the country with Ray advocating for incorporating African-American spirituals into the Catholic liturgy. Eventually, the National Office of Black Catholics bought into the idea and commissioned the Mass.

Ray a graduate of Northwestern University in music and piano performance, was teaching at the University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana and premiered *Gospel Mass* with his students. Still an untrained composer, he composed the work in two weeks and attributes its quality and success to divine inspiration.

Essentially, *Gospel Mass* includes the traditional five sections of the Ordinary of the Mass, but it also includes an additional movement, "Acclamation, Hallelujah" which Ray

composed the night before the premiere and taught the chorus by rote.

"Everything about each performance has been special," Ray said. "It's different each time because of the nature of the choirs, the soloist and the instrumentalist."

Program notes by:
Joseph and Elizabeth Kahn
wordprosmusic.com

Artist Biographies

Rozlyn Sorrell, Soprano

Rozlyn Sorrell, a New York native, spent a number of years performing in music, film, television and stage performances in Los Angeles before relocating to North Carolina. A National Recording artist, she has performed and/or recorded with renown performers such as Barbra Streisand, Al Jarreau, Norman Connors and the late Whitney Houston, to name a few and has been a regularly invited guest soloist with both the North Carolina and Durham Symphonies.

Ms. Sorrell has a BA in Theatre and MS in Special Education from NYC's Hunter College and has appeared in many local stage productions including, *RUINED* (Burning Coal), *HAIRSPRAY* (Temple Theatre), *A Raisin in the Sun* (Justice Theatre Project), *Black Pearl Sings* and *Master Class* (Theatre in the Park).

Locally, she operates Vocal Precision Studio, a private voice-training facility, where she coaches aspiring performing artists and coaches corporate clients to better communicate with confidence, clarity and conviction. www.rozlynsorrell.com

Jeremy Herring, Tenor

Singer Jeremy Herring has been praised for his Rhythm and Blues flavored contemporary gospel music style and has met with success in both the gospel and secular realms. He lives in Knightdale, North Carolina and is a Special Education teacher at Sallie B. Howard School for the Arts and Education in Wilson. There, he also is the director of the afterschool Arts Academy music program and the gospel choir.

Moreover, Jeremy is the Director of Music at the Salvation and Deliverance Church of Tarboro, NC. He and his brother, Kristian, have led the choir to receive national acclaim—being named America's Best Church Choir and winning over \$100,000. Jeremy has shared the stage with many gospel pioneers and other artists including Shirley Caesar, Dolly Parton, Queen Latifah, Cissy Houston and many others. He credits his hard work in music to his high school music teacher, Mr. William Pollard.