

The Wanderer's Tethering

Boston Lyric Opera

Saturday, April 6
Luth Concert Hall
Prior Presents 2023–24

PRIOR
Performing Arts Center

Welcome

Dear friends,

Welcome to the final event of the 2023-2024 Prior Presents season. Boston Lyric Opera is a celebrated force in contemporary opera, recently partnering with institutions across the country to commission the Pulitzer Prize-winning opera *Omar*. (Audiences at The Prior were the first in New England to hear selections from this work, which BLO previewed for us in advance of its regional premiere last spring!) BLO's vision, "to create operatic moments that enrich everyday life," indicates the treat you are in for today. You may be new to the astonishing art form of opera, or you may already love it. Regardless, I am confident that you will experience moments of thrill and surprise as you encounter "The Wanderer's Tethering."

Prior Presents is the keystone of the Prior Performing Arts Center's public-facing programming, merging live events by visiting artists with robust educational and outreach activities. Defined by exceptional artistic quality, interdisciplinary impulses, and the potential to spark both wonder and reflection, this annual series celebrates artistic risk-taking and the exchange of ideas and perspectives from around the globe. On the occasion of the College's Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of Coeducation, it is a special privilege to bring this female creative team to Holy Cross. Composer Mason Bynes and poet Porsha Olayiwola have spent time in Holy Cross classrooms, offered master classes and Q&As to Worcester Public High School students, and filmed interviews to share with our broader community. Their generosity and artistic journeys are inspiring.

This year we have encountered electrifying work by artists in theater, photography, poetry, dance, performance installation, and contemporary and classical music at The Prior. We hope to see you next season for more!

Kyle Frisina
Interim Director
Prior Performing Arts Center

Special thanks for their support of and engagement with this residency to Oliver de la Paz, Katie Gardiner, Colleen Fitzgerald, Matthew Jaskot, Ellen Lokos, Lynn Kremer, Frances Maughan-Brown, Shawn Maurer, and Carolyn Richardson, and Morgan Rocks.

Program

Act I Pieces

"Love Let the Wind Cry" by Undine Smith Moore

"I Want to Die While You Love Me" by Rosephayne Powell

"Season of Rememberance" by Jacqueline Hairstone

"Is this America" from Deep River: A Fannie Lou Hamer Story by Mary D. Watkins

"Umoja (Unity)" by Valerie Coleman

Five Folksongs in Counterpoint No. 1 "Calvary" by Florence Price

Modes for String Quartet "Moderato" by Dorothy Rudd Moore

Four Negro Folksongs in Counterpoint No. 4: "Joshua Fit de Battle of Jericho"

Act II Pieces

The Wanderer's Tethering, music by Mason Byner and poetry by Porsha Olayiwola

Program Notes

The Wanderer's Tethering

The Wanderer's Tethering is an operetta which Boston Lyric Opera premiered in June 2023 that combines poetry by Boston Poet Laureate Porsha Olayiwola and music by composer, vocalist, and multimedia artist Mason Bynes. It follows the story of Tobi, a descendant of the Igbo community, whose members were stolen from modern-day Nigeria and led a revolt on the shores of Georgia in 1803. Bynes's music merges Negro spirituals and Igbo folkloric music, reflecting the transformation experienced by the contemporary protagonist as she claims her own identity. The program will also include stirring selections of vocal music and string quartets performed by BLO artists and Castle of Our Skins.

The Wanderer's Tethering is the second performance from Poetry in Music, a Boston Lyric Opera initiative bringing together the work of prominent poets and opera composers with roots in Boston to create new musical works and artistic experiences.

The Wanderer's Tethering was commissioned by Boston Lyric Opera With lead commissioning support by Merrill Family Charitable Foundation.

Love Let The Wind Cry... How I adore Thee

by Undine S. Moore, text based on a poem by Sappho

Love let the wind cry on the dark mountain,
Bending the ash trees and the tall hem locks.
With the great voice of thunderous legions.
How I adore thee.

Let the hoarse Torrent in the blue canyon
Murmuring mightily out of the gray mist of primal chaos.
Cease not proclaiming
How I adore thee.

Let the long rhythm of crunching rollers breaking and bursting
On the white seaboard. Titan and tireless tell, while the world stands...
How I adore thee.

Love let the clear call of the tree cricket,
frailest of creatures, green as the young grass, mark.
With his trilling resonant bell-note.
How I adore thee.

But, more than all sounds Surer, Serener, Fuller of Passion and exultation,
Let the hush'd whisper in thine own heart say...
How I adore thee.

I Want to Die While You Love Me

by Rosephanye Powell, text by Georgia Douglas Johnson

I want to die while you love me, while yet you hold me fair,
While laughter lies up on my lips and lights are in my hair.
I want to die while you love me. And beat to that still be, your kisses: turbulent unspent,
To warm me when I'm dead.
And never, never see the glory, glory of this day. Grow dim or cease to be,
Grow dim or cease to be. I want to die while you love me.
Oh, who would care to live 'til love has nothing more to ask and nothing more to give?
I want to die while you love me, and never ever see the glory of this perfect day,
the glory of this perfect day. Grow dim or cease to be!

The Season of Remembrance from On Consciousness Streams
by Jaqueline B. Hariston, text by Dr. Howard Thruman

Again, and again it comes:
The time of Recollection, The Season of Remembrance.
Empty vessels of hope fill up again;
Forgotten treasures of dreams reclaim their place,
Long lost memories come trooping back to me.
This is my season of remembrance, My time of recollection.

Into the challenge of my anguish I throw my strength of all my hopes;
I match the darts of my despair with the treasures of my dreams.
Upon the current of my heart I float the burden so the years;
I challenge the mind of death with my love of Life!
Life! Such to me is the time of Recollection. This is the Season of Remembrance.
This is my season of Remembrance!

"Is This America?"

from *Deep River: A Fannie Lou Hamer Story* by Mary D. Watkins
text by Mary D. Watkins

If the Freedom party is not seated today, I question America.
Is this the land of the free? Home of the brave?

If the Mississippi Freedom Party is not seated I question America
The home of the free and the brave.

Is this the America, Where we sleep with our phones off the hook.
We leave our phones off the hook!
Our lives are threatened daily,
All we want is to live our lives as decent Americans in America.

They shoot up our houses. They burn down our churches.
They threaten to kill us. They take away our jobs.
They evict us from our homes. They beat us they lynch us.
They make our lives Hell!
Is this America?

The Wanderer's Tethering

by Mason Bynes, text by Porsha Olayiwola

I. DUNBAR CREEK I

have you played at dunbar creek?
have you stayed at dunbar creek?
where the grass is as tall as pearled gate
where the water's ripples reveal your fate
it's a place beyond what eyes can attest
where the water possesses and is possessed

have you laid at dunbar creek?
where magic is shaped like memory
the river like love,
a soft screaming stream

where what you see isn't what it seems

II. TOBI

(Spoken): purpose? power?
lineage and destiny?
beacon of who I am to become
and who wants the weight
the wonder of the width
the cautious carrying of legacy
if i am named after an ancestor
is that guardian or ghost
if not my own, whose prophecy
am i assigned to fulfill
what if we gave ourselves
our own names as gift
our own intentions
what if we leaned more on owning our dreams
are we because of what we have been
or is it what we have been because of who we are.
is my name my own

(Sung): what's in a name
what's in a name
what is my name
what's in a name
what's in a blame
who is in my name
who is in my name
what is my numb
what is my name
what is my name

Artists

Mason Bynes, Composer
Porsha Olayiwola, Librettist and Poet

Brianna J. Robinson, Soprano
Ji Yung Lee, Pianist
Matthew Vera, Violinist
Grant Houston, Violinist
Ashleigh Gordon, Violist and co-founder and artistic/executive director of Castle of Our Skin
Francesca McNeeley, Cellist

Biographies

Mason Bynes, Composer

Mason Bynes is a Boston-based composer, vocalist, and multimedia artist from Sugar Land, TX. She received her Master of Music in composition from the Boston Conservatory at Berklee, and she also holds a Bachelor of Music in composition from the University of North Texas. In her 2021/22 season, she enjoyed her first compositional residency with Boston Art Song Society, a prestigious presentation of her music at The Rosa Parks Museum on Rosa Parks Day, and a variety of premieres for voice, chamber orchestra, classical guitar, and wind quintet. Her passion for bringing listeners together has sparked a variety of commissions with various ensembles and composer-led initiatives, including: The Westerlies & Festival of New Trumpet Music (FONT), The National Association of Teachers of Singing (NATS), Ex-Aequo, Bass Players for Black Composers, and Lumedia Musicworks. Bynes's music has been featured with Bang On a Can, the North End Music and Performing Arts Center (NEMPAC), the International Society of Bassists, Dallas Opera, Fort Worth Opera, BBC Radio 3, IDAGIO Live, and Greenleaf Music Podcast.

Porsha Olayiwola, Librettist and Poet

Porsha Olayiwola is a native of Chicago who writes, lives, and loves in Boston. Olayiwola is a writer, performer, educator, and curator who uses Afro-futurism and surrealism to examine historical and current issues in the Black, woman, and queer diasporas. She is an Individual World Poetry Slam Champion and the founder of the Roxbury Poetry Festival. Olayiwola is Brown University's 2019 Heimark Artist-In-Residence, as well as the 2021 Artist-in-Residence at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. She is a 2020 Poet Laureate Fellow with the Academy of American Poets. Olayiwola earned her MFA in poetry from Emerson College and is the author of *i shimmer sometimes, too*. Olayiwola is the current poet laureate for the city of Boston. Her work can be found in or forthcoming from TriQuarterly Magazine, Black Warrior Review, The Boston Globe, Essence Magazine, Redivider, The Academy of American Poets, Netflix, Wildness Press, The Museum of Fine Arts, and elsewhere.

Ashleigh Gordon, Violist & co-founder and artistic/executive director of Castle of our Skin

Ashleigh Gordon is co-founder, artistic/executive director, and violist of Castle of our Skins, a Boston-based concert and educational series devoted to celebrating Black artistry through music. She has presented at the IDEAS UMass Boston Conference and 180 Degrees Festival in Bulgaria; been featured in the International Musician and Improper Bostonian magazines, as well as the Boston Globe; and was awarded the 2016 Charles Walton Diversity Advocate Award from the American Federation of Musicians. She is a 2015 St. Botolph Emerging Artist Award recipient, a 2019 Brother Thomas Fellow, a nominee for the 2020 Americans for the Arts Johnson Fellowship for Artists Transforming Communities, and named one of WBUR's "ARTery 25," twenty-five millennials of color impacting Boston's arts and culture scene.

Brianna J. Robinson, Soprano

Soprano Brianna J. Robinson is a former Jane and Steven Akin Emerging Artist with Boston Lyric Opera, where she covered and performed roles such as Lucy, *Fellow Travelers*, Mimì (cover), *La bohème*; Lena, *Svabda* and covered several roles in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Most recently, she stepped onstage as Julie in the 2023 Pulitzer Prize-winning opera *Omar*. In the 2023/24 season, Ms. Robinson makes her Carnegie Hall debut with The Cecilia Chorus of New York in Vaughan Williams' *Dona nobis pacem*. She returns to Boston Lyric Opera as Jeannette, *The Anonymous Lover*, also covering the role of Léontine. Last season, she made multiple concert debuts with several orchestras, including the Akron Symphony Orchestra, Claflin Hill Symphony Orchestra/New World Chorale, and *Crossing the Deep* with the Handel and Haydn Society. She was named a finalist in the Benjamin Matthews Vocal Competition with Opera Ebony and awarded first prize at the 6th Getting to Carnegie Competition. She has participated in the Berlin Opera Academy and Opernfest Prague, and made her international debut in Ruse, Bulgaria in 2021, creating the role of Ophelia in the world premiere of Joseph Summer's *Hamlet*. Ms. Robinson is a proud graduate of Ohio Wesleyan University and the Eastman School of Music.

Ji Yung Lee, Pianist

Pianist and vocal coach Ji Yung Lee is an active performer and has made appearances at Carnegie Weill Hall, Alice Tully Hall, John F. Kennedy Center, Merkin Concert Hall, The Greene Space, Troy Savings Bank Music Hall, and Jordan Hall. She has also performed via numerous radio broadcasts including WQXR (New York), MPR (Minnesota), WFMT (Chicago), WSMR (Florida). Lee joined the faculty in January 2022 as an opera coach at New England Conservatory in Boston, MA and the music staff in July 2023 as a coach at Boston Lyric Opera. Recent highlights include Dame Myra Hess Concert Series; Pehlivanian Opera Academy as a conducting fellow (*La Traviata* in 8 different cities in Slovenia); concerts with violinist Chad Hoopes, Danbi Um, and violist Barry Shiffman at Rockport Chamber Music Festival; Harriman-Jewell Series; a video-shooting with cellist Laurence Lesser for Tonebase; *Omar* at Boston Lyric Opera; a new opera *Fat Pig* at Victory Hall Opera; New York Classical Music Radio WQXR's Live Christmas Concerts at The Greene Space; Minnesota Public Radio's Performance Today. She has worked with Boston Lyric Opera, Victory Hall Opera, Boston Arts Song Society, Korea Chamber Opera Festival, Juilliard's Drama division, and Amelia Island Opera. Ji Yung has served Victory Hall Opera as its first official pianist-in-residence, with the title of Chief Répétiteur.

Matthew Vera, Violinist

Violist and Violinist Matthew Vera has been a member of the Boston Philharmonic's first violin section since 2010. Orchestrally, Matthew performs in many ensembles including the Boston Philharmonic, Albany Symphony, Portland Symphony, Rhode Island Philharmonic, Boston Modern Orchestra Project, Teatro Nuovo, and the New Bedford Symphony. An avid chamber musician, Matthew is the first violinist of the emerging Izarra String Quartet. Izarra explores fresh interpretations of the classic repertoire with a keen focus on amplifying compositional voices of the LGBTQIA+ + BIPOC communities. Matthew is a violinist with Castle of our Skins, a concert and educational series dedicated to celebrating Black artistry through music. He has also been heard with Radius Ensemble, Juventas New Music Ensemble, and Ogunquit Chamber Music Festival. Matthew made his solo debut on the viola with the Tucson Philharmonia at age 14. He has appeared as soloist with the Buffalo Philharmonic, Tucson Philharmonia, Tucson Symphony, World Youth Symphony Orchestra, and New England Conservatory Symphony. He has attended numerous festivals including Tanglewood, The Heifetz Institute, Brevard Music Center, Green Mountain Chamber Music Festival, and more.

Grant Houston, Violinist

Violinist Grant Houston's recent appearances have included the notable festivals of Ravinia's Steans Music Institute, Yale University's Norfolk Chamber Music Festival, the Perlman Music Program, Yellow Barn Young Artists Program, The Moritzburg Festival Academy, and the Music Academy of the West. Grant appears frequently with the conductorless ensembles Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, A Far Cry, and Palaver Strings, and most recently as a guest principal with the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra. Performing regularly as a sought-after freelance chamber musician, recent engagements include a performance on Boston's First Monday at Jordan Hall series and a studio recording of Florence Price's *G Major String Quartet* which has aired on WGBH public radio. Additional recent chamber music performances include Juventas New Music Ensemble's Music for Peace project, a collaboration between Castle of Our Skins and Boston Lyric Opera, and the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum's Weekend Concert Series. Recent projects have included a recital focusing on solo violin works of living composers Ellen Taaffe Zwilich and Salvatore Sciarrino, an appearance on the Boston Symphony Orchestra's "What I Hear" chamber music series curated by composer Bernard Rands, and multiple performances as part of [nec]Shivaree, the avant-garde ensemble of New England Conservatory.

Francesca McNeeley, Cellist

Francesca McNeeley began her musical journey in her native country of Haiti when she was four years old. Today she enjoys an eclectic career in Boston, as a soloist, chamber musician, contemporary music specialist, and orchestral player. She plays regularly with Castle of Our Skins, the Celebrity Series of Boston, as a substitute with the Boston Symphony & Boston Pops Orchestras, and most recently will be joining A Far Cry. Francesca attended Princeton University with a primary focus in politics, and went on to receive scholarships to attend Rice University and the New England Conservatory for her graduate degrees in cello performance. She has earned fellowships and prizes from the Tanglewood Music Center, where she also served as a New Fromm Player. With her Fromm colleagues she has founded the Chroma Trio, championing modern string trio repertoire. She attended the Music Academy of the West, Kneisel Hall Chamber Music Festival, Spoleto Music Festival & Toronto Summer Music. She has been awarded multiple grants from the Sphinx Organization, and now serves on The Artist Council for the National Alliance for Audition Support. In addition to her private teaching studio, she serves on the faculties for the Boston Youth Symphony Orchestra's Intensive Community Program and Project STEP.

About Boston Lyric Opera

Boston Lyric Opera celebrates the art of the voice through innovative productions and public programming. BLO has produced world and US premieres, commissions, and co-productions of note, ranging from live stage productions to films streamed worldwide. BLO employs nearly 500 artists and creative professionals annually — vocalists, artisans, stagehands, costumers, scenic designers, administrators, and beyond. The Company is proud to play a significant and meaningful role in Boston's vibrant arts community.

About Castle of Our Skins

Castle of our Skins is a Black arts institution dedicated to fostering cultural curiosity and celebrating Black artistry through music. In classrooms, concert halls, and beyond, Castle of our Skins invites Black heritage and culture exploration, spotlighting both unsung and celebrated figures of past and present.

Prior Performing Arts Center

A catalyst for creativity and learning, the Prior Performing Arts Center amplifies the arts at Holy Cross and provides the College, the greater Worcester community, and visiting creative thinkers with an inspiring environment to pursue diverse questions of the human experience.

For more information, visit www.priorperformingartscenter.org.

Prior Presents

The Wanderer's Tethering is the eighth event of this year's **Prior Presents** series, the Prior's signature visiting artist program, which complements the innovation and creativity of work produced throughout the year by Holy Cross students, faculty, and staff. Building on the foundation laid by Arts Transcending Borders (2014-2023), Prior Presents is the keystone of the Prior Performing Arts Center's public-facing programming, merging thrilling live events by visiting artists with robust educational and outreach activities. Defined by exceptional artistic quality, interdisciplinary impulses, and the potential to spark both wonder and reflection, this annual series celebrates artistic risk-taking and the exchange of ideas and perspectives from around the globe. Short- and long-term visiting artist residencies include performances, artist talks, installations, workshops, and experiential learning opportunities for Holy Cross students and the greater Worcester community. Creative residencies, which provide artists with time and space to develop new work, make an essential contribution to the broader arts ecosystem and provide on- and off-campus community members with a window into intimate aspects of the creative process.

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