

# M.Mus Choral Conducting Recital of Christopher Ducasse |

## Program Notes

**Date du récital/Date of recital :** Friday, November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2022

**Nom/Name :** Christopher Ducasse

**Classe de/Class of :** Jean-Sébastien Vallée

*These program notes are written by the student performing and are presented by the student in partial fulfillment of the requirements of their course.*

*Ces notes de programme sont écrites par l'étudiant-interprète et sont présentées en tant que réalisation partielle des critères de leur cours.*

### Abstract

*“Our heritage is what we have inherited from the past, to value and enjoy in the present, and to preserve and pass on to future generations.”* We live in a century where everything and everyone is the most connected we have ever been; communication among people from different countries has never been more accessible thanks to the internet and auto-translation technology. Culture and customs have never been shared worldwide as much as they are now. But the concept of heritage, legacy, and belonging is still a major subject of discussion and even conflict in world societies. Even though at this point in human history, no one is one hundred percent of a specific ethnic group, race, nationality, etc., we still use those characteristics to separate ourselves from one another. The constant fight to hold on to old “heritage” and to separate ourselves from one another with the justification that we are different, and that we have to preserve our “heritage” has sadly brought only a lot of pain and suffering to our lives.

This evening’s program will center around *African Heritage* in the choral repertoire. My choice to focus on this is meant to highlight the beauty of the amazing music that was created worldwide during our history when multiple heritages mixed together to create something new and wonderful. The music performed represents composers of African descent who wrote in a style/genre inherited from African music, composers of African descent who wrote music in a style/genre not inherited from African music, and composers who are not considered of direct African descent, but who wrote music in the style/genre inherited from African music. This combination of heritage, culture, and knowledge to create something

beautiful is what this program is about. It is something that we need more of in our lives -- less of the feeling of group belonging but more of embracing, sharing, and showing compassion for one another to create a better life for all of us. To quote *Gabrielle T. Guillaume*, poet and father of *Sydney Guillaume*, whose compositions will open and close this recital, “*Do not let hatred steal our hopes; With perseverance, we will gain victory. We must not let hatred steal our hopes. Step by step, hand in hand, for a better tomorrow. How so? All together!*”

## The music

The recital opens with two loud slaps from a Djembe in *Mama Afrika*, echoing like thunder announcing the coming of a storm. Composed by Haitian American composer Sydney Guillaume, *Mama Afrika* is set to a text written by his father, Gabriel T. Guillaume, in Haitian Creole. In Gabriel’s words, “Africa, apparently, the original land of life and humanity, has become more and more the land of suffering and misery.” *Mama Afrika (Mother Africa)* is a cry for help from its children, wondering what is happening, and why there is so much suffering and death. Sydney marries the language of the text with hand percussions, which are centerpieces of the African and music, and therefore of Haitian culture and music which evolved from it. The constant syncopations in the melodies and the use of onomatopoeic effects mimicking congas are clear characteristics of African-inherited music. This piece expresses a sense of loss, struggle, and deep pain but also conveys hope that, in one way, we will figure out how to silence and relieve those cries.

*Indodana* is a South African traditional song, more precisely, an isiXhosa traditional work. isiXhosa (or Xhosa) is one of the official languages of South Africa. Arranged by Michael Barret and Ralf Schmitt, *Indodana* is an imploration to Jehovah for the crucifixion of Jesus. Written in a traditional South African style, the arrangement features sopranos and altos singing the melody and text in parallel motion. The tenors and basses create a wall of harmonic sound to accompany the melody and add some expressive interjections to support the text and the feeling of imploration.

Undine Eliza Anna Smith Moore was a Black American composer and prolific professor of music in the twentieth century. Known as the “The Dean of Black Women Composers,” Undine trained as a classical pianist, but her heart lay in vocal music. She composed numerous choral works, most of which were inspired by African and African American spiritual and folk music. Her arrangement of *We shall walk through the valley of peace* in this program is as beautiful as it is simple. She captured the essence of what Black spiritual music was created for -- the need to share emotion through music in a simple but effective way, where everyone in the community could sing a simple melody while adding their own

feelings of sorrow and hope into it. Developed during times of deep oppression, African American spirituals were a conduit of self-expression as well as a way to honor their ancestry.

Commonly described as a feature of objects that makes them pleasurable to perceive, beauty, by its nature, is very subjective. Once we get into a deeper layer of what could make something considered as beautiful, however, a lot of us start to agree on calling beautiful certain aspects or action in life. For example, the unconditional love of a parent towards their newborn without asking or hoping for anything in return is considered by many to be beautiful. At first glance, the text of *O Eternal Beauty* can be associated with the everlasting presence of God as beauty in our life. But individually or personally, this text also can be about something beautifully unique to us -- something so strong, that no matter how hard life gets or how much sadness, loss and suffering life throws at us, this something will be eternally beautiful. In addition, it will always be a light of hope for better days to come.

*Regina Caeli* is one of four Marian antiphons, with following versicles and prayers, traditionally said or sung after night prayer immediately before going to sleep. It is said throughout Eastertide, that is, from Easter Day through Pentecost, the seventh Sunday after Easter. This setting is by Vicente Lusitano, a Portuguese composer from the sixteenth century. He is known to have been of a mixed race, from a white father and a black mother. He is, to date, the earliest black-published composer. Lusitano's compositions are sonorous and intricate. He writes in the typical Renaissance style of his time; a style where single ideas generate intricate melismatic lines for multiple voices and interweave in a contrapuntal manner.

*He's got a whole world in his hand* is a Black American spiritual arranger by Cedric Dent for the Jason Max Ferdinand Singers. Cedrick Dent is a baritone vocalist, music arranger, and co-producer of the 10-time GRAMMY Award-winning vocal group TAKE 6. The native of Detroit, Michigan, draws from multiple genres of black music for this arrangement, such as traditional black spiritual, gospel-jazz, and some south African influences. It results in a beautiful mixture of South African rhythm and a robust sound of men's chorus with and gospel-jazz harmonies.

*Ansanm ansanm*, the finale of this program, is a composition by Sydney Guillaume in a mixed style of Haitian rhythm and Western art music choral writing. Typical of Haitian culture, *Ansanm ansanm* is very animated with a dance-feel. Music and dance are in the heart of every Haitian. They dance and sing at every occasion, whether it is a sad event or a happy one. The soul of Haitian music is always promoting hope for a better tomorrow. This piece promotes that same feeling of hope but asks us to lead and create it all together. To echo the words of Gabrielle T. Guillaume, the poet of *Ansanm ansanm* "For quite some time, our world has seen very somber days; Natural disasters, fratricidal wars, social

*injustice. All together, let us honor the men and women who have worked for peace and harmony everywhere around the world. It's our turn now to raise our voices and sing together for worldwide liberty and justice... hand in hand, for a better tomorrow... All together!"*

## Text English Translations

### 1- Mama Afrika – Sydney Guillaume (b.1982)

Cries! The troubadour hears cries!

The troubadour from the island of Haiti is asking why...

Why all the chaos in lands of Afrika?

Why all the chaos in the island of Haiti?

Cries! We hear cries!

The young ones are yelling: oh mother!

Cries! We hear cries!

The grown ones are screaming: woh!

Cries! We hear cries!

All the young ones, all the grown ones!

We hear cries!

They are crying:

“Mother, mother, mother, mother,

Oh Mother Africa!

Mother, where are you mother, where are you?

Mother, mother, mother, mother,

Oh Mother Africa!”

Day and night

There is misery and nuisance

Day and night

There is illness and death

There is hunger and war.

Gabriel T. Guillaume

### 2- Indodana – arr. Michael Barret/Ralf Smith

The Lord has taken his son who lived amongst us.

The son of the Lord God was crucified.

*Hololo* Father Jehovah (*Hololo represents crying and has no translation*)

*Zjem zja* Father (*Zjem zja is expressive with no meaning*)

Traditional isXhosa

### 3- We shall walk through the valley in peace – Undine Smith Moore (1904-1989)

We shall walk through the valley in peace.

If Jesus himself shall be our leader,

We Shall walk through the valley in peace.

There will be no trials,

If Jesus himself shall be our leader,

We Shall walk through the valley in peace.

*Traditional black American spiritual*

### 4- O Eternal Beauty – Christopher Ducasse (b.1993)

O Eternal Beauty,

ever ancient, ever new,

you have shattered the old order of death

by your rising, healing eyes, earth-blinded,

binding humanity and divinity forever.

*Shannon DeGrave*

### 5- Regina Caeli – Vincente Lusitano (1520-1561)

Queen of Heaven, rejoice, alleluia.

For He whom you did merit to bear, alleluia.

Has risen, as he said, alleluia.

Pray for us to God, alleluia.

### 6- He's got a whole world in his hand – Cedric Dent (b.1962)

He's got the whole world in His hand.

He's got you and me, brother, in His hand.

He's got you and me, sister, in His hand.

He's got the itty-bitty babies in His hand.

*Uphe the bonk'a bantu Ezandle' Uphe thum hlab' Ezandleni.*

*("He's got the whole world in His hand" in Zulu)*

He's got the whole world in His hand.

*Traditional black American spiritual*

### 7- Ansanm ansanm – Sydney Guillaume (b.1982)

All Together

For peace and for justice, many of them died.

For their courage, for their vision,

For all they accomplished and for all they endured,

We sing for them. We sing their praises.

Hats off to them!

All together, with hearts settled, we sing for them.

In unity, without prejudice, we follow their legacy.

All together, hand in hand, let's work for peace.

They made our lives better, let us honor them.

Hats off to them!

In love and in peace, let's make life more beautiful.

With honor and respect,

All together, let's work for peace.

Without gates, without borders,

All together, let's make life more beautiful.

Who are we singing for?

For all those who fought to make our lives better.

For all those who fight so that love can prevail,

So that the flag of freedom can continue to float,

So that the banners of justice can spread around the world.

It's for them that we sing; let's keep on singing.  
Hats off!

It's our turn; let's make our lives more beautiful.

No, no, no!

Do not let hatred steal our hopes;

With perseverance, we will gain victory.

We must not let hatred steal our hopes.

Step by step, hand in hand, for a better tomorrow.

How so? All together!

*Gabriel T. Guillaume*