

La Caccina presents
THE MATRIARCHY

Saturday, November 20, 2021 ~ 7:30 pm
Wicker Park Lutheran Church - Chicago, IL

Sunday, November 21, 2021 ~ 3:30 pm
Second Unitarian Church - Chicago, IL

Prologue

Our Time/Shout

Moira Smiley

Conjuring

Spinna Minni

She Rises

Laggard Dawn

Mist Porkelsdóttir

Catherine Dalton

Ethel Smyth

Ancestors

Harriet Tubman

**New Dreams*

Malala

**The Girl with the Numbers*

Walter Robinson, arr. Kathleen McGuire

Melissa Dunphy

Joan Szymko

Marie-Claire Saindon

INTERMISSION

Legacy

Say Her Name

Kujichagulia

Nahuatl Hymn to the All-Mother

Wild Embers

Alysia Lee

Zanaida Stewart Robles

Gilda Lyons

Melissa Dunphy

Celebration

Danse Africaine

What Happens When a Woman

Chapo Pou Fanm

Jessie Montgomery

Alexandra Olsavsky

Sydney Guillaume

*world premiere, commissioned by La Caccina

We Must Remember Joy.

After a year and a half of silence, a year and a half without being able to sing together or share our music with the community we love, two soloists draw us into the present moment. Accompanied by voices singing chords like a church organ, these soloists tell us that our time is near—a time to rise, revive, remain, and remember joy.

That notion of remembering is at the heart of *The Matriarchy*, the concert that ignites our tenth anniversary season, **She Rises**. This is a program that truly rises from the ashes of the past, the music calling us to remember all those who have gone before us and shown us the way to courage, innovation, compassion, and joy. In the case of the songs in “Conjuring,” the call is a literal one, our voices interweaving the music with speaking, shouting, hissing, and body percussion to awaken our ancestors and invite their memories to live within this space for a time. By “Celebration,” the call echoes outward to include all women from all times and all places, inviting us to view ourselves as part of a community that spans the entirety of human history and to embrace the divine feminine within us all.

And yet, it seems to me that to remember joy is also to remember sorrow. This concert teaches us that there is no legacy of triumph without an accompanying legacy of setbacks, of heartbreak, of struggle. “Put her name in the air,” implores Alysia Lee’s haunting and powerful *Say Her Name*, and we do, naming a small handful of the Black women whose lives have been ended by police brutality in recent history. What power accompanies putting someone’s name in the air? If we speak something aloud, does it become more powerful than if we were to think it? What if we sing it?

With each new lyric, the pieces on this program beg us to use the power of music to reimagine our world. That might mean constantly asking, “why not?” as Marie-Claire Saindon’s muse, Dr. Katherine Johnson, does in *The Girl with the Numbers*, or demanding a brighter future by asking, “why is community a revolutionary idea?” as activist Grace Lee Boggs does in Melissa Dunphy’s *New Dreams*. In a concert with lyrics bursting with questions, it becomes suddenly clear that the very act of questioning is, in fact, an act of creation. Questions spark thought and discussion, just as the work of our ancestors sparks in us a flame that catches and ignites, driving us forward. To remember joy is to remember that we are the descendants of great thinkers, creators, revolutionaries, and questioners. Indeed, as Melissa Dunphy’s *Wild Embers* reminds us, it only takes “a single wild ember to bring a whole wildfire to life.”

- Carling FitzSimmons

Texts and Translations

Our Time/Shout

Our time is near, but not to die,
For we must rise before that final sigh.
Though we are low and we do strain,
We must revive the soul so we remain.

My time is glad, though I do weep
For all the secrets that we keep.
Though we are old and full of doubt,
We must remember joy and we must shout!

Spinna Minni

Examine the young ones, mix the mead.
Consciousness awakens, and she remembers the road.
Examine the young ones, brew the mead.
This stretch of leaves drives her awareness,
And she eyes the road.

One eye is sensitive, looking forward.
The other, the mirror predicting again.
Her eye is sensitive to all eyes,
Remembering into the future,
Predicting others in the mirror,
Spinning a thread from memory.

She keeps the threads a thousand years,
Predicting and spinning mirrored threads.
She keeps them hidden,
Keeps them for centuries,
Looks ahead from the rearview mirror,
Spins a thread from memory.

The threads her vision obtains this way
Mark the direction of our journeys.
Her threads sew visions of nations,
Our heavy destinies,
As we happily set our courses
And stumble blindly forward into the fog.

She Rises

She rises up from the heather.
Her flame in hand, she crosses the sky.
When she's tired she lays down her head.
In the sweet heather she makes her bed.

All night we tend to her flame,
Her sacred light, eternal and bright.
When she wakes, she'll open her eyes.
Then up from the heather, she'll again rise.

She flames the poet's pen,
Fires the forge and hearth,
Lights the fire within.

Laggard Dawn

When will the weary night be over? When will the laggard sun arise?
Behold the East aglow at her coming, and soon will her radiance blind our eyes.
In fear we waited; in hope we shall meet her.
She bursts through the clouds! Up, up and greet her.

Long was the grieving, black the darkness, heavy the silence of the night.
For this the day shall fill you with gladness. For this shall you sing in your delight.
What though we suffered and wept in our sorrow?
'Tis gone with the night; we hail the morrow!

Sisters, the poor and friendless need you, seek you where other help has failed.
Your faithful hands shall steer through the tempest to wide sunlit oceans yet
unsailed,
Bring balm and healing to hearts that were breaking,
And point to the sky where hope is waking.

What of the friends who fought beside us, gone from us never to return?
Beyond the stars their bright spirits watch us and lend us the fire wherewith we burn.
They bore our burden, they help us to bear it,
And Victory won will know and share it!

Lost to our vision, yet are they here,
Whispering softly, "Lo, dawn is near!"

Harriet Tubman

One night I dreamed I was in slavery, 'bout 1850 was the time.
Sorrow was the only sign: nothing around to ease my mind.
Out of the night appeared a lady leading a distant pilgrim band.
"First mate," she yelled, pointing her hand,
"Make room aboard for this young man," and sayin'

"Come on up! I got a lifeline.
Come on up to this train o' mine."
She said her name was Harriet Tubman, and she drove
for the underground railroad.

Hundreds of miles we traveled onward, gathering slaves from town to town,
Seeking every lost and found, setting those free that once were bound.
Somehow my heart was growing weaker, fell by the wayside's sinking sand.
Firmly did this lady stand, lifted me up and took my hand.

Who are these children dressed in red?
They must be the ones that Moses led.

New Dreams

Dreams are born in questions.
How do we transform ourselves?
How do we transform our world?
What do we need?
What do we want?
What is the difference?
How do we reconnect with the rhythms of nature?
Should we do something just because we can?
What is the purpose of education?
What does it mean to care?
How do we create community?
Why is community a revolutionary idea?
How can we re-civilize society?
How do we grow our souls?
How do we take heart of grace?

Malala

I am Malala.

Their bullet did not stop me.

I am Malala.

Their bullet gave me power to raise my voice.

Hear my voice:

One child, one teacher, one pen, one book can change the world.

I am Malala.

I am afraid of no one.

The Girl with the Numbers

Can a Black student

Take part

As a scholar, a classmate?

Can “separate but equal”

Unite?

Why not?

I am no better than anyone,
But no one is better than me.

Can a woman

Pioneer

As an expert, a master?

Can a “computer in skirts”

Change the script?

Why not?

I am no better than anyone,
But no one is better than me.

Can a Black woman

Challenge

As a colleague, an equal?

Can the “girl with the numbers”

Balance the question

And reach for the moon?

Why not?

I am no better than anyone,
But no one is better than me.

Say Her Name

Say her name. She cannot be forgotten by us.

Put her name in the air.

Sandra Bland.

Riah Milton.

Breonna Taylor.

Michelle Cusseaux.

Rekia Boyd.

Latasha Walton.

Kujichagulia

“Kujichagulia” is the second principle of Kwanzaa, meaning self-determination.

Nahuatl Hymn to the All-Mother

Hail to our Mother! Hail to the Goddess
Who poured forth bounteous flowers,
Who scattered the seeds of the maguey
As she came forth from Paradise.

Hail to our Mother! Hail to the Goddess
Who caused yellow flowers to blossom,
Who was plumed with the crest of eagles,
As she came forth from Paradise.

We sing praise to you, the Goddess,
Who nourishes beasts in the desert,
Who feeds the green herbs of this earth,
Who summons the Quetzal to song,
Who comforts the newborn child –
This little jewel you care for when weeping
As she cries out to you.

Hail to our Mother! Hail to the Goddess
Who shines in the thick of the thornbush,
Whose bounty was granted to all things
As she came forth from Paradise.

Wild Embers

We are the descendants
Of the wild women you forgot.
We are the stories you thought
Would never be taught.

They should have checked the ashes
Of the women they burned alive.
Because it takes a single wild ember
To bring a whole wildfire to life.

Danse Africaine

The low beating of the tom-toms,
The slow beating of the tom-toms
Low... slow
Slow... low -
Stirs your blood.
Dance!
A night-veiled girl
Whirls softly into a
Circle of light.
Whirls softly... slowly,
Like a whisp of smoke around the fire -
And the tom-toms beat,
And the tom-toms beat,
And the low beating of the tom-toms
Stirs your blood.

What Happens When a Woman?

What happens when a woman takes power?
What happens when she won't back down?
What happens when a woman takes power?
What happens when she wears the crown?

What happens when she rules her own body?
What happens when she sets the beat?
What happens when she bows to nobody?
What happens when she stands on her own two feet?

We rise above. We lead with love.
We have won. We are one. We've just begun.

Chapo Pou Fanm

For all women who fought in the history of all countries,
For all of us now and all the ones to come,
Hats off! Bravo!
Let us shout hooray!

It is inside us that Kings are made,
In our bellies that Presidents blossom,
We balance out democracy,
And we will fight until the end!

We will fight until the end
To spread justice,
To bring a change to all countries,
To bring a smile to life.

For centuries they have suffered,
Pinched their noses to drink smelly water,
But one fine day they revolted
So they could change humanity!

In Asia, in America,
In Europe like in Africa,
Elbows linked, all women rose
Hand in hand to bring a change!

Hats off, hats off, hats off to women!
Hooray for women!

A Note from the Composers

There are two world premieres on this program, each inspired by a powerful woman from the past. Read on to hear Melissa Dunphy's thoughts on civil rights activist Grace Lee Boggs (1915-2015), and Marie-Claire Saindon's thoughts on NASA mathematician Katherine Johnson (1918-2020).

New Dreams

I only started learning about the life and work of trailblazing activist and human being Grace Lee Boggs after she died in 2015, shortly after her 100th birthday. Like me, she was a second-generation immigrant whose parents came to the West from Guangdong, China, but the clear-sighted bravery with which she faced the hurdles of gender and race in the first half of the 20th century astonishes me. After getting her Ph.D. in 1940, she devoted most of her life to the question of how to create a better society and a better world, with a focus on the Black American struggle, and her writings and actions inspire and challenge me to dig deeper and go further in my own political views and work. When I sat down to write "New Dreams," I kept getting "Amazing Grace" stuck in my head because of her name, and for a long time I resisted incorporating it into the music—until I watched the documentary *American Revolutionary: The Evolution of Grace Lee Boggs*. In a chance street scene, Boggs pauses under a wall with a graffiti tag that reads "Amazing Grace" and roars with laughter; it felt as though she were giving me permission from beyond the grave to follow my impulse to quote the hymn! Grace Lee Boggs's work is continued by the Boggs Center in Detroit, which you can support at boggscenter.org.

- Melissa Dunphy

The Girl with the Numbers

"Get the girl." On February 20, 1962, John Glenn was the first American to launch into space and orbit the earth. *Friendship 7's* success heavily depended on the exactitude of the rocket trajectory's calculations. A few days prior to the mission, Glenn trusted his life with the only person to confirm by hand these IBM-generated numbers: Dr. Katherine Johnson, a 44-year-old mathematician, daughter, sister, widow, wife, mother of three, friend, teacher, community-builder, chorister, and the first woman—and African American woman—to join NASA's Space Flight Research Division in Langley's Memorial Aeronautical Laboratory as research mathematician and who was part of the Space Task Group for America's first multiple missions to space. Human computer. "The girl with the numbers."

Born in 1918 in West Virginia, Katherine Johnson lived in a time and place where social norms were being questioned for both women and Black people. Having been denied an education higher than grade 6, Johnson's father armed her with many tools. One that would propel her beyond many challenges was the following lesson: "You are no better than anybody, but nobody's better than you." Johnson was able to gather the courage and ask many questions that some may not have dared to

ask both as a woman and an African American. One of her favorite questions was, “why not?” Why couldn’t she integrate the all-white West Virginia University when the Jim Crow segregation law’s justification, “separate but equal,” could no longer stand? Why couldn’t she do creative and theoretical thinking as a woman instead of being assigned the role of a “human computer,” which was the only role a female mathematician could hold at NASA (hence the nickname “computer in skirts”)? Why couldn’t she, as a Black woman, participate at all-male meetings pertaining to her research? Contribute to one of the first American manuals about space technology? Pen multiple research papers? At every turn, Johnson girded herself with her strengthening lesson that she would later impart to her students at every opportunity: “I am no better than anyone, but no one is better than me.”

“I loved numbers and numbers loved me. They followed me everywhere. No matter what I did, I was always finding something to count.” In the end, Johnson got to live her dream as a research mathematician. This choral piece is my reaction to reading her young-adult-oriented autobiography, *Reaching for the Moon*. May her story continue to inspire women and men, young and old alike.

- Marie-Claire Saindon