

# WIGMORE HALL

Tuesday 7 March 2023  
7.30pm

Will Liverman baritone  
Jonathan King piano

Damien Sneed (b.1979)

I Dream a World (2021)

Margaret Bonds (1913-1972)

3 Dream Portraits (1959)

*Minstrel Man • Dream Variation • I, Too*

Harry T Burleigh (1866-1949)

5 Songs of Laurence Hope (1915)

*Worth While • The Jungle Flower • Kashmiri Song •  
Among the Fuchsias • Till I Wake*

*Interval*

Florence Price (1887-1953)

Songs to the Dark Virgin (1941)

Robert Owens (1925-2017)

Mortal Storm Op. 29 (1969)

*A house in Taos • Little Song • Jaime •  
Faithful One • Genius Child*

Jasmine Barnes

A Sable Jubilee (2022)

Shawn E Okpebholo (b.1981)

Two Black Churches (2020)

*Ballad of Birmingham • The Rain*

CLASSIC *fm* Wigmore Hall £5 tickets for Under 35s supported by Media Partner Classic FM



This concert is part of the CAVATINA Chamber Music Trust ticket scheme, offering free tickets to those aged 8-25

*Wigmore Hall is a no smoking venue. No recording or photographic equipment may be taken into the auditorium nor used in any other part of the Hall without the prior written permission of the management.*

*In accordance with the requirements of City of Westminster persons shall not be permitted to stand or sit in any of the gangways intersecting the seating, or to sit in any other gangways. If standing is permitted in the gangways at the sides and rear of the seating, it shall be limited to the number indicated in the notices exhibited in those positions.*

*Disabled Access and Facilities - full details from 020 7935 2141.*

*Wigmore Hall is equipped with a 'Loop' to help hearing aid users receive clear sound without background noise. Patrons can use this facility by switching hearing aids to 'T'.*



*Please ensure that watch alarms, mobile phones and any other electrical devices which can become audible are switched off. Phones on a vibrate setting can still be heard, please switch off.*

The Wigmore Hall Trust Registered Charity No. 1024838  
36 Wigmore Street, London W1U 2BP • Wigmore-hall.org.uk • John Gilhooly Director

Wigmore Hall Royal Patron HRH The Duke of Kent, KG  
Honorary Patrons Aubrey Adams OBE; André and Rosalie Hoffmann; Louise Kaye; Kohn Foundation; Mr and Mrs Paul Morgan



Harlem renaissance jazz poet, novelist, playwright and activist Langston Hughes wrote *I Dream a World* in response to social inequalities African Americans faced owing to the colour of their skin. As one who observed the terror and brutality of racism, Hughes committed his life to dreaming radically – of a world in which African Americans could experience freedom and joy, even as they were suffocating in the destructive hold of racial inequality. What scholar Robin DG Kelley calls 'Freedom dreams' are a constant thematic motif within most of Hughes's writing. Reverberating throughout *I Dream a World* is the desire for equality of all races – more specifically equality for Black people living in America, and by extension, Black peoples of the diaspora. The thematic heart is love, unity and peace for all races. Through his writing, Hughes sought to insist and express to us that the world he desired – a world that Black people desired – was possible: a world where love and freedom rule.

In this musical performance, **Damien Sneed** sets the poem written by Hughes to music, demonstrating the interconnectedness of creative expression and the power of artistic possibilities. Set for two instruments – piano and voice – this performance sonically depicts the world that is and the world that can be, the juxtaposition between reality, dystopia and utopia.

Born in Chicago and classically trained, **Margaret Bonds** forged a pathway for Black women composers in the 1930s. In her cycle *3 Dream Portraits*, Bonds selected poems from Langston Hughes's collection *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems*. In this work, through musical performance, Bonds sought to disrupt the White gaze and to challenge negative perceptions of African Americans. Evidenced in the three songs is the celebration of Blackness and beauty within Blackness. This is music as a sonic embodiment of the politics of resistance, used to resist racial shaming and to promote Black self-love.

**Harry T Burleigh** was an African American composer, arranger and classically trained baritone. Written in 1915, the *5 Songs of Laurence Hope* are considered to be one of Burleigh's greatest achievements. Each of the songs is centred around the themes of love, sexual desire, the danger(s) of love, companionship, and the mourning of loss. In the prefatory notes of the original publication, Henry Edward Krehbiel, then musical editor of *The New York Times*, wrote: 'They are... artist's songs, in which the singer and pianist are paired in a lovely union and engaged in a mission calculated to warm the feelings of those who contemplate it'. These songs stir our imagination about the possibilities and beauty of love, as well as reminding us of the importance of grief as a space that we navigate in our personal lives.

Set to another poem written by Langston Hughes, 'Songs to the Dark Virgin' is by **Florence Price**, who became the first African American woman to be recognised as a symphonic composer and whose work would go on to be played by major orchestras. She composed widely – songs, symphonies, chamber works, organ anthems, piano pieces and the arrangement of Spirituals. Evidenced in her output was her commitments to racial equality and justice; she belonged to the community of 20th-century Black creative practitioners who formed the Chicago Black Renaissance. As a collective, Price and her comrades created art which embedded themes of racial uplift, Black progress and gender equality, whilst also highlighting issues affecting the Black communities – namely social alienation, political powerlessness, economic

inequalities and racial shame. At the heart of her work is a sonic methodology – one which seeks to use sound as a strategy to reflect past and present experiences of Black people living in America.

'Songs to the Dark Virgin' highlights the racial shame experienced by Black people living in America. As with most of his poems, Hughes juxtaposes the possibility of Black beauty and freedom with the ugly, earthy reality of racial terror experienced by Black America. Within this work, Hughes and Price seek to highlight the issue of racial shame and its effect on the perception of one's own Black body, and one's internal and external sense of worth.

As one author notes, 'Price was extremely proud of her heritage and looked for ways to celebrate and memorialise it in her life's work; yet the musical traditions of their studies and compositions were European, not African American. She was faced with a dilemma of discovering a means of reconciling the musical traditions of their heritage with those of their training. She found a solution in the poetry of Langston Hughes'.

*Mortal Storm* by **Robert Owens** also consists of settings of Hughes's poetry. The composition is designed to reflect in sound the turbulences we face in our lifetime, musically depicting the challenges we encounter, in particular through dramatic piano accompaniment. According to Owens, '*Mortal Storm* tells the stories of the storms we as mortals face'. From the rain and thunder in 'A House in Taos' to the interior storm found in 'Genius Child', *Mortal Storm* reveals to us, the listeners, the reality of being human and navigating the vicissitudes of life.

Composed by Black composer **Shawn Okpebholo**, *Two Black Churches* relates two tragic events at the hands of White supremacists in two Black churches decades apart – namely the 1963 16th Street Baptist Church bombings in Birmingham, Alabama which claimed the lives of four Black girls, and the 2015 Mother Emanuel AME Church shooting in Charleston, South Carolina, which resulted in the death of nine church members. 'Ballad of Birmingham' sets a poem by Dudley Randall (1914-2000). In the poem, Randall projects a narrative account of the attack through the lens of the mother of one victim. Musically, it uses Black gospel idioms juxtaposed with contemporary art song to represent the devastating event experienced at this historical moment. Echoes of 'We Shall Overcome' seem to be present in this song, demonstrating the Black solidarity in moments of turmoil and tragedy experienced by Black communities in America at the hands of White supremacists. The second song, 'The Rain', sets words by Marcus Amaker, a poet from Charleston. Serving as a metaphor, the 'rain' reflects the racism which Black people continue to experience and endure in America. Staying above the water of racism is an everyday battle – one which causes many to be subsumed in the floods of anxiety, doubt and despair. Whilst the 'rain' signifies the racism, the number nine is also significant in this compositional work, there to remind us about the nine parishioners killed on that terrible day by a White supremacist. The hymn we hear quoted in the song, 'Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus', is the hymn that was sung during the first service in the church following the shooting. The lifting of every voice to sing this hymn, given the evil that occurred, was a sonic testimony of joy in the face of sorrow, love in the face of hate, and hope in the face of despair.

© Dr Samson Tosin Onafuye 2023

*Reproduction and distribution is strictly prohibited.*

## Damien Sneed (b.1979)

### I Dream a World (2021)

*Langston Hughes*

I dream a world where man  
No other man will scorn,  
Where love will bless the earth  
And peace its paths adorn  
I dream a world where all  
Will know sweet freedom's way,  
Where greed no longer saps the soul  
Nor avarice blights our day.  
A world I dream where black or white,  
Whatever race you be,  
Will share the bounties of the earth  
And every man is free,  
Where wretchedness will hang its head  
And joy, like a pearl,  
Attends the needs of all mankind—  
Of such I dream, my world!

## Margaret Bonds (1913-1972)

### 3 Dream Portraits (1959)

*Langston Hughes*

#### Minstrel Man

Because my mouth  
Is wide with laughter  
And my throat  
Is deep with song,  
You do not think  
I suffer after  
I have held my pain  
So long.

Because my mouth  
Is wide with laughter,  
You do not hear my inner cry?  
Because my feet  
Are gay with dancing  
You do not know  
I die?

## Dream Variation

To fling my arms wide  
In some place in the sun,  
To whirl and dance  
Till the bright day is done.  
Then rest at cool evening  
Beneath a tall tree  
While night comes gently  
Dark like me.  
That is my dream.  
To fling my arms wide  
In the face of the sun.  
Dance! Whirl! Whirl!  
Till the quick day is done.  
Rest at pale evening,  
A tall, slim tree,  
Night coming tenderly  
Black like me.

## I, Too

I, too sing America.

I am the darker brother.  
They send me to eat in the kitchen  
When company comes.  
But I laugh,  
And eat well,  
And grow strong.

Tomorrow,  
I'll sit at the table  
When company comes.  
Nobody'll dare  
Say to me,  
'Eat in the kitchen,'  
Then.

Besides,  
They'll see how beautiful I am  
And be ashamed.

## Harry T Burleigh (1866-1949)

### 5 Songs of Laurence Hope (1915)

*Laurence Hope*

#### Worth While

I asked my desolate shipwrecked soul  
'Wouldst thou rather never have met  
The one whom thou lovedst beyond control  
And whom thou adorest yet?'  
Back from the senses, the heart, the brain,  
Came the answer swiftly thrown,  
'What matter the price? We would pay it again,  
We have had, we have loved, we have known!'

#### The Jungle Flower

Thou art one of the jungle flowers, strange and fierce and  
fair,  
Palest amber, perfect lines, and scented with champa  
flower.  
Lie back and frame thy face in the gloom of thy loosened  
hair;  
Sweet thou art and loved - ay, loved - for an hour.

But thought flies far, ah, far, to another breast,  
Whose whiteness breaks to the rose of a twin pink flower,  
Where wind the azure veins that my lips caressed  
When Fate was gentle to me for a too-brief hour.

#### Kashmiri Song

Pale hands I loved beside the Shalimar,  
Where are you now? Who lies beneath your spell?  
Whom do you lead on Rapture's roadway, far,  
Before you agonise them in farewell?

Oh, pale dispensers of my Joys and Pains,  
Holding the doors of Heaven and of Hell,  
How the hot blood rushed wildly through the veins - oh  
pale soft hands!  
Beneath your touch, until you waved farewell.

Pale hands, pink tipped, like Lotus buds that float  
On those cool waters where we used to dwell,  
I would have rather felt you round my throat,  
Crushing out life, than waving me farewell!

Pale hands I loved, where are you now?

## Among the Fuchsias

Call me not to a secret place  
When daylight dies away,  
Tempt me not with thine eager face  
And words thou shouldst not say.

Entice me not with a child of thine,  
Ah, God, if such might be,  
For surely a man is half divine  
Who adds another link to the line  
Whose last link none may see.

Call me not to the Lotus lake  
That drooping fuchsias hide,  
What if my latent youth awake  
And will not be denied?  
Ah, tempt me not for I am not strong  
(Thy mouth is a budded kiss) -

My days are empty, my nights are long;  
Ah, why is a thing so sweet so wrong,  
Why is a thing so sweet so wrong  
As thy temptation is?

#### Till I Wake

When I am dying, lean over me tenderly, softly,  
Stoop as the yellow roses droop in the wind from the  
South,  
So I may when I wake, if there be an awakening,  
Keep what lulled me to sleep; the touch of your lips on my  
mouth.

#### Interval

## Florence Price (1887-1953)

### Songs to the Dark Virgin (1941)

*Langston Hughes*

#### I.

Would  
That I were a jewel,  
A shattered jewel,  
That all my shining brilliants  
Might fall at thy feet,  
Thou dark one.

## II.

Would  
That I were a garment,  
A shimmering, silken garment,  
That all my folds  
Might wrap about thy body,  
Absorb thy body,  
Hold and hide thy body,  
Thou dark one.

## III.

Would  
That I were a flame,  
But one sharp, leaping flame  
To annihilate thy body,  
Thou dark one.

## Robert Owens (1925-2017)

### Mortal Storm Op. 29 (1969)

*Langston Hughes*

### A house in Taos

#### *Rain*

Thunder of the Rain God:  
And we three  
Smitten by beauty.

Thunder of the Rain God:  
And we three  
Weary, weary.

Thunder of the Rain God:  
And you, she, and I  
Waiting for nothingness.

Do you understand the stillness  
Of this house  
In Taos  
Under the thunder of the Rain God?

#### *Sun*

That there should be a barren garden  
About this house in Taos  
Is not so strange,  
But that there should be three barren hearts  
In this one house in Taos -  
Who carries ugly things to show the sun?

#### *Moon*

Did you ask for the beaten brass of the moon?  
We can buy lovely things with money,  
You, she, and I,  
Yet you seek,  
As though you could keep,  
This unbought loveliness of moon.

#### *Wind*

Touch our bodies, wind.  
Our bodies are separate, individual things.  
Touch our bodies, wind,  
But blow quickly  
Through the red, white, yellow skins  
Of our bodies  
To the terrible snarl,  
Not mine,  
Not yours,  
Not hers,  
But all one snarl of souls.  
Blow quickly, wind,  
Before we run back  
Into the windlessness -  
With our bodies -  
Into the windlessness  
Of our house in Taos.

### Little Song

Lonely people  
In the lonely night  
Grab a lonely dream  
And hold it tight.

Lonely people  
In the lonely day  
Work to salt  
Their dream away.

Lonely people.

### Jaime

He sits on a hill  
And beats a drum  
For the great earth spirits  
That never come.

He sits on a hill  
Looking out to the sea  
Toward a mirage-land  
That will never be.

## Faithful One

Though I go drunken to her door,  
I'm ever so sure she'll let me in.  
Though I wander and stray and wound her sore,  
She'll open the latch when I come again.  
No matter what I do or say,  
She waits for me at the end of the day.

## Genius Child

This is a song for the genius child.  
Sing it softly, for the song is wild.  
Sing it softly as ever you can -  
Lest the song get out of hand.

*Nobody loves a genius child.*

Can you love an eagle,  
Tame or wild?

Wild or tame,  
Can you love a monster  
Of frightening name?

*Nobody loves a genius child.*

Kill him - and let his soul run wild!

## Jasmine Barnes

### A Sable Jubilee (2022)

*Tesia Kwarteng*

Inspiration  
Black joy is a tapestry woven by belly laughs  
Electric sliding through gradients of melanin  
The flavors of the earth  
Rich soil, tree bark, cacao, brown sugar  
Caramelized dreams  
Sweet potato pie  
Love passed down through generations  
Smiled though silent tears and weary years  
Happiness down a soul train line  
Unc's white linen suit  
Homecoming "Who all gon' be there?"  
Cocoa butter scented hugs  
Tea spilled before I let you go  
The pleasure of perfectly round afro puffs  
Constellations of seasoned food gifted from the ancestors  
Shining stars no matter who we are  
Hair that coils like two intertwined lovers  
Wrapped like kente across broad shoulders  
Crystal sweetness gleaming like gold name plates  
A shared understanding  
A secret language  
Head nods, daps, five on the black hand side

A lineage of strength  
A let's stay together kind of lov  
Praise and Black pride  
Shouts of joy and thanks  
Standing on the promises  
Elated to be melanated  
Luxury  
We're proud of ourselves  
Why wouldn't we be?  
Trendsetters, history makers  
Creative always imitated  
Evidenced by the culture  
We set the tone  
Daring doers  
Mesmerizing magic  
Beautifully human  
We are more than enough  
Why can't you see that?  
Too blessed  
Unstressed syllables and moods  
A way of being, living, moving, breathing  
Fists high, torches of solidarity  
This joy is radical  
Precious and must be protected  
Bold and blooming  
Watered and fueled by the divine  
This joy is luxury  
Theme and variations of onyx obsidian, ebony, raven, jet  
Black.  
Elevation  
A sparkling legacy  
Unapologetically shining like Opal  
Our darkness is no illusion  
It was designed to illuminate endless originality  
Ingenuity  
Metallic freedom that never loses its luster  
Resonant warriors  
Rejoicing, vibrating  
A harbinger of hope  
Shades of chestnut  
An offering you shouldn't take for granted  
Spellbinding cinnamon  
Satellites orbiting our birthright  
And still creating our own

**Shawn E Okpebholo** (b.1981)

**Two Black Churches** (2020)

**Ballad of Birmingham**

*Dudley Randall*

'Mother dear,' she asks, 'may I go downtown  
Instead of out to play,  
And march the streets of Birmingham  
In a Freedom March, Freedom March, today?'

'No, baby, no, you may not go,  
For the dogs are fierce and wild,  
And clubs and hoses, guns and jails  
Aren't good for a little child.'

'But, mother, I won't be alone.  
Other children will go with me,  
And march the streets of Birmingham  
To make our country free.'

'No, baby, no, you may not go,  
For I fear those guns, I fear, will fire.  
But you may go to church instead  
Go to the church instead and sing in the children's choir.'

She has combed and brushed her night-dark hair,  
And bathed rose petal sweet,  
And drawn white gloves on her small brown hands,  
And white shoes on her feet.

The mother smiled to know her child  
Was in the sacred place,  
But that smile was the last smile  
To come upon her face.

For when she heard the explosion,  
Her eyes grew wet  
And her eyes grew wild.  
She raced through the streets of Birmingham  
Calling for her child.

She clawed through bits of glass and brick,  
Then lifted out a shoe.  
'O, here's the shoe my baby wore,  
But, baby, where are you?'

**The Rain**

*Marcus Amaker*

When the reality of racism returns,  
All joy treads water in oceans of buried emotion.

When the reality of racism returns...

Charleston is doing  
Everything it can  
To only swim  
In a colorless liquid of calm sea  
And blind faith.

But the Lowcountry  
In a terrain  
Of ancient tears,  
Suffocating through floods of segregation

When murderous gunshots  
Made waves at  
Emanuel AME Church,  
We closed our eyes,  
Held our breath  
And went under.

And we are still trying  
Not to taste the salt  
Of our surrounding blues  
Or face the rising tide  
Of black pain,  
Of black pain.

*Text of Florence Price from The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes, The Weary Blues, 1926 volume. Text of Jasmine Barnes by Tesia Kwarteng, printed with permission. 'The Rain' by Marcus Amaker – <http://marcusamaker.com> – printed with permission.*