



PRESENTS

*Out of the Shadows:*  
Art Songs by Black Composers

MELISSA GIVENS

SOPRANO

GENEVIEVE FEIWEN LEE

PIANO



Department of Music  
Faculty Recital

Mabel Shaw Bridges Hall of Music  
Streaming Sunday, November 8, 2020 at 3:00 PM

## *OUT OF THE SHADOWS:* ART SONGS BY BLACK COMPOSERS

*Melissa Givens, soprano*  
*Genevieve Feiwen Lee, piano*

*Dream Variations* (2010)

Prelude  
Dream Variations  
Harlem  
Mother to Son  
The Weary Blues  
Daybreak in Alabama

Jeremiah Joseph  
(b. 1987)

*Hold Fast to Dreams* (1945)

*The Heart of a Woman* (n.d.)

*Fantasy in Purple* (n.d.)

Florence Price  
(1887–1953)

*Songs of Sun and Shade* (1911)

You lay so still in the sunshine  
Thou hast bewitched me, beloved  
The Rainbow-Child  
Thou art risen, my beloved  
This is the island of gardens

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor  
(1875–1912)

*Threnody Song Cycle* (1969–72)

Threnody  
Alien  
Benediction  
Poet  
Pastourelle

Zenobia Powell Perry  
(1908–2004)

From *Saracen Songs* (1914)

III. His helmet's blaze

IV. I hear his footsteps, Music sweet

*Lovely, Dark, and Lonely One* (1935)

Harry Thacker Burleigh  
(1866–1949)

*Miss Wheatley's Garden* (2011)

A Winter Twilight

I Want to Die While You Love Me

Songs for the People

Rosephanye Powell  
(b. 1962)



*Pomona College is grateful to its alumni and friends whose continuing generosity makes this and other programs presented by the Department of Music possible.*

## PROGRAM NOTES

*Out of the Shadows: Art Songs of Black Composers* owes its existence, in part, to the many conversations currently taking place surrounding the validity of the Western classical music canon. Who “belongs” in classical music? Which voices need to be elevated? Is classical music really the sole domain of dead white men? Of course, glimpses of women and people of color have always been visible: the odd flotsam and jetsam on a roiling sea of white maleness. For those of us who have made our home in classical music, the rich tapestry of beauty woven by underrepresented composers and stitched in vivid musical hues has always been known, if not always appreciated or given pride of place.

With this program, we elevate, celebrate, and introduce you to composers of the diaspora of Blackness. Composers like Harry Thacker Burleigh, almost exclusively known for his groundbreaking arrangements of Negro Spirituals; Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, the Afro-British composer best known for his choral and instrumental works; and Florence Price, a pioneer among Black composers and the first Black woman to have a symphonic work performed by a major US orchestra. Additionally, composers who straddle the twentieth and twenty-first centuries like Zenobia Powell Perry, a music professor who counts Darius Milhaud among her teachers; Rosephanye Powell, a leading choral composer; and Jeremiah Joseph, a composer in his 30s who expands the notion of what a classical song cycle is and does.

Song is the primal musical utterance, set apart from instrumental music by its genesis in words. Here, too, we explore the lived experience of communities relegated to the shadows. The poetry of Langston Hughes, a leader of the Harlem Renaissance who so poignantly sang the lives of Black folk, leads the way on this program in the songs of Joseph, Price, and Burleigh. Poems by his distaff colleague, Georgia Douglas Johnson, one of the most prolific woman writers of the Renaissance, are set here by Price and

Powell. Two of their lesser-known compatriots in the Renaissance sing their way out of obscurity in these songs. Angelina Weld Grimké, a biracial poet, playwright, and educator, penned the text of the opening song in Powell's cycle. Five poems by Douglas Jeffery Hayes comprise Perry's *Threnody Song Cycle*. Despite his traveling in those heady circles, not much is known about him. Ephemera from the era tell us that he caught the attention of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who suggested him for WPA work in the 1930s, and that he frequently submitted poems to the leading magazines of the day. Abolitionist Frances Ellen Watkins Harper worked for the Underground Railroad and provided the words to the stirring anthem that closes both Powell's song cycle and our program. Our composers did not limit themselves to texts by diasporic authors, however. Burleigh composed his *Saracen Songs* on texts by the British poet Alfred G. "Fred" Bowles, who wrote almost exclusively for song settings. Also hailing from England, noted lesbian poet Marguerite Radclyffe-Hall provided the sensual texts for the Coleridge-Taylor cycle.

**Jeremiah Joseph: *Dream Variations*** Bernsteinian syncopations, jazz-inflected harmonies, and the blues come together in this song cycle that takes its name from and includes Langston Hughes's iconic poem. This work, which began its life as a senior composition project, is a musical exploration of the quotidian joys, cares, and aspirations of dreamers, city denizens, worried mothers, blues musicians and their audiences, and (fittingly!) young composers. Joseph employs driving rhythms, wordless vocalizations, finger snaps, and spoken word to paint Hughes's vivid texts, underscored by accompaniments that evoke improvisation, yet are fully composed. Currently living in Houston, Texas, Joseph is a freelance performer and composer.

–MG

Langston Hughes's texts for *Dream Variations* are available online. Follow links below:

Dream Variations (<https://songofamerica.net/song/dream-variations>)

Harlem (<https://poets.org/poem/harlem>)

Mother to Son (<https://songofamerica.net/song/mother-to-son>)

The Weary Blues (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47347/the-weary-blues>)

Daybreak in Alabama (<https://songofamerica.net/song/daybreak-in-alabama>)

– Langston Hughes (1902–1967)

**Florence Price: *Three Songs*** Despite her stature as a towering figure of the Black Renaissance in Chicago, the composer the *Defender* hailed as "The Dean of Negro Composers of the Middle West" fell into relative obscurity after her death from a stroke. A mentor, a teacher, and a single mother, her music has been enjoying a "rediscovery" since 2009, when a trove of previously unknown works was found in a ramshackle house. A large part of her oeuvre consists of the piano pieces she used in her lessons, but significant works, like her E-Major Piano Sonata, are finding their way into the repertoire. She composed a large number of songs, including spirituals and art songs, many of which only exist in manuscript form. The last two songs in our set are recently published and undated discoveries. Her vocal writing is characterized by soaring melodies as well as declamatory settings, and her writing for the piano has an orchestral complexity. One of the most famous interpreters of her songs was the contralto Marian Anderson, who included them on her famous recital on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.

–MG

*Hold Fast to Dreams*

Hold fast to dreams  
For if dreams die  
Life is a broken-winged bird  
That cannot fly.

Hold fast to dreams  
For when dreams go  
Life is a barren field  
Frozen with snow.

– Hughes

*The Heart of a Woman*

The heart of a woman goes forth with the dawn,  
As a lone bird, soft winging, so restlessly on,  
Afar o'er life's turrets and vales does it roam  
In the wake of those echoes the heart calls home.

The heart of a woman falls back with the night,  
And enters some alien cage in its plight,  
And tries to forget it has dreamed of the stars  
While it breaks, breaks, breaks on the sheltering bars.

– Georgia Douglas Johnson (1880–1966)

*Fantasy in Purple*

Beat the drums of tragedy for me.  
Beat the drums of tragedy and death.  
And let the choir sing a stormy song  
To drown the rattle of my dying breath.  
Beat the drums,  
Beat the drums of tragedy for me  
And let the white violins whirl thin and slow,  
But blow one blaring trumpet note of sun to go with me  
To the darkness where I go.

– Hughes

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor: *Songs of Sun and Shade* In spite of the difficulties of his early life as a biracial child in an overwhelmingly white society, Coleridge-Taylor became highly regarded as a composer in Victorian England with his choral setting of *The Song of Hiawatha* to the poetry of Longfellow. Fiercely proud of his African ancestry, he sought opportunities to incorporate the idioms of his heritage into his compositions; he eventually composed a collection of spirituals under the title *Negro Melodies*. An invitation to conduct the Washington, D.C. choral ensemble that bore his name was his entrée into American musical society. Considered a forefather of the Harlem Renaissance, he influenced many of the composers associated with the movement. *Songs of Sun and Shade* are typical of Coleridge-Taylor's vocal works, combining a Victorian frothiness with post-Romantic harmonies and lushness.

–MG

**1. You lay so still in the sunshine**

You lay so still in the sunshine,  
So still in that hot sweet hour—  
That the timid things of the forest land  
Came close; a butterfly lit on your hand,  
Mistaking it for a flow'r.

You scarcely breath'd in your slumber,  
So dreamless it was, so deep—  
While the warm air stirr'd in my veins like wine,  
The air that had blown thro' a jasmine vine,  
But you slept—and I let you sleep.

**2. Thou hast bewitched me, beloved**

Thou hast bewitched me, beloved,  
Till I am weaker than water,  
Water that drips from the fountain,  
Through thy white tapering fingers.

Yet as the waters together  
Gather and grow to a torrent,  
Gathers the flood of my passion,  
Bearing thee forth on its bosom!

### 3. The Rainbow-Child

The sunshine met the stormwind  
As he swept across the plain,  
And she wooed him till he lov'd her,  
And his kisses fell as rain.

She was fair, and he was ardent.  
And behold! one happy morn,  
While I watched their mingled glory,  
Lo! a rainbow child was born!

### 4. Thou art risen, my beloved

Thou art risen, my beloved,  
And thou callest me to follow,  
Follow thro' the chilly twilight  
Of this silent virgin morning.

Whither, whither wouldst thou lead me,  
To what place of new enchantment?  
Can the day that thou art seeking  
Give such rapture as the darkness?

Thou art warm with many kisses,  
With the hand clasps of thy lover,  
Turn again unto my bosom,  
I would have it night for ever!

### 5. This is the island of gardens

This is the island of gardens,  
Filled with a marvelous fragrance,  
O! the pale scent of the jasmine!  
O! the delicious mimosa!

Beating soft pinions together,  
Cometh a wind from the mountains;  
Why wouldst thou leave us, O small wind?  
Rest thee awhile 'mid the laurels.

Even as thou, have I wandered  
Over the earth and the ocean,  
Pondering many things deeply,  
Now I lie down in the sunshine.

– Marguerite Radclyffe-Hall (1880–1943)

Zenobia Powell Perry: *Threnody Song Cycle* Perry came late to the craft of composition, pursuing graduate study at the University of Wyoming in her late 40s. It was there that she came to the attention of Darius Milhaud, who invited her to study with him and eventually made her his assistant at the Aspen Music Festival. Like Hayes, she enjoyed the patronage of Eleanor Roosevelt, a passionate supporter of Black artists. Perry was an accomplished pianist and accompanist, and primarily composed her songs for specific singers, who notably included her daughter Janis-Rozena Peri, a professional singer. Though she often composed with specific voices in mind, her songs are free of idiosyncrasies that might deter other singers. *Threnody*, her earliest cycle, displays her gift for musical line, rhythmic variety, and inventive harmonies.

–MG

### 1. Threnody

Let happy throats be mute;  
Only the tortured reed  
Is made a flute!

Only the broken heart can sing  
And make of song  
A breathless and a lovely thing!

Only the sad—only the tortured throat  
Contrives of sound  
A strangely thrilling note!

Only the tortured throat can fling  
Beauty against the sky—  
Only the broken heart can sing  
Not asking why...!

## 2. Alien

Do not stifle me with the strange scent  
Of low growing mountain lilies—  
Do not confuse me  
With the salubrious odor of honeysuckle!

I cannot separate in my mind  
Sweetness from sweetness—  
Mimosa from wild white violets;  
Magnolia from Cape jasmine!

I am from north tide country,  
I can understand only the scent of seaweed;  
Salt marsh and scrub pine  
Riding on the breath of an amorous fog!

O do not confuse me  
With sweetness upon sweetness;  
Let me escape safely from this gentle madness—  
Let me go back to the salt of sanity  
In the scent of the sea...!

## 4. Poet

No rock along the road but knows  
The inquisition of his toes;  
No journey's end but what can say:  
He paused and rested here a day!  
No joy is there that you may meet  
But what will say: His kiss was sweet!  
No sorrow but will sob to you:  
He knew me intimately too...!

## 3. Benediction

Not with my hands  
But with my heart I bless you:  
May peace forever dwell  
Within your breast!

May Truth's white light  
Move with you and possess you—  
And may your thoughts and words  
Wear her bright crest!

May Time move down  
Its endless path of beauty  
Conscious of you  
And better for your being!

Spring after Spring  
Array itself in splendor  
Seeking the favor  
Of your sentient seeing!

May hills lean toward you  
Hills and windswept mountains  
And trees be happy  
That have seen you pass—

Your eyes dark kinsmen  
To the stars above you—  
Your feet remembered  
By the blades of grass...!

## 5. Pastourelle

Walk this mile in silence—  
Let no sound intrude  
Upon the vibrant stillness  
Of this solitude!

Let no thought be spoken  
Nor syllable be heard  
Lest the spell be broken  
By the thunder of a word!

Here, such matchless wonder is  
As might tear apart—  
Should the lip give tone  
To the fullness of the heart...!

— Donald Jeffrey Hayes (1904–1991)

**Harry Thacker Burleigh: Three Songs** One of the first composers to consider Negro spirituals as art music, Burleigh began his professional life as a well-regarded singer, including a long tenure as a soloist at St. George's Church in New York City. While a scholarship student at the National Conservatory, he met Antonín Dvořák when the established composer began teaching there, though he was not Dvořák's student. After hearing Burleigh sing spirituals, Dvořák knew they needed to be the basis of an American national music. Another leading composer of the Harlem Renaissance, Burleigh's art songs and spiritual settings appeared regularly on vocal recital programs. *Saracen Songs* was his first song cycle. Bowles's texts clearly reflect the Orientalism that pervaded the era. *Lovely, Dark, and Lonely One*, a setting of a Langston Hughes text that celebrates endurance in the face of strife, is considered one of his best songs.

–MG

**III. His helmet's blaze**

Be thou mine eyes! I cannot see;  
The vision dies; Who comes to me?  
His horse's tread, His helmet's blaze,  
His lifted head; Ah, day of days!

– Alfred G. Bowles (1871–1925)

**IV. I hear his footsteps, Music sweet**

Ah! I hear his footsteps, music sweet,  
As long ago they came;  
One moment and we truly meet,  
Ah, better love than fame!  
A sun that sheds consuming fire,  
A torch that blows to flame,  
Is not more fierce than my desire  
That kindles at his name!

– Bowles

*Lovely, Dark, and Lonely One*

Lovely, dark, and lonely one,  
Bare your bosom to the sun.  
Do not be afraid of light,  
You who are a child of night.

Open wide your arms to life,  
Whirl in the wind of pain and strife,  
Face the wall with the dark closed gate,  
Beat with bare, brown fists—  
And wait.

–Hughes

**Rosephanye Powell: *Miss Wheatley's Garden*** One of American's leading choral composers, Powell is also an accomplished singer and voice professor. An active clinician, conductor, and adjudicator, she has composed for and been commissioned by choirs across the country, from elementary to college, amateur and professional. The title of her song cycle pays homage to Phillis Wheatley, a former slave who was America's first Black published poet, and to her works, "which are the garden in which many generations of African-American women poets have blossomed." The intimacy of "A Winter Twilight" and "I Want to Die While You Love Me" give way to the rousing encouragement of "Songs for the People." As a fitting end to our journey, Powell writes that this final song "draw[s] the audience's attention to the contrasts found in the vicissitudes of life. The singer must express a joyful belief in the power of music to accomplish good."

–MG



### 1. A Winter Twilight

A silence slipping around like death,  
Yet chased by a whisper, a sigh, a breath;  
One group of trees, lean, naked and cold,  
Inking their cress 'gainst a sky green-gold;

One path that knows where the corn flowers were;  
Lonely, apart, unyielding, one fir;  
And over it softly leaning down,  
One star that I loved ere the fields went brown

– Angelina Weld Grimké (1880–1958)

### 2. I Want to Die While You Love Me

I want to die while you love me,  
While yet you hold me fair,  
While laughter lies upon my lips  
And lights are in my hair.

I want to die while you love me,  
And bear to that still bed,  
Your kisses turbulent, unspent  
To warm me when I'm dead.

And never, never see  
The glory of this day  
Grow dim or cease to be.

I want to die while you love me  
Oh, who would care to live  
Till love has nothing more to ask  
And nothing more to give!

I want to die while you love me  
And never, never see  
The glory of this perfect day  
Grow dim or cease to be.

– Johnson

### 3. Songs for the People

Let me make the songs for the people,  
Songs for the old and young;  
Songs to stir like a battle-cry  
Wherever they are sung.

Let me make the songs for the weary,  
Amid life's fever and fret,  
Till hearts shall relax their tension,  
And careworn brows forget.

Not for the clashing of sabres,  
For carnage nor for strife;  
But songs to thrill the hearts of men  
With more abundant life.

Let me sing for little children,  
Before their footsteps stray,  
Sweet anthems of love and duty,  
To float o'er life's highway.

Our world, so worn and weary,  
Needs music, pure and strong,  
To hush the jangle and discords  
Of sorrow, pain, and wrong.

Music to soothe all its sorrow,  
Till war and crime shall cease;  
And the hearts of men grown tender  
Girdle the world with peace.

– Frances Ellen Watkins Harper (1825–1911)

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS

American soprano **Melissa Givens** moves and excites audiences and critics alike with a rich, powerful tone, crystalline clarity, and intelligent musical interpretations. Especially noted for her expressiveness and elegance on the stage, she's been hailed as a singer whose music making is "consistently rewarding" and "a pleasure to hear." Givens is also an extremely versatile artist, regularly performing repertoire from the Baroque era through music of the twenty-first century.

Recent performances include *Unity: Songs of Invitation* with Conspirare, the world premiere of *Dear Lieder* by Tom Flaherty (with Pomona College faculty artists), and the premiere of Eric Banks's *To Be a Stranger* with Ensemble Diaspora. Upcoming events include a master class for the University of Puget Sound, a duet recital with baritone Timothy Jones, and the release of her second solo recording, *The Artist at Fifty*, a recital of art songs from the composers' fiftieth years.

A champion of collaborative musical endeavors, Givens performs with various chamber music groups including Conspirare—winner of the 2015 Grammy® for Best Choral Performance. Her solo appearances on their major label releases have received enthusiastic reviews. She can also be heard on her debut solo CD, *let the rain kiss you*.

Givens is Assistant Professor of Music in voice at Pomona College. She earned a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the Moores School of Music at the University of Houston, a Master of Music degree from the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University, and a Bachelor of Arts in Music from Davidson College. She is a native of Buffalo, New York.

A versatile performer of music spanning five centuries, Grammy®-nominated **Genevieve Feiwen Lee** has thrilled audiences on the piano, harpsichord, toy piano, keyboard, and electronics. She enjoys finding music that challenges her to go outside of her comfort zone to sing, speak, act, and play new instruments. She has given solo recitals at Merkin Concert Hall in New York and the Salle Gaveau in Paris. Since her first concerto engagement at age 12, she has appeared with the São Paulo State Symphony Orchestra, Brazil; the Vrazta State Philharmonic, Bulgaria; and The Orchestra of Northern New York. Her concerts in China appeared on Hunan State Television, and her performance from the Spiegelzaal at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam was broadcast on live radio.

Ms. Lee has premiered and commissioned numerous works, and she can be heard on the Innova, Albany, and Reference labels. She was nominated in the Best Chamber Music Performance category at the 58<sup>th</sup> Grammy® Awards for the recording of Tom Flaherty's *Airdancing*. In the Los Angeles area, Ms. Lee has been a guest performer with the Los Angeles Philharmonic Chamber Music series at Disney Hall, Southwest Chamber Music, Jacaranda, Piano Spheres, and the Hear Now New Music Festival. She is a founding member of the Mojave Trio and was a member of the Garth Newel Piano Quartet when they performed in Carnegie Hall. Ms. Lee received her degrees from the Peabody Institute, École Normale de Musique de Paris, and the Yale School of Music. Having joined the Pomona College faculty in 1994, she is the first recipient of the Everett S. Olive Professorship, endowed by Yuk Mei Shim '50.