

Chamber Music Corvallis presents: Marian Anderson String Quartet

February 23rd, 2024
First Presbyterian Church



Marianne Henry • *first violin*
Nicole Cherry • *second violin*
Diedre Lawrence • *viola*
Prudence McDaniel • *cello*

Chamber Music Corvallis receives support from the Oregon Arts Commission, a state agency supported by the State of Oregon.



Program — "On Being Enslaved"

At the Purchaser's Option	Rhiannon Giddens (b. 1977)
Follow the Drinking Gourd	Jonathan McNair (b. 1959)
Introduction	
On being enslaved	
Interlude	
Rivers and Hills	
Crucifixion/ In Memoriam: Marian Anderson	Samuel Adler (b. 1928)
In Honor of Marian Anderson	David Wallace (b. 1970)
Wayfaring Stranger	

Intermission

String Quartet No. 12 in F major, "American"	Antonin Dvorak (1841-1904)
Allegro ma non troppo	
Lento	
Molto vivace	
Finale: Vivace ma non troppo	
Lift Every Voice and Sing	John Rosamond Johnson (1873-1954) James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938)

Program Notes

At the Purchaser's Option with Variations by Rhiannon Giddens is a string arrangement of a song from her album *Freedom Highway*. Giddens was inspired to write the song after discovering an advertisement in a 19th-century book that read:

For sale, a remarkable smart health Negro Wench, about 22 years of age; used to both house work and farming, and sold for no fault but for want of employ. She has a child about 9 months old, which will be at the purchaser's option.

The arrangement for string quartet serves as a heartbreaking reminder of the suffering caused by slavery in the United States and allows us to reflect on the experience of enslaved women during the nineteenth century. Giddens's musical style is rooted in American folk, country, and blues, and her albums and musical performances have been celebrated with numerous prominent international awards, including a Grammy Award, an International Folk Music Award, Living Blues Awards, and many others. Most notably, Giddens was honored as a McArthur Genius Fellow in 2017 for her "drive to understand and convey the nuances, complexities, and interrelationships between musical traditions [and] enhance our musical present with a wealth of sounds and textures from the past" (macfound.org).

Follow the Drinking Gourd by Jonathan McNair is based on an African American folk song of the same name. Initially composed on commission by the Chattanooga Symphony, McNair adapted the work for the Marian Anderson String Quartet, which they presented at the National Gallery of Art in Washington D.C. The folk song was first published in 1928 and was believed to have been used by the Underground Railroad conductor Peg-Leg Joe, who taught it to slaves working as temporary laborers on plantations. The song lyrics directed the fugitive slaves north (the "drinking gourd" as code for the Big Dipper) and offered landmarks, such as rivers, along their way to freedom. The story behind McNair's quartet as told by a narrator features a fictional African American family escaping slavery. In addition to incorporating the original folk song "Follow the Drinking Gourd" in a variety of ways, the quartet includes melodies of three spirituals, along with original music and creative treatment of the tunes.

Samuel Adler's *Crucifixion/In Memoriam: Marian Anderson* and David Wallace's *In Honor of Marian Anderson* were composed to honor the quartet's namesake. Anderson (1897–1993) was a contralto who was born and musically trained in Philadelphia. As a Black woman, she was denied entry to the Philadelphia Music Academy (now known as the University of the Arts), so she continued her studies privately with famed voice teacher Giuseppe Boghetti. Anderson's public career began in 1923 when she became the first singer to record African American spirituals on a major American record label. Two years later Anderson won first prize in a competition sponsored by the New York Philharmonic, which led to future concert performances throughout the US and Europe. Despite facing racial prejudice throughout her life, Anderson developed an illustrious musical career, performing in major venues around world, from Wigmore Hall in London to the Metropolitan Opera in New York. In 1939, Anderson was denied a concert performance at Constitution Hall in Washington D.C. by the Daughters of the American Revolution due to her race. With the support of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and the U.S. Department of the Interior, Anderson gave one of her most notable and critically acclaimed performances on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial on Easter Sunday 1939 in front of an integrated crowd of 75,000 during the era of segregation. Anderson was known for her rich, vibrant contralto voice of intrinsic beauty. Adler's *Crucifixion* and Wallace's *In Honor of Marian Anderson* honor Anderson's contributions to the concert stage with works that center around African American spirituals.

Antonín Dvořák also drew on African American spirituals in his **String Quartet No. 12 in F major ("American")** to create an American musical nationalism despite his Czech nationality. When Dvořák was offered the position of director of music at the National Conservatory in New York in 1892, he left his native Bohemia to find American composers relying solely on European styles and lacking a unique American sound. Dvořák was known for his ability to express musical nationalism in his own music by incorporating native Bohemian folk elements in works like his *Slavonic Dances*. Seeking what he believed to be the sound of the Americas, Dvořák found inspiration in Native-American drumming and African American spirituals, the latter of which he regarded as profoundly original music to serve as a basis for a national style. The "American" String Quartet was composed while he was on vacation in Spillville, Iowa, in 1893 visiting a Czech immigrant community. In the quartet you will hear frequent use of the pentatonic scale, which often evokes the general character of folk. The second movement—though an invention of the composer's inspiration—resembles an African American spiritual, and the third movement includes a quote of a bird he

heard in Iowa. Though Dvořák denies he intentionally incorporated American elements into his music, he managed to capture an American spirit that would serve as an inspiration to future composers.

The hymn “**Lift Every Voice and Sing**” was written by brothers John Rosamond Johnson (composer) and James Weldon Johnson (lyricist). It has become known as the Black national anthem following its first performance by 500 school children for Abraham Lincoln’s birthday in 1900. The brothers were born in Florida and moved to New York in 1899 to find a producer for their operetta and eventually formed relationships with influential performers, publishers, and producers. Along with Robert Cole, the three became one of the most successful songwriting partnerships of the era. Since it was first performed, “Lift Every Voice and Sing” has become the music that unites Black communities, from its origins in churches across the Jim Crow South, to more contemporary performances by Beyoncé at Coachella and its use to ignite social awareness and change following the 2020 murder of George Floyd.

—Kimary Fick, Ph.D.

Upcoming Concerts

Marian Anderson String Quartet at the Corvallis Public Library

Youth Outreach Performance

February 24, 2024 10:00 am

Haerim Liz Lee (violin) & David Fung (piano): “Gerswhin: My Time is Today”

April 12, 2024

Spanish Brass: “Spanish Brass 35”

Rescheduled Date: September 25th, 2024

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A special thank you to Gay Hall for sharing her artistic abilities with her watercolor
“Theorbo Reborn” for the cover of our season brochure.