



ELEVATION

# Brand New Day

ARREON A. HARLEY-EMERSON  
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DIRECTOR*

ERIK MEYER  
*KEYBOARD*

SUNDAY, APRIL 14TH  
6:00 PM

DELAWARE ART  
MUSEUM



EVA

ELEVATE  
VOCAL ARTS

# Brand New Day

## I.

Eternity | Alvin Trotman  
*Kethrellan Peterson, solo*

Are You Looking for Me? | Dominick DiOrio  
*Kethrellan Peterson, Rachel Clark - soli*

Measure Me Sky | Elaine Hagenberg  
*L. Jay Besch - conductor*

We Are the Music Makers | Tim Brent  
*Jillian Harrison-Jones, Kate Pizac, Aimee Pearsall,  
Douglas Jones, Tim Hurtt - semi-chorus*

Joy Never Leaves | Christopher Harris  
*Jillian Harrison-Jones - conductor*

## II.

Cantata For a More Hopeful Tomorrow | Damien Geter  
*Jillian Harrison-Jones - solo*  
*Kate Pizac, Libbi Nixon, Aimee Pearsall,  
Melanie Mijares, William Lim, Burjis Cooper - semi-chorus*  
*Ajibola Rivers - cello*

Yes | Shekinah Glory  
*Kim Kenny Green - solo*

### III.

I, Too | Undine Smith Moore

Plain-Chant for America | William Grant Still  
*Jillian Harrison-Jones - conductor*

*Interval*

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### IV.

Hymn to Time | Lee Kesselman

In the Middle | Dale Trumbore

Time | Jennifer Lucy Cook

### V.

I Smile | Kirk Franklin  
*Jaysen Rosario - solo*

Elevate! | Lori Hicks

The Color Purple | Russell, Willis, & Bray; arr. Rollo Dilworth  
*Jillian Harrison-Jones - solo*

Brand New Day | Luther Vandross; arr. Anita Cracauer



# Letter from the Artistic Director

Dear Reader,

Thank you for joining us this evening at the beautiful Delaware Art Museum for the last concert of Elevation's inaugural season. This evening's program, "Brand New Day," celebrates the journey we embarked upon as an organization just over a year ago. As we reflect on this past season, we are filled with gratitude for the support and enthusiasm we have received from our community. From our very first performance in September to tonight's finale, this first season has been nothing short of extraordinary.

Elevation was born out of a vision to create something meaningful—Delaware's only all-professional vocal ensemble that celebrates the rich traditions of the vocal arts and embraces the diversity of our community and world. We are more than just a performing ensemble. We are a community of artists, educators, and advocates who are committed to using our voices to make a difference. We are a community of vocal artists who seek to expand the repertoire presented on concert stages to include more than traditional classical vocal music. We are a community that believes that our musicking has the power to change hearts, minds, and the world around us.

Throughout this season, we consistently witnessed the power of music to unite, inspire, and uplift. In our concert programming, we explored themes of hope, faith, resilience, and the human spirit through a diverse repertoire that spans classical choral masterpieces to contemporary works, pushing traditional choral music's boundaries.

Tonight, as we present "Brand New Day," we invite you to join us in celebrating the journey we took together this season. As we close this season and look ahead to the future, we are filled with excitement and anticipation for what lies ahead. We are resolved to continue our mission of elevating voices and stories that deserve to be heard—that must be heard—and we are grateful for your continued support as we embark on this journey together.

Thank you for being a part of Elevation's inaugural season. We hope that tonight's program will inspire us all to forge, experience, and relish the power of a brand-new day!  
With warmest regards,



Arreon A. Harley-Emerson  
CEO & Artistic Director



## Eternity | Alvin Trotman

Robert Herrick's powerful text explores the concept of the soul's immortality and the hopeful prospect of an improved existence beyond our earthly lives. It contemplates death as a transition to a liberated form of being, free from temporal confines. The poem underscores the fleeting and elusive nature of time, suggesting that embracing the present and living life to its fullest offers a glimpse of eternity. Ultimately, instead of mourning death, the poem rejoices in the soul's eternal nature and the hope it provides for a superior existence post-mortem. Alvin Trotman's composition is a colorful and vibrant exploration of voice, showcasing the profound beauty of harmonious interplay and solo virtuosity that defines Elevation's vocal artistry.

## Are You Looking For Me? | Dominick DiOrio | World Premiere

Commissioned by Elevation, Dominic DiOrio's "Are You Looking For Me?" is a choral meditation that elegantly sets a text that "reminds us to look for the divine, not in the everyday materials, possessions, or rituals of religion, but instead in the elemental, life-giving oneness of our humanity." The meditative choral texture provides the harmonic underpinning for a soprano soli descant, evoking a divine world floating somewhere beyond our own. DiOrio's addition of crotales and gong channels the mystic nature of Kabir's text, asserting that there is a divine being, but the divine is not found in artificial rituals and religious practices. Instead, when we look more closely, when we look inwardly, we find the divine instantly as we ARE divine and carry divinity within us. The metaphor of the divine as "the breath inside the breath" urges us to find, love, and commune with the divinity within us.

## Measure Me Sky | Elaine Hagenberg

Elaine Hagenberg's setting of Measure Me, Sky! expresses a longing for growth and connection with nature. Leonora Speyer's sonnet and Hagenberg's piano accompaniment intertwine, serving as a driving depiction of the clouds and rotation of the earth spinning: constant and infinite. Elements of nature—the wind, the sky, the horizon—are used as tools of measurement to show one's aspiration to move beyond this earth's limitations.

## We Are the Music Makers | Tim Brent

An “ode” is a ceremonial lyric poem that celebrates a person, place, thing, or idea. Arthur O'Shaughnessy's iconic poem “Ode” is a celebration of art, creation, poetry, and music. The poem praises artmaking and music making, citing artists, poets, and music makers as the “dreamers of dreams.”. Tim Brent's setting of O'Shaughnessy's poem has three distinct parts: a majestic and declamatory introduction centering music makers as dreamers; an energetic, rhythmic, and joyous section praising the art of music making; and a slower, more introspective section that reflects upon the responsibility of the artist or music maker. Brent uses a semi-chorus of vocalists, much like the Greeks used choruses in their theatrical works to describe and make commentary on the action in the drama. In this composition, the semi-chorus heightens the harmonic, rhythmic, and dramatic tension of the text setting, bringing out key phrases such as “we are Music, we are the makers” and “dreaming, singing.”

## Joy Never Leaves | Christopher Harris

Composer Christopher Harris explores the complexity of the human condition in his 2022 composition, featuring text by Devondra F. Banks. “Joy Never Leaves” is an exaltation of the human spirit, leaving our eyes filled with tears at the thought that we as humans “carry the promise of beauty for ashes and life anew.” The music cascades with ascending triads and rubato from start to finish. The a cappella moments are delicate and center moments of contemplation, inner reflection, and gratitude, revealing the complexities of joy as both boisterous and quiet, personal and shared.

## Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow | Damien Geter

This five-movement work for choir and cello, commissioned by the Washington Chorus in 2020, is based on J.S. Bach's cantata BWV 12 Weinen, klagen, sorgen, zagen and illustrates the transition from hopelessness to optimism. The composer, Damien Geter, states: “It is a fact that the pandemic has touched the Black community in a much more aggressive manner than other communities. To highlight this atrocity, I chose to pay homage to the ancestors and Black Americans by incorporating spirituals in this Cantata. There are five movements. The piece begins in a deep state of despair and moves emotionally upward toward a state of hope. The movements are as follows: Fear, The Prayer (I Want Jesus to Walk With Me), Breathe, The Resolve (There's a Balm in Gilead), and Hope (Poem by Walt Whitman "Continuity").

## Yes | Shekinah Glory

This soul-stirring song, written and performed by Gospel recording group Shekinah Glory, shows a single decision's impact on our lives. Immediately following “Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow” in this program, “Yes” closes this set as an affirmation of trust and complete yielding to a higher power, an act of submission and humility that forfeits our need, as humans, to be in control of our own lives at all times. In order to manifest the “hope” that we desire to see, we must say “yes” to what is difficult and scary. It’s not difficult to say yes; it’s difficult to *commit* to “yes!”

## I, Too | Undine Smith Moore

Undine Smith Moore, the “Dean of Black Women Composers,” offers a captivating setting of a famous yet poignant text by Langston Hughes that portrays encounters of racism in America. The musical conventions of “I, Too” are written through her personal and ancestral connection to the poetry’s text, as Smith-Moore is a Virginia native and a granddaughter of enslaved persons. Moore stated, “One of the most evil effects of racism in my time was the limits it placed upon the aspirations of Blacks.” Typical of Moore’s compositional style, the use of brilliant harmonies and bold piano accompaniment serve as a striking complement to Hughes' rebellious and audacious message in this work.

## Plain-Chant for America | William Grant Still

“Plain-Chant for America” attests to the racial injustices that existed in this nation long before the present and dreams of realizing “the dream unfinished.” Composed in 1941, the song highlights America's shortcomings in defending the principles of equality and freedom, despite the fact that World War II raged across the Atlantic and we battled against “blackshirt cruelty, the goose-step mind.” It also makes reference to the lynchings and violence of the time but conveys optimism for a brighter future. We pledge to work together to create the equitable future that everyone deserves.



## Hymn To Time | Lee Kesselman | East Coast Premiere

Hymn to Time, commissioned by a consortium of ensembles, including Elevation, is a choral meditation on the element of time, exploring the poetic and emotional effects that time has on us. Lee Kesselman writes, “The music develops in a circle, starting and finishing at its most philosophical points.” The piece emulates the sounds of ticking clocks and quotes Westminster Chimes, the ubiquitous set of pitches used by clocks around the world to toll the hours of the day. This composition asks us to grapple with time, what we do with time, and how we perceive time.

## In the Middle | Dale Trumbore

From the composer: “Barbara Crooker’s poem ‘In the Middle’ describes the struggle to connect in the rush of ordinary life. In this setting, the piano is an unreliable timekeeper, ebbing and flowing as our perception of time does. Sometimes, it pushes us on, frantic; sometimes, the pace relaxes in a moment of peace. The word “time” itself occurs over and over within the piece, serving as a sort of refrain, a reminder to slow down...It is so easy to forget, in the context of everyday life, that time will ultimately catch up with all of us. There’s no antidote, but in the meantime, we should “take off our watches” more often, finding ourselves “tangled up in love” with another or just with this life, and granting time permission, if not to stop, then to slow.”

## Time | Jennifer Lucy Cook

Despite its artificial nature, time is a concept that we all adhere to in our daily lives. It holds significance only because of our collective societal agreement to acknowledge its existence and our need for it. Composer and lyricist Jennifer Cook cleverly composed this piece, depicting time’s fleeting nature. The exact text is expressed three times throughout the song, each time the text is reiterated, there are fewer words than before (though structurally identical). Cook states, “As lyrics disappear, phrases take on new meaning, like how a 30th birthday differs from a fifth birthday, or how old memories can appear sharper than yesterday’s. We lose time when we try to keep it, we spend time as we try to save it.”

## I Smile | Kirk Franklin

This anthem, by the GRAMMY award-winning gospel artist Kirk Franklin, is a testament to the transformative power of joy. Released in 2011, this chart-topping track serves as a reminder that even during life's most challenging moments, one can find strength and solace in faith and inner resilience. With its infectious melody, uplifting lyrics, and a fusion of contemporary gospel with R&B undertones, "I Smile" is not just a song—it's an invitation to embrace hope, to dance through the rain, and to let one's spirit soar. As listeners are swept up in its euphoric chorus, they are reminded of the enduring power of a smile to heal, uplift, and connect us all.

## Elevate! | Lori Hicks

When Elevation was founded, we committed to presenting a diverse repertoire of vocal music, including Hip-Hop. As we began the search for Hip-Hop pieces that could be performed with our entire ensemble, we found a significant void in the notated choral literature. When discussing this gap in the literature, Dr. Lori C. Hicks volunteered to craft something for Elevation. The result was "Elevate!" Throughout the work, Dr. Hicks employs one of the most salient characteristics of Hip-Hop, looping. The technique of looping is when an artist repeats part of a song using a looper device, pedal, or digital plugin. The term "looping" originated with reel-to-reel tape machines. Before digital audio, engineers recorded bands on reel-to-reel tape. They would make a loop out of a section of tape and feed it through the tape machine, playing it back repeatedly, then recording the playback. In "Elevate!" Lori Hicks brings Hip-Hop to center stage with layers of repeated rhythmic cells stacked on top of each other to build momentum and texture. The composition evokes a spirit of joy and hope through the familiar Hip-Hop themes of community, love, and liberation. Hicks' sampling in "Elevate!" pays homage to genre-defining music and lyrics by legendary Hip-Hop and R&B artists, including Queen Latifah, Aaliyah, Drake, Stevie Wonder, and Sister Sledge.

## The Color Purple | Russell, Willis, & Bray; arr. Rollo Dilworth

A tribute to the strength of hope, “The Color Purple” tells the story of an ordinary woman, Celie, who overcomes extraordinary hardship. This song highlights Celie’s epiphany that she is beautiful and divine despite what she has been told by others and the hardships that have come along her journey. The Broadway adaptation of Alice Walker’s award-winning novel *The Color Purple* has a powerful, life-affirming gospel-style musical score that begins quietly and builds steadily to the uplifting finale: “Look what God has done.” This song is a culminating testament to the healing power of community, the contributions of all who inhabit this world (great or small), and crediting God as the source of all of the love that we’ve ever needed in this world.

## Brand New Day | Luther Vandross, arr. Anita Cracauer

Who doesn’t love a classic song that celebrates Black Joy and the wonders of life?! “Brand New Day” (alternatively titled “Everybody Rejoice”) is excerpted from the famed musical and motion picture *The Wiz*. The themes of self-discovery, bonds of friendship, journeying, and finding home are all given a vastly different meaning when a Black girl is the one to don the proverbial ruby red slippers. Luther Vandross’s “Brand New Day” is the most explicit pro-Black message in the musical. After Dorothy has defeated Evillene, Evillene’s slaves, known as the Winkies, are able to shed their shackles and live as they please.

We end our program with this number today as we, too, are ready and committed to championing and creating a new day—a day when all members of our community can come together to create a harmonious world. Our work is far from done, though we are grateful you have decided to come along on this journey with us. Can’t you feel the power of a brand-new day?



## Elevate Vocal Arts Staff

Arreon A. Harley-Emerson

*CEO & Artistic Director*

Rachel Clark

*Executive Director*

Dr. Jillian Harrison-Jones

*Associate Artistic Director*

L. Jay Besch

*Operations Manager  
& Assistant Conductor*

Erik Meyer

*Collaborative Keyboard  
& Composer-in-Residence*

## Our Vocal Artists

Scott AuCoin - Alyssa Bernstein - Jay Besch - Jade Blocker  
Steven Burlanga - Gabe Castro - Rachel Clark - Malcolm Cooper  
Burjis Cooper - Danielle Gover - Hannah Grasso McClain  
Yalonda JD Green - Arreon A. Harley-Emerson  
Jillian Harrison-Jones - Tim Hurtt - Daniel Jackson - Douglas Jones  
Kim Kenny Green - William Lim - Ravon Middlebrooks  
Melanie Mijares - Brian Ming Chu - Alex Nguyen - Libbi Nixon  
Aimee Pearsall - Kethrellan Peterson - Kate Pizac - Angela Pope  
Jaysen Rosario - Ben Schroeder - Keith Schwartz - Mairin Srygley  
Orin Strunk - Garrett Thomas - Kimberly Waigwa

## Instrumental Artists

Erik Meyer

*Piano*

Stephen Tipping

*Percussion*

Hans Hibbard

*Bass*

Ajibola Rivers

*Cello*

Steven Page

*Synthesizer*

## Our Story

Elevate Vocal Arts was founded out of a need to address the fact that the contributions of underrepresented musicians, musical cultures, and methodologies are devalued by educational and cultural choral institutions; this system of prejudice is embedded into our very understanding of the vocal arts. The contributions of Black and Brown musicians have revolutionized Western music, contributing and heavily influencing Spirituals, Gospel, Jazz, Hip Hop, R&B, and pop idioms and genres. It is critical that this music is taught and explored with the same veracity and scholarship as the music of Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms.

At Elevate Vocal Arts (EVA) we seek to provide workforce development opportunities to Vocal Artists and Vocal Arts Apprentices who tell stories that inspire, activate, and enliven community, civic engagement, and democracy. By telling stories through song, spoken word, and storytelling, Vocal Artists envision and create new possibilities, thus expanding our creative economy and transforming our community and world.

We strive through our performances and programming to uplift those voices that have, for far too long, been marginalized and relegated from the concert stage and classroom.

## Support

Your support is vital to the success of Elevate Vocal Arts' mission to create and expand creative workforce development opportunities, inspire communities, and strengthen our democracy through the power of vocal arts. While we always appreciate direct financial support, you can also help to elevate the vocal arts by joining our mailing list, inviting a friend to a future concert, following us on social media, or volunteering with us. You can learn more about these opportunities at [elevatevocalarts.org/volunteer](https://elevatevocalarts.org/volunteer) or by clicking the links below.

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