

Program Notes

DR. WILLIAM BANFIELD, COMPOSER

Here I Stand, in honor of the work of Paul Robeson, and *Testimony of Tone, Tune and Time*, inspired by the writings of Frederick Douglass, are two pieces compelling me to deal squarely with being a mature person, and making sense of being an artist who speaks in this season from that seasoning.

These new works are a “2-part music and words celebration” in the form of Symphony 8: *Here I Stand*, a symphony (multimovement orchestral concert form with connecting themes), and an instrumental concerto (orchestral concert work written highlighting an instrumental soloist, surrounded with music interchanges of orchestra), with spoken texts and film.

These two men had the advantage to develop their works, ideas, commitments over time, and to devote themselves to their principles, values, and passions. And they were unswerving. They as well never diminished their cultural voices, identity, and commitment to their people, other people and the critique of their nation to be a better place for all, as in equality. They are truly inspiring. They were calling on government, people of means, and power to truly be humane and purge themselves of the chains that bonded them to greed, hatred, oppression, and injustice. It wasn't a correction minute; it was for the life, soul, or death of a nation.

They were truly statesmen, heroes and saints for real. They both used the arts as a calling symbol to humanity. They are causing me to really dive into values and evaluate how I will stand strong in my own time which still struggles with the meaning of liberty, and moves slowly to be in pulse with justice, peace, equality, with concern for the good of the people, in humility and with integrity.

How will we stand together today to ensure our art rings with their kind of Relevancy, their kind of note and song meaning, that kind of deep human courage, and that kind of finding resolve?

My primary interest artistically is how to tell a more honor-based and redemption story with these figures while being true to their themes and passions. These are not “social protest works,” but sound statues remembering these inspiring figures.

The orchestra, its musical themes and movements, are again simply sound paintings of the life and workings of Paul Robeson.

For Douglass, our saxophone soloist is the strong, defiant and soulful spirit, Frederick himself, the speakers share boldly his message to the world, and the world that surrounds him (saxophone, Frederick) is the orchestra.

Douglas's work is purposely lifting up the ideals of imbuing a perfected national state. He delivered these ideas with song and speeches.

The Tones piece is about how the songs carried the cementing sentiment of our nation's value core.

Douglas's words in many ways tell us and take us forward, allowing us to leave having feasted on the sustainability of ideas that make us believe again in what we can accomplish, together.

He is truly inspiring, as his call was on government, people of means and power to truly be humane and purge themselves of the chains that bonded them to greed, hatred, oppression and injustice. It wasn't a correction minute, it was for the life, soul or death of a nation. He was truly a states person, national hero and for real. And he used the art of the folk song as a calling symbol to humanity. Civilization, as he said was, .."all love and tenderness towards whatever accords and cooperates."

I worked very particularly with my words collaborator Dr. Ruth Naomi Campbell. In our collaboration we sought to get just the right words, and how rare these word collections are, in the way we've envisioned a modern rendering of Frederick Douglass as a thinker, public community worker, who envisioned a greater republic, truly based in common goodwill of citizens, freedom, equality, and love for all.

I am also indebted to my friend Gregory Lampe, who shared his book, *Frederick Douglass, Freedom's Voice 1818- 1845*, his early work as an Exhorter, licensed preacher and community organizer, in the AME Zion church working in New Bedford Mass. It was here in these years he learned to be a great spiritual leader, listener, and how he truly learned about the power of love and the value of community.

It is this great thinker and prophetic figure whose ideas changed and transformed a nation, redirected the course of our history and whose beliefs, ideas on a true democracy and thought we are standing upon today.