

WORDS BY THE TWIN POETS
ALBERT MILLS & NNAMDI CHUKWUOCHA

UNITED SOUNDS OF AMERICA

MUSIC BY
MARK HAGERTY



A NEW SYNTHESIS

The history of concert music in the United States of America has, from the beginning, been tied to a myth of cultural inclusion and synthesis. The story goes something like this: A young country, in search of musical identity, seeks a musical expression for itself. The sources had to be modern, and they had somehow to encompass the music of multiple cultures, potentially including indigenous people, the English aristocracy, immigrants from first Germany, then Ireland, and then beyond, and of course, most aspirationally, the music of enslaved African people. In this story, the only musical forms that could hold together such a diverse collage would be symphonic and related forms considered by Europeans to be most universal.

This account would include the music of William Henry Fry and Louis Moreau Gottschalk, or later, George Gershwin, Aaron Copland and Florence Price. In all these stories, classical music in the European tradition provides the solid base, while diverse American musical traditions are the decorations on top. But what if such a narrative of inclusion and synthesis is at best a fantasy? Or worse, a pretense complicit in the country's denial of the coercion, violence, and trauma that forced disparate peoples together in a colonized land and then cheerfully pronounced it a melting pot?

united sounds of america is a fresh start. It asks whether sounds can be united, and can they then say something about America. It ignores the historic tradition and does not indulge the self-delusional fantasy. Crucially, despite the symphonic setting, this work is not symphonic, or even a traditional "musical work". Nor is it one individual's attempt at a unified statement. Instead, it's an authentic and deep collaboration that embraces the truth about our continuing problems and pains as a culture, with uncompromising poetry and music that goes wherever it needs to go to support the poetry and its message.

Among the collaborators are, first and foremost, the Twin Poets, Albert Mills and Nnamdi Chukwoucha, identical twins from Wilmington, Delaware, who have built wide-ranging and impactful careers as social workers, community activists, public servants, and of course, spoken word poets. Their collaborator in creating *united sounds of america* is the impossible-to-categorize composer Mark Hagerty. Performers joining them are soprano Makeda Hampton, pianist Oksana Glouchko, percussionist-composer Jonathan Whitney, and the University of Delaware Symphony Orchestra, led by James Allen Anderson.

Wilmington, Delaware, might not be an obvious place for grand ambitions of any kind, let alone a search for national identity. But maybe it is being from this place that makes this project universal. Wilmington lies between Baltimore and Philadelphia and, despite its reputation as a business center and haven for corporations, and its history of privilege and the Dupont Company and family, it faces all of the social inequities and ills of its larger neighbors. Because it's not Compton or the Bronx, it can stand in for any city in the US. It can be anywhere and everywhere. To take the first full movement, *dreams are illegal*, as an example, the Poets spin a dystopian fantasy grounded in their own local experience but easily recognizable almost everywhere in this country. Motifs of the typical American dream – the suburban home, girl scout cookies, a literal apple pie – are accompanied by naive and hopeful, almost Coplandesque, woodwinds, which quickly revert to a slow, stately jazz piano accompaniment with an improvisatory feel as the poetry turns dark: “some children live for nothing / some children die for nothing”. Though strongly rooted in the specific world of Wilmington, Delaware, it could easily be the experience of any city in the country.

The spoken word poetry of the Twin Poet is urgent and topical but mostly absent the tropes and

rhythms of contemporary hip-hop – the notable rhythmic exception being the childhood lament *i wish i could go back*. For the most part the brothers deliver their lines almost wistfully, even at their poems' most excited moments. Their voices, so inherently harmonious, interweave and crisscross, landing on frequent but unexpected moments of unison. Themes include neighborhood violence, self-esteem, poverty, police violence, PTSD among military veterans, gun control, and the legacies of slavery and Jim Crow. But above all, they return again and again to childhood as the scene of both nostalgia and trauma. A venerated grandmother is remembered, as well as teenage crushes, and the disappointment of a Philadelphia Eagles loss, the fight song comically interpolated. At another moment, a child narrator whose mother has disappeared explains, “i'm not woken up by no i love yous or no alarm clocks beeping” and resorts to stealing food from the corner store to feed his little sister.

Over the course of twelve movements, Hagerty and the other collaborators skillfully weave together a setting of abstract allusions to jazz idioms, sometimes spare, sometimes lush, to underpin the Twin Poets. But Hagerty provides a rich variety of other accompaniments as well, harmonies and textures that can be heard as jazz,

classical, cinematic, or sometimes what we think of as truly “modern music”. The opening and closing movements feature a roaring percussion line by Whitney, while Anderson’s orchestra interjects bright, open chords reminiscent of both a big band and the clean harmonies of mid-century modernism. *how ironic*, an exploration of PTSD as experienced by military veterans, features a searching solo trumpet line, wistful and consoling, full of blue notes, but also alluding to Charles Ives’ “The Unanswered Question”. One of the most emotionally affecting movements, the Twin Poets’ tribute to their grandmother, “Mrs. Frances,” is set for Hampton’s soaring soprano accompanied by a rich string orchestra. Swept up in this forthright and soulful outpouring, one cannot doubt the authenticity of the inclusion and synthesis – the unity – behind it.

To return to the opening question: What kind of statement is this ambitious work, *united sounds of america*, making about, well, America? The stories are at once both small and grand. The music is built on collaboration within a community, rather than the singular vision of one artist. There is ultimately no one statement here, no one point of view, and the experience is all the stronger, more authentic, and all the more American for it.

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A COMMUNAL SOUNDSCAPE

The word *united* can mean unanimous or compatible. It can refer to a sort of oneness or togetherness. When this word is paired with America, recognizing that we, the United States, are a nation of fifty states and one federal district; a multi-ethnic-classed-gendered space; an endless dreamscape where we speak of the impossible as being possible *and* the possible being impossible, the sounds of *this* America become cacophonous. In *united sounds of america*, an ambitious melding of urban spoken word poetry and music, these merging and overlapping sounds may clash at times; they are ironic, communal, reclaiming, declarative, and proud – just a few ways to describe this profound collaboration between artistic genres. This experience requires you to listen, maybe even get lost in the stories, laugh sometimes, hurt a bit, and most definitely feel. You must feel!

It is important to name not just the artists but the artistry. The Twin Poets, Albert Mills and Nnamdi Chukwuocha, have been described as advocates for poetry, but they are more than advocates. They *are* poetry. They cross the boundaries of language by embodying this artistic form through their intonations, word choice, voice-overlap, and experiences. They are poets, yes. Moreover, they are Griots – storytellers who preserve the

history of their community, whether they are talking about themselves, youth, elders, veterans, or family. Each track is a story that comes alive. And the stories have their ebb and flow. When I interviewed the Twin Poets in the spring of 2024, Nnamdi quoted one of The Last Poets, Abiodun Oyewole, “You got to memorize that poem, you got to digest it to make it spoken word”. Albert then followed the comment by referring to the work and practice The Last Poets devote to learning their poems: “You can hear the passion; you can hear the pregnant pauses that they did on purpose to give you space to think and just consume what was said”. Spoken word enlivens a story. But sometimes other instruments will shape a story as well – piano, percussion, trumpet, winds, strings, and singing voice.

Composer Mark Hagerty talks about this shaping and the intention of setting the stage in the first track, *introduction*. “The slow, meditative piano lays out the harmonies of the orchestral introduction. I wanted the piano to sound like it might be on a concert stage or in a jazz club or in a church basement”. Oksana Glouchko’s sensitive and melodic piano is followed by Jonathan Whitney’s jazz drums, creating a steady rhythm. Next, the human voice joins the two instruments, intentionally singing no words. Dr. Makeda Hampton’s wordless soprano voice, Hagerty states, offers the feelings of yearning and hope.

The University of Delaware Symphony Orchestra under James Allen Anderson’s direction, by this time, has made its entrance and fills the space. This musical moment is vitally important for both the beginning and end of the album, since the repetition of this passage also closes this artistic collaboration.

The Twin Poets make their entrance with the poem *dreams are illegal*. I first heard this poem on the HBO series *Def Poetry Jam* in the early 2000’s. Listening to the track now is like watching the movie unfold through my auditory sense. I can reimagine this story because the Twin Poets paint a picture with their voices. They simply ask, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” And then the brothers begin to create their own symphony – overlapping, aligning, harmonizing with their speaking voices – finishing each other’s thoughts. All the while, the music is shaping the poets’ descriptions, transporting the listener into a different world. Apple-pie dream, the great American dream, the how-dare-you-dream-on-this-side-of-the-tracks resonates scene after scene, until the listener is reminded that even the most unsavory experiences can create a renewal of dreams.

There is a sort of enlightenment in the work, not only because spoken word is paired with this musical ensemble and operatic voice in a

particular way, but also because the Twin Poets are skillfully and most authentically holding up a mirror in one hand and living out a double consciousness in another. Their spoken word is hopeful and empathic, even if the listener has not personally experienced these stories. The track *monday morning* speaks to this. Human similarities such as ethnicity, gender, and age don't always account for having the same experiences, but verbalizing one's story and being willing to listen acknowledge humanity's breadth and depth. The repetition throughout the track *hello beautiful* unequivocally tells young ladies to be still for a moment. Affirm oneself. Look inward. And do it again and again.

But don't get it twisted, colloquially speaking – with gravity also comes humor. We must laugh. We must recognize the joys of our adolescence and constant development throughout the life cycle. There is humor in their storytelling, e.g., the poem *no time to study*. Along with the reminder that the United States loves its football, the Twin Poets tell us a few times that we are in the land of The Eagles! This is necessary banter that lightens our load in a world that “plays the dozens” with destructive *-isms* – racism, sexism, ageism, and so forth.

Notably, I return to voice and how familial this instrument is. The Twin Poets obviously aren't the only ones creating magic. Makeda Hampton's shimmering voice enters subtly throughout certain tracks such as *no home to go home to*. She drifts in and out after the brothers recite vignettes. Her voice crescendos as they describe atrocities. One may consider her voice the backup, but the vibration of a voice can change the energy in a split second – it adds, subtracts, subdues, and it heals. We sense the fullness of her voice in the track *rest in peace Mrs. Frances*, an ode to the Twin Poet's grandmother. It's a benediction that also honors a generation of maternal beings – recognizing our pathway to the present is through their existence. Hampton connects, evokes, protects, and *siiiiings!* It is this second-to-last track that leads us back to the beginning; we must not be afraid to speak and sing and be an instrument for others. In sharing these human stories, we become a beautiful soundscape in this American space, soulfully united.

© Dr. Traci Evadne Currie, 2025
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UNITED SOUNDS OF AMERICA

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2. DREAMS ARE ILLEGAL

i had a dream that i was in america
i was actually in the land of the beautiful
and the home of the brave
my boss came into my office
and said hi bob, how's it going?
why don't you take off early
and here is that raise
as i pulled my suburban
up to my suburban home
i got the mail out of the box
and saw that i was approved for another home equity loan
the girl scouts were there with cookies to sell
of course, i bought a box
as hillary quieted down marmaduke who had begun to bark
later me, the wife and kids
all took a bike ride to the park
when we got back we had a snack
apple pie with ice cream on top
then we buckled up and headed on down to the red box
to get some videos to watch
when we returned the kids put on their pjs
and we relaxed on the couch in the den
for some family time watching videos
then all these strangers turned to me and said
what are you doing here?
don't you know that dreams are illegal?

gun shots ring in the heat of the night
followed by screams
violently disrupting my dreams
in my neighborhood
i don't have to read the paper or watch the news
to know that something bad happened around here tonight
but once the ambulance leaves, the police sirens stop
and the crowd disperses
that silence soaks into my soul
sobering my senses in this often over intoxicating society
and i try to relax, but the Devil just won't let go
he keeps pointing to the signs
posted all around me that read
Dreams Are Illegal

my neighborhood is the bottom of the barrel
where drugs get mixed
here there are no brothers & sisters
just confused brother & sisters
here people drown in the backwash
of the latest political scandal
in the midst of ghetto chaos
dreams are quickly lost
the Devil is in sweet control
as dreams are stolen
and you know
there is no honor amongst thieves
so dreams are stolen with ease
as a high school graduate barely seventeen
gives up her college dreams
for a pair of tight jeans
and a chance to be the next ghetto queen

in the inner city
checks and basketballs bounce with regularity
life and death intermix with no disparity
some children live for nothing
some children die for nothing
every day blue skies are gray
all they know is: they want to make dough
the Devil has them chasing a colorless rainbow
and at the end there is no pot of gold
just a pot of steam
which he exchanges for their dreams
bonafide slaves are made in the Devil's dream trade
without dreams you are equivalent
to being non existent
our children need to be told that they can achieve
and that God blesses those who hold on to their dreams
we have to take down the signs so the kids won't know
that the Devil is trying to make dreams illegal
DREAMS ARE NOT ILLEGAL

3. WHY I WRITE

i write for those kids
the ones who never had the chance to just lie in the grass and look up at the clouds
for the ones that hide on the inside
when the teacher asks for volunteers to read out loud
i write for the ones who never even looked up at the clouds
without expecting to feel rain
i write for little girls who must double dutch near bloodstains
and don't know their fathers' names

i write to show the youth
that there are far more important things to think and talk about
than the fake beef between drake and meek or when the new jordans coming out
i write to give a voice to all the beautiful everyday things
like birds flying south and leaves turning colors
that get over looked
i write for all the fiends who swore they'd never get hooked
i write for all the nephews out there that know the pain
of seeing their favorite Uncle go from being one of the Kookest Kats on earth
to just a junkie always begging for change
i write for relatives who can't relate to one another
for little girls who were looking for love and found themselves teen mothers
i write for the circle of poverty that never ends in the pj's
for grown men that prey on young girls these days
i write for the beautiful artist, the talented poets, singers and scholars
whose talent warrants that of athletes' dollars
i write cause a man with a ball in his hand has never been a threat
that's why labron and steph can cash million dollar checks
i write for jail cells that get filled before the prisons are even built
i write for all those who see prisons as businesses
and wardens as CEOs
those that say lets build these prisons and fill these prisons
and see how many people they can hold
i write for parents that don't have good parenting skills
like the ones that buy outfits rather than paying bills
i write cause God's thoughts enter my mind in the form of rhyme
and my minds rhymes take you to the confines of grimy urban places
so when i address the fact
that so many black teens have never seen their father's faces
they label me racist
so i write
i write to share my love affair of words with the children

because God is on my tongue and the world is in need of healing
i write cause the children didn't understand
the depth behind the deaths of big and pac
i write cause there is no more room at all on the walls
For RIP man man—&—mookys on my block
i write for all the mothers that had their children killed by guns
i write for all the i love yous fathers never said to their sons
so i write

4. MONDAY MORNING

you see monday mornings at your house a little bit different than mine
you see monday mornings at your house
you probably wake up your kids with a good morning sunshine
and kiss them on their foreheads
your kids have a complete breakfast
then they go back upstairs and brush rinse and floss
grab their bag lunches and skip off out to the garage
hear i love you and have a great day
as they get dropped off

but monday mornings at my house a little bit different than yours
because somewhere in her travels home for the past few nights
my moms got lost
now i haven't seen my moms in like a day or two
ain't no clean clothes or nothing to eat
so what am i supposed to do
i'm only 12 years old and haven't seen my mom all weekend
no i'm not woken up by no i love yous or no alarm clocks beeping
but rather my little sister standing in my doorway
asking what we gonna be eating
my little sister she only 7 man she don't know no better

she still dressed in the same dirty clothes she wore all last week
asking me what we gonna eat
i say mommy not here man go on in go back to sleep
i got up around 11
my little sister was still asleep
i hit the corner store and stole us some noodles and chips to eat
around then mom staggers in from her long weekend
we barely looked up from our bowls
we just keep on eating
you see this is monday morning at my house
love kept us silent too afraid of the truth that might come out
them unasked questions
like she don't ask us why we not in school
and we don't ask her where she's been
she didn't even ask where those noodles came from
she just asked me to go in there and make her some
i said it's not no more
handed her my full bowl
and i'm headed back out the door
to the store to steal some more
and then here you come
asking me why i'm not in school and i just say
monday mornings at my house a little bit different than yours

5. I WISH I COULD GO BACK (FOR UNCLE ANT)

flipping through the pages of a photo album
i am reminded of what life is about and sometimes
i wish i could go back
sometimes i just wish i could go back
i wish i could go back to this picture of my favorite x-mas

i remember i was on honor roll so mom got me
everything on my wish list
a couple of kangols, green suede pumas
a rope chain with a medallion that said my name
a swatch watch, a boom box and two tapes
T La Rock and Dougie Fresh instrumental beatbox
man i was in b-boy heaven
i thought i was dreaming as i spun on my back

sometimes, i wish i could go back

i remember waking up just two days after x-mas
to find all my new stuff missing
i'm thinking maybe my mom put it somewhere
so i'm looking all around the house even down in the kitchen
i checked every room, every closet—but yet its still missing
in the basement i find my uncle sitting with his eyes glistening
i asked him "have you seen my stuff?"
but he just nodding he not even listening
and when i looked in his eyes it hurt
cause i realized i had become the latest victim to my uncle's addiction
my mom can replace all the stuff
but there is something missing in me she can never get back

sometimes i wish i could go back

i wish i could go back to when the pain was gone
as i look at this picture of my uncle in his high school football uniform
i remember telling everybody i wanted to be just like you
when all the other kids wanted to be like Dr. J or Kareem Abdul-Jabbar
when OJ Simpson was running through airports
and Reggie Jackson had his own candy bar
you was my uncle and you was my hero
you was the pride and joy of our family

you was the all-state, college bound running back
i remember my brother and i would stay up late
to hear your often over exaggerated after game recaps
you'd tell us how the other team had an illegal defense
with 12 men on the field and they still couldn't stop you
cause you were just 'the man'
how you scored three touchdowns with three men on your back

sometimes, i wish i could go back

i wish i could go back to this picture
where you were all dressed up in this tux for your high school prom
i wish there was something, anything i could do
to prevent that girl that is with you from becoming your baby's mom
cause although i love my little cousin
i just wish he had came at a later time
then maybe you would have had the opportunity
to go to michigan state instead of graduating to the university of vietnam
you said you had to take care of your son
so instead of running with the ball you were now running with a gun
if you never went to vietnam
you probably would have never been introduced to drugs
and you wouldn't have been a junkie when you came back
so, honestly i just want my Uncle Anthony back!

6. HELLO BEAUTIFUL

hello beautiful
who you looking at like that?
hello beautiful
i don't know why you keep looking at me like that
girl, i don't know why you don't just let the corners of your mouth curl up

and point to the sky
who you looking at with those old ugly eyes
tryin to tell me those old ugly little lies
about how we not pretty enough
about how our features are too strong or rough
i swear you need to get your eyes checked
because every day here you come again with the same old mess
about how she looks better and how you like her hair
don't you think she's thinking the same thing when she looks in the mirror
yeah i know blah blah blah i heard it all before
you know we don't like our nose our eyes our cheekbones or our lips for sure
don't even get me started on the pimples and blackheads
and how you wish mom would give us proactive like the other kids
and then my skin will look better and everybody will say how cute i am
but snap out of it, snap out of it
when did hating our gifts become part of the plan
you think you wanna be like her
but she's just doing what she saw someone else do
the flyest thing of all is just you being you
so just smile because you can't be number two
because there's only one you
so let's make a pact and agree
that when we look in the mirror from now on you'll be amazed
at all the beauty you see
i want you to see your face as a priceless jewel
a full sunflower, a peach blossom in bloom
i want you to see the marks of beauty that make us unique
gaze at your features, draw your fingers down our cheeks
see the rainbows that are my eyebrows
right over the roses that are my eyes
in the middle of my carnation lily cheeks is my lotus flower of a nose
and my mouth is as beautiful as jasmine and ginger

and when i smile you notice that i no longer have two lips
but rather tulips, orchids and daisies
i know seeing you this way the first time is amazing
but we in this together girl, me and you
and if you forever see the beauty in me
i'll forever show the beauty in you
so when you look at me i want you to see your bestie
i want you to smile and want to take a selfie
so when you greet me tomorrow morning and you say
hello beautiful i won't be surprised
i just know now she knows the beautiful flower she is
on the inside

7. HOW IRONIC

they suggested i was one of the lucky ones
because i had survived the encounter still breathing
but years later my heart is still bleeding and my soul is still grieving
in the desert, just what did they do to Miss Mary's baby boy
now they say it's post traumatic stress disorder
PTSD—those are the letters they use to describe me
because the silence of war still rings in my ear
years later, loud and clear
i'm tortured, because after hearing a dead man's last scream
you can no longer return to being that innocent teen
there are no more innocent places in my heart
the keys to my emotions are gone
because i know morally what i was doing was wrong
how do we know our final days, our final words
what were they thinking before the last moments of their lives occurred
i mean it's a strange feeling being on foreign soil

without a foreign person in sight
after what we did last night
i squeezed triggers and reloaded as things exploded
they said it was patriotic
now they tell me i'm psychotic
how ironic

i squeeze my eyes tight, trying to bring my memories closer
but the negative is damaged due to overexposure
i'm unable to alter or photoshop these images
they're scarred in my mind and become delusions
that keep me in seclusion
i'm traumatized by the cruel acts before my eyes
and sometimes i'm unaware that i'm not still there
i'm still struggling with all the dead kids
trying to understand why
why sarge shot that lady in the back of her head
and he got medals for it
but my soul has never been settled for it
and there are no isolated or random acts in war
the ones you murder today will torment your tomorrows
the children's screams and tears
still burn my eyes and ears
as misguided men lead guided missiles
as scared teens tote M16s
and cowards clutch their 45 pistols
they truly ruined some good sons
with their bad, twisted logic, misguided lessons and loaded guns

now daily i feel the agony i caused and endured
it greets me and defeats me before i can leave my own front door
my world is flipped
i'm unable to right this ship

my days go to nights, wrongs from rights
to an empty life, another ex-wife
the peace i'm searching for eludes me
gun in my waistband or within reach of my night stand usually

and at times God still refuses to speak to me
he's still angered by the foul deeds i've done
he's too ashamed to call me his son
he still refuses to speak to me
and i remember when he glared at me with those angry eyes
i'll never forget, i knew exactly what he meant
they had no weapon
they were no threat
we could have just let them walk away
but instead he yells Fire and we empty our clips
just more bodies buried in the sand

now the Devil grins as the guns are put down and the war ends
for he knows the real war, the war in your mind
is ready to begin
he knows of the bad days and the storms to come
demons from yesterday's deaths
become tomorrow's nightmares and flashbacks
and they're real and i can feel them like the scar on my arm
where they shot us up with that anthrax
they can't believe what we received
i still feel it in my bones deep
i get bad sleep
as soon as i drift off i'm awake
i smell smoke, gasping for air, unable to breathe
i squeezed triggers
they said it was patriotic

now my doctor tells me i'm psychotic
how ironic

i struggle to put the pieces of my life back together again
just to be my mommy's baby boy, a father to my son, my brother's twin
but thirty days later i'm all broken again
morally corrupt, and i pay the price
fear, insomnia, nightmares at night
to live in the shadows of your own life
this is what happens when you take innocent life
i squeezed triggers
they said it was patriotic
now they tell me i'm psychotic
how ironic

8. NO TIME TO STUDY

i have a big test tomorrow i must study for
but i can hear my friends playing right outside my door
ha-ha-ha—laugh kick score
i go the window and sneak a peek
all my buddies playing soccer in the street
i have a big test i must study for
but i put the book down and rush out the door
ha-ha-ha—laugh kick score
so much fun playing soccer in the street
i laughed and played until it was time to eat
after dinner to myself i said i'll study until its time for bed
i read a couple of pages maybe 3 or 4
then my dad yells
"the game is on and Odell Beckham just scored!"

no time to study for tomorrow's big test

just E – A – G – L – E – S

EAGLES!

the eagles lose the game now i'm feeling depressed

upstairs i head to study for my test

i read a page or two as i sat on my bed

then my eyes get heavy and i lay down my head

i tell myself i'll nap, just get a little rest

next thing i know mom is saying "hurry up get dressed"

i get to school, break out my book and try to cram for my test

minutes later my teacher says clear your desk

i hardly knew any answers on the test

how did i get in such a mess?

maybe next time i won't play soccer i'll just study for my test

maybe next time i'll study hard and get some rest

so i can be prepared for my big test

how did i get in such a mess?

E – A – G – L – E – S

EAGLES!

9. THE SCIENCE OF LOVE AND WAR

there's a girl in my science class

she makes my heart stop whenever she walks past

believe me, she's the reason that lip gloss was made

together we could be the Beyoncé and Jay Z of 5th grade

but there's just one small problem

and time after time my mind keeps reminding me of this:

SHE DOESN'T EVEN KNOW YOU EXIST!

yeah i know, i'm just trying to take it slow

now my mind's always giving me

hints and suggestions of things
i could do in order to make her mine:
YOU CAN BUY HER FLOWERS AND CANDY
GIRLS LOVE CANDY
ok, ok, ok, i say
now one day i'm in science class
and i'm daydreaming about you know who
when out of the blue she steps up and asks me
if she could borrow a pen
you would have thought she's asked me out for a date
because i couldn't move, i was frozen in place
my mind said: SURE!
nervously i knocked my pencil box to the floor
and i picked it up and i gave her my favorite pen
my sponge bob pen
she said oooh, oooh, i love sponge bob
my mind said: SAY ME TOO, SAY ME TOO!
but i didn't; i just let her walk away
and at the end of the day
my mind said: GO TALK TO HER,
AT LEAST GET YOUR PEN BACK, SILLY!
i said, see that's my new strategy
as long as she has that pen she'll always have a part of me
my mind said: YOU'RE AN IDIOT! YOU GOTTA CHANGE YOUR METHODS
AT THIS RATE SHE'LL NEVER GET THE MESSAGE!
and from that point on besides eating and sleeping
me and my mind spent most of our time
trying to figure out ways to make her mines
my mind said, LOOK, IT'S AS EASY AS 1, 2, 3 ...
you know, you're right, you're right
i'll just step up and ask her to go out with me
every day my mind says: TODAY'S THE DAY

but day after day i keep putting it off
and i have to keep reminding my mind
look here buddy i am the boss
my mind sets up the perfect moment,
THE GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY
and everything went smooth until the moment of execution
i panicked and my mind starts screaming
JUST DO IT, JUST DO IT
i'm like—will you please just be quiet!
she turns around and says, i hope you're not talking to me!
oh no, i was talking to myself i said
oh great, now she thinks i'm a coo-coo
who talks to the voices in his head
thanks a lot, thanks for nothing, i said
my mind says: GET READY CHAMP, HERE SHE COMES AGAIN
i open my mouth but no words come out
my mind says: COME ON, YOU CAN DO IT. YOU CAN DO IT!
but i have butterflies inside, and my legs have turned to fluid
my mind says: YOU BLEW IT!
i'm tired of fighting this war
so now i'm in love with someone else
because i realized that my mind didn't want the girl for me
he wanted her for himself

10. NO HOME TO GO HOME TO

he said "negro, you should be happy that you're here to america"
he said if it wasn't for him and his fellow christians on their civilizing missions
he said i would still be in africa—with those uncivilized savages
he said i'd be there with the backward soulless people of the world
the ones who have no history nor future
he said i should be grateful i was brought to this great land
happy to call america my home

but i know in my heart i can never really call america my home
because if this was my home they wouldn't treat me the way they do
and if what they saying about africa is true
i don't wanna go back there either
so i'm starting to feel like i ain't got a home to go home to

they got me sharecropping on a piece of worthless land
and it seems like the more i make
the more they take
season after season, a bigger balance is due
and at the end of the harvest
i have nothing to go home to
and when i thought about moving up north
he said you can't go nowhere
said i couldn't leave until i paid you all i owed, so
still ain't nothing to go home for

my kids can't go to school like other children do
they gotta help me work in the fields
because of the money i owe you
so in the eyes of my kids thanks to you
coming home is no home to go home to

they got me working, doing odd jobs
seems like even the salvation of my soul
is being used to maintain their life of leisure

now my heart could never explain somebody else's pain
but why would she say i raped her
why would she say i raped her when in reality
she couldn't keep her hands off me
told me not to tell a soul cause she gonna cross me
now they are burning crosses all around town
burned my house down to the ground

now what am i going to do
cause i don't have no home to go home to

they got their dogs and their guns
they are coming after me, for something i didn't do
in her heart, she knows it's true
and i refuse to die for her lie, to be blamed for her shame
my wife said, you can try to explain but the truth they ain't gone believe
they ain't going to be happy until you hanging from one of those trees
my grandmother says son, all you can do is run
child please just leave
she said if you don't leave tonight
you won't live to see the morning light

so now i'm running
i know where i'm running from
but i don't know where i'm running to
cause it seems like i ain't got no home to go home to
but i'm running

running through the darkness of the woods
i am guided by the light of my mother's face
i'm running to the memories of my mother's smile
i'm running like i am racing against my childhood memories
i remember being taken out of my mother's arms as a child
i remember my grandmother telling me
that i laid in the blood that spilled when my father got killed
she said "but they can never kill his spirit"
she said that's why they call me nnamdi cause it means
my father is inside of me
she said that's igbo our native tongue
from the land east of benin where our people come from
so although it seems like i don't

i guess i really do got a home to go home to
but i can't

i wish i could run back to those african shores
but i can't
i run until i can't run no more

but my mind's still running
thinking about my family and how much they're going to miss me
as i stand on the banks of the mississippi
and i say to God that i don't know what to do
and then the face of the river became the face of God
and He smiled

and said come on home child, you got a home to come home to
and it seemed that the more the river roared
the more God said He loved me
then He stretched open His arms
like He was just waiting to hug me
and as my feet leave this loveless land

i hear my grandmother on her knees prayin/sayin
"precious lord please take my baby's hand"
and although it's the middle of the winter
the water was warm
and this world can't do me no harm
cause now i'm in God's arms
and i know He's real
i can feel Him holding me tight
as i'm carried under and away by the current of the river
i don't fight
cause i know God is going to bring me home tonight

11. REST IN PEACE MRS. FRANCES

Grandmom only the morning sunshine can capture the beauty in your eyes
that's why i say good morning to you when i see the sunrise
this loss we carry
like wings of a dove we will heal in Love
knowing you've gone up Yonder to be with the Lord gives me grace
and knowing one day i will again see your face
you are Proverbs 10:7—
good people will be remembered as a blessing

Grandmom you ain't never left
you help bring out my best
you're on my mind always, in all ways, on all days
truly knew my words held powers for years
since reading scriptures into your dying ears
holy art thou amongst the stars
only your peace can cease this grief
i'm never lost because of you and the love you've shown
still gives me guidance & balance to find my way back home

Grandmom you're in all the good that your daughter and her children
and their children even their children's children do
all the goodness in this family's heart i can trace back to you
and sometimes i'm torn about what happens first when i enter Heaven's doors,
do i go greet the Lord?
or do i run to that embrace that i've been missing and yearning for of yours
you were our garden
and it was Godly how you grew things on that little patch of dirt
and how your face & embrace could melt away life's hurt
it was majestic—how you just did God's work
how you saw beyond our faults
acceptance & forgiveness was always taught

tables & pews at the church houses & tabernacles were filled because of you
you had more reverence than reverends & preachers
you had more patience than parents and teachers
i've seen your loving hands stop seizures
and it didn't matter where—you were always in prayer
kept us covered—never left us lonely
taught us to turn test into testimonies

so this poem is really an armful of your favorite gladiolus
or one last rose i suppose
as i'm writing this i feel touched by your spirit
and i pray to God that you can hear it
what's more important the words or the flowers
the gifts of a poet
or the soil that helped grow it
there will never be another light that shines as bright as yours in my life

Grandmoms i miss you—i miss your hugs—i miss your meals—
i miss your songs—i miss your smell—i miss your laugh
i've had visions of you many times since you passed
i see you Sunday of communion dressed in white
surrounded by children
i pray for the day we have a reunion and our souls can unite
my heavy heart is baptized with your hallelujahs when i hear you singing
i'm going up Yonder to be with our Lord
i pray that with this love card you left me
i can swipe my way into Heaven's door
and see you once more

12. UNITED SOUNDS OF AMERICA

it's the sounds of america
it's mowers mowing and leaf blowers blowing
because husbands have honey to do lists so home depot always stays full
so their wives won't complain because tomorrow is sunday
and he just wants to be able to drink a beer and watch the eagles game

it's the sounds of america
where moviegoers can relax & recline at the IMAX with a glass of wine
and spend millions each weekend
while teachers go on strike and budget cuts affect our children's education
in the classroom they teach in

it's the sound of america where madness comes in stages
not just in inner cities but from hotel windows in vegas
and in school hallways
and gun control is at the center of the debate always
and it's the NRA who takes the pulse when lives are loss at the Pulse

it's the sounds of america
where hurt people use metal things to settle things
where reality is worse than your worst bad dreams
when angry teens can legally get their hands on AR-15's
it's the sounds of america

triggers are squeezed by fingers with no forgiveness
dreams dissolve into the distance
tragedy after tragedy
despair cannot continue to be our strategy
the consequence of violence cannot be silence
these are the united sounds of america
a united voice to take us to a better place
a united country not divided by color, class, race or hate

we must unite our cry for justice and equity
instead of building up, we tear down with just word of mouth
fake news is the only news we hear about
they cover us with careless news coverage
meant to smother us
killing a movement in a moment
fanning the fires of the most violent
intensifying our pain and strife
but what's wrong has never been right
so we fight
with a belief that we can do better
these are the united sounds of america

it's the sounds of america
and this is main street in any city across the USA
where mom-and-pop shops and other small business
are being forced to close their doors
for they can no longer compete
with the big box monopoly conglomerates anymore

it's the sounds of america
where the media outlets try to use fear
to control our worldview and what we think and do
today they say it's the virus, no it's ukraine
and then tomorrow they say it's a new variant coming
but open the schools and unmask the kids
so, we all run out and get our vaccines but still ended up catching covid

it's the sounds of america
where our inner cities have more deaths than iraq and afghanistan combined
but they mostly blacks and latinos so america leaves it in the blind spots of its mind
lost in america's blind spot screaming hands up don't shoot
battlefields on american boulevard's bring death like bombs in beirut

it's the sounds of america
and it sounds like a gunshots from trigger-happy cops
it's the sounds of america when another body drops
for i've seen the beauty of the morning sunlight become good
for only revealing the ugliness from last night's gun fight
where blood stains still remain from where little Jermaine got slain
and it's too many Freddie Grays and Eric Garners in my heart to be forgot
too many Arteise Browns, Ronald Kelsons & Walter Scotts
and Trayvons and so on and the list continues on—
and it appears that there is no end in sight
when an officer can pull up to a playground and shoot down 12 year old Tamir Rice
they say Black Lives Matter but i'd have to disagree
with all the tragic traffic stops i see

the united sounds of america
a need to fill the air with something true
something meaningful
the good old red, white and blue
empowering the equality of rainbows
these sounds are just as american
as the muted sound of our children's pain
just the song of a slave
where the walls of my classroom
are the walls of my grave

the united sounds of america
where flag draped coffins
rest under patriotic skies
cries of no more war
without an agreed upon declaration of what we are truly fighting for
these are the united sounds of america

it's the sounds of america when school doors are closing
and prison doors are opening
so in prison you stay
because to the justice system he's a criminal
but really he's just a sad little boy
he was sad his dad went away
sad that his mom had no money on picture day
and he didn't have a new bike on Christmas day
so that's why he tried to steal that bike and ride away
it's the sounds of america when a police officer come his way

it's the sounds of america and we all are crying
from pain at the pump
everyday gas prices jump
stock market down—inflation is up
democrat vs republican
enough is enough
just what happened to that land
with opened borders and welcoming hands?

it's the sounds of america
america is as beautiful as the sounds of our children's laughter
as beautiful as a thousand flowers opening slowly
american you're so beautiful
america please show me
it's the sounds of america

racist propaganda presented as policy
we can create all sorts of laws
and we still will not be safe
from her own hate

singing the united sounds of america
we search for silence in the midst of screams
our children living in the land of lost dreams

police sirens sadly serenade
the souls of those soon to be trafficked
hymns sung with silence
beneath the chorus of sex and violence
naked aggression
she's beaten until she sees stars
strangled beneath this banner

these are the united sounds of america
where anxiety and doubt
spilling out of our children's mouths
communities of color
where cries go unnoticed
that these disparities existed
well before covid

unrecognized pain and anguish
you would think our united sounds of america
are being sung in a different language
glass ceilings above floor after floor of racism
built upon a foundation of hatred
united sounds of america
still the birth of a nation

these are the united songs we sing
together we move to a place
beyond the hate
beyond the hype and hysteria
these are the united sounds of america

we must stop feeding the lies to the boys and the girls
stop spreading the sickness which is now the way of the world
we wait for the healing to begin
if not now, then when?

our children demand more
we stand for justice
we stand united for what's right

unified we march for our sisters, our brothers, our fathers, our mothers
we march for our children, our husbands, our wives
we march for our lives

from the mountain tops
from the farms to the street blocks
this is the united sounds of america
this is more than just street art
it's graffiti written on the walls of my heart

it's the tree of life
it's our roots that run deep
that keeps us standing strong
united voices carrying this song

the united sounds of america
a unified harmony
producing environments
where our children feel safe
without carrying a gun
the chorus of my country
telling me that i can be someone

these are the united sounds of america



TWIN POETS

ALBERT MILLS & NNAMDI CHUKWUOCHA

Among many awards and honors, Twin Poets Albert Mills and Nnamdi Chukwuocha have been Delaware's Poets Laureate since 2017 and in 2020 were named Academy of American Poets Laureate Fellows. Their art is profoundly integrated with their lives and their work in the community. In addition to being celebrated urban spoken word poets, they are mentors, activists, veterans, coaches, historians, master social workers, non-profit administrators, and elected representatives in city and state government. Al and Nnamdi are involved in prison poetry programs across the Mid-Atlantic region and are the founders of Art for Life – Delaware, a youth and community development organization rooted in the arts. Anyone who has witnessed a performance or read a poem by the Twin Poets has felt the power of their work.



JAMES ALLEN ANDERSON

CONDUCTOR

Award-winning conductor, pianist, and composer James Allen Anderson continues to engage audiences worldwide with entertaining and thought-provoking performances. Anderson's pioneering projects, such as the University of Delaware Cultural Fusion Initiative (CFI) and Cinema Symphony Series, are stretching the boundaries of the traditional concert experience.



MAKEDA HAMPTON
SOPRANO

Award-winning soprano Makeda Hampton is widely recognized for her warm and shimmering voice. She holds a doctorate from the University of Kentucky and has studied and performed across the United States and in Portugal, Spain, Germany, and Austria. Hampton appears regularly in the Metropolitan Opera chorus and performed in the Met's Grammy-winning recording of Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* and the Met premiere of Anthony Davis's *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X*. In addition to her work as a performer, Makeda is dedicated to equity in the classical music field.



JONATHAN WHITNEY
PERCUSSION

Jonathan Whitney is a drummer, composer, and activist who, in addition to composing and performing, uses the arts to connect people to create positive change in our communities. He recently received the Delaware Division of the Arts Established Artist Fellowship for Jazz Composition and has completed many commissions and collaborations, including for the Cooch's Bridge Historic Site, *Mélomanie*, and *Pieces of a Dream Dance Theatre*. He has brought his artistry to a variety of spaces, from opera houses to prisons.



OKSANA GLOUCHKO

PIANO

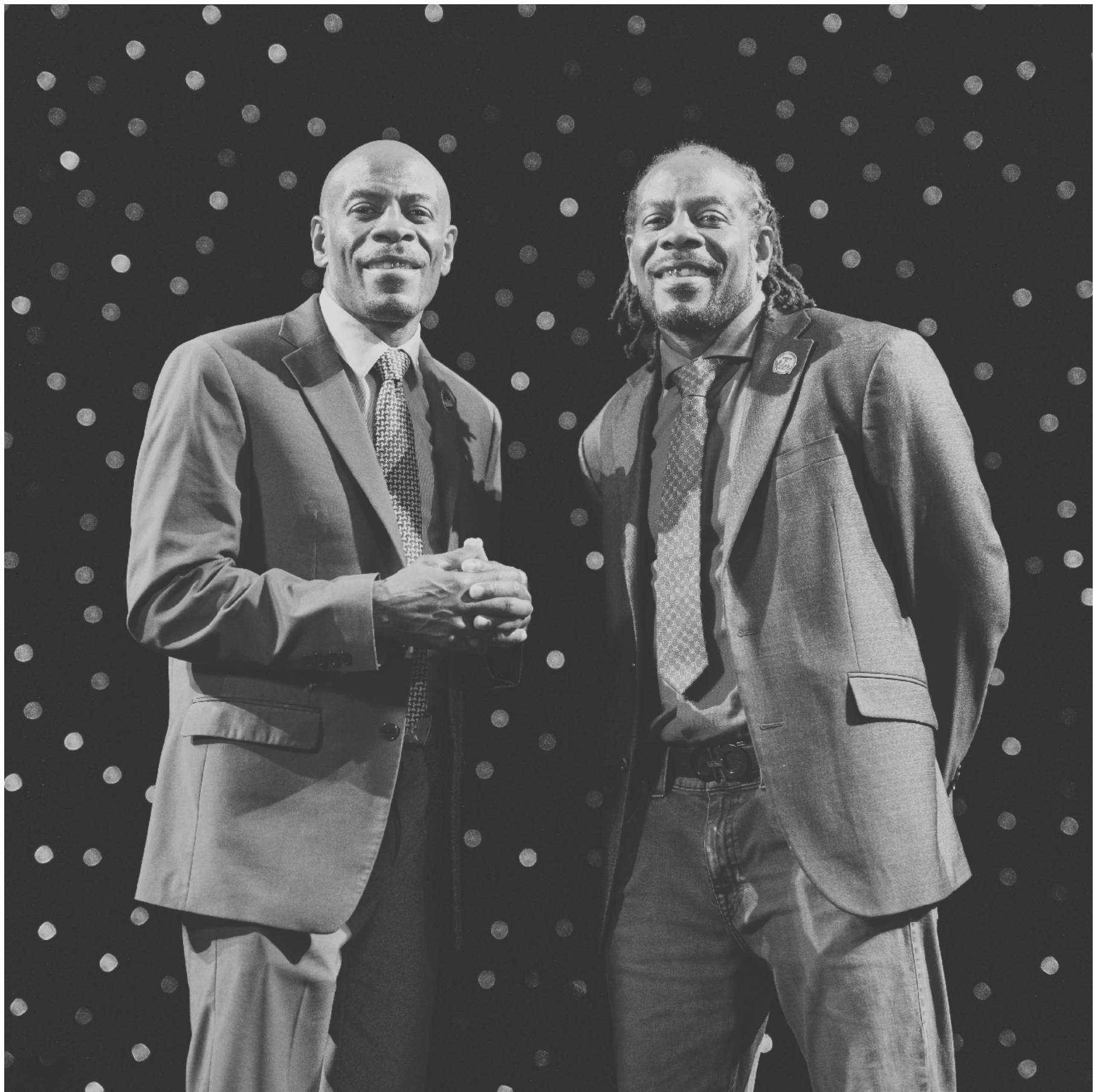
Pianist Oksana Glouchko brings a persuasive, idiomatic, and commanding voice to the piano literature. A Russian-born Israeli, Dr. Glouchko has been a featured soloist at international festivals, performing with orchestras such as the Chile Symphony Orchestra, Rishon-LeZion Symphony Orchestra, and Carter Symphony Orchestra of Tel Aviv. She has won numerous piano competitions, including the prestigious Claudio Arrau International Competition in Chile. Dr. Glouchko holds advanced degrees in piano performance from Tel Aviv University and Stony Brook University, where she earned her Doctorate in Musical Arts, and has served on the piano faculty of various institutions.



MARK HAGERTY

COMPOSER

Mark Hagerty is an award-winning, highly individualistic composer who pursued classical training as an instrumentalist, singer, and composer and then determined his own path, outside of any tradition or institution. His music has found enthusiastic audiences from Carnegie Hall to Iceland to Shanghai to Rio de Janeiro. While much of his work is inspired by science and nature, he is increasingly dedicated to using music in the service of social change.



Recorded at Puglisi Hall, University of Delaware, USA, on 7 May 2022

Producers

Mark Hagerty & James Allen Anderson

Recording Engineers

Andreas K. Meyer & Nancy Conforti

Mixing & Mastering

Andreas K. Meyer at Swan Studios NYC

Label Manager

Timothée van der Stegen

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Pragma Création

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James Allen Anderson © Rylan Lott

Makeda Hampton © Edward Goodman, IV

Jonathan Whitney © Moonloop Photography

Oksana Glouchko © Dario Acosta

Mark Hagerty © John David Becker

Twin Poets (standing) © Moonloop Photography

Music

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This recording was produced as part of the University of Delaware's Cultural Fusion Initiative, James Allen Anderson, founder and director.

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Division of the Arts



UNITED SOUNDS OF AMERICA

Music by Mark Hagerty

Words by the Twin Poets Albert Mills & Nnamdi Chukwuocha

**University of Delaware
Symphony Orchestra**

James Allen Anderson
Conductor

Twin Poets
Spoken word poetry

Makeda Hampton
Soprano

Jonathan Whitney
Percussion

Oksana Glouchko
Piano

1.	introduction	2:05
2.	dreams are illegal	3:18
3.	why i write	2:38
4.	monday morning	2:34
5.	i wish i could go back (for uncle ant)	2:16
6.	hello beautiful	3:04
7.	how ironic	6:58
8.	no time to study	1:27
9.	the science of love and war	2:24
10.	no home to go home to	4:01
11.	rest in peace Mrs. Frances	7:56
12.	united sounds of america	9:22
Total Running Time		48:35