

# Powerful Voices

March 25, 2023

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Darko Butorac, Conductor  
Florida A&M University Concert Choir  
Mark Butler, Conductor

Errolyn Wallen  
(b. 1958)

Mighty River

Joel Thompson  
(b. 1988)

Walk in Dignity  
A Commemoration of the Tallahassee Bus Boycott

## INTERMISSION

David Maslanka  
(1943-2017)

Symphony No. 4

#myTSO  
@tallahasseesympphony



## Program Notes

Born in Belize in 1958, **Errollyn Wallen** moved to London when she was two. She studied music and dance in Great Britain before relocating to New York to study at the Dance Theatre of Harlem in 1976-8. After returning to England, she studied composition at King's College London and eventually earned a M.Phil. in composition from King's College Cambridge. Her first orchestral commission was written for percussionist Colin Currie who premiered her concerto at the BBC Young Musician Competition in 1994. Its performance at the 1998 BBC Proms made Wallen the first black female composer to have a work performed at the Proms. [Named for Promenade concerts that originated in 1895, the Proms encompass eight weeks of daily classical concerts every summer and are an important part of British history and culture.] A singer and pianist, Wallen has composed vocal, chamber, and orchestral works as well as twenty-two operas. Her music has been part of the 2012 Paralympic games and Queen Elizabeth's Golden and Diamond Jubilees. Wallen also founded an orchestra called Ensemble X, whose *Photography* album of Wallen's music was named one of NPR's Top Ten Classical Albums in 2016.

**Mighty River**, which incorporates gospel music and spirituals, was written in 2007 to commemorate the bicentenary of the Act for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in England. It begins with "Amazing Grace" played by a solo horn that is soon joined by piccolo, then clarinet, and then the rest of the orchestra. Reminiscent of Steve Reich's 1964 "In C," where a pianist repeatedly plays octave Cs, a pulse is provided here by a continuously repeated pitch in the strings. There are flourishes in the woodwinds, and one hears a fragment of the spiritual "Deep River." Later, "Amazing Grace" returns in the flute, then oboe, strings, and finally brass, while the pulse continues with only a couple brief seconds of relief.

Mighty River ends as it began with a solo horn playing "Amazing Grace."

### DID YOU KNOW?

John Newton, who wrote the lyrics for "Amazing Grace" in 1772, was a British slave trader before he became a Christian. Transformed into an impassioned abolitionist, Newton became friendly with William Wilberforce who, in 1789, introduced "The Abolition of Slavery" bill that was finally passed by the British House of Commons in 1804 and the House of Lords in 1807. In 1835 "Amazing Grace" was set to the hymn tune "New Britain," which happens to use the pentatonic scale that is common in African music.

**Joel Thompson (b. 1988)** is a conductor, pianist, and educator. He earned a Master of Music in Choral Conducting from Emory University and served as Director of Choral Studies and Assistant Professor of Music at Andrew College for two years. Thompson studied composition with Stephen Hartke and Christopher Theofanidis at the Aspen Music Festival in 2017, and he is currently pursuing a Doctorate in Musical Arts at Yale University. Thompson made some Tallahasseeans a bit uncomfortable on 31 March 2019 when his work *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed* was performed by the TSO. The work was powerful; it was frightening; it was sobering; and it fostered conversation. In August 2021 he premiered another new work in Boulder at the Colorado Music Festival. The piece sets writings of James Baldwin to music. And now Thompson has been commissioned by the TSO (thanks to a grant from the National Endowment of the Arts) to write a work commemorating an important Civil Rights Movement event that took place in our town, the 1956 bus boycott (May 28 – December 22). On 27 May 1956, two black

FAMU co-eds, Wilhelmina Jakes and Carrie Patterson, sat in two available seats on a city bus, but the front was reserved for white people. When they refused to stand in the back or get off the bus without receiving a refund, police were summoned, and the students were arrested for "inciting a riot." Released on bond, they were visited the next day by the Reverend C. K. Steele, pastor of Bethel Baptist Church, who pledged to support them. The students organized the Inter-Civic Council (ICC) to stage a boycott of the city bus system. During this time, Rev. Steele, Rev. Daniel B. Speed, as well as volunteer carpool drivers were arrested, and the pastors had to collect \$11,000 for bond payments for a total of twenty-one people. Despite intimidation, the African American community persevered until the Supreme Court ruled on 21 December that segregation on buses was unconstitutional. ICC members agreed to resume bus patronage but only if they were fully integrated. The Tallahassee City Commission said seating would be "driver designated," so more students were arrested when they tested biased seating assignments, but integration gradually took place and tensions eased over a period of months.

Massachusetts-born **David Maslanka (1943-2017)** studied composition at Oberlin Conservatory and at the Mozarteum in Salzburg, Austria, and he completed the M.M. and Ph. D. degrees in composition at Michigan State University. Maslanka served on the faculties of Sarah Lawrence College and State University of New York before moving in 1990 to Montana, where he became increasingly interested in incorporating meditation, the subconscious, and dreams into his compositional process. A prolific composer, his legacy rests on over 100 works including fifty pieces for wind ensemble, numerous concertos (saxophone, flute, clarinet, piano, percussion, tenor trombone, two horns), and nine symphonies. He was working on a

tenth at the time of his death due to cancer, and he left instructions for his son Matthew to complete the work based on his sketches; it premiered the year after David's death.

Tonight's **Symphony No. 4** was composed in 1993 and premiered the following year in San Antonio. Commissioned by a group of universities for the Texas Music Educators Association state convention, it was originally written for wind ensemble. Darko and Matthew Maslanka worked together to transcribe the composition for orchestra. The Symphony begins with an extended horn solo. Soloistic winds, energetic percussion outbursts, quiet, ethereal sections with harp arpeggios, and transcendent brass chorales provide alternations of mood and tempo. If you wonder what creates that eerie crying sound in the middle of the work (the composer refers to these passages as "the babies"), it is a sliding of pitches (glissando) on just the mouthpiece section of the clarinet. Maslanka is fond of repeating pitches and short phrases that often recur in ascending or descending patterns ("sequences"). The only melodies that one might take home are references to two Bach chorales ("Only Trust in God to Guide You" and "Christ Who Makes Us Holy") as well as the hymns "Old Hundredth" and "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross." Maslanka, an Abraham Lincoln enthusiast, included Old Hundredth (or the Doxology, "Praise God from Whom all Blessings Flow," because a brass band played it when the assassinated President's body was transferred from the Ohio State Capitol to the funeral train. Old Hundredth and the Wondrous Cross hymns appear near the beginning of the composition and again toward its conclusion, creating a cyclical "symphony." In the finale, each pitch of Old Hundredth is lengthened (rhythmic augmentation) and followed by punctuation from the percussion instruments. Maslanka's notes in the score expand on this use

of hymn tunes: "I have used Christian symbols because they are my cultural heritage, but I have tried to move through them to a depth of universal humanness, to an awareness that is not defined by religious label. My impulse through this music is to speak to the fundamental human issues of transformation and re-birth in this chaotic time." Ultimately the composer reveals, "The central driving force is the spontaneous rise of the impulse to shout for the joy of life."

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
 FSU's Director of Bands, Dr. Patrick Dunnigan, has conducted Maslanka's Symphony No. 4 several times. He states, "The amazing thing about David's music is the incredible mileage he gets out of relatively simple musical ideas. No one makes better use of the 'less is more' idea."

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 Dr. Akers has a Master of Music degree in Piano Performance from Indiana University and a Ph.D. in Historical Musicology from Florida State University.



**Joel Thompson**, best known for the choral work, *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed*, is an artist and educator currently serving as composer-in-residence with the Houston Grand Opera (HGO). Committed to creating spaces for healing and community through music, Thompson has collaborated with the New York Philharmonic, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Minnesota Orchestra, Tallahassee Symphony Orchestra, Chicago Sinfonietta, Colorado Music Festival, and also serves as composer-in-residence at the New Haven Symphony Orchestra. His opera, *The Snowy Day*, was commissioned and premiered by HGO in December 2021.



**Mark Butler**, composer, conductor, music educator, pianist, baritone. Butler received his undergraduate degree in Music Education from Florida A&M University. He holds a M.M.E degree from Florida State University and a Doctorate degree (DMA), in Choral Conducting from



## Guest Artists

The American Conservatory of Music in Hammond, IND. Dr. Butler is Director of Choral Activities and Studies at Florida A&M University in Tallahassee, FL. He also serves a choral consultant and as an adjudicator for NATS vocal competitions, and conductor for various Choral Music Festivals & Concerts. October 2018 Dr. Butler presented at the Florida ACDA on the topic "Performing the Concert Spiritual" and in April of 2018, he served as clinician and Conductor for the Miami / Dade High School Honors Chorus. In the Spring of 2017 Dr. Butler served as choir master for a performance of Verdi's Requiem with the Tallahassee Symphony Orchestra along with the Florida A&M University Concert Chorale and Tallahassee Community Singers. He has also conducted major works by Handel, Vivaldi and other great composers. In 2019, Butler was selected to serve as commissioned composer for the first HBCU Honors Choir at the Southern Region of the American Choral Director's Association (Mobile, AL). In 2015 he also served as Composer in Residence and Vocal Consultant at the Grady Rayam Vocal Competition where he too conducted a Master Class series (Orlando, FL.) In addition, Dr. Butler served as Guest Conductor of the AASCA Music Festival in San Pedro Sula, Honduras and as a Conductor at the Florida Music Educators Conference with the FAMU Concert Choir presenting a performance and topic demonstration "Gospel Performance in the Choral Setting". Dr. Butler and the FAMU Concert Choir will be present in performance again at the Florida Music Educators Conference, January 2022 (Tampa, FL) As a published composer, his compositions have quickly grown to popular fame and are in performance demands at National and International music events such as the American Choral Director's Association, Music Conferences and Festivals. The internationally acclaimed Boys and Girls Choir of Harlem performed his arrangement "Glory Hallelujah to the New Born King" on The Good Morning America Show. In 2018, his composition "I Am The Voice" had its debut performance by The Morehouse Glee Club

and the Men of FAMU Concert Choir. Dr. Butler has conducted the Perdido Symphony Orchestra and the FAMU Concert Choir in a performance of "Handel's Messiah". He is a member of the American Choral Director's Association, Music Educator's National Conference, NATS, American Composer's Forum and Omega Psi Phi Fraternity. Dr. Butler continues to serve as guest conductor /choral consultant and composer in residence for State and National Choral Events, Church Workshops, and other Musical involvements throughout the United States.



Very well known for the versatility of their various singing styles, their diverse repertoire spans the choral genres of classical, a cappella spirituals, contemporary, gospel, jazz and multicultural styles. **The Concert Choir** consists of some of the most talented students on the campus of **Florida A&M University**. These gifted students assemble together weekly to prepare for Annual events such as Fall, Holiday and Spring Concerts as well as performance invitations and concert tours. Past tours include Washington D.C., Virginia, Florida and Georgia. The FAMU Concert Choir gave a command performance at the 2022 FMEA conference. Also recently, FAMU Concert Choir was selected to be the first group to sing the Black National Anthem - "Lift Every Voice and Sing" at an NFL game. This national historical performance was a compilation presentation with vocal artist Alicia Keys. Also, recently the FAMU Concert Choir was selected as 1st place winners at the HBCU

"Battle of Voices". And on November 17, 2021 The FAMU Concert Choir were featured in USA TODAY News national syndicated documentary titled "Seven Days of 1961" The Florida A&M University Concert Choir was selected to perform at the world renowned, Carnegie Hall on April 6, 2020. Unfortunately, due to the COVID pandemic occurrence, the Concert Choir's debut performance was canceled. Amid the heartbreak and disappointment of the cancellation, the students maintained their integrity and drive to promote melodious music, and turned their focus to creating a proliferation of rejuvenation. Hence, their decision to start a series to uplift and encourage the people of our Nation with their "Songs to Inspire Series" March 2019 the FAMU Concert Choir was featured with the Morehouse Glee Club and the Tallahassee Symphony Orchestra in a performance of Beethoven's 9th symphony and in 2018 the FAMU Concert Choir was featured as the exhibition choral ensemble at the Florida American Choral Directors Association and in January 2020 the FAMU Concert Choir will perform at the Florida Music Educators Association Conference (Tampa, FL) In March of 2017 the FAMU Concert Choir gave a command performance of Verdi's Requiem along with the Tallahassee Symphony Orchestra and Community Chorus. The FAMU Concert Choir has made several collaborative performances with celebrity artists. Some include: Gospel artist, Tye Tribbett, Vocalist, Alicia Keys Rapper, T - Pain, The legendary group Female Folk Singers, Sweet Honey in the Rock Classical Vocalist, NaGuanda Nobles, and Broadway Singer, Sal Viviano The choir remains visible and proactive by hosting various musical events and choral activities for High School Choruses and within their community and surrounding areas. Recent music graduates of the FAMU vocal and choral division have continued to share their scholarly gifts and talents by; attending renowned graduate schools, serving as music educators and performing major cast roles in Musicals and Opera Productions.