

## A Note from the Composer

In composing the score to *Let Freedom Sing: The Story of Marian Anderson*, I drew upon some of the music Marian Anderson sang, integrating this music into the fabric of the opera for dramatic purposes (rather than merely quoting it.) Four spirituals, plus music of Bach and Schubert, and also some harmonic and textural reference to Brahms are embedded in the opera.

There are phrases, thematic variations, and contrapuntal treatments of the spirituals *Oh What a Beautiful City*, *He's Got the Whole World in His Hands*, *Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho*, and *Deep River*. In one scene for example, Marian Anderson sings *He's Got the Whole World in His Hands* while the other characters sing about the denial of her right to sing in Constitution Hall. As she sings the spiritual, Marian Anderson remains apart from the turmoil, as she did in life, and is presented as a noble, dignified figure who only wants to sing, to bring her art to the people, while around her racial politics set in motion a national crisis, which is musically portrayed in the other parts. Later in the opera, Marian Anderson sings phrases of the spiritual *Deep River* while characters from her life appear in collage-like fashion. Here, the spiritual provides a centerpiece to the spinning, changing music and action around her, giving Marian a sense of timelessness.

When Marian Anderson speaks on the phone to tell the boss at Wannamaker's Department Store that her mother, Mrs. Anderson, will no longer be washing toilets at the store but instead will go on tour with her, the music of *Erbarme dich* from Bach's St. Matthew Passion forms the foundation of the aria. The music uses the Bach as a point of departure, signifying the profound sense of righteousness and spirituality that goes above and beyond the daily misery Mrs. Anderson had been subjected to – it is a transcendent moment in their lives. The music of *Erbarme dich* supplies the power and beauty as a backdrop to this scene, while also connecting it to the real musical life of Marian Anderson, whose recording of this aria was one of the highlights of her career and remains a landmark in the history of recording. Another musical phrase from Bach's St. Matthew Passion – the dramatic *Lass ihn kreuzigen* motif – is used in the scene where Fred Hand denies Marian Anderson the right to sing in Constitution Hall.

In the second scene, where Marian, as a young girl, finds a paper blowing in the wind that turns out to be a brochure announcing her debut concert, the piano accompaniment from Schubert's song *Gretchen am spinnrade* – harmonically transformed – forms the basis of the aria in the opera. Marian Anderson was renowned for her many superb performances and recordings of Schubert lieder, and so the inclusion of the famous, recognizable piano accompaniment, with its swirling configurations, forms a connection to the music in her life while providing the ideal texture for the operatic moment.

Finally, when Marian Anderson reaches the moment that she must first sing at the Lincoln Memorial, she sings *My Country 'Tis of Thee*, which she sang in reality to open her historic performance. However, in the opera the accompaniment draws on the romantic, dark and somber harmonies of Brahms, giving the melody, which is unchanged, a strange, unsettling quality, allowing the final moment of the opera to be one of hope mixed with pain, triumph tinged with sorrow, and also connecting the various musical influences of her life.

Bruce Adolphe