

### Witness, Paul Caldwell and Sean Ivory: Composers' Notes

Loosely based on a well-known spiritual, *Witness* is designed to call awareness to recent episodes of genocide, particularly as they have impacted the lives of children. The *why* and *how* of this is apparent in the score. It is a chance for the singers, the children of fortune, to make a promise to the children of war.

The work is inextricably linked to our Holocaust work, *Ani Ma'amin* (published by earthsongs). As we premiered that work, and as choruses worldwide continue to sing it, we must acknowledge that the end of the Holocaust did *not* mark the end of genocide. In *Ani Ma'amin*, we added our voices to the promise, "never again." But then there is the issue of Rwanda. And Darfur.

As the narration indicates, *Witness* might not exist at all were it not for Clemantine Wamariya. This work barely scratches the surface of her story. This amazing child is now an extraordinary young woman. Her experiences as a child living in refugee camps in various African countries will be explored in subsequent musical works.

Years after Rwanda, she made her way into a sponsorship and immigration program which landed her in the United States. As a high school student in a Chicago suburb, Elie Wiesel's Holocaust remembrance, *Night*, was required reading. In a subsequent essay, she wrote that the book changed her life. Wiesel was brave enough to tell his story. She had never told hers. Now inspired, she recounted her experiences as a child of genocide and (worse, she says) as a child living without parents in refugee camps.

Clemantine's essay was submitted to *The Oprah Winfrey Show* and selected for broadcast. Clemantine met Elie Wiesel face to face. More importantly, Oprah Winfrey orchestrated Clemantine's reunion with her parents, who had survived the Rwandan genocide.

As 19 choruses across the US and Canada prepare for the premiere of *Witness*, Clemantine is preparing for her freshman year at Yale.

We thank Clemantine for sharing her story. It has changed us all. If any chorus preparing *Witness* wishes to contact her or arrange for her to attend a performance, reach out to [paulcaldwell@gmail.com](mailto:paulcaldwell@gmail.com). It is well within the realm of possibility.

Additionally, we want to thank Elizabeth Thomas, Clemantine's American mother. She arranged our meeting. Also, thanks go to Mary Alice Miller, who brought Clemantine's story to us in the first place. Thanks to Melissa Walker for helping us craft narration worthy of the subject. Finally, deep appreciation goes to Dr. Marian Dolan. She has championed *Ani Ma'amin* and kept reminding us that the stories of Rwanda and Darfur awaited our attention.

There are some technical issues which must be addressed. The opening section utilizes narration in order to make *perfectly* obvious the point of the work. The narration is accompanied by a choral "carpet." Each of the four narrated sections is punctuated by a brief piano interlude. We have attempted to be clear about exactly when each of the four sections of narration begins and where the piano interludes fall in relation to the spoken text. If a conductor feels even remotely confused or unsure about how this should unfold, please contact us via email: [paulcaldwell@gmail.com](mailto:paulcaldwell@gmail.com). We can talk.

At measure 6, the altos have pitch changes (D-C-D). A written instruction indicates that these changes are *slides*. We envision these as messy, dirty, rough-sounding smears. Singers should not change pitch all at the same time. They should slide. This happens again in the soprano part at measure 10, in the alto part at measure 14 and in various voices throughout measures 16-18. They are all slides.

The same messy, dirty smear technique reappears later in the work: in the alto voice at measures 38-41, measure 77 and measure 81

~Paul Caldwell and Sean Ivory, December 1, 2008

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*Witness* is the culmination of a commission donated to the Chorus America Auction 2008, held in Denver during the National Performing Arts Convention. It was purchased by a consortium of choruses, raising nearly \$30,000 to support Chorus America's programs. The consortium participants are listed below. Their confidence in us to complete this work flatters us beyond measure.

Appalachian Children's Chorus  
Selina Cosby Midkiff, Artistic Director

Atlanta Young Singers  
Paige Fumbanks Mathis, Music Director

Buffalo Niagara Youth Chorus, Inc  
John Fleischman, Jr., Founder & Artistic Director

Cantaré Children's Choir  
Catherine Glaser-Climie, Founder & Artistic Director

The Children's Chorus of San Antonio  
Marguerite McCormick, Artistic Director

Children's Chorus of Washington  
Joan Gregoryk, Founder & Artistic Director

Cincinnati Children's Choir  
Robyn Reeves Lana, Founder & Managing Artistic Director

Colorado Children's Chorale  
Deborah DeSantis, Artistic Director

Fairfield County Children's Choir  
Jon Noyes, Music Director & Founder

Florida's Singing Sons Boychoir  
Craig Denison, Artistic Director

Hawaii Youth Opera Chorus  
Nola A. Nahulu, Executive & Artistic Director

Miami Children's Chorus  
Timothy Sharp, Music Director

Milwaukee Children's Choir  
Emily Crocker, Artistic Director

New Orleans Children's Chorus  
Cheryl Dupont, Music Director

Northwest Girlchoir  
Sarah Boos, Artistic Director

Princeton Girlchoir  
Jan Westrick, Artistic Director

South Bay Children's Choir  
Diane Simons, Artistic Director

Young Naperville Singers  
Angie Johnson, Artistic Director

The Youth Choral Theater of Chicago  
Paul Caldwell, Artistic Director