



A Note from Richard Danielpour, *composer*

Photo by Timothy Greenfield-Sanders



An American Mosaic was composed between June 3 and August 5, 2020, on a commission from Oregon Bach Festival for pianist Simone Dinnerstein. It was written as a tribute to the heroic Americans who have suffered, struggled, prevailed, and perished during this terrible pandemic.

The idea for this work came to me as I was finishing the libretto to an opera that I was writing in April and May. At that time, I was under a strict quarantine imposed by my MD because of my asthma. I was waking up at 2 AM and was not able to go back to sleep. As I wrote the opera libretto, I began thinking about a large-scale architectural plan for work on a solo piano piece that would serve as a testimony to the pandemic struggle that continues to today. The only thing that was able to get me to relax enough to go back to sleep was listening to Simone Dinnerstein's Bach, particularly her recording of *The Goldberg Variations*.

By the end of May, I realized that listening to her music at 5 AM had become a therapeutic habit. I also remembered that Simone had arrived in Eugene, Oregon in the summer of 2018, shortly after my oratorio, *The Passion of Yeshua*, was premiered. With that in mind, I called OBF to get Simone's email so that I could write her a thank you note. It was also at that time that I realized I needed to find the right pianist to perform the new piano work at the end of 2020, because that would be the time that America would be at its lowest point in the crisis. OBF staff member Michael Anderson said, "What about Simone?" I honestly hadn't thought about her for the project. In those days, I saw her as a kind of unapproachable figure who had saved me from being in the hospital. But as soon as Mike mentioned her, I realized that she was likely the only person who could perform this in the way I wanted it done. After an exchange of emails with Simone, I had a FaceTime chat with her at the end of May, and about a week later, Oregon Bach Festival commissioned the work.

I wrote at a breakneck pace, and following the completion on August 5, I began writing three J.S. Bach transcriptions of choral works for solo piano. This was done with the understanding that Simone would need more than the 50 minutes of music planned for *An American Mosaic* to complete a full-length CD, which I was hoping would happen for this project.

I feel blessed to have been able to collaborate with such an extraordinary artist. In the same way that we experience the secret ingredient of "love" in the food of a great family-run restaurant, there is always love, great heart, and an impressive level of intelligence in Simone's sound.

Most of the movements pay tribute to pairs of individuals (e.g. caretakers and research physicians, parents and children, doctors and interns, rabbis and ministers, teachers and students, etc.) and each movement is dedicated to a person who heroically represents that field of endeavor. The 14th movement, "Prophets and Martyrs," is dedicated to black lives lost during the pandemic. There are four movements I have called "Consolations," which occur at the beginning of the work, one-third of the way through the piece, two-thirds of the way through, and at the very end. These Consolations are an evocation and musical image of angels who have come to comfort the suffering in their time of great need. Each Consolation is a variation of the first movement, the Prologue.

In times such as these, music is rediscovered as a universal language that carries the potential to bring people together, even when they are at a forced physical distance from one another. It is my hope that the writing and realization of this piece will bring comfort and peace to those who need it most.

Richard Danielpour
November 30, 2020

An American Mosaic