

# virginia CHORALE



## Composers Commonwealth Connection



**Mason Bates** Composer of the Grammy-winning opera *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs*, Mason Bates is imaginatively transforming the way classical music is created and experienced as a composer, DJ, and curator. With electro-acoustic works such as *Mothership* and multimedia projects such as the animated film *Philharmonia Fantastique*, Bates has become a visible advocate for the modern orchestra and imaginatively integrates it into contemporary culture. As the first composer-in-residence appointed by the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts,

he presented a diverse array of artists on his series *KC Jukebox* using immersive production and stagecraft. Championed by legendary conductors from Riccardo Muti, Michael Tilson Thomas, Marin Alsop, and Leonard Slaktin, his symphonic music is the first to receive widespread acceptance for its unique integration of electronic sounds. Named as the most-performed composer of his generation in a recent survey of American music, Bates has also composed for feature film, including Gus Van Sant's *The Sea of Trees* starring Matthew McConaughey and Naomi Watts, and *Philharmonia Fantastique*, the soundtrack of which was awarded a 2022 Grammy Award.

This season features the premiere of *Nomad Concerto* for violinist Gil Shaham with the Philadelphia Orchestra under the baton of Yannick Nezen-Seguin. Co-commissioned by Nashville Symphony and San Diego Symphony, the concerto explores the rich music of travelers, particularly Europe's 'music of the Roma' with its blend of soul and rhythm. Bates' recently premiered *Piano Concerto* continues to be performed by superstar Daniil Trifonov, who brings the piece this season to Chicago and Rome.

Several large works continue to be heard across the country this season, including *The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs* at San Francisco Opera. Awarded a 2019 Grammy, the opera explores an iconic figure of our time and the people closest to him. After the past few years have seen the second production visiting five cities to much acclaim, SF Opera brings back the original production that first launched the piece in Santa Fe.

Continuing to delight audiences of all ages is *Philharmonia Fantastique: The Making of the Orchestra*, for animated film and live orchestra. The work has become Bates' most-performed work, with close to one hundred performances in its first few years, and demonstrates the composer's innovative approach to the orchestral medium. A collaboration with multi-Oscar-winning Gary Rydstrom of Lucasfilm and Jim Capobianco of Aerial Contrivance, the work explores the connection between creativity and technology with the help of a magical Sprite, who flies through instruments as they are played. The film is available to rent or purchase on Apple TV or stream on Apple Music, and the Grammy-winning soundtrack was recorded by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and conducted by Edwin Outwater for Sony Classical.

Highly informed by his work as a DJ, his curatorial approach integrates adventurous music, ambient information, and social platforms in a fluid and immersive way. Working in clubs under the name DJ Masonic, Bates has developed *Mercury Soul*, a classical club show that has packed clubs around the country. Its home series in San Francisco this season continues the organization's celebration of spectacular spaces, with events at the Old San Francisco Mint and other exciting venues, soon to be announced.

Bates' current focus is *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier & Clay* for The Metropolitan Opera. Based on the bestselling novel by Michael Chabon, the opera tells the story of two Jewish cousins in 1940's New York who go into the cartoon business, hoping to make enough money to save their family from Prague amidst the Nazi occupation. In the process they create the superhero *The Escapist*, which becomes a cultural phenomenon across America, even while Joe Kavalier descends into madness. Los Angeles Opera gives the world premiere in October 2024 followed by The Metropolitan Opera the following season.

A diverse artist exploring the ways classical music integrates into contemporary culture, Bates serves on the faculty of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music.

<https://www.masonbates.com/about/>



**Thea Musgrave** Rich and powerful musical language and a strong sense of drama have made Scottish-American composer Thea Musgrave one of the most respected and exciting contemporary composers in the Western world. Her works are performed in major concert halls, festivals, and radio stations on both sides of the Atlantic.

Known for the clarity of her invention, the skill of her orchestrations, and the power of her musical communication, Musgrave has consistently explored new means of projecting essentially dramatic situations in her music, frequently altering and extending the

conventional boundaries of instrumental performance by physicalizing their musical and dramatic impact: both without programmatic content (such as the Clarinet Concerto, the Horn Concerto, the Viola Concerto, and Space Play), and others with specific programmatic ideas (such as the paintings in The Seasons and Turbulent Landscapes, the poems in Ring Out Wild Bells, Journey through a Japanese Landscape, and Autumn Sonata, and the famous Greek legends in Orfeo, Narcissus, Helios, and Voices from the Ancient World); -- all extensions of concerto principles. In some of these, to enhance the dramatic effect, the sonic possibilities of spatial acoustics have been incorporated: in the Clarinet Concerto the soloist moves around the different sections of the orchestra, and in the Horn Concerto the orchestral horns are stationed around the concert hall. Thus the players are not only the conversants in an abstract musical dialogue, but also very much the living (and frequently peripatetic) embodiment of its dramatis personae.

Her ten large-scale and several chamber operas of the past 40 years beginning with The Voice of Ariadne (1972) and followed by Mary, Queen of Scots (1977), A Christmas Carol (1979), Harriet, The Woman Called Moses (1984), Simón Bolívar (1992), Pontalba (2003) are in every sense the true successors to these instrumental concertos.

Two major retrospectives in recent years have shown the immense diversity of her music: the BBC's Total Immersion weekend in 2014 and the Stockholm International Composer Festival 2018, in which fifteen of her orchestral and chamber works in four concerts – the largest profile of her music to date. Musgrave has been featured at many other major festivals including as Edinburgh, Warsaw Autumn, Florence Maggio Musicale, Venice Biennale, Aldeburgh, Cheltenham and Zagreb.

Musgrave has been the recipient of many notable awards including two Guggenheim Fellowships, the Ivors Classical Music Award 2018, and The Queen's Medal for Music. She was awarded a CBE on the Queen's New Year's Honour List in 2002.

<https://www.theamusgrave.com/biography>



**Judith Shatin** is a composer and sound artist whose musical practice engages our social, cultural, and physical environments. She draws on expanded instrumental palettes and a cornucopia of the sounding world, from machines in a deep coal mine, to the calls of animals, the shuttle of a wooden loom, a lawnmower racing up a lawn, the ripping of tape. Timbral exploration and dynamic narrative design are fundamental to her compositional design, while collaboration with musicians, artists and community groups are central to her musical life.

Shatin's music has been commissioned by organizations including the Barlow Endowment and

Fromm Foundations, Carnegie Hall, the McKim Fund of the Library of Congress, the Lila Wallace-Readers Digest Arts Partners Program, Music-at-LaGesse Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts . It has been featured at festivals including Aspen, BAM Next Wave, Grand Teton, Havana in Spring, Moscow Autumn, Network for New Music, Seal Bay, Soundways (St. Petersburg) and West Cork, while orchestras that have presented her music include the Denver, Houston, Illinois, Knoxville, National, Minnesota and Richmond Symphonies, as well as American Composers Orchestra. Shatin has held residencies at Bellagio (Italy), Brahms Haus (Germany), Stiftung Dr. Robert und Lina Thyll-Dürr, Casa Zia Lina (Italy), La Cité des Arts (France), Mishkan Omanim (Israel) and in the US at MacDowell, the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, and Yaddo. Educated at Douglass College (AB, Phi Beta Kappa; studied with Robert Moevs), The Juilliard School (MM, Abraham Ellstein Prize; studied with Hall Overton, Otto Luening and Milton Babbitt) and Princeton University (MFA, PhD; studied with Milton Babbitt and JK Randall), Judith Shatin is William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor Emerita and Founder of the Virginia Center for Computer Music at the University of Virginia. She has been honored with four Composer Fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts, as well as awards from the American Music Center, Meet the Composer, the New Jersey State Arts Council and the Virginia Commission for the Arts. A two-year retrospective of her music, and the commission for her evening-length folk oratorio, COAL, was sponsored by the Lila Wallace-Readers Digest Arts Partners Program. Shatin's music is published by Arsis Press, C.F. Peters, Colla Voce, Hal Leonard, E.C. Schirmer, G.Schirmer and Wendigo Music. It can be heard on the Centaur, Innova, Neuma, New World, Ravello and Sonora labels, and is featured in Women of Influence in Contemporary Music, Nine American Composers (Scarecrow Press). Long an advocate for her fellow composers, Shatin has served on the boards of the American Composers Alliance, the League/ISCM, and the International Alliance for Women in Music (IAWM) and as President of American Women Composers Inc.; she currently serves on the National Council of the Atlantic Center for the Arts. In demand as a master teacher, she has been BMI composer-in-residence at Vanderbilt University, Master Artist at the Atlantic Center for the Arts, and Senior Composer at the Wellesley Composers Conference, among many others.

<https://www.judithshatin.com/short-biography/>



**Undine Smith Moore**, the granddaughter of slaves, began studying piano at the age of seven with Lillian Allen Darden. She attended Fisk University, where she studied piano with Alice M. Grass and first began to compose. In 1924, at the age of 20, she became the first graduate of Fisk to receive a scholarship to Juilliard. She graduated cum laude in 1926, and soon after became the supervisor of music for the Goldsboro, NC public school system. She began teaching piano, organ, and music theory at Virginia State College (now Virginia State University) in 1927, where she remained on faculty until her retirement in 1972. She

commuted to Columbia University in New York City between 1929 and 1931 and received her Master of Arts in Teaching. Moore traveled extensively as a professor, conducting workshops and lecturing on Black composers. Among her many awards were the National Association of Negro Musicians Distinguished Achievement Award in 1975, the Virginia Governor's Award in the Arts in 1985, and a Candace Award from the National Coalition of 100 Black Women in 1984. She was also awarded honorary Doctor of Music degrees by Virginia State University in 1972 and Indiana University in 1976, and in 1977 was named music laureate of Virginia.

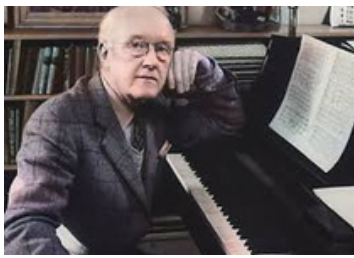
Known to some as the "Dean of Black Women Composers," Moore is most widely known for her choral works, though she also wrote for piano and various instrumental ensembles. Her *Scenes from the Life of a Martyr* is a 16-part oratorio on the life of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., which was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in 1981.

<https://www.musicbyblackcomposers.org/2017/08/25/undine-smith-moore/>



**Gregory Spears** is a New York-based composer whose music has been called "astonishingly beautiful" (The New York Times), "coolly entrancing" (The New Yorker), and "some of the most beautifully unsettling music to appear in recent memory" (The Boston Globe). He has been commissioned by The New York Philharmonic, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Santa Fe Opera, Cincinnati Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Seraphic Fire, The Crossing, Volti, BMI/Concert Artists Guild, Vocal Arts DC, New York Polyphony, The New York International Piano Competition, the JACK Quartet, and The New York Youth Symphony among others. His latest opera "Castor and Patience", written in collaboration with former U.S. Poet Laureate Tracy K. Smith, was commissioned by Cincinnati Opera

for their 100th Anniversary and premiered in 2022. In the 2021-2022 season the New York Philharmonic premiered a new work by Spears also written in collaboration with Smith for countertenor and orchestra. They are currently writing a new opera for Santa Fe Opera ("The Righteous") for premiere in summer 2024. Spears' 21-movement solo piano cycle "Seven Days" was released in the form of a custom designed app produced by the 92Y in fall 2021. Spears' opera, "Fellow Travelers", written in collaboration with Greg Pierce, premiered at Cincinnati Opera in 2016 and was subsequently produced at the Prototype Festival (NYC), The Lyric Opera of Chicago, The Minnesota Opera, Madison Opera, Boston Lyric Opera, Arizona Opera, Columbus Opera, the Des Moines Metro Opera, the Seagle Festival, and Florida Grand Opera. It will be produced this season at Virginia Opera. It was hailed as "one of the most accomplished new operas I have seen in recent years" (Chicago Tribune) and an opera that "seems assured of lasting appeal" (The New York Times). The premiere was featured in The New York Times' Best in Classical Music for 2016, and Cincinnati Opera released a commercial CD recording in 2017. Spears' first opera, "Paul's Case", written in collaboration with Kathryn Walat, was described as a "masterpiece" and a "gem" (New York Observer) with "ravishing music" (The New York Times). It was developed by American Opera Projects and premiered by Urban Arias in 2013. The opera was restaged at the Prototype Festival in New York, and presented in a new production by Pittsburgh Opera in 2014. "Paul's Case" was released on National Sawdust's record label featuring the original cast in 2019. Spears' children's opera "Jason and the Argonauts", also written with Kathryn Walat, premiered in 2016 at the Lyric Opera of Chicago and was subsequently performed for over 20,000 school children. An opera about space exploration, "O Columbia", written with Royce Vavrek, premiered in 2015 at Houston Grand Opera. Recent commissions include a new vocal work, "The Bitter Good", commissioned by New York Polyphony — made possible by a 2016 Chamber Music America Classical Commissioning Program grant, as well as "The Tower and the Garden" for a consortium of choirs including The Crossing underwritten by the Ann Stookey Fund for New Music. Spears also recently completed a "Double Trumpet Concerto" for Concert Artists Guild and the soundtrack for the British feature film "Macbeth" (Kit Monkman, director) featuring 18th-century instruments. His "Requiem" was released by New Amsterdam records in 2011. Other commissions have come from Bang on a Can, Five Boroughs Music Festival, OPERA America, poet Tracy K. Smith, Christopher Williams Dances, the Dalton School Orchestra, pianist Marika Bournaki, the Present Music Ensemble, New Vintage Baroque, the Damask Ensemble, and the Greater Princeton Youth Orchestra. He has been an artist-in-residence at Yaddo, MacDowell, the Aaron Copland House, the Rauschenberg Residency at Captiva Island, and was a participant and later a composer mentor for The American Opera Project's Composers and the Voice program. He holds degrees in composition from Eastman School of Music (BM), Yale School of Music (MM), and Princeton (PhD). He also studied as a Fulbright Scholar at the Royal Danish Academy in Copenhagen with Hans Abrahamsen. He currently teaches composition and orchestration at Purchase College Conservatory (SUNY). His music is published by Schott Music and Schott PSNY.



**Randall Thompson** An American composer, born in New York City in 1899, had a long career as an educator and is best known for the choral Alleluia, heard at church services, choral concerts, and academic ceremonies. The son of an English teacher, Thompson grew up in an atmosphere that emphasized academic excellence, and while on summer vacations he became interested in an old parlor reed organ that led to his earliest written works. Entering Harvard University, Thompson was rejected for the Glee Club, causing him to spend much of his subsequent career attempting to strike back through his choral compositions. In 1922

Thompson won a scholarship to the American Academy at Rome, returning to the United States later in the 1920s. Using a Guggenheim Foundation grant to examine the state of college music education, Thompson's published results in 1935 helped reset the collegiate agenda in music education. Over his academic career Thompson taught at Wellesley, the University of California - Berkeley, the University of Virginia, Princeton, and Harvard, from which he retired in 1965. Alleluia was written in 1940 for the opening of the Berkshire Music Center at Tanglewood. Among Thompson's other choral works were The Testament of Freedom in 1943, based on the texts of Thomas Jefferson, and Frostiana in 1959 on the texts of poet Robert Frost. Although his writing for voice spanned his entire life, Thompson also produced three symphonies, two string quartets, and other instrumental pieces. His Symphony No. 2 was conducted by Leonard Bernstein in his first appearance as a conductor in 1931. Thompson also produced chamber and piano music and one short opera, Solomon and Balkis in 1942. Despite criticisms as being sentimental and jingoistic, his choral works were more widely performed than any other American composer up to his time. He died in 1984.

<https://www.kennedy-center.org/artists/t/ta-tn/randall-thompson/>