

L O S   A N G E L E S

# MASTER CHORALE

Van Nuys High School Students Write and Compose New Oratorio, *Requiem: This Earth, Our Home*, that Explores the Impact of Climate Change



Students and Los Angeles Master Chorale singers to perform the world premiere of the requiem Friday, February 28th and Saturday, February 29th at Van Nuys High School



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(Los Angeles, CA) February 4, 2020 – *Requiem: This Earth, Our Home*, a timely new oratorio written by Van Nuys High School students for the Los Angeles Master Chorale's Voices Within Oratorio Project, will be premiered by students and members of the Master Chorale on Friday, February 28th and Saturday, February 29th in the school's auditorium. The Friday performance will be for fellow students; Saturday's performance at 1:00 p.m. is a free community concert and open to the public.

Every year the Los Angeles Master Chorale's Oratorio Project immerses a group of high school students in the creation of an original oratorio. The text and theme of the work has varied over the years, usually inspired by current political and cultural issues, and this year is no exception. Riding the global, youth-driven wave of momentum, this year's Oratorio Project will be a requiem for climate change—a theme and format chosen by the school—and the urgency to do something about it.

"We asked students for their ideas for possible subject matter for the Oratorio Project," says Lesili Beard, the Master Chorale's Director of Education. "This year the school felt strongly about a requiem for Mother Earth and the subject of climate change was borne out of our conversations. We invited guest speaker Matt Almos from the Climate Reality Project (founded by Al Gore) to come talk with the students as well."

It may seem provocative to call this year's project a requiem – the Latin name of a mass for the dead – when referring to the earth, but the musical format of a requiem accurately captures the level of anxiety among the students about the future of the natural world. Doug Cooney, one of the teaching artists on the project and an originator of the Master Chorale's Voices Within program says, "In *Requiem: This Earth, Our Home*, we asked the high school students to consider the causes, implications, and consequences of climate change. Using the classical oratorio form, students shared their thoughts about the impact on rising sea levels, weather patterns, animal extinction, and displaced people, as well as the issue of climate denial. In



addition to these concerns, students looked at positive developments regarding public awareness and renewable sources of energy.”

This is not the first time that the Oratorio Project topic has mirrored current events: last year’s oratorio, *WALKOUT: Past, Present, Repeat*, recounted the East Los Angeles High School Walkouts of 1968, when over 20,000 Los Angeles students walked out of the classroom to protest discriminatory practices that undermined the academic ambitions of Latino students. In 2018, *Hear Our Voice: A Woman’s Journey* focused on the history of women’s rights in the midst of a rising #metoo movement, and was featured in the [Los Angeles Times](#); in 2017 the students created an oratorio called *In America* examining the topic of Japanese incarceration camps during World War II, written and performed at a time of heightened focus on immigration issues. *In America* received national press coverage in a [PBS NewsHour story](#).

The performances of the 45-minute *Requiem: This Earth, Our Home* are the culmination of the Los Angeles Master Chorale’s 20-week Oratorio Project program. The program engaged three teaching artists, Alice Kirwan Murray, lead teaching artist and singer, Doug Cooney, lyricist, and Saunder Choi, composer, to work with the students, alongside Van Nuys High School choir teacher Brianne Arevalo, who leads the vocal program of 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students. Students write the libretto and create melodies for each movement of the requiem. They are mentored by the teaching artists on how to use musical techniques to capture the voice of the characters they create, propel the momentum of the plot, and paint the mood of the scene. After the requiem has been written, the students audition for solo roles and are coached vocally to prepare for the performances. Eight Los Angeles Master Chorale singers perform the oratorio with the students and a chamber orchestra comprised of students from the school’s instrumental department.

Voices Within is an educational artists’ residency program developed for the Los Angeles Master Chorale by Marnie Mosiman in collaboration with Bernardo Solano, Penka Kouneva, David O, and Doug Cooney.



Voices Within and the Oratorio Project are made possible by generous support from the City of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs, Cheryl Petersen and Roger Lustberg, Rosemary Schroeder, Dwight Stuart Youth Fund, Walter J. and Holly O. Thomson Foundation, California Arts Council, Anonymous, Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors / Kathryn Barger, Carolyn L. Miller, William H. Hannon Foundation, John and Beverly Stauffer Foundation, Lon V. Smith Foundation, Employees Community Fund of Boeing California, The ASCAP Foundation Irving Caesar Fund, Sidney Stern Memorial Trust, American Business Bank, and Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors / Mark Ridley-Thomas.

CALENDAR EDITORS:

**WHAT:**

*Requiem: This Earth, Our Home*

An original oratorio by Van Nuys High School students created for the Los Angeles Master Chorale's Oratorio Project. Performed by Van Nuys High School students and members of the Master Chorale. Conducted by Brianne Arevelo.

**WHEN & WHERE:**

Friday, February 28th, 1:00 p.m.  
Van Nuys High School student performance

Saturday, February 29th, 1:00 p.m.  
Community performance – free and open to the public

**Van Nuys High School Auditorium**  
6535 Cedros Ave, Van Nuys, CA 91411

Members of the press are welcome to attend, photograph, and film the Oratorio Project performances. Please RSVP to [lbellamore@gmail.com](mailto:lbellamore@gmail.com)

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