

PRESS RELEASE

L O S A N G E L E S

MASTER CHORALE

**A NEW ORATORIO, *IN AMERICA*, WRITTEN BY
VAN NUYS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS ABOUT
WORLD WAR II JAPANESE AMERICAN INCARCERATION CAMPS
TO BE PREMIERED IN FEBRUARY**



Students and Los Angeles Master Chorale singers to perform the oratorio at a free community concert Saturday, February 18 at 2 PM at Van Nuys High School

Performance to take place the weekend of the Japanese American community's Day of Remembrance, marking the 75th anniversary of the signing of Executive Order 9066

Oratorio Project is part of the Los Angeles Master Chorale's Award-winning Voices Within Education Program



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(Los Angeles, CA, January 10, 2017) – When a group of 85 choral students at Van Nuys High School began learning about World War II Japanese American incarceration camps in September as part of the Los Angeles Master Chorale’s Voices Within Oratorio Project, the topic was a historical look back. Following November’s election, with deportations and ethnic registries making headlines, the students found that the topic had become starkly relevant. The resulting 45-minute oratorio they composed called *In America* poses the question: “Where can I be an American; If not in America?”

The students will perform *In America* accompanied by eight members of the Los Angeles Master Chorale at Van Nuys High School at a free community concert on **Saturday, February 18 at 2 PM**. On Thursday, February 16 they will premiere the piece in front of their fellow students at a full-school assembly. Sunday, February 19 marks the 75th anniversary of President Roosevelt signing Executive Order 9066 that resulted in the forced removal and incarceration of around 120,000 Japanese Americans. The Japanese American community will hold Day of Remembrance events throughout the weekend.

The performances of *In America* are the culmination of the Los Angeles Master Chorale’s 20-week Voices Within Oratorio Project program. The program places three teaching artists, performer Alice Kirwan Murry, lyricist Doug Cooney, and composer David O, in the classroom to work with students in writing the libretto and creating melodies for each movement of the oratorio. The students, who range from 9th grade through 12th grade, are mentored by the 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 oratorio has been written, the students audition for featured roles and are coached vocally to prepare for the performances. Eight Los Angeles Master Chorale singers perform the oratorio with the students, providing additional professional guidance.



Each year, a historical event or epic life story is selected as the subject for the oratorio. This year's topic of Japanese American incarceration camps during World War II was chosen in August and the students began the project in September.

"A core value of the Voices Within program is to encourage expression through collaboration," said President & CEO of the Los Angeles Master Chorale, Jean Davidson. "That this oratorio, *In America*, about the Japanese American incarceration camps can have so much contemporary relevance is somewhat of an accident of timing, but it speaks to the universality of music and how it can allow us to find our voice, while also illustrating that looking to the past can provide guidance for the present."

To further enhance their understanding of the camps and the impact of Executive Order 9066 on the Japanese American community, the students visited the [Japanese American National Museum](#) (JANM) in downtown Los Angeles in November. Many of the museum's docents and their families were incarcerated providing valuable first-hand accounts of the experience. The museum's ongoing exhibit *Common Ground: The Heart of Community* documents 130 years of Japanese American immigration and history and includes a barrack building from the Heart Mountain concentration camp.

The performance of *In America* on Saturday, February 18 at Van Nuys High School is free to attend and open to the public. Members of the Japanese American community are encouraged to attend.

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.

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ABOUT THE LOS ANGELES MASTER CHORALE

The Los Angeles Master Chorale is widely recognized as one of the country's leading professional choruses and one of Southern California's most vibrant cultural treasures. Hailed for its powerful performances, technical precision, and artistic daring, the Master Chorale is led by Artistic Director Grant Gershon and President and CEO Jean Davidson. It is a founding resident company of The Music Center and the choir-in-residence at Walt Disney Concert Hall. Chorister positions are highly sought-after and the professional choir is a diverse and vocally dynamic group showcasing the many voices of L.A.

Presenting its own concert series each season, the Master Chorale performs choral music from the earliest writings to contemporary compositions striking a balance between innovation and tradition. It also regularly performs with the Los Angeles Philharmonic at Disney Hall and the Hollywood Bowl. Praised for its definitive performances, the choir is committed to recording the choral repertoire and has also featured with Gershon on the soundtracks of many major motion pictures. It is further heard beyond the concert hall via broadcasts by Southern California's Classical KUSC.

Committed to community engagement and fostering music education in schools, the Los Angeles Master Chorale's education programs include Voices Within that encourages young people to write and perform their own songs and an Oratorio Project for high school students, and the annual High School Choir Festival, which brings around 1,000 teenagers from throughout the Southland to perform en masse in Walt Disney Concert Hall.

www.lamasterchorale.org

CALENDAR EDITORS:

WHAT:

IN AMERICA

Voices Within Oratorio Project free community concert featuring students from Van Nuys High School and members of the Los Angeles Master Chorale.

WHEN & WHERE:

Saturday, February 18 at 2 PM

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

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Members of the press are welcome to attend, photograph, and film the Oratorio Project community concert. Please RSVP to Jennifer Scott, jscott@lamasterchorale.org

