

Nkeiru Okoye, Ph.D.

410-462-4118 • nkeiruokoye@mac.com • www.nkeiruokoye.com

Program Notes

Voices Shouting Out

Duration: 5 Minutes

INSTRUMENTATION:

Piccolo	2 Bassoons	Timpani
2 Flute 2	4 Horns in F	3 Percussion*
2 Oboes	3 Trumpets in C	Harp
2 Clarinets in Bb	1 Tenor Trombone	Strings
Bass Clarinet in Bb	1 Bass Trombone	
	Tuba	

*Glockenspiel, Marimba, Xylophone, Triangle, Cymbals, Cymbal, Woodblock, Bass Drum

COMPOSER STATEMENT

A Native New Yorker, Nkeiru Okoye penned the initial sketches of what would be “Voice Shouting Out” on New Year’s Eve, 2001/02. The completed work premiered six weeks later by The Virginia Symphony and has continued to delight and captivate audiences of all ages and backgrounds.

"I sat to write “Voices” in the wake of September 11th; however, in my grieving process, I failed to find music within. It was as though my muse crumbled with our twin towers. So, though I originally attempted to compose a piece, “Voices Crying Out,” in response to the destruction... I could not. As this nation recovered, we were united in a response: we would resume our lives, using normalcy to defy the terrorism. In the end, rather than ‘crying out’ my official response was “Voices Shouting Out” in freedom, as it were, through the music. It was a march to acknowledge those fighting on behalf of our safety, and yet a sparkling celebration of life for those of us who continue living."

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Original Commission with Virginia Symphony

The Virginia Symphony commissioned *Voices* for a multicultural program titled, “Of Heroes and Human Rights.” The commission was offered a few months before 9/11; and subsequently my feelings about what I was to write changed. The original festive work requested was then to be a meditative tribute to those lost.

Nkeiru Okoye, Ph.D.

410-462-4118 • nkeiruokoye@mac.com • www.nkeiruokoye.com

Several failed attempts at writing this caused me to reevaluate my thoughts. As a native New Yorker, born within a mile of Ground Zero, I was shaken, and angry. A sudden burst of inspiration and defiance struck some months later. I decided not to write the terrorism into my music: the piece would be a celebrative tribute to those of us who keep living. So I drove home early from a Christmas trip and wrote the piece on New Year's Eve, which incidentally, remains my favorite way to usher in a new year. The composition was finished on New Year's Day, with minor edits made over the next ten days.

Writing process

Most people are surprised to learn that *Voices* is based on a tone row. I did this deliberately and out of happenstance: I am often called to bridge cultural boundaries through my music and teaching, so my works usually have an educational aspect.

As I drove home from my Christmas trip, I decided I would use whatever was on my writing desk as the basis for the new piece. I still have no idea how the row fragment that became *Voices Shouting Out* got onto my desk, since I typically do not use serialism; however I had already promised myself to use "whatever," and also, the challenge of taking a tone row and making it not only tonal, but palatable for a "non-traditional" audience was too tempting to pass up; so I worked with it.

Theoretically Speaking

Voices is based on a 11-note "tone row" that is harmonized in fourths and fifths to create jazz-like harmonies. The row's construction is similar to Berg's Violin Concerto, in that it alludes to chordal structures, giving a tonal sensibility. A pulsating beat gives it forward motion, and the theme is interrupted by a trumpet fanfare, since a trumpeter friend asked for an interesting part. The trumpet riffs use Harmon mutes as a tribute to Miles Davis.

The piece is in ABA' form. Its middle section is lyrical, with motives reminiscent of a contemporary gospel piece that had gained popularity. The outer sections are rhythmically aggressive with orchestral allusions to a marching band. This is because the university I worked for while writing *Voices*, had a prominent marching band that practiced outside my office window each afternoon. I dedicated the premiere performance to them.

11 note tone row from *Voices Shouting Out*

