

Uplifting Every Story:

Words & Music of Liberation and Justice

A conversation between Phillis Wheatley and Benjamin Franklin
written and directed by Debbie Wiess
and musical performances by Castle of Our Skins



Sunday, February 9th at 2:30pm
at Old South Church in Boston & on live stream

*Presented by the (G)RACE Speaks Committee at Old South Church in Boston
in partnership with playwright Debbie Wiess and Castle of Our Skins*

Program

Welcome Message Rev. June Cooper
Theologian in the City at Old South Church

Setting the Scene Debbie Wiess
Playwright

Musical Prelude Castle of Our Skins

All that is Good
Anthony R. Green (b. 1984)

I. Phillis Wheatley
II. Harriet Jacobs
III. Sojourners Truth

Presentation of Play

A REVOLUTIONARY ENCOUNTER IN LONDON
Written and Directed by Debbie Wiess
Featuring actors Cathryn Philippe and Josiah George

Musical Postlude Castle of Our Skins

Song Without Words
Charles Samuel Brown (1940-2021)

Death of an Old Seaman
Cecil Cohen (1894-1967)

An Hymn to the Evening
James Dargan (b. 1984)

Discussion/Q&A

Refreshments of Cookies & Tea Cookies baked by Elise Bee

Program Notes

A REVOLUTIONARY ENCOUNTER IN LONDON

Written and Directed by Debbie Wiess

On May 8, 1773 enslaved African poet Phillis Wheatley departed Boston for London to oversee the final preparations of her book of poetry *Poems of Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* for publication later that summer. Copies of her first edition would come to Boston in the fall on board the Dartmouth, one of the three vessels involved in the events of the Boston Tea Party. Phillis' arrival in England created much buzz on both sides of the Atlantic, and during her six-week stay in the British capital she was the toast of the town, meeting many notables, among them American Founding Father Benjamin Franklin, who had been living there for almost 18 years, advocating for Colonial interests before the Crown and Parliament. This well-researched piece, which uses the words of both figures as much as possible, is an imagining of their little-known meeting, unfolding in real-time 252 years after it took place.

All that is Good by Anthony R. Green

Text by: Phillis Wheatley, Harriet Jacobs, & Sojourner Truth

Powerful Black women have paved so many paths for the numerous Black and non-Black people that exist today. In the United States, those women who somehow forged deeply cherished personalities and careers after enduring the barbaric institution of slavery hold a special place in my heart. I cannot imagine the sheer fortitude it took not only to survive enslavement, but to thrive afterwards and live a life of giving. In ... all that is good ..., I utilize private and public texts from Phillis Wheatley, Harriet Jacobs (at the time writing as Linda Brent to avoid pursuit by her previous "master"), and Sojourner Truth. These texts speak of liberty, dignity, and the fundamental nature of "wrong" and "good." There is such wisdom in each of these excerpts – a wisdom I attempted and failed to match musically because the task is impossible. However, it is my sincere hope that the music will help convey this wisdom to a wider audience by using the powerful medium of music, harmony & melody, and the sung human voice. -Anthony R. Green

Song Without Words by Charles Samuel Brown

A vocalise based on the singing of Blind Willie Johnson.

Death of an Old Seaman by Cecil Cohen

Text by: Langston Hughes

An Hymn to the Evening by James Dargan

Text by: Phillis Wheatley

Bios: A REVOLUTIONARY ENCOUNTER IN LONDON

Cathryn Philippe (Phillis Wheatley) is excited to reprise the role of Phillis Wheatley in A REVOLUTIONARY ENCOUNTER IN LONDON. In December 2019, she had the pleasure of portraying Miss Wheatley for the first time during the annual Boston Tea Party Reenactment at the Old South Meeting House and continued to interpret as Miss Wheatley at the Boston Tea Party Ships & Museum for four years. She studied acting at Plymouth State University in Plymouth, NH, where she also received her Master's degree in Secondary Education. Cathryn is thankful for this opportunity and is thrilled to take part in the continued evolution of the play as it makes the rounds to new audiences.

Josiah George (Benjamin Franklin) is thrilled to continue bringing the role of Dr. Benjamin Franklin to life with this script! Josiah has spent the last 12 years as Assistant Creative and Production Manager for the Boston Tea Party Ships & Museum, for which he co-wrote, directed and produced the 250th anniversary events celebrated in 2023. Prior to life at the BTPS&M, Josiah has been a proud member of Actor's Equity Association and the American Guild of Music Artists, with a lengthy career in professional theatre as a stage, company and production manager, also enjoying stage direction and sound design. He has worked with notable companies such as Boston Lyric Opera, Opera New England, Opera Pacific, Maine State Music Theatre, Merrimack Repertory Theatre, Greater Boston Stage, Riverside Theatreworks, Yellow Taxi Productions, Actor's Collective Theatre and Boston Opera Collaborative.

Debbie Wiess (Author & Director) is a Boston-based writer, who writes plays and poetry, in French, as well as English. Her work has been presented in both languages throughout the US and abroad, in traditional theatres, alternative spaces, on the radio, cable and internet. She is a published author and several of her plays have won awards. In addition to writing, she also directs and produces, projects and events. She enjoys writing on historical subjects, particularly those concerning Art and Literature, as well as intriguing encounters! She could not be more excited to be presenting her play concerning two of Boston's Colonial icons, who were also members of the church, in this special event at Old South Church, in its Gordon Chapel, 252 years after their meeting in London! She would like to thank her talented actors Cathryn and Josiah for their striking portrayals of these two amazing characters, the Boston Tea Party Ships & Museum for its continued support of the project, and (G)RACE Speaks (especially Rev. June Cooper and El Hilaire) & Old South Church for their warm embrace of her and her play, as well as wonderful collaboration on this event.

Bios: Castle of Our Skins

American mezzo-soprano **Arielle Rogers-Wilkey** (she/her) is a New England native, currently attending Boston University for an M.M. in vocal performance. Opera credits include *Kate*, *The Pirates of Penzance* and *Katisha*, *The Mikado*, *Opera Providence*; *La Ciesca*, *Gianni Schicchi* and *Ensemble*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Don Pasquale*, and *Le Nozze di Figaro*, *Salt Marsh Opera*. She has done extensive work with Boston Lyric Opera as *Mary*, *Omar*; *Gertrude*, *Romeo and Juliet*; and *Ensemble*, *Madama Butterfly*, *Champion*, *La bohème*, *Norma*, *Pagliacci*, and *A Handmaid's Tale*. Ms. Rogers-Wilkey took part in *Odyssey Opera's* production and album recording of *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X*, which received a Grammy Award nomination. With *OperaHub* in Boston, she was honored to portray *Sissieretta Jones* in the world premiere of *DIVAS*, an operatic play with an all-female cast. Oratorio and orchestral solo credits include *Handel's Messiah*, *Schubert's Magnificat*, and *Vivaldi's Gloria*; as well as *Carmen*, *Narragansett Bay Symphony Orchestra's Operatic Highlights*; a Juneteenth concert series with *Castle of Our Skins* and *Boston Lyric Opera*; and the participatory educational concert *Link Up!* with the *Rhode Island Philharmonic Orchestra*. Ms. Rogers-Wilkey can be seen next as *Maurya* in *Riders to the Sea* at Boston University.

Pianist **Sarah Bob**, hailed as “sumptuous and eloquent” (*Boston Globe*) and that “dynamic player...superstar” (*National Sawdust*), is a soloist and chamber musician noted for her charismatic performances, colorful playing and diverse programming. The goal, her strong suit, is to introduce music in a loving, inclusive, and intoxicating way. Sarah is founding director of *New Gallery Concert Series*, a combination of new music and new visual art along with their creators, and *Nasty Cooperative*, dialogue driven artistic events created to build community and raise funds for organizations in need. Her accolades include top prizewinner of *Holland's International Gaudeamus Competition*, *New England Conservatory's Outstanding Alumni Award*, and instant world-wide acclaim for her most recent solo album *...nobody move....* She is an original and active member of *Radius Ensemble* and *Primary Duo*, maintains a private studio, and is on faculty at *Longy School of Music of Bard College*. More information: www.sarahbob.net.

Charles Samuel Brown was a talented composer, performer, and educator. Brown began his studies at *Morehouse College*, and after a pause due to a draft notice in 1966, he completed his studies at the *University of Michigan*, where he received a *Bachelor of Music* and a *Master of Music*. As an educator Brown taught at *Lincoln University of Missouri*, in the *New York Public Schools*, and at the *Borough of Manhattan Community College*.

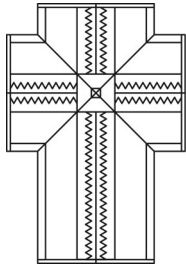
Bios: Castle of Our Skins

The creative output of **Anthony R. Green** includes musical and visual creations, interpretations of original works or works in the repertoire, collaborations, educational outreach, and more. Behind all of his artistic endeavors are the ideals of equality and freedom, which manifest themselves in diverse ways in a composition, a performance, a collaboration, or social justice work. As a composer, his works have been presented in over 25 countries across six continents by various internationally acclaimed soloists and ensembles. He has received commissions from the Fromm Foundation, Community MusicWorks, and Celebrity Series of Boston, among other soloists and ensembles, and been a resident artist at the Kimmel Harding Nelson Center for the Arts (Nebraska), Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, and Space/Time (Scotland), among others. Through music, text, and entrepreneurship, Green comments on many issues related to social justice. His most important social justice work has been with Castle of our Skins, a concert and education series he co-founded and served as Associate Artistic Director and Composer-in-Residence.

Cecil Cohen was born in Chicago in 1894. He was educated at Fisk University of Oberlin Conservatory. Mr. Cohen taught for many years on the faculty of Howard University in Washington DC. Possessed with dynamic temperament and rare artistic style, Mr. Cohen often broke away from formal, measured expression to find a new self-expression in a seemingly chaotic music period of atonal, swing and ecstatic motion. With the same exhaustive and thoughtful precision injected into his teaching, he captured a similar brilliant vitality in his composition. He was reported to be an excellent pianist. Cecil Cohen died in 1967.

James Dargan is a musician and writer from North Carolina; he is based in New York City, where he sings while composing, playing the violin, writing, and teaching. James has been a musician since he was a child, and has shared his voice and carefully curated programs all over the US and Europe. James also teaches on spirituals and other Black music, and is honoured to walk in his family tradition of telling truthful stories. James relishes writing for Black singers, and he is currently writing two operas. Career highlights include solo work with The Boston Pops, and operatic work with Esperanza Spalding and Wayne Shorter. James is also a founding member of the consortium Ring Shout.

About the Organizations



OLD
SOUTH
CHURCH
in BOSTON

Founded in 1669, Old South Church in Boston is a multicultural, LGBTQIA+ friendly, intergenerational, theologically progressive Christian church. A congregation of the United Church of Christ, we worship a God who is bigger than we can know or comprehend. Welcome to the church of Benjamin Franklin and Samuel Adams, of Phillis Wheatley and the Boston Tea Party.



Old South Church in Boston

The (G)RACE Speaks Committee works to affirm the God-given dignity of every human person by promoting sacred conversations about matters of race within the life of Old South Church. The committee fosters diversity awareness throughout the church with the goal of becoming proficient at protecting the dignity of self and others.



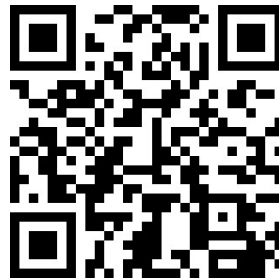
Castle of our Skins is a Black arts institution dedicated to fostering cultural curiosity and celebrating Black artistry through music. In classrooms, concert halls, and beyond, Castle of our Skins invites Black heritage and culture exploration, spotlighting both unsung and celebrated figures of past and present.

Donate

Donations will go to Immigrant Family Services Institute (IFSI).

IFSI is an NGO located in Boston that serves recent immigrants and immigrant families, including people from Haiti. They use a holistic approach to help immigrant children to maximize their full potential.

In addition, IFSI-USA advocates for immigrant rights, helping with alternative paths to citizenship and providing accurate and timely information about and responses to new developments.



To make your donation, please scan the QR code and choose the “Uplifting Every Story” option in the donate form.

To learn more about IFSI, visit www.ifsu-usa.org

Thank you for your contribution to this important organization!