

# MY BROTHER'S KEEPER



JOSHUA BLUE | STEVEN BLIER | WILL LIVERMAN  
JOSEPH PARRISH | ALAN WILLIAMS  
JORELL WILLIAMS | CHAZ'MEN WILLIAMS-ALI

*Digital Liner Notes*

# Track Listing

1. **Come Unto Me** arr. Take 6 (The Ensemble) 3'29
2. **Three Dream Portraits** - Margaret Bonds
3. **Minstrel Man** (Will Liverman, Baritone | Steven Blier, Piano) 2'03
4. **Dream Variation** (Joseph Parrish, Baritone | Steven Blier, Piano) 2'10
5. **I Too, Am, America** (Jorell Williams, Baritone | Steven Blier, Piano) 1'51
6. **Americana** - Jorell Williams (Steven Blier/Jorell Williams, Piano) 4'31
7. **Beware the Anger of Soft-Spoken Men** - Steve Lutvak (The Ensemble) 3'46
8. **Sence You Went Away** - H. Leslie Adams (Joshua Blue, Tenor | Steven Blier, Piano) 4'58
9. **A Black Pierrot** - William Grant Still (Alan Williams, Bass | Steven Blier, Piano) 2'35
10. **Die Schwestern (Die Brüder)** - Brahms (Williams-Ali, A. Williams | Steven Blier, Piano) 2'25
11. **Guiding Me Back Home** - Harry Revel (Williams-Ali, Parrish | Steven Blier, Piano) 3'50
12. **Sylvie** - "Leadbelly" Huddie Ledbetter (The Ensemble) 4'52
13. **Santa Ain't Black** - Rachel J. Peters (Jorell Williams, Baritone | Joseph Parrish, Piano) 3'45
14. **Some Enchanted Evening** - R. Rodgers arr. Liverman (Will Liverman, Baritone/Piano) 4'00
15. **He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother** - B. Scott/B. Russell arr. Williams-Ali (The Ensemble) 7'27
16. **Hold Fast** - BONUS TRACK - Jorell Williams (The Ensemble) 3'48

Producers: Justin Austin, Steven Blier, Jonathan Estabrooks

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# On The Album

## **JUSTIN AUSTIN, Co-Producer**

As a child, I was profoundly captivated by the Grammy-winning a cappella group Take 6, a remarkable ensemble of six young Black men whose music celebrated the transformative power of goodness and love. Years later, their artistry became a source of inspiration for my vision of "My Brother's Keeper." Growing up surrounded by encouraging influences, I felt empowered to believe that I could achieve anything. The Black men in my life made it their mission to instill in me the values of intelligence, kindness, empathy, strength, determination, and love. They recognized that, as a Black man, I would face unique challenges in the world, and they diligently equipped me to navigate those obstacles.

As I matured, I became aware that not all young Black children have access to positive role models who can guide them toward fulfilling lives. I count myself fortunate to have had such uplifting figures. The notion that the world desperately needs the compassion, decency, and work ethic I received in my youth resonates deeply with me. Inspired by this, I got the idea of programming a concert around this theme. It literally came to me in a dream: a gathering of six remarkable Black men who inspire me daily, presented by New York Festival of Song, an organization that has nurtured me since my student days. On this record we aim to showcase our mutual love and support, and hope to encourage all who witness our journey—regardless of race or creed—to embrace the profound importance of selfless love for one another.

Our first song, "Come Unto Me" by Take 6, encapsulates this message beautifully. It offers solace and encouragement to those burdened by life's struggles and invites them to seek love as a pathway to peace, and it does so using jazz harmonies that are as difficult to master as they are delightful to hear.

In any brotherly alliance, one often encounters what I call "bittersweet tension." This phenomenon is a common thread in all close relationships, and Johannes Brahms's "Die Schwestern" serves as a delightful and playful illustration of this inevitable dynamic. Begun in 1852 and revised for publication in 1874, "Die Schwestern" (The Sisters)—or "Die Brüder" as we've refashioned it—features a text by the German poet (and Lutheran pastor) Eduard Mörike. The song offers a cheerful picture of the companionable affection between two siblings, originally sisters, now brothers in our version, who share an inseparable bond, engaging in every activity together—singing, working, strolling, even sharing the same bed. However, their harmonious existence is abruptly disrupted when they discover they are both enamored by the same sweetheart. I wager that this will be the first time "Die Schwestern" has been performed by two men ("Maybe in some drag art song bar?" suggested Steve Blier), but we couldn't resist.

## **STEVEN BLIER, Pianist and Co-Producer**

I've known Justin Austin since 2016, when we collaborated on a concert in Caramoor's Vocal Rising Stars program. Since then, of course, Justin's star has risen, and we have continued to create some of the most satisfying programs of my career, notably W. C. Handy and the Birth of the Blues and 'Taint Nobody's Business If I Do: Songs of Gay Harlem. Justin has said that he considers me one of his important mentors, and he has returned the favor by becoming one of my great inspirations. So when he wrote me a text message proposing a project that had come to him in a dream, complete with cast and title, I returned his text in three seconds flat: "We're doing it."

The original plan had been for Justin to sing in the performance, but when that became impossible we brought on another wonderful artist, Alan Williams, whose background in a cappella jazz ensemble singing was a godsend for an evening that included so many group numbers. Justin remained on board as Co-Artistic Director of the show, working on the playlist and marshaling the cast from afar.

Of course, Justin came to My Brother's Keeper with ideas about repertoire, and we also canvassed the six vocalists for their suggestions. Justin and I wanted everyone on the stage to feel that My Brother's Keeper truly represented their experience, their worldview, their alliances, and their passions. Jorell Williams was inspired to contribute two compositions of his own, and the other singers sent wish lists.

I had only three requests, and the first of them was, of all things, "Some Enchanted Evening." I had heard Will Liverman perform that old chestnut at a concert in 2021, when he took Rodgers's music into wild, delicious directions I had never dreamed of. Will is a musician with a stunning musical imagination, and I have been longing to hear his arrangement of this song (a favorite of mine) for the past three years. He obliged, and broke my heart all over again.

My second idea was a song that the late Steve Lutvak gave me over a decade ago: "Beware the Anger of Soft-Spoken Men," scored for five male voices. For some of us, it is difficult, even taboo, to express anger, and we seem to accumulate life experiences that only confirm our fears. Steve Lutvak's piece is a hymn to the joys of being passive-aggressive, that surreptitious alternative to showing authentic anger. I offer it as a tribute to my late friend Steve, who died suddenly of a pulmonary embolism in 2023, at age 64. I miss him terribly; he was a superb songwriter, a Tony Award winner for his musical A Gentleman's Guide to Love and Murder, and one of the dearest and gentlest men I have ever known.

My third contribution was a tune NYFOS has offered in past programs, "Guiding Me Back Home," written in 1928 by Harry Revel and Noble Sissle. On the surface, it's a rousing waltz about a man's enduring connection to his roots, especially to his mother. I thought that Chaz'men and Joseph had the potential to raise the roof with this tune, particularly in my voice-flattering arrangement. But I also love the fact that the song is a collaboration between a Jewish immigrant, Harry Revel, and a Black lyricist, Noble Sissle. After Revel's parents fled Russia to settle in London, they changed their family name, Glaser, to Revel—the name of the French soldier who helped them escape. Noble Sissle came to prominence with James Reese Europe's renowned regimental band during World War I, the first to play marches with syncopated rhythms. His partnership with ragtime legend Eubie Blake led to their 1921 Broadway hit *Shuffle Along*, after which Sissle enjoyed a rich career as bandleader, accompanist, and collaborator with artists like Duke Ellington and Lena Horne. Both Sissle's and Revel's careers straddled the Atlantic—Sissle toured extensively in Europe, and Revel worked on Broadway and in Hollywood. True to form, "Guiding Me Back Home," with its quintessentially American theme, was published in England.

### **JOSEPH PARRISH**

When Steve and Justin asked us to suggest material for *My Brother's Keeper*, I immediately thought of "Sylvie" or "Bring Me a Little Water, Sylvy," a song whose origins trace back to 1936.

Its first known recording was by American folk musician Huddie William Ledbetter, better known as Lead Belly. Famous for his distinct timbre and virtuosic 12-string guitar playing, Lead Belly recorded more than 500 songs, spanning from folk and blues to jazz and gospel. His influence extended to later musicians such as Eric Clapton, Bob Dylan, and, of course, Harry Belafonte. "Sylvie" started as a work song, but Lead Belly sang it in a light and airy way, transforming its original heft and bitterness into a song of charm and swinging rhythm.

I discovered it in the summer of 2022 in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Scanning the record collection of my host (with whom I was staying for the Santa Fe Opera Apprentice Program), I came across a vinyl LP, *Harry Belafonte Live at Carnegie Hall in 1959*. Steve tells me that every middle-class household in America (including his own) had a copy of this record in the living room. "Sylvie" made an immediate impression on me due to its musical simplicity, witty lyrics, and catchy refrain. Belafonte was accompanied only by a guitar, with some occasional humming from voices in the background. If I closed my eyes, sat back, and listened, it felt like he was singing right to me.

Discovering Harry Belafonte soon led me into a full-on blaze of inspiration. Steve encourages all of his artists to dig deep within themselves to find what is unique to them. My Brother's Keeper celebrates that principle, shining a very important light on the Black male experience through song.

## **JOSHUA BLUE**

My Brother's Keeper is a testament to the indomitable spirit of community between Black men in America. Time and time again, our community has been threatened, our lives have been at risk, our souls have been shaken, but through coming together in unity and song we reaffirm our commitment to one another. My colleagues inspire me to be greater in everything I do; they uplift me, celebrate me, and I them. Sharing the joy of creating art together is something uniquely special. I'm honored both to be a part of this project and to share it with you. The songs in this concert are celebrations, somber reflections, and reminders of what has been and what could be.

"Sence you went away" is from H. Leslie Adams's song cycle Nightsongs. Set to the poetry of American writer and civil rights activist James Weldon Johnson (author of the lyrics to "Lift Every Voice and Sing"), the piece can take on many meanings, but I look at it through the lens of a man singing to a loved one he lost to incarceration, which disproportionately affects Black men in this country. As someone who has spent time working with incarcerated men, I've heard the sorrow and sadness of being separated from the world and your loved ones for longer than you ever deserved, knowing that nothing will change while still pining for what could be. This song is dedicated to these men; they've never left my heart.

## **JORELL WILLIAMS**

Clear communication is, to me, one of the most vital parts of any interaction, whether face-to-face or through one of our many digital screens. When we share our intimate thoughts, worries, struggles, and triumphs, we open doors to learn, grow, listen, and connect. Tonight's show is a perfect medium for that kind of communication and truth-telling.

As a child, I was constantly writing songs and jotting down phrases—sometimes even slipping manuscript paper into my Bible during church services. I feel blessed to have a connection to the minds of great composers of the past, and tonight I'm honored to present a pair of original scores I've composed for this concert. After George Floyd's tragic death in 2020, I felt compelled to pour my heart into a piano arrangement of "Go Down, Moses." Now, with our country at a crossroads, I've expanded it into a four-hand piece called Americana—a powerful juxtaposition that mirrors both the fractures in my own spirit and those in our nation's fabric. It urges us to rethink the narratives we've taken for granted.

In 2011, Rachel J. Peters was invited to write a Yuletide-themed song for the Broadway's Future concert series at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, amidst debates over holiday greetings and Santa's racial identity. "Santa Ain't Black" joins her catalog of witty responses to sanctimonious debates and is as close as she'll get to a holiday classic—meaning, not very close at all. Rachel has been a cherished collaborator since our time in the American Opera Projects' Composers & The Voice program, and I'm honored to introduce her music to the NYFOS family.

Choral music is in my soul. To close tonight's program, I wrote a piece that, like the title of the program, holds us accountable to stand shoulder to shoulder, reminding the world that, no matter what we face, we will remain steady as we "Hold Fast to Dreams," and never let them die.

### **ALAN WILLIAMS**

I'm honored to be singing alongside some of the world's leading Black men in the music industry, representing a new era of brotherhood. This is a golden opportunity to connect with new colleagues as we share our love not only for the classical genre, but also for jazz, gospel, and soul. I can't stress enough how important it is for Black men to be connected to one another when faced with adversity, and to uplift each other. Being surrounded by a group of extraordinary Black vocalists fills me with deep gratitude.

In Langston Hughes' poem, "Black Pierrot," the narrator laments a lost love. Though rejected by his lover, he gains the resolve to start a new day and seek love again. Pierrot is a character from the tradition of Commedia dell'arte, a theatrical art form that originated in 16th-century Italy. He is usually depicted as a lovesick, whiteface-painted clown. Langston Hughes cleverly utilizes this traditional figure in his poem, creating several interesting layers of symbolism: it is simultaneously about a sad clown who mourns his unrequited love, and a Black man wearing whiteface clown makeup. The writer Madhuri Deshmukh makes a persuasive argument that Hughes is using this juxtaposition as a way of exposing and countering the damage caused by American minstrelsy, which demeaned and exploited Black performers for decades until it began to die out in the 1920s. In William Grant Still's cycle, *Songs of Separation*, "Black Pierrot" is the final song. Still uses blues and jazz harmony to evoke Black melancholy, and in tandem with Hughes' straightforward words he paints a visceral picture of human remorse, natural beauty, and Black resilience.

## WILL LIVERMAN

It is a true joy to return to NYFOS, after nearly twelve years, for *My Brother's Keeper*, a deeply meaningful concert conceived by Justin Austin. I've never been part of something like this: a showcase for a group of Black men who are all enjoying flourishing careers as classical singers. That alone makes a powerful statement in a country where Black men are so often mischaracterized and misjudged. Coming together as brothers to sing and celebrate songs of our heritage is both uplifting and profoundly fulfilling to me. It's also part of a movement in classical music that is advancing this beautiful art form. With Steve Blier at the helm—a visionary and a giant in this industry who has been redefining classical concerts for decades—I feel truly honored to be part of this septet of artists.

Our progress in classical music would not be possible without the Black artists who paved the way for us, including one of the most notable composers of her time, Margaret Bonds.

Though only recently rediscovered as one of America's most prominent composers, Margaret Bonds had been a significant player in the musical landscape of mid-twentieth century America. Born in Chicago in 1913, she began her studies at the music school where her mother was an instructor. She won numerous scholarships, and despite having to fight constant racism and misogyny, graduated from Northwestern University in 1934 with both bachelor's and master's degrees in piano and composition. It was during her studies there that she began her lifelong friendship with the renowned poet Langston Hughes.

Bonds's *Three Dream Portraits*, composed in 1959, set to music a trio of poems by Hughes, with whom Bonds shared a deep artistic partnership. The cycle reflects their shared commitment to social justice, elevating themes of resilience, identity, and the struggle for equality.

The songs in *Three Dream Portraits*—"Minstrel Man," "Dream Variation," and "I, Too"—explore the complex emotions of Black Americans confronting a society rife with racial prejudice. In "Minstrel Man," Hughes' words express the pain behind the public façade of happiness often expected of Black performers. "Dream Variation" contrasts a desire for joyful freedom with the reality of oppression, and "I, Too" offers a vision of hope, proclaiming an inevitable inclusion in the American identity.

Many of Bonds' works have been lost to time—and to racism. Her sudden death at the age of 59 took place four years before the passing of the Copyright Act, which would have allowed her estate to protect her intellectual property, and due to the pervasive disrespect that women of color faced at that time, much of her music went unrecorded. In 2013, 18 precious boxes of her scores, letters, and documents were found and acquired by Georgetown University, allowing for posthumous world premieres of one of the greatest jewels in the crown of American classical music.

## CHAZ'MEN WILLIAMS-ALI

In early 2023, I reached out to Justin and told him it had been on my mind to do a project with him. He texted back and said "...this is freaky stuff, you're not going to believe this! Last night I had another dream about you. It might have even been exactly when you texted me at 3:51 am that NYFOS put together a concert and album called My Brother's Keeper." I have the text still. And since that day, this has been a project that I have been very excited to see come to fruition.

I am deeply honored to be in the number of those chosen to work on this concert. Growing up in a very musical and theatrical family, I have had many passions when it comes to genre and performance types. It brings me great joy to be able to explore so many of those passions in this concert. I'm thrilled to be singing Brahms, and taking the stratospheric high line in "Come Until Me," the ensemble that opens the program.

I have also taken on the joyous responsibility of bringing an iconic song of Donny Hathaway's to life. I am from St. Louis, MO, and in those parts Donny is the gold standard. He was a native son, and for us he has reached almost mythical status. In St. Louis, everyone knows someone who worked with him. "He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother" is a song that has maintained its relevance over the half-century since Bobby Scott and Bob Russell first created it. In this world, it's important to know that everyone needs help to reach their final destination, and it is all too easy to walk past and ignore those in need, justifying ourselves by saying that it's someone else's problem. But today, I'm proud to stand next to my brothers in artistry and say that when any of them need someone to help shoulder the load, I'll be there for them.

# Biographies



## JUSTIN AUSTIN

Drama Desk-nominated baritone Justin Austin, praised for his “mighty lyric voice” (NY Times) and “velvet-voiced charisma” (The New Yorker), was named 2024 Rising Star at the International Opera Awards and received the 2024 Marian Anderson Vocal Award. In 2025–26, he debuts at San Francisco Opera (*The Barber of Seville*), Houston Grand Opera (*Porgy and Bess*), and summer premieres at Edinburgh (*The Galloping Cure*), while returning to Washington National Opera, La Jolla Music Society, Florentine Opera, and New York Festival of Song. A versatile artist, he performs opera, recital, and concert repertoire worldwide, collaborating with major orchestras and jazz, R&B, and musical theater artists.

## JOSHUA BLUE

British-American tenor Joshua Blue returns in 2025–26 to the LA Phil (*Mozart Requiem*), Metropolitan Opera (*Tamino in The Magic Flute*), English National Opera (*Così fan tutte*), and St. John the Divine (*Beethoven’s Ninth*). He debuts with Opéra national de Nancy-Lorraine (*Verdi Requiem*) and sings Rodolfo in *La bohème* with Opera North and Austin Opera. Recent highlights include performances with English National Opera, San Diego Opera, Detroit Opera, and Opera Philadelphia. A frequent concert soloist, he has appeared at Carnegie Hall and internationally. A Juilliard graduate, Blue is a GRAMMY-nominated recording artist and former Washington National Opera young artist.



## WILL LIVERMAN

GRAMMY® Award-winning baritone Will Liverman, hailed as “a voice for this historic moment” (The Washington Post), is celebrated for his versatility as a performer and composer. He co-created *The Factotum*, premiering at Lyric Opera of Chicago in 2023. His recording *The Dunbar/Moore Sessions, Volume II* earned a 2026 GRAMMY nomination. Liverman performs widely with major opera companies and orchestras, including the Metropolitan Opera, where he starred in *Fire Shut Up in My Bones*. An advocate for inclusion, his albums and projects highlight Black composers and stories. A Juilliard graduate, he is also an influential artistic advisor and collaborator.





### **JOSEPH PARRISH**

Joseph Parrish, winner of the 2022 Young Concert Artists Susan Wadsworth Auditions, is praised for his commanding presence and vocal warmth. A Baltimore native, he trained at Cincinnati Conservatory and Juilliard, earning multiple honors. In 2024–25, he made his New York recital debut at Merkin Hall and performed at Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, and Town Hall. Concert highlights include Messiah, Bach’s St. Matthew Passion, and Beethoven’s Ninth. He debuted in Europe at the Salzburg Festival and appears widely in chamber and symphonic settings. Upcoming seasons include recitals, orchestral engagements, and operatic roles with Opera Saratoga.

### **ALAN WILLIAMS**

American bass Alan Williams, winner of the 2025 Santa Fe Opera “Outstanding First Year Apprentice Award,” is an emerging operatic talent. In 2025–26, he debuts with Pittsburgh Opera (La Bohème), American Symphony Orchestra at Carnegie Hall, and New York Philharmonic, and returns to the Metropolitan Opera and Des Moines Metro Opera. Recent highlights include Grounded at the Met, Messiah in Los Angeles, and appearances with New York Festival of Song and Santa Fe Opera. A former LA Opera Young Artist, he has performed a wide range of roles. A competition finalist and prizewinner, Williams trained at the University of Michigan and Northern Arizona University.



### **JORELL WILLIAMS**

American baritone Jorell Williams, praised by BBC Music Magazine for his “magnificent” voice, is a leading presence on international opera and concert stages. Known for his rich tone and expressive depth, he performs major roles including Figaro, Don Pasquale, Escamillo, and Dizzy Gillespie in Yardbird. He made his Off-Broadway debut in Intimate Apparel in 2022. Williams has toured with prominent groups and performed with artists like Wynton Marsalis, Lauryn Hill, and Jon Batiste. An award-winning singer, he supports artist advocacy and serves in leadership roles, promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in the arts.

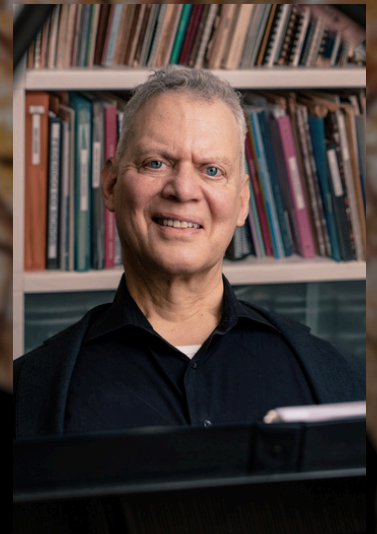


### **CHAZ'MEN WILLIAMS-ALI**

Chaz'men Williams-Ali is a tenor from St. Louis, MO. After debuting with English National Opera and Dutch National Opera, he joined Theater und Orchester Heidelberg, where he performed roles including Pinkerton and later Canio in Pagliacci. In 2021, he made his Metropolitan Opera debut in *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* under Maestro Pappano. Recent highlights include Nate in *Highway 1 USA* at LA Opera, Florestan in *Fidelio* at Washington National Opera, and Raymond Santana in *The Central Park Five* at Detroit Opera. He is also active in concert and as a music director across the Midwest, and remains grateful for his journey.

### **STEVEN BLIER**

Steven Blier is the Artistic Director of the New York Festival of Song, which he co-founded in 1988 with fellow pianist Michael Barrett. Since the Festival's inception, he has programmed, performed, translated, and annotated more than 160 vocal recitals with art song repertoire spanning from Schubert to Szymanowski, and popular song from early vaudeville to the present day. Mr. Blier's recital partners have included Michael Spyres, Renée Fleming, Cecilia Bartoli, Susan Graham, Kate Lindsey, Jessye Norman, and Samuel Ramey, in venues ranging from Carnegie Hall to La Scala. He is currently on the faculty of The Juilliard School; his discography includes the premiere recording of Leonard Bernstein's *Arias and Barcarolles*, which won a Grammy Award. *Opera News* proclaimed Blier "the coolest dude in town."



# Text and Translatinas

## **Come Unto Me: Traditional, arr. Take Six Sung by The Ensemble**

Come unto me, all ye that labor  
And I will give you rest  
Take my yoke upon you and learn from me  
For I am meek and lowly of heart  
And ye shall find rest unto your souls  
Rest unto your souls  
Rest unto your souls  
It's easy  
For my burden is light.

## **Three Dream Portraits [1959]**

**Music by Margaret Bonds (1913-1972); poems by Langston Hughes (1901-1967)**

### **I. Minstrel Man**

#### **Sung by Will Liverman**

Because my mouth  
Is wide with laughter  
And my throat  
Is deep with song,  
You do not think  
I suffer after  
I have held my pain  
So long.

Because my mouth  
Is wide with laughter,  
You do not hear  
My inner cry,  
Because my feet  
Are gay with dancing,  
You do not know  
I die.

## II. Dream Variation

**Sung by Joseph Parrish**

To fling my arms wide  
In some place of the sun,  
To whirl and to dance  
Till the white day is done.  
Then rest at cool evening  
Beneath a tall tree  
While night comes on gently,  
Dark like me—  
That is my dream!

To fling my arms wide  
In the face of the sun,  
Dance! Whirl! Whirl!  
Till the quick day is done.  
Rest at pale evening . . .  
A tall, slim tree . . .  
Night coming tenderly  
Black like me.

## III. I, Too

**Sung by Jorell Williams**

I, too, sing America.  
I am the darker brother.  
They send me to eat in the kitchen  
When company comes,  
But I laugh,  
And eat well,  
And grow strong.  
Tomorrow,  
I'll be at the table  
When company comes.  
Nobody'll dare  
Say to me,  
"Eat in the kitchen,"  
Then.  
Besides,  
They'll see how beautiful I am  
And be ashamed—  
I, too, am America.

**Beware the Anger of Soft-Spoken Men [2002]**

**Music and lyrics by Steve Lutvak (1959-2023)**

**Sung by Joseph Parrish, Alan Williams, Jorell Williams,  
Chaz'men Williams-Ali**

Beware the anger of soft-spoken men  
They will surprise you again and again and again  
There's G.I. Joe underneath those baby blues of Ken  
Beware the anger of soft-spoken men.  
The man who smiles as he opens up your door  
The man who smiles as he offers you some more  
Anyone whose smile shows you too much teeth  
Beware the anger that's underneath.  
Beware the anger of soft-spoken men  
They will surprise you again and again and again  
There's G.I. Joe underneath those baby blues of Ken  
Beware the anger of soft-spoken men.  
Somebody told us "Always be nice.  
Always say yes. Never think twice."  
Nobody told us there's always a price  
If you never learn how to say no.  
Somebody told us "Always say yes."  
Must've been someone important I guess.  
Nice is nice, but nevertheless  
Where does the anger go?  
Beware the anger of soft-spoken men  
They're like the bull with his eyes on the lock of the pen  
If you should open it, better stand back and then  
Beware the anger of soft-spoken men.  
I'm telling you, you better recognize the style  
We'd eat you for breakfast with a smile.  
Go ahead and let yourself be charmed  
But remember, forewarned is forearmed.  
Beware the anger of soft-spoken men  
They will surprise you again and again and again  
There's Genghis Khan under all that fucking Zen  
Beware the anger of soft-spoken men.  
--Hey, no problem...  
--Of course I have time...  
--Sure, how much do you need...?  
Beware.

### **A Black Pierrot [1959]**

**Music by William Grant Still (1895-1978), poem by Langston Hughes**

**Sung by Alan Williams**

I am a black pierrot:  
She did not love me,  
So I crept away into the night  
And the night was black, too.  
I am a black pierrot:  
She did not love me,  
So I wept until the red dawn  
Dripped blood over the eastern hills  
And my heart was bleeding, too.

### **Die Schwestern (Die Brüder) [1860]**

**Music by Johannes Brahms (1833-1897), poem by Eduard Möricke (1804-1875)**

**Sung by Alan Williams and Chaz'men Williams-Ali**

Wir Brüder zwei, wir schönen,  
So gleich von Angesicht,  
So gleicht kein Ei dem andern,  
Kein Stern dem andern nicht.  
Wir Brüder zwei, wir schönen,  
Wir haben nußbraun Haar,  
Und flichtst du sie in einen Zopf,  
Man kennt sie nicht fürwahr.  
Wir Brüder zwei, wir schönen,  
Wir tragen gleich Gewand,  
Spazieren auf dem Wiesenplan  
Und singen Hand in Hand.  
Wir Brüder zwei, wir schönen,  
Wir spinnen in die Wett',  
Wir sitzen an einer Kunkel  
Wir schlafen in einem Bett.  
O Brüder zwei, ihr schönen,  
Wie hat sich das Blättchen gewandt!  
Ihr liebet einerlei Liebchen –  
Jetzt hat das Liedel ein End'.

Wir Brüder zwei, wir schönen,  
So gleich von Angesicht,  
So gleicht kein Ei dem andern,  
Kein Stern dem andern nicht.  
Wir Brüder zwei, wir schönen,  
Wir haben nußbraun Haar,  
Und flichtst du sie in einen Zopf,  
Man kennt sie nicht fürwahr.  
Wir Brüder zwei, wir schönen,  
Wir tragen gleich Gewand,  
Spazieren auf dem Wiesenplan  
Und singen Hand in Hand.  
Wir Brüder zwei, wir schönen,  
Wir spinnen in die Wett',  
Wir sitzen an einer Kunkel  
Wir schlafen in einem Bett.  
O Brüder zwei, ihr schönen,  
Wie hat sich das Blättchen gewandt!  
Ihr liebet einerlei Liebchen –  
Jetzt hat das Liedel ein End'.

## Guiding Me Back Home [1928]

Music by Harry Revel (1905-1958), lyrics by Noble Sissle (1889-1975)

Sung by Joseph Parrish and Chaz'men Williams-Ali

Of roaming I'm fond,  
I'm a real vagabond,  
And the road, just beyond, is my way.  
I never turn 'round,  
For there's one that I've found,  
Guiding me up and down Life's highway:  
No matter where I go, how I go, when I go,  
There's always one I know  
Guiding me back home.  
Her voice so tenderly calls to me, o'er the sea,  
Wherever I may be  
Guiding me back home.

Though I am only a rover,  
When my roaming days are all over,  
I'll be by mother's chair, kneeling there, joys  
to share,  
Answering her loving prayer,  
Guiding me back home.  
I sometimes go wrong  
As I'm singing a song  
And I'm swinging along a by-road.  
Though guideposts I lack  
To help me find my track  
Yet I always get back to my road.  
No matter where I go, how I go, when I go...

## **Sylvie**

**Traditional, adapted by "Lead Belly" (Huddle Ledbetter) (1888-1949)**

**Sung by Joseph Parrish; Alan Williams, Guitar**

Sylvie, Sylvie,  
I'm so hot 'n' dry,  
Sylvie, Sylvie  
Can't you hear me crying?  
Bring me little water, Sylvie  
Bring me little water now  
Bring me little water, Sylvie  
Every little once in a while.  
Sylvie says she love me  
But I believe she lies  
She hasn't been to see me  
Since the last day of July.

She brought me a little coffee  
She brought me a little tea  
Well, she brought me nearly every damned  
thing  
But she didn't bring the jailhouse key.  
Bring me little bucket, Sylvie  
Bring me little bucket now  
Bring me little bucket, Sylvie  
Every little once in a while.  
Took a look a yonder  
What is that I see?  
Well, I thought it was little Sylvie

## **Santa Ain't Black [2011]**

**Music and lyrics by Rachel J. Peters (b.1977)**

**Sung by Jorell Williams; Joseph Parrish, pianist**

Black Friday in a Jersey City mall  
Black Santa's come to town, come one, come all  
Come lunchtime, there's a line winds up down back around and out the door  
Toddlers, nannies, frat boys, army wives, one pet ferret and hundreds more  
And they shriek  
And they pee  
And they never say "please"

Still I promise a mountain of Barbies  
And Grand Theft Auto for PlayStation 3s  
Who knew sitting could be so exhausting  
Covered in boogers and buttercream frosting?

Beard tangled, I'm a mess of spirit gum  
Then one girl, sweet as any sugar plum  
Blond ringlets, bright blue eyes and a pretty white dress for her photo op  
Only nine, alone in line with her Ma at the spa leaving Pa to shop  
So she sits

And she smiles

And she makes me smile back

She says, "Mister, you seem like a nice man,

But you ain't Santa 'cause Santa ain't black!"

While Mommy gets her algae facial

Santa tries to be post-racial

"Oh, little one

Santa is all the colors of the rainbow

Oh, little one

Santa is all the colors of your heart

Oh, little one

Christmas is all the colors of the rainbow

Oh, little one

Help me stop before I start...

I'ma bring this child some Angela Davis

I'ma bring this child some Malcolm X

I'ma show this child the meaning of Christmas

Ain't nothin' like the world expects

Santa eat the crumbs from my dollar store cookies

Santa be a shill for corporate greed

Santa get your fat jolly ass down my chimney and

Santa gimme all kinda crap I don't need

Santa ain't black

Santa ain't brown

Santa ain't red

Santa ain't green

'Cause Santa ain't REAL!"

...So now I'm out of a job

But I know I did right

Merry Christmas to all

And to all a good night.

**Some Enchanted Evening, from South Pacific [1949]**

**Music by Richard Rodgers (1902-1979), lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II (1895-1960)**

**(arrangement by Will Liverman)**

**Sung by Will Liverman**

Some enchanted evening  
You may see a stranger,  
You may see a stranger  
Across a crowded room.  
And somehow you know,  
You know even then,  
That somewhere you'll see her again and  
again.

Some enchanted evening  
Someone may be laughing,  
You may hear her laughing  
Across a crowded room—  
And night after night,  
As strange as it seems,  
The sound of her laughter will sing in your  
dreams.

Who can explain it?  
Who can tell you why?  
Fools give you reasons—  
Wise men never try.  
Some enchanted evening,  
When you find your true love,  
When you feel her call you  
Across a crowded room—  
Then fly to her side  
And make her your own,  
Or all through your life, you may dream all  
alone.  
Once you have found her,  
Never let her go.  
Once you have found her,  
Never let her go!

**He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother [1969]**

**Music and lyrics by Bobby Scott (1937-1990) and Bob Russell (1914-1970)**

**Sung by Chaz'men Williams-Ali**

... The road is long  
With many a winding turn  
That leads us to who knows where,  
who knows where  
But I'm strong  
Strong enough to carry him  
He ain't heavy, he's my brother  
... So on we go  
His welfare is of my concern  
No burden is he to bear  
We'll get there  
... For I know  
He would not encumber me  
He ain't heavy, he's my brother  
... If I'm laden at all  
I'm laden with sadness  
That everyone's heart  
Isn't filled with the gladness  
Of love for one another  
... It's a long, long road  
From which there is no return  
While we're on the way to there  
Why not share?  
... And the load  
Doesn't weigh me down at all  
He ain't heavy, he's my brother  
... He's my brother  
He ain't heavy, he's my brother  
He ain't heavy, he's my brother

**Hold Fast to Dreams [2024]**

**Music by Jorell Williams (b.1984),**

**poems by Langston Hughes (1901-1967)**

**Sung by The Ensemble**

Hold fast to dreams  
For if dreams die  
Life is a broken-winged bird  
That cannot fly.  
Hold fast to dreams  
For when dreams go  
Life is a barren field  
Frozen with snow.

I ask you this:  
Which way to go?  
I ask you this:  
Which sin to bear?  
Which crown to put  
Upon my hair?  
I do not know,  
Lord God,  
I do not know.

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