

Program Notes: The Meadowlark

As a diverse group of busy women, at first we weren't quite sure what story we wanted to tell.

In true twenty-first-century fashion, our first idea-generating session was a hybrid in-person/Skype meeting, with Micaela and Alicia sitting at a Cold Stone Creamery in Phoenix and me, Kristen, at home with my kids in East Mesa. At one point I had to lock myself in my bedroom so I could hear what was being said over the din of my household (I have four children, two dogs, and one husband).

We introduced ourselves and kicked around ideas but it was clear: we were each at very different points in our lives. Micaela is a student studying vocal performance and music education at Arizona State University. Alicia is studying music composition at Phoenix College. I am old. While my academic background is in music, my day job is as a writer and editor at ASU.

Music is the great equalizer, but could we find other commonalities?

We moved our next conversations online. We brainstormed about possible themes, chiming in when we found time and inspiration. Two distinct but interwoven threads became visible: empowerment and voice. Specifically, we knew we wanted to "lift up" other women, as we ourselves had been lifted up on occasion. And we knew we wanted to address "voice" in both a literal and figurative fashion.

As our group's designated writer, I then did what I often do when I'm not sure where to start: I went outside.

My family, very optimistically, had planted a garden late last summer. I imagined what the birds who frequented our backyard's mesquite trees were thinking of this foolhardy idea. I know at least some of them thought it was great; they ate the leaves off several of the plants. An idea began to grow...

Later, as I locked myself in my bedroom again to write, I became one of those birds: curious, hungry, noisy, all-knowing in a mother nature way. I thought about *voice*. What were its uses? I wrote about singing to document, to tell, to warn, to announce, to reflect, and to encourage. I shut out the cacophony of my children's shouts and laughter, the barking dogs, the drone of the dishwasher and relentless hiss of air conditioning, and I wrote my way into *quiet*.

Then it was Alicia's turn. Here's what she says of her process:

"It seemed like a daunting task at first. I had never written an art song before, let alone collaborated on a composition. However, when I first read Kristen's poetry, I was instantly inspired by the first two lines and knew which direction I wanted to take the music. I spent some time studying the poem, broke it up into sections that made sense

musically, and also had Kristen send me a recording of her speaking the words. This helped me to identify which words and phrases that she emphasized naturally or that she thought were important. When I first sat down at the piano to work on setting the text, I decided to focus on the first two lines and ended up writing the opening chord progression.

I then took this project into my composition lessons with Dr. Schindler at Phoenix College and each lesson, I would bring in my latest draft of the piece and he would guide me with helpful suggestions. Week by week, the piece felt like it started coming together and when I felt stuck, I had the text to tell me where the story went next. My intentions were to make the song feel hopeful, empowering, and inspiring; just as it had inspired me. Finishing 'The Meadowlark' and hearing Micaela perform it live for the first time was a very powerful moment. Not only had I created an art song, but I had collaborated with two wonderful, talented women to create something that wasn't there before; to tell a story that would stay with the listener long after the music ends. We wanted to explore the idea of voice while working on this piece and throughout the process, I felt that I was able to explore my own voice as a composer and that you can hear it when you listen to 'The Meadowlark.'"

Micaela's musical interpretation is just right. As the piano introduces her, she is confident, serene, almost reverent. Her opening phrase is open and strong, and she adds a lilt as she wings her way through the text. As a writer, it was so incredibly humbling to hear her beautiful, soaring soprano communicate what had come from inside me; in voicing them, the words became hers. And in sharing them, they took on a life of their own.

Alicia's great care and sensitivity in handling the text, and Micaela's artistry in articulating it are together a gift. Thank you for listening.