

## **Dr. King's Dream in Jazz**

The rushing waterfall of the Martin Luther King memorial fountain subtly reminds Yerba Buena Gardens concert-goers of his call for justice to “roll down like the waters.”

On May 1, those inspiring fountains will be the perfect accompaniment to the premier of a new work by Marcus Shelby – “MLK” -- an oratorio for jazz orchestra and vocal ensemble in celebration of Dr. King and the civil rights movement.

The concert features the 15-piece MSJO (and guest Howard Wiley on tenor and soprano sax) along with the soaring voices of renowned vocalists Faye Carol, Kenny Washington, Nicholas Bearde, and Jeannine Anderson.

"MLK" includes Shelby's original compositions as well as rearrangements of music written during the civil rights period.

Woven into the mix of swing, ballad, blues, afro-latin, scat singing, gospel, jazz and European classical forms, listeners will hear the familiar strains of freedom songs like "We Shall Overcome," "Go Tell it on the Mountain" and "There is a Balm in Gilead."

Shelby is not only a visionary composer, he is also a dedicated historian. To prepare for this composition, he studied King's writings, traveled to Birmingham, Little Rock, Memphis, and other historic sites, and interviewed those who marched, protested, walked picket lines, sat down, stood up and sang out for freedom

As with his other major compositions rooted in African American history – “Port Chicago” and “Harriet Tubman” -- Shelby introduces each section with an explanation of key historical moments like the Freedom Riders, the arrest of Rosa Parks, the murders of Emmett Till and Medgar Evers, the Little Rock 9, the Memphis sanitation workers strike, and more. His original lyrics for “Black Cab,” set to an upbeat swing rhythm, tell the little-known story of the innovative homegrown transport system that took people to work during the Montgomery bus boycott.

Yerba Buena Gardens Festival executive director Linda Lucero, who supported the composer's Harriet Tubman oratorio, considers it a privilege to work with Shelby. “Shelby's compositions resonate on so many levels,” she said, “Not only are they gorgeous, they tell us important, often hidden, stories about our times.”

Shelby, who has toured internationally and has 10 CDs to his credit, is a key figure in the Bay Area cultural scene. The award-winning bassist, who has performed with Winton Marsalis, often plays at Yoshi's, the Red Poppy Art House and Intersection for the Arts. The founder of the Marcus Shelby Jazz Orchestra, he serves as a mentor for young musicians and has taught at Stanford and San Francisco State.

As for playing with the sounds of the Martin Luther King fountain in the background, Shelby says, “We've been playing for many years in this space, and it seems like everything has led up to here – it is a big honor to share that space and our common connection.”

That space will resound on May 1, as Marcus Shelby sets Dr. King's dream to jazz.

Elaine Elinson