

**United Strings of Color *Day of Enlightenment* Violin Vigils Program
May 25, 2021, 6:30 pm Raleigh Little Theatre Amphitheatre**

This Is Our Dream, NPR crowd-sourced poem, read by
Hallelujah by Leonard Cohen, played by United Strings of Color
Being Black, written and read by Destiny Carless, Rolesville High
We Shall Overcome by Charles Albert Tinley, played by United Strings of Color
Before I'm Me, written and read by Taylor Kennedy Mendez, Rolesville High
Stereotypes by Black Violin, played by United Strings of Color
Stereotyping, by Mario Kersey read by Jolie Duquene during the music
Change by Sumeyya Miraloglu, Wakefield High, read by Destiny Carless
Oh Freedom! arranged by Hugues Delay, played by United Strings of Color
'the activity called a spectacle' written and read by Jillian Seversky, Holly Springs High
Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen by Undine Smith Moore, played by United Strings of Color
What We Can Do by Mario Kersey, staff East Wake High, read by Taylor Mendez
Lift Every Voice by James Weldon and John Rosamond Johnson. The audience invited to stand and sing with United Strings of Color
Colors by Jimena Gonzalez-Aguina, Holly Springs High, read by Noelia Fernandez
Meditation by Ernest Bloch, played by United Strings of Color
Movement written and read by Jayla Dennis, North Wake College and Career Academy
A Change Gonna Come by Sam Cooke, played by United Strings of Color
The Hill We Climb by Amanda Gorman, read by Jolie Duquene
Simple Gifts and ***Shaker*** by Black Violin, guest musicians join United Strings of Color: Tayla Murphy, Cameron Timo and Jada Starr, violins; Jolie Duquene, viola; Joshua Alston and Alex Hayes, cello; Rayah Thomas, bass.

Special thanks to Heather Strickland, Executive Director of Raleigh Little Theatre, Kelly Starling Lyons, 2021 Piedmont Laureate, Stefanie Etienne Parent Coordinator, and Heather Elliott Director of Community Engagement.

Program Details

Welcome and Introduction

We are opening with two verses from the National Public Radio crowd sourced poem that was curated by Kwami Alexander, a poet, educator and New York Times bestselling author of 21 books.

This Is Our Dream

I dream a world that sounds like a gentle "good morning,"
like "sleep tight" at the end of the day,

like Ella scattin',
a world filled with a universal song.
A hallelujah of joyous rejoicing, in this moment's gift of life.

I dream a world in color,
Where nature's artist takes the lead.
Clear, blue oceans and vibrant reefs,
and all creatures thrive with what they need.

Such is a world I dream of!

United Strings of Color: *Hallelujah* by Leonard Cohen

My name is Destiny Carless and I am in the 10th grade at Rolesville High where I study English with Dr. Bailey. What inspired me to write this poem was just current events. I had been wanting to write a poem about everything that was happening but I did not know how to start. When I found out about this opportunity, I was quick to jump to the case. Everything that has been going on in this world is unacceptable and disheartening to hear. This is something that touches on what it truly means to be Black in America and I believe my poems needs to be heard.

Being Black

Being Black is having ancestors
Originating from the Motherland.
Being Black is dancing to rhythmic beats.
Being Black is reaching goals
We were not supposed to reach.
Being Black is having purpose.
Passion.
Priceless.
Powerful.
Prosperous.
But in reality,
What does it actually mean to be Black
In America?
Fear.
People fear because of the color of our skin.
We're in the United States but it seems we can't win.
Heartbreak.
It seems it's what we're used to.
We lose another soul each day
To the wrath of this world.
Police can take a knee and take a life.
And it's alright.

But when Kap takes a knee
And we all join together peacefully
We see frustration arise as if we're trying to start a fight.
Police brutality.
Overtook a young spirit living bright.
For some candy.
"Looking" suspicious.
Trying to return to family.
Why?
Is Black really a bad color?
Are we not supposed to be successful like you?
In the midst of this pandemic, more have come to realize
That not much has changed
Since the days
That we were slaves.
We're treated like outsiders.
Like we don't belong.
We can't be great.
We have to live through all this hate.
Literally shot down from achieving more.
Being Black in America is fearing for your life
Everyday you step out on the street
And meet people who don't look like you.
Seeing police wondering "Will this be my last breath?"
"I can't breathe."
Something needs to change.
Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said,
" I have a dream...
that all men are created equal."
If that was a dream,
Can we all
Just stay asleep?

United Strings of Color plays *We Shall Overcome* by Charles Albert Tinley

My name is Taylor Kennedy Mendez. I am a junior at Rolesville High School and study English with Rebecca Hamilton. My inspiration for the following poem is my personal experience with code switching. I've always seen code switching as a useful tool; my father would call me "chameleon". I'm starting to question if code switching is even worth it when black people are murdered before they can speak; and by people who are supposed to be PROTECTING them.

Before I'm Me

when I walk into a room my skin
screeches before me
the way she makes a scene
does too much
how rude she is
all the while out of place

I'm black before I'm me

I'm looking for a code to best fit when it's time to speak
you tell me I'm not like the others
there's no need to cross the street
you say that I'm the whitest black girl that you'll ever meet
just cause I knew my aave and ebonics
would be a disadvantage to me
but I can go from the white house to the trap house
without skipping a beat
that's what Katelynn Duggins told me
but how long can the code switch really save me
cause when I go home I'm thinking about Breonna the emt
who was gunned down in her sleep
and now that she's not here they can make her into whoever
they want her to be
how do you think Ahmaud's mother feels
when there's pieces of his body still lying in the street
will the switch save me
when the officer's knee is on my neck
and I can't breathe

Elijah McClain's last words were I love
everybody

I might as well throw it away
and continue to let my skin speak for me
because at the end of the day

I know I'm black but do you know me

United Strings of Color: *Stereotypes* by Black Violin.

Poetry by Mario Kersey, staff at East Wake High, will be read during the slow, quiet sections.

Stereotyping

You see before you the future
But you hold me in the past
Questioning my citizenship
Or my intelligence while sitting in calculus.
Stereotyping.

I don't run for my health
But walk to prevent anyone
From thinking I am fleeing a crime.
Stereotyping.

You see the apostrophe in my name and know
I will be trouble with a stank attitude
So you pass on me.
Stereotyping.

You speak the slang because you expect me to,
But my parents told me to enunciate.
Stereotyping.

Just meet me halfway, and we may discover
How similar we really are.
Enlightenment.

The following poem is by Sumeyya Miraloglu, a senior at Wakefield High school, who could not be with us today. She studies Creative Writing with Ms. Jefferson. She was inspired to write this poem after riots began breaking out and injustices being held against minorities finally had a place in the spotlight.

Change

I wish I could say we live in a world full of peace, justice, and love,
But I can't.
When the color of somebody's skin determines whether they are a threat.
When the hijab a woman wears to preserve her modesty reminds others to "never forget".
When the braids of a young girl with kinky hair is seen as inappropriate for school.
But the lighter girls' straight hair is just seen as, 'following the rules.

I wish I could say we live in a world full of peace, justice, and love,

But that would contradict with the instances I have mentioned above.
When children fear for their lives going to school to pursue their education,
Because of the loose gun laws that threaten our nation.
When certain people are stopped by airport security for a 'random check'
When a person is innocently murdered by having a knee pressed into his neck.

I wish I could say we live in a world full of peace, justice, and love,
But that would be denying the true instances that I have mentioned above.
When people are labeled as terrorists for practicing a religion that preaches peace,
When people are told 'go back to your country!' making them believe they belong
overseas.
When too many children are raised in broken families of single mothers
When Muslim women in France are forced to strip off their modest swimwear because
it 'frightens others'.

I wish I could say we live in a world full of peace, justice, and love,
But that would oppose every true instance I have recited above.
When some Asians are made fun of for the shape of their eyes
When the deaths of minorities are constantly being dehumanized
When the Uyghur Muslims in China are being tortured
When the children of Yemen are dying from starvation like flowers in a decaying
orchard.
When people are shot up in night clubs because of their sexuality
When wanting to be treated equally is seen as a fantasy rather than a reality

I wish I could say we live in a world full of peace, justice, and love,
But that would reject every true instance I have recited above.
So, I hope that we can all start by making positive change.
To make sure anything labeled as different is not seen as something that needs to be
rearranged.

United Strings of Color: *Oh, Freedom!* arranged by Hugues Delay

My name is Jillian Seversky and I am in the 12th grade at Holly Springs High where I study English with Meghan Sanders. This poem is inspired by the lynchings' within the united states within the late 1800s and the early half of the 1900s. And furthermore, and how many white Americans would treat it as if a movie a grand entertaining event something to look forward to and have fun at. They showed this by bringing a picnic with their family and watching and taking pictures of the victim's and putting them on postcards. Later they through these victims out like garbage into the swamps and secret places. I do not wish to romanticize this topic or dark place in history, but rather I want with this poem to acknowledge the twisted things done to these people of color, and educate others on the history of our country though it might be a difficult one to come to terms with.

'the activity called a spectacle'

Thousands will Show
they heard from the peculiar pages
the published publicly ones

they will bring their picnics
they will bring their children
they will commemorate it on courthouses
in postcards
and stowaway many secrets in swamps

you will say the advertisements made us do it
you will say you are not sorry
but the evidence is damning
all red hands around
the backwoods permanently blood-stained

yet you make the trees carry your shame-still-of being used

to grow so very tall.
to try to bring beauty
to then be used to end it with their branches.

the singular savior holding them in your arms
when everyone has gone and it is just you 2, 3, 4 or more
hanging brown bodies
and falling leaves

United Strings of Color: *Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen* by Undine Smith Moore

This poem was written by Mario Kersey who is on the staff at Eastern Wake High School and asked that a student read. He addresses the topic of stereotyping.

What We Can Do

We are a tenement of pigeonholes
Cramped with potential some fear
Will make them lose
Their comfort of privilege.

There is room for all of us to expand
Into the big picture of a King's dream.

The content of our character is the seed
For our growth together.

Our stereotypes are the demarcation for walls
built around each other limiting belief
In the abilities any of us possess but too often
See in only one type of person.

Be the black dot on the white painting
Stand out while stomping down
The narrow views to reveal the open space
For the diversity of thought and expression
To expand, touching all of us.

United Strings of Color: *Lift Every Voice* by James Weldon Johnson and John
Rosamond Johnson

Please stand and sing:

Lift every voice and sing
Till earth and heaven ring
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty
Let our rejoicing rise
High as the listening skies
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea
Sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us
Sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us
Facing the rising sun of our new day begun
Let us march on till victory is won

The following poem is by Jimena Gonzalez-Aguina, a junior at Holly Springs High school, who could not be with us today. She is a student of Meaghan Sanders. This poem is about an African American girl who is being accused of something (anything) solely because of her skin color. The whole poem talks about “her colors” because who we are as people is what makes up our colors, not our skin tone; although it is something to embrace. In the end, they wouldn’t listen to her pleas, so her unique colors are gone from the world, all because of ignorance.

Colors

Her cheeks are stained with deep blue tears
Her plump lips as red as the blood of her ancestors
Why won’t they listen to her?

It wasn't her.

Her words come out a bruising purple,
Dripping with fear.
Her delicate, dark hands tremble.
The night sky strains itself to provide her cover,
Engulfing the rich color of her skin.
They still aren't listening to her.
It wasn't her.

Her cascading, untamed dark curls stick to her face,
Shielding her from the man who shouts sharp words
Piercing her golden heart.
It's too late to listen now.
It wasn't her.

And now no one will know the beauty within
her eyes, her smile, her laugh.
They will never truly grasp the value of,
her colors.

United Strings of Color: *Meditation* by Ernest Bloch, Sterling Elliott solo viola

The next poem is by Jayla Dennis, a student of Monica Perdomo at North Wake College and Career Academy where she is in the 10th grade.

Movement

A change or development.
Movement is the shift in my stride,
the air in which I inhale and exhale,
the way my hands are bound as the
screams of my family and community
orchestrate a symphony in my ears.

My movement is seen as violent.
Violent because I have learned how
to turn my steps into war drums so that
even the mightiest may tremble.
Violent because I have made my words sharp
enough to pierce the heart of prejudice,
violent because my skin is the ultimate weapon.

Bullet wounds so deep in my back
they clap against my rib cage.
How many more drops of my blood
do you want to see fall,
before you realize I matter.

My movement is flexible.
It curls against my calves
and gives me the extra bounce
so that I may continue in my stride.

It strains with the ligaments in my arms
as I hold them to my body when
I walk down these streets that
have had more black bodies
laid down on them than the stickers in a scrapbook.

My movement is intelligent.
It is abundant in my mind
constantly replaying the excuses of lawless murders.
It can recount death dates,
and times it has turned my brain into a battle zone.

My movement is loud.
It makes my ears ring
with the sounds of chains to remind me I still have further to climb.
The first note of a cry that is so known yet so ignored.
My movement is trendy.
It has been worn like the summer sports collections.
On Wednesdays we wear the blood of Trayvon Martin.
On Friday we wear the colors
of the screams that were heard by countless generations.

My movement is me .
Who has had to fight for my life
before being able to legally buy a drink.
Before knowing how to take out a loan or buy car insurance

Who is still fighting and has seen the faces of my oppressors.
Snickering as they try to imitate my charms and the way I swing my hips.
DemEANing me until they see the ashes of my self esteem.

The oppressors suddenly want to be given the title of oppressed,
wanting to mimic tears of the ones they've slain.
Their movement is in opposition to mine,
they've turned their steel hate into actual bullets,
yet they hide behind white sheets and the girl next door narrative.
If history had its eyes on us why do I get the feeling that they are colorblind.
Only seeing the white narrative and believing those white lies.

My movement tells me to keep going forward never back,
spew your truth until the weight of their guilt makes your neck crack.
Sandra I've heard about your fate,
George I'm not lowering my stakes,
Breonna I'm building my own path,
Aura I have made peace with my faults,
but Stephon I will not categorize my blackness as a fault.
Philando, we are the template,
Alton we will never stop.

United Strings of Color: *A Change Is Gonna Come* by Sam Cooke

*Our final poem was written by National Youth Poet Laureate, Amanda Gorman. She first read *The Hill We Climb* at President Joseph Biden's inauguration.*

The Hill We Climb

When day comes we ask ourselves,
where can we find light in this never-ending shade?
The loss we carry,
a sea we must wade
We've braved the belly of the beast
We've learned that quiet isn't always peace
And the norms and notions
of what just is
Isn't always just-ice
And yet the dawn is ours
before we knew it
Somehow we do it
Somehow we've weathered and witnessed

a nation that isn't broken
but simply unfinished
We the successors of a country and a time
Where a skinny Black girl
descended from slaves and raised by a single mother
can dream of becoming president
only to find herself reciting for one
And yes we are far from polished
far from pristine
but that doesn't mean we are
striving to form a union that is perfect
We are striving to forge a union with purpose
To compose a country committed to all cultures, colors, characters and
conditions of man
And so we lift our gazes not to what stands between us
but what stands before us
We close the divide because we know, to put our future first,
we must first put our differences aside
We lay down our arms
so we can reach out our arms
to one another
We seek harm to none and harmony for all
Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true:
That even as we grieved, we grew
That even as we hurt, we hoped
That even as we tired, we tried
That we'll forever be tied together, victorious
Not because we will never again know defeat
but because we will never again sow division
Scripture tells us to envision
that everyone shall sit under their own vine and fig tree
And no one shall make them afraid
If we're to live up to our own time
Then victory won't lie in the blade
But in all the bridges we've made
That is the promise to glade
The hill we climb
If only we dare
It's because being American is more than a pride we inherit,
it's the past we step into
and how we repair it
We've seen a force that would shatter our nation
rather than share it
Would destroy our country if it meant delaying democracy

And this effort very nearly succeeded
But while democracy can be periodically delayed
it can never be permanently defeated
In this truth
in this faith we trust
For while we have our eyes on the future
history has its eyes on us
This is the era of just redemption
We feared at its inception
We did not feel prepared to be the heirs
of such a terrifying hour
but within it we found the power
to author a new chapter
To offer hope and laughter to ourselves
So while once we asked,
how could we possibly prevail over catastrophe?
Now we assert
How could catastrophe possibly prevail over us?
We will not march back to what was
but move to what shall be
A country that is bruised but whole,
benevolent but bold,
fierce and free
We will not be turned around
or interrupted by intimidation
because we know our inaction and inertia
will be the inheritance of the next generation
Our blunders become their burdens
But one thing is certain:
If we merge mercy with might,
and might with right,
then love becomes our legacy
and change our children's birthright
So let us leave behind a country
better than the one we were left with
Every breath from my bronze-pounded chest,
we will raise this wounded world into a wondrous one
We will rise from the gold-limbed hills of the west,
we will rise from the windswept northeast
where our forefathers first realized revolution
We will rise from the lake-rimmed cities of the midwestern states,
we will rise from the sunbaked south
We will rebuild, reconcile and recover
and every known nook of our nation and

every corner called our country,
our people diverse and beautiful will emerge,
battered and beautiful
When day comes we step out of the shade,
afame and unafraid
The new dawn blooms as we free it
For there is always light,
if only we're brave enough to see it
If only we're brave enough to be it

The United Strings of Color's Day of Enlightenment Violin Vigil will end with the Shaker song **Simple Gifts** followed by Black Violin's **Shaker**.

Special remarks by Roger Floyd, Uncle of George Floyd.

Partner remarks by Tolulope Omokaiye, My Brothers and Sisters Keeper, Wake

The United Strings of Color is sponsored by the non-profit Philharmonic Association and was begun in 2018 by Margaret Partridge to address racial disparity in classical music. The Philharmonic Association is supported by funds from the City of Raleigh, based on recommendations of the Raleigh Arts Commission, and United Arts Council of Raleigh and Wake County, with funds from the United Arts Campaign as well as the North Carolina Arts Council, a division of the Department of Cultural Resources.