



PRESS

KIT 2024



www.peaceoratorio.org

CONCEPT

MUSICAL / CULTURAL / HISTORICAL / SOCIAL

« BY INFUSING A CLASSICAL MUSIC VEHICLE, SUCH AS AN ORATORIO, WITH REGGAE, POP, GOSPEL AND JAZZ-INFLUENCED SONGS, I AM BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER BY TEARING DOWN THE BARRIERS BETWEEN "CLASSICAL" MUSIC AND "POPULAR" MUSIC. I ALSO WISH TO RAISE THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF YOUNGER GENERATIONS ON THIS MAJOR 20TH CENTURY PEACE MESSENGER, WHO FOUGHT EPIC BATTLES AND SACRIFICED HIS LIFE SO THAT WE CAN ALL LIVE IN A MORE EQUAL AND JUST SOCIETY. I HOPE THAT THIS PIECE WILL HELP PEOPLE TO OPEN UP THEIR HEARTS ».

John Meldrum



PEACE ORATORIO celebrates the life of **Martin Luther King** and a vision of the world where we can live and sing together in "Peace, Freedom and Justice". It unites communities and generations singing a powerful message of brotherhood. It promotes diversity and fights discrimination through music.

This project incorporates an educational element with John Meldrum's participation in music classes and recreation centers in elementary schools and junior high schools that allows young people to discover singing while making rhythm, participating and having fun while learning English. The story of Peace Oratorio is dedicated to raising consciousness of citizenship in a just society by teaching about the Civil Rights movement from the '50's and '60's in the USA and using this knowledge to fight against all forms of discrimination today and in the future.

The PEACE ORATORIO by John Meldrum is a cycle of compositions for 10 soloists, choir, string orchestra, French horn, trumpet and a band (acoustic, electric and classical guitars, drums, stand up and electric bass, percussion, Hammond Organ and Fender Rhodes).

17 songs based on themes progressing from oppression to despair and finally hope. The guiding thread is a narrative based on the life and work of Martin Luther King.



SYNOPSIS

After a narrative and instrumental prelude, the first song « **Peace, Freedom, Justice** » opens the show with a sort of Mantra of the Oppressed, a theme that reappears with the Gospel and Negro Spiritual flavours in « **Down To The River** » and « **Talk To The Angels** ».

« **Yaweh** » gives hope for better days. In the darkness of the night, Michael Robinson personifies the fighting spirit and the courage of Martin Luther King's struggle in « **I'll Be There With You** » whereas the song « **United We Stand** » extols universal love and the unity of different peoples the world over. Julie Cavalleri follows accompanied by an ensemble of strings with the exotic sounds of « **Fertila** » before leaving her place to the sublime Natalie Baer-Gond, who interprets the reggae influenced « **Cover Me** ».

Act 2 begins with the euphoric « **Happy Feet** » which celebrates in a catchy High Life rhythm the victorious march on Washington for civil rights in August 1963.

« **Forever Free** » is a lyrical variation on Martin Luther King's famous speech « **I Have A Dream** ». The poetic ballad « **Walking A Wounded** » invites the follower to keep reaching on the painful path to freedom whereas « **Jezebel And The Infidel** » stages Martin Luther King's assassination with accents of ancient Greek tragedy.

Portia Solani Manyike marks this moment in « **Long Live The King** » with an uplifting South African influenced dance that is energized by the magnificent Djembé solo performed by percussionist Patrick Gorce.

The Polyson choir celebrates the heart-breaking farewell of « **Now They Belong To The Ages** » interpreted by Cy Plotel who seems to be an angel of reconciliation...

The cycle concludes on the vision of a fraternal world heralded by the song « **Brother Brother** » with John Meldrum.

« **Big City Of Peace** » closes Act 2 in a burst of fraternal energy and joy.

PEACE ORATORIO ACT 1

Instrumental prelude - Narration by Curtis Robert Young

PEACE, FREEDOM, JUSTICE Portia Solani Manyike, Lisa Arscott, Jessie Lee Houllier

DOWN TO THE RIVER The Highlites Chorale

YAWEH Julie Cavalleri, Eric Francoiseau

I'LL BE THERE WITH YOU Michael Robinson

UNITED WE STAND Johnny Stein

FERTILA François Michaud, Mathilde Febrer violins, Alain Grange cello, Paul Susen alto

TALK TO THE ANGELS Ken Kuriki, Juliette Marty, Jessie Lee Houllier

COVER ME Natalie Baer-Gond

PEACE ORATORIO ACT 2

HAPPY FEET Anna Louise Spencer, Michael Robinson, Alexis Didier, François Michaud

FOREVER FREE Joniece Jamison, John Meldrum

WALKING A WOUNDED Natalie Baer-Gond, Michael Robinson

ELEGY Guitar solo John Meldrum

JEZEBEL AND THE INFIDEL Lisa Arscott, Jessie Lee Houllier, Gilles Erhart, Romain Bly

LONG LIVE THE KING Portia Solani Manyike, Patrick Gorce, Jean-Baptiste Gbadoe, Sacha Lounis,

Lisa Arscott, Christian Duperray, Alexis Didier, Gilles Erhart, Romain Bly

NOW THEY BELONG TO THE AGES Cy Plotel, Les Polysons, Alexis Didier

BROTHER, BROTHER John Meldrum and the Highlites

BIG CITY OF PEACE Joniece Jamison, Portia Solani Manyike and the choir

Lyrics & music : John Meldrum

Texts : John Meldrum (translation : Claire Domenget)

BIOGRAPHY JOHN MELDRUM

/ **Guitarist**
/ **Singer - Songwriter**
/ **Composer**
/ **Choirmaster**
/ **Music Teacher**

John Meldrum is putting all his talents together to create his most ambitious work, PEACE ORATORIO, performed in October 2012 on the stage of the Alhambra theater in Paris and broadcast in part on the French national radio France Culture.

Originally from Cleveland, Ohio, John Meldrum did a five year stint in the jingle business there but grew tired of the relentlessness of advertising music, so he left America in search of something else, a different way to live. John won second prize in the Billboard song contest with the instrumental Samba del Mar in 1989, but upon seeing Paris for the first time, he fell in love with the City of Lights, and his life was never the same.

He started working in Paris playing Highlife music with Freduia Ageymang, a superb Ghanaian drummer and songwriter. John played rhythm guitar and sang with him for 5 years, the influence of this experience was to play a large role later on. In 1993/94, John wrote and recorded his first album No rules here (Melmuse). As the title suggests, the disc holds to no particular style, but explores the range of his talents in a variety of settings : rock, pop, jazz and classical guitar.

In 1995 he put together his group, Zongo Ambassadors and recorded the album Ayijah (Melmuse/Night and Day), which ranges from Highlife to pop and gospel. John's song, « Brother, Brother » was performed with 650 children from 27 countries at the UNESCO auditorium in Paris. Along the way, John was lucky enough to meet Carlos Santana, Salif Keita, Cheick Tidiane Seck, Tony Allen, Flea, Daymon Albarn, Max Roach, Jacques Higelin, Jean-Philippe Rykiel and Nana Danso and Madeleine Peyroux. Produced by Pierre-Jean Gaucher, the French Jazz guitarist and composer, Long Live Love was John's latest album in 2006



with concerts in Paris, London and the USA.

John created his choir John Meldrum and the Soulways in 1999, and they now perform as « John Meldrum and the Highlites ». John is also a singing teacher and music group coach at the ATLA school of modern music in Paris.

John received his first commission in 2009 to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the choir festival Voix sur Berges. He composed a 13 minute work in Latin, French and English entitled « The River of Love » with over 200 singers and 6 musicians.

His music is featured in the documentary «GrandPa Was a Freedom Rider» by the young French film maker Martial Buisson.

He has also written and produced the album «Indiana» by French-Italian singer Julie Cavaleri.

THE ARTISTS

JOHN MELDRUM AND THE HIGHLITES Choir

John Meldrum and the Highlites was founded in 1999. The choir gets together with amateur and professional choir singers who share the same passion for singing and who participate all together to varied events : festivals, street concerts...



CURTIS ROBERT YOUNG Narrator

American author, historian and thinker at the University Paris IV, Curtis Robert Young is specialised in History of France and slavery. He is the narrator of Peace Oratorio, in French and in English.



JONIECE JAMISON Soprano

Joniece Jamison is an American singer. She has sung concerts and done recordings with a host of artists including Elton John, Jean-Jacques Goldman, Daniel Balavoine, Catherine Lara and Michel Sardou. She has shared the stage with François Feldman in the chart topping duets "Joue Pas " and "J'ai Peur ". She has dedicated much of her career to Gospel music including an album released in 1994 entitled "Dream in Color". With Philippe Cataldo, Phil Barney and DJ Cyprien Rose, Joniece Jamison performed on the occasion of the grand opening of the new Parisian concert hall "Moods" in the 13th quarter. "Her voice and stage presence amazed the public".



THE ARTISTS

ANNA-LOUISE SPENCER Soprano

Originally from England (Yorkshire), Anna has lived in France for seven years working in administrative capacities. Passionate about music since a young age, Anna started out on the violin before taking on the guitar. It was at university that Anna started singing seriously and she was offered roles in the musical « Grease » and « The Blues Sisters ».



LISA EDMONDSON Alto

Originally from Jamaica, Lisa Edmondson is an experienced actress and a talented singer. As a founding member of Zongo Ambassadors, she has toured throughout Europe and recorded the album "Ayijah" with John Meldrum. Currently Lisa composes, sings and plays bass for the indie rock band "Terranovacaine". They released their first album "Burner" in 2012.

John has composed the song "Jezebel and the Infidel" from Peace Oratorio especially for Lisa which she sings while playing the Talking Drum from Ghana.



PORTIA SOLANI MANYIKE Alto

South African Gospel singer and dancer Portia has interpreted the role of Raffiki in the musical "The Lion King" at the Mogador theater. She was recently in the French film "Stars 80" as the background singer for the Gilbert Montagné. She also has a personal project "Abangani" that has had numerous concerts in Paris. Starting in January 2013, Portia has been selected to be a featured artist in a touring production of "The Lion King" in Brazil. John has specially composed the song "Long Live The King" in Peace Oratorio for this multi-talented artist.



THE ARTISTS



NATALIE BAER-GOND
Soprano

Natalie Baer-Gond is an American singer originally from the state of New York. She spent 6 years training in New York City as an opera singer, and has since moved to Paris where she is currently singing with various groups, including her own group Swimming for Freedom. She has been singing with John Meldrum for 6 years.



JULIE CAVALIERI
Soprano

Young Franco-Italian woman born in 1986, Julie has had a passion for music since childhood. She has been studying singing, accordion, piano and classical composition in Strasbourg, Rome and Paris. She has released her first album "Indiana" (composed, arranged and produced by John Meldrum), containing songs in French, Italian and English in May 2010.



JESSIE LEE HOULLIER
Soprano

Born in 1993, Jessie Lee started singing and playing the guitar at the age of six years old. Her musical environment allowed her to blossom very early on the stage and in the studio, notably with the musicians of Dr Z Oliver and The Little Desert Blues Band. Her stay at the ATLA music school in Paris has allowed her to collaborate with Gilles Erhart, Pierre Chérère, John Meldrum...

THE ARTISTS

JOHN MELDRUM

Tenor



Guitarist, singer-songwriter, John MELDRUM is the leader of the Highlites Choir, and composer of The PEACE ORATORIO.

MICHAEL ROBINSON

Tenor



Michael Robinson comes from Chicago and has sung in Gospel and Rhythm and Blues groups in Paris for many years. He is currently recording and touring with the French harmonicist J.J. Milteau. Michael's voice can also be heard on many dance music hits. The song «I'll Be There With You» has been specifically composed for Michael's voice.

KEN KURIKI

Tenor



Born to Japanese parents in 1981 in Senlis, France (Oise), Ken started singing when he was 13 years old. He sang in many pop rock/hard rock/métal bands. Songwriter, Ken also plays cello and piano. He is a member of the Highlites for 5 years.

THE ARTISTS

CY PLOTEL The young soprano

Cy Plotel is the rising star of the cast in Peace Oratorio. His expressiveness and natural musicality shine through on the song Now They Belong to the Ages that John composed specifically for him. Cy's mother has African roots and his father is a white Englishman ; we feel he incarnates the hope for better understanding between races and cultures.

Since 2006, Cy has participated in the Highlites choir directed by John Meldrum who also gives him private singing lessons. He has studied music at the Montreuil Conservatory and joined the stage choir of the CREA directed by Didier Grosjman where he has participated in the production of the children's opera «Les Sales Mômes» presented in October 2010. In September 2010, Cy entered the prestigious Maîtrise de Paris where he currently studies music as well as a normal curriculum.



THE POLYSONS CHOIR

The Polysons choir was started in 1994 by Marc and Elisabeth Trigo. It is today an active association which brings together children essentially from the Belleville quarter in Paris. There are forty singers in the group. Most of them do not read music, but a passion for singing together, under the rigorous yet gentle direction of Elisabeth Trigo, have given them a musical level that has taken them to sing in the most prestigious places (Comédie Française, Ministry of Culture, l'Opéra Garnier... and even to the Stade de France in front of 65,000 spectators for Bizet's opera «Carmen»).



THE MUSICIANS



GILLES ERHART
Musical codirector

Gilles Erhart accompanied the French star Alain Souchon for many years as well as many other artists. Gilles teaches keyboards and directs band workshops at the ATLA school in Paris. His performance on the Fender Rhodes and the Hammond Organ in Peace Oratorio is particularly impressive.

JOHN MELDRUM
Guitarist

Guitarist, singer-songwriter, John MELDRUM is the leader of the Highlites Choir, and composer of The PEACE ORATORIO.



PATRICK GORCE
Percussionist

For over 30 years, Patrick Gorce has accompanied over 100 artists and groups with whom he has toured in Europe, the United States, in Africa and the Middle East. A passionate expert of world rhythms and instruments, Patrick has created an ingenious and knowledgeable blend of styles for Peace Oratorio. He has also written a percussion method based on his multiple experiences.



ALEXIS DIDIER
Musical codirector

Alexis Didier is an eclectic electric guitarist. He is the singer and guitarist in several blues groups that carry his stage name Mr AL. He also accompanies French singers (such as Marie Guerraz), produces and arranges groove songs (Guillaume Honoré), composes music for the theater (Je d'Ombre et de Lumière, les Déchargeurs with Flora Cannell), and he co-composed and arranged an album for Kalash. He is also a guitar teacher at the ATLA music school where he teaches Blues and Jazz.



ROMAIN BLY
Trumpet player
Horn player

Romain is a classically trained musician in trumpet and French Horn. He received First Prize at the Conservatory of Rueil-Malmaison for French Horn and chamber music and graduated with honors from the CRR in Paris. On the trumpet, he is a member of the group "Les Gars Dans Le Coin" which has toured in France and Europe for 6 years. Romain currently lives in Rotterdam where he is studying at the CODARTS conservatory.

CONCERTS

IN 2012 / 2013...

- / **Dorothy's Gallery** - March 22nd 2013
- / **Jardin d'Acclimatation** - April 7th 2013
- / **FIAP Jean Monnet** - May 7th 2013
- / **Maisons d'arrêt de Villepinte et Centre pénitentiaire sud Francilien de Réau**
(with the association «Relais Enfants Parents») - December 2012 / January 2013
- / **Stéphane Hessel's birthday for the association La Voix De l'Enfant** - December 2012
- / **Forum de la Bellevilloise** - November 2012
- / **Alhambra** (afternoon for 550 children / sold Out for the paying public) - October 17th 2012
- / **Mairie du XXème arrondissement de Paris** - October 2012

...AND BEFORE !

- / **Peace Oratorio à l'Alhambra** - Benefit concert for the Association Beit Ham - October 2011
- / **Festival Rencontres chorales de Paris Théâtre Jemmapes** - 2008, 2009, 2010
- / **Voca'lib à la Maison des Pratiques Artistiques Amateurs (MPAA)**
Auditorium de St. Germain des Prés - September 2010
- / **Place du Trocadéro avec les Polysons** - September 2010
- / **Fête de la Musique parvis de la Mairie du 20e arrondissement** - June 2010
- / **Creation John Meldrum of «The River of Love»** in latin, french and english for the 15th anniversary of the festival Voix sur Berges with 250 singers and 6 musicians - June 2010, 2011, 2012
- / **Espace Jemmapes Rencontres Chorales de Paris** - March 2009 - The first representation of Peace Oratorio
- / **"Brother, Brother"** final song for the festival VOIX SUR BERGES sang by 1000 singers - 2008, 2009

THEY SAID :

(...) The talent, the energy, the enthusiasm, the creativity, truly well done. Two African-American colleagues from the embassy came with me and we all had a ball ! (...)

Sophie Nadeau

Cultural Affairs Specialist
Public Affairs American Embassy Paris

(...) [Thank you to John] for his kindness and attention to our young students ; we were very open to his extraordinary artistic and teaching talents. A big BRAVO to all the Peace Oratorio group.

Jean-Pierre

CASPE 20

I am a big fan of Gospel music and being a musician myself I am very exacting about shows, but here I was blown away by the talent of John Meldrum and the musicality of the choir. It is a moment of pure joy. Bravo !!!!

Spectator of the Alhambra show

Website billettereduc.com - October 2012

I was at the rehearsals : talented musicians and singers, an inspired composer, you will not be disappointed by this uplifting show, vibrant with emotions and energy !

Spectateur Alhambra

Website billettereduc.com - October 2012

OUR PARTNERS

MAIRIE DE PARIS 

Mairies des 10ème, 19ème, 20ème arrondissements



Les Services Culturels de l'Ambassade
des Etats-Unis d'Amérique



Le CRL 10

espace *Jemmaïpes*
LA SCÈNE DU CANAL

CE Microsoft
EMEA



LE MOUVEMENT DE LA PAIX

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