



SCHOOL OF MUSIC, THEATRE & DANCE

GEORGE SHIRLEY VOCAL COMPETITION

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Welcome Concert

Program of Songs and Spirituals by African American Composers
May 16, 2025 | 7:00 p.m. | Britton Recital Hall

15th Annual George Shirley Vocal Competition
The University of Michigan
School of Music, Theatre, and Dance

Introduction by Louise Toppin, Director and co-founder of GSVC

Introduction by Professor Stephen West, Chair of Voice and Opera, SMTD

Welcome from The University of Michigan, School of Music, Theatre and Dance

Dr. Christi-Anne Castro, Associate Professor of Music (Musicology)
Associate Dean for Faculty Development.

“The Heart of a Woman”

H. Leslie Adams

Sloane O’Neill, soprano; Sarah Thune, piano
2024 George Shirley Competition 2nd place High School winner

Introduction to Denyce Graves Foundation’s Shared Voice Program

Dr. Christine Jobson McMillian, Shared Voices Program Coordinator
2019 George Shirley Competition 1st place Pre-Professional winner

“Lyric for True Love”

Undine Smith Moore

“Golden Days” from *Costaso*

William Grant Still

Amber Rogers, soprano; Muse Ye, piano
2024 George Shirley Competition, 1st place College winner
2024 National Association of Negro Musicians, 1st place Vocal Competition winner

Introduction to the Minnesota Opera mentorship initiatives

Dr. Darius Gilliard, Vice-President, Impact for Minnesota Opera
2021 George Shirley Competition Contemporary Spiritual prize winner

World Premiere of “Umgida Ndawonye” (Rat Race)

Joshua Mthembu

The cycle story is about the rat-race, in context of the lower and middle class South African laborers who work hard but earn little, who have to be away from their loved ones. They are subjected to slavery and injustice and they are missing good times of others. They are trying to save money but it does not work. Year after year, the cycle repeats, they are still poor and they struggle until they age and become disposable. This cycle was written in 2024 for Wayne Mkhize.



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Umgida Ndawonye (Rat Race)

Ithemba Alibulali
Nsuku Zaphuma
Yaklabalasa Induna
Ngiyisigqila nje
Mhla Siphumela Ngaphandle
Kukude Emakhaya
Lapho Kuphela Unyaka

Wayne Mkhize, tenor; John Morefield, piano

2023 George Shirley Competition, winner of the Karen Slack Commission Prize

World premiere of “Dreams”

Maria Thompson Corley

“Dreams” can be seen as a hopeful, encouraging poem, but since dreams are elusive and the world of dreams always has elements that skew reality, I chose augmented harmonies and repeated notes in the piano part to convey that the unconscious is a mysterious place. The first part of the song stays in the realm of augmented harmony to convey that dreams can, indeed, die, while the second half is more major in tonality, conveying the possibility of positive outcomes if the listeners keep their dreams alive.

There are several instances of word painting. For example, the idea of holding fast is conveyed with long notes in the vocal line, while the broken-winged bird is illustrated with bursts of "fluttering" in the piano and "barren field frozen with snow" is set with a single pitch in the lower portion of the singer's range. The use of the upper range in the voice and/or piano is meant to suggest soaring towards a higher reality. I chose to end with inspiration by leaving the listener with the idea of "holding fast" rather than the "barren field" in the original text.

Sarah Rosales, soprano; John Morefield, piano

2024 George Shirley Competition, winner of the Karen Slack Commission Prize

2024 George Shirley Competition, 2nd place Pre-Professional Winner

Concluding remarks by George Shirley, Co-founder of the GSVC

Thank you for attending the 2025 GSVC Welcome Concert.

2025 GSVC Schedule



2025 GSVC Live Updates

