



Damien Geter's *Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow*

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Damien Geter's *Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow* is a contemporary social justice work that charts an emotional journey from fear to hope in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Structured in five powerful movements, the cantata leads listeners from anxiety and uncertainty in "Fear," through the inward reflection of "The Prayer" and "Breathe," to the renewed optimism of "The Resolve" and "Hope." Geter recontextualizes elements from historical works and combines them with contemporary secular poetry to create a piece that connects time periods and communities. Scored for SATB choir with *divisi*, chamber singers (SATB quartet), cello, and vocal soloist,¹ *Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow* is a technically compelling work and a powerful expression of resilience and transformation that merits further study and performance.

Biography

Damien Geter is a multi-faceted artist. A successful opera singer, music director, conductor, artistic advisor, actor, author, teacher, and composer, he also owns his own publishing company. He has served on the music faculty at The Catlin Gabel School in Portland, Oregon, and co-authored the book *Music in Historical Context: An Examination of Western European Music Through a Socio-political Lens* with Merrin Guice.² Currently he works as music

director of Portland Opera. Geter's works have been performed by renowned orchestras, choirs, and other musical organizations throughout the United States. To date, his oeuvre includes over two dozen works in the following genres: chamber, large-scale instrumental, small-scale vocal, operatic, and choral.

Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow

The cantata was commissioned by Eugene Rogers and The Washington Chorus in 2020, in part to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the chorus and Rogers's first concert as director. The Chorus opened its 2020 fall season virtually by streaming a twenty-three-minute short film created by Emmy Award-winning filmmaker Bob Berg, which featured *Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow*, The Washington Chorus, soprano Aundi Marie Moore, and cellist Seth Parker Woods.³ Since its premiere, the cantata has been programmed by many notable organizations and university choirs.

Geter's work focuses on COVID-19, specifically the pandemic's disproportionate impact on Black Americans. The composer summarized his approach, saying, "It is a fact that the pandemic has touched the Black community in a much more aggressive manner than other communities. To highlight this atrocity, I chose to

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pay homage to the ancestors and Black Americans by incorporating spirituals in this cantata.”⁴ The text captures the emotional and psychological landscape of this historic moment while also providing a message of hope for the future.

Geter uses form, texture, harmony, and text-painting to portray the emotional character of each movement. Additionally, he recontextualizes historical elements—including Johann Sebastian Bach’s *Weinen, Klagen, Sorgen, Zagen*, BWV 12; the spirituals “I Want Jesus to Walk With Me” and “There is a Balm in Gilead”; and the Charles Albert Tindley hymn “We’ll Understand It Better By and By,” and combines them with poetry of Megan Levad, Aminata Sei, and Walt Whitman to bridge past and present struggles. Megan Levad is a poet, librettist, professor, and author of the books *Why We Live in the Dark Ages*⁵ and *What Have I to Say to You*.⁶ Aminata Sei is a writer and social justice advocate whose work explores themes of resilience, equity, and cultural identity. Walt Whitman was an American poet, essayist, and journalist, celebrated for creating a style of free verse that included “oratorical rhythms and chanted lists of American places, names, and objects.”⁷

The title of each movement represents a state of being or an action that occurs during times of difficulty. Fear is a natural response to hardship and is often manifested physically as well as emotionally. Prayer is a practice embraced across religions and is a way to seek comfort and guidance in the face of adversity. Breathing is an important component of many meditation practices and can mitigate anxiety by calming the body and mind. Resolve refers to a firm determination to act. Hope is the belief that despite difficulties, a positive outcome is possible. It can lead to a sense of peace and optimism. The journey from fear to hope is amplified in numerous ways throughout the work, specifically through harmony, tempo, and the organization of texts (Table 1).

I. Fear

The first movement is set in a large, two-part form with an introduction and a coda and features the sacred poetry of Salomo Franck and the secular poetry of Megan Levad (Table 2 on the next page).

Geter sets the first three of four lines in Franck’s text, drawing from the second movement of BWV 12. Levad’s text comprises eight stanzas in free verse. In the

Table 1. Overview of *Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow*

	I. Fear	II. The Prayer	III. Breathe	IV. The Resolve	V. Hope
Text Sources	Salomo Franck and Megan Levad	Traditional spiritual, “I Want Jesus to Walk With Me”	Aminata Sei	Traditional spiritual, “There is a Balm in Gilead,” and hymn, “By and By”	Walt Whitman
Key areas	Fm	Fm	D Dorian → C	Eb	Ab
Tempo Range	60 bpm	56-65 bpm	55-70 bpm	55-72 bpm	70-100 bpm
Overall message	Fear and Struggle	Yearning for Comfort	Perseverance	Healing	Transformation

first stanza, Levad references humanity's attempts to tame forces of nature: "the fire, the flood, the mountain, and its bear." She includes a directive to "look everywhere" for these potential threats, emphasizing the constant awareness required to navigate life's challenges. Levad suggests that instead of looking outward for dangers, people should look inward for calm and strength. Persistence is another central theme of her poem, and it is underscored by the lines "we are born to trouble, we are built for trouble." This suggests that although challenges are intrinsic to the human experience, people can overcome them. The theme of persistence emerges again in the lines "we seek, we seek, we seek and reach" from the third stanza. The repetition of the word "seek" suggests the necessity of continued action to navigate difficulties.

In the introduction, Geter employs parody technique, borrowing the texture of the second movement of BWV 12 from the beginning through m. 44. There are three differences between Bach's setting and the parody. First, the second viola part is omitted. Second, Bach's continuo line is set for solo cello. Third, the chamber singer parts are arrangements of Bach's other instrumental

parts, excluding the second viola (soprano – violin 1, alto – violin 2, tenor – viola 1, and bass – bassoon). The SATB choral parts are the same in both works. Geter also sets Franck's text in the chamber singer parts, even though they are derived from instrumental parts. The text of the chamber singer parts corresponds to the text in the choir in any given section throughout the introduction. The syllables of each word are separated with a rest, which creates a feeling of breathlessness (Figure 1 on the next page).

Bach's setting features a four-bar *lamento basso* pattern that appears twelve times. Geter sets the figure eleven times in the introduction, cadencing after the eleventh iteration. The *lamento basso* is featured in each of the five movements of the cantata, creating thematic unity, although it is often transformed (transposed, inverted, in retrograde, etc.).

The A section opens with a two-measure passage for solo cello, while the voices whisper "fear," a textual addition, corresponding with the title of the movement. There are a variety of textures in the A section, including contrapuntally enlivened homophony, paired

Table 2. Musical overview of "Fear"

	Intro	A	B	A'	B'	Coda
Measures	1-45	46-62	63-73	74-85	86-94	95-97
Stanzas	Franck text	Levad 1-2, "Fear"	Levad 3-4	Levad 5-6	Levad 7-8 (lines 1-2)	Levad 8 (lines 3-4)
Forces	SATB choir, chamber sing- ers, cello	SATB choir (<i>divisi</i>), cello				
Meter	3/2	2/2	2/2, 3/4	2/2, 4/4, 6/4	2/2, 4/4	4/4
Tempo	Lento, H=60			Sostenuto, Q=60, H=60		Q=60

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voicings, and canonic writing. The frequent change of texture contributes to a sense of anxiety throughout the movement.

Text-painting is another important compositional approach that is employed to great effect in this movement. Where the text references floods and mountains, the bass is juxtaposed in its low range and the soprano in its upper range, painting the images referenced in the text. The words “we seek and reach” are set in sequential, cascading long notes, representing the persistence necessary to reach the desired outcome. Consecutive quarter-note triplets convey the dragging nature of the

“long day.”

Geter draws particular attention to two lines of text. At “the closest breath,” the composer indicates a *ritardando*, giving special attention to its reference to the transmission of COVID-19. In the last few measures of the movement, he highlights the text “and try and dream,” set in the altos alone, and ends the movement with a C major chord, foreshadowing the hope later in the work.

II. The Prayer

“The Prayer” is scored for SSAATTBB choir, soloist, and cello and is set in theme and variations form with

Lento ♩ = 60

The musical score is for Movement 1, "Fear," measures 1-5. It is in 3/2 time, Lento (60 bpm), and has a key signature of three flats. The score is for a chamber choir (Soprano Solo, Alto Solo, Tenor Solo, Bass Solo) and a full choir (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass). It also includes a cello part (Vlc.). The lyrics are: "Wei - nen, Kla - gen, Sor - gen, Za - gen, Wei - nen, Kla - gen, Sor - gen, Wei - Za - gen,". Dynamics include *mp* (mezzo-piano) and *mf* (mezzo-forte).

Figure 1. Damien Geter, *Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow*, Movement 1, “Fear,” mm. 1–5.

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four sections (Table 3).

The second movement of *Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow* features the tune and the text of the spiritual “I Want Jesus to Walk With Me.” In the text, the speaker expresses a desire for Jesus’s presence throughout their life, which they describe as a “pilgrim journey.” The speaker asks for Jesus during moments of profound hardship, when their emotional burden becomes overwhelming, with the words, “In my trials, Lord, walk with me.” In the context of the cantata, the inclusion of this spiritual represents the profound struggles people faced during 2020, particularly early in the pandemic when death tolls and hospitalizations were rapidly rising and governmental lockdowns were occurring. Geter explains: “This spiritual was on my heart at the time.... I kept singing it...before I had even been asked to write the piece.”⁸

Section A begins with the soloist (Geter calls this “the voice of hope”⁹) singing the melody with embellishments. The choral parts have short, improvisatory phrases with fragmented or reordered text. By setting the music in this way, Geter emulates the church music of his youth while also intensifying the feeling of yearning.¹⁰

In Section C, the tenors and basses sing an ostinato pattern, repeating the phrase, “Walk with me.” The tenor and bass 1 parts interject “Please walk with me”; the bass 2 part remains consistent throughout. The melodic line moves to the soprano 1 part, while the so-

prano 2 and alto parts harmonize homophonically. The melodic phrases are separated with rests, evoking a feeling of breathlessness reminiscent of the first movement.

The movement features varied textures, including non-imitative polyphony, duets, and trios in Sections A and B, homophonic and contrapuntal textures in Section C, and quarter-note ostinatos that are contrasted with sustained whole notes in Section D. Unlike the first movement, in which frequent textural shifts evoke anxiety, the changes in this movement express a deep yearning and desire for comfort and represent numerous prayers happening simultaneously, reflecting the central theme of “The Prayer.”

III. Breathe

“Breathe” is scored for SSAATTBB choir and cello, and the movement is set in modified rondo form with four main sections (Table 4 on the next page).

It features the text of Aminata Sei’s poem of the same name. The poem comprises four stanzas and is set in free verse. Although some stanzas have slant rhymes (words that have similar—but not identical—sounds), Sei shares, “I can’t really say [I] took into account rhyme or any conventional use of literary devices. I just wrote then what sounded good to me.”¹¹ The final line in each stanza concludes with the word “breathe,” creating a sense of thematic unity and structural symmetry.

The text begins with a feeling of simplicity for the text “no complex expectations.” Here, the directive is

Table 3. Musical overview of “The Prayer”

	A (Theme)	B (Variation 1)	C (Variation 2)	D (Variation 3)
Measures	1-15	16-32	33-52	53-63
Stanza	1	2	1	1 fragmented
Meter	4/4	4/4, 2/4	3/4	4/4, 3/4
Tempo	Q=65		Pesante, Q=56	

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"Just breathe." The tone changes in the second stanza as "disruptions" make even the natural act of breathing difficult: "Now we don't know how to breathe." The third stanza reflects a loss of confidence and hope with the words, "shaken" and "stirred"; however, Sei encourages the reader: "We must continue to breathe." The final stanza urges the reader to turn inward to regain a sense of peace. The final line recalls the end of the first stanza, "Learn again to just breathe." Sei uses "breathe" in a literal way but also as a metaphor for finding balance and strength during difficult times.

Musically, Geter begins this movement with a four-measure passage for solo cello followed by staggered vocal entrances, with multiple repetitions of "Just breathe." The repeated figures evoke calming self-talk. The melody enters but is obscured by the simultaneous polyphony. At the climax of the B section, Geter repeats the text, "don't know how to breathe," setting it homophonically as duplets in compound meter, and culminates the phrase with a cluster chord, underscoring the anxiety expressed in the text (Figure 2 on the next page).

Geter uses various compositional techniques throughout the movement to illustrate the text. In the A sections, he employs two extended techniques in the cello part: *tonlos* and harmonics, *sul D*. *Tonlos*, described

by Geter in the score, is playing, "On the bridge, creating a breathy, non-pitched effect," representing the struggle for breath one might experience when stricken with COVID-19. Harmonics, set in a steady, repeated pattern, evoke the sound of a hospital monitor.

Most of the movement is set in the Dorian mode, and Geter frequently employs dissonance as well as high vocal registers to create a feeling of anxiety. The vocal lines in various combinations clash at the interval of a second (sometimes displaced by an octave). The soprano 1 part remains in a high register, often around D5–F5. Geter further illustrates the text with moments of word painting, such as "shaken" and "stirred," which he sets with rapid sixteenth-note triplets.

In Section D, the key changes to C major, reflecting the more hopeful text of the final stanza. Here, Geter uses more traditional triadic harmonies and employs a more conventional chord progression, suggesting stability. The concluding A' section features long, melismatic soprano lines that oscillate between C and D and create a feeling of suspension. Although this final section is in the key of C, the movement ends with a sustained G pitch in the altos and the cello, again employing *tonlos*. By ending the movement this way, the composer captures both glimpses of hope and the lingering uncertainty that characterize this middle movement.

Table 4. Musical overview of "Breathe"

	A	B	A'	C	D	A''
Measures	1-23	24-35	36-43	44-60	61-77	78-94
Stanza	1	2	1 (line 4)	3 & 2 (line 4)	4	1 (line 4)
Key	D Dorian				C major	
Meter	2/4	6/8	2/4	2/4, 4/4, 4/8, 2/8	4/4, 2/4	3/4, 4/4
Tempo	Q=55	DQ=70	Q=55	Q=70	Q=62	

IV. The Resolve

Like the second movement, “The Resolve” is scored for SATB choir with *divisi*, chamber singers, soloist, and cello. The movement features an introduction and a coda, with the majority of the movement made up of the melodies from “There is a Balm in Gilead.” The spiritual is set in the traditional verse-refrain form, beginning with the refrain, with a repeat of the refrain after the second verse. Geter sets the refrain of “By and By” in the transitional section before the coda (Table 5 on the next page).

The text of “There is a Balm in Gilead” has numerous references to healing. This healing is not just for

physical wounds but also for deeper emotional and spiritual pain. The overall message is that, despite struggle and hardship, healing can be found in the holy spirit and the support of others. Geter notes, “I can’t think of any other spiritual that...talks about the trajectory of going from fear and despair to hope.... There’s something that’s going to help soothe your soul.”¹²

Tindley’s hymn text includes four verses, each with the same refrain. Only the refrain text and tune are used in this work. Geter changes Tindley’s second line from “All the saints of God are gathered home” to “All of us are here together as one,” which allows the message in the hymn to be universal. In “By and By,” the

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S cer - tain - ty e - merge we don't know how to breathe. Don't know how to breathe.

A don't know how to breathe. Don't know how to breathe.

A tain - ty Now we don't know how to breathe. We don't know how to breathe.

T merge... we don't know how to breathe. Don't know how to breathe.

B cer - tain - ty, we don't know how to breathe. Don't know how to breathe.

B merge Now we don't know how to breathe. Don't know how to breathe.

Vlc.

Figure 2. Damien Geter, *Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow*, Movement 3, “Breathe,” mm. 31–35.

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speaker looks forward to a future time of unity and clarity. In the context of this work, the line “when the morning comes” symbolizes optimism and new beginnings. Geter comments that the text in “By and By” does not shy away from “the fact that we went through [the events of 2020], but also...[recognizes] that we did get through this and understand the reasons why this happened later.”¹³

In this movement, Geter allows the spiritual and hymn to speak for themselves, presenting each separately before returning to the peace of “There is a Balm in Gilead” in the coda. While he incorporates modern harmonic language, the composer remains faithful to the mode, melody, phrase lengths, rhythm, and texts of the source materials. One exception to the authentic treatment is his inclusion of cello in a traditionally unaccompanied genre. The cello plays continuously throughout the refrains and verses, often with

legato eighth-note passages, providing harmonic support. The cello writing in this movement is notably the most lyrical in the cantata so far, marking a significant shift toward a more hopeful tone.

In the first refrain, the altos sing the melody, while the other choral parts harmonize with the full text or text fragments in contrapuntally enlivened homophony. For the second refrain, the soloist joins the altos on the melody and has a sixteenth-note embellishment on the word “balm.”¹⁴ The third refrain is closely related to the first two but has more variation. The fourth refrain is different from the first three in several ways: the melody returns to the soloist while the chamber singers replace the choir and harmonize polyphonically at a *mezzo piano*; the harmonization is more dissonant for the chamber singers, with reverse pedal tones in the soprano line. In addition, the *lamento basso* returns in the tenor line. Geter also acknowledges the structure

Table 5. Musical overview of “The Resolve”

	Intro	A	B	A'	B'	A''	A'''	C	C'	Coda
Source Materials		There is a Balm in Gilead Refrain	There is a Balm in Gilead Verse 1	There is a Balm in Gilead Refrain	There is a Balm in Gilead Verse 2	There is a Balm in Gilead Refrain	There is a Balm in Gilead Refrain	By and By Refrain		There is a Balm in Gilead Refrain fragment
Measures	1-4	5-12	13-20	5-12 repeat	13-20 repeat	21-28	29-35	36-51	36-55	56-62
Forces	SATB choir, cello		SATB choir, solo, cello				Chamber singers, cello	SATB choir, cello	SATB choir, CS, cello	SATB choir, CS (SA), cello
Meter	3/4	4/4						2/2	2/2, 4/4	4/4
Tempo	Q=72						Q=65	Joyously, with light swing; No swing (same tempo)		Q=55

of the traditional spiritual in the verses by setting two lines of text over four measures, while incorporating a respectful treatment of the melody with only one embellishment on the word, “Spirit” (“knowledge” in the repeat). The choir sings on “Oo” and then finishes with the latter portion of text for each line, often the final word, amplifying the main part of the message. In the final lines of the first two verses, all vocal parts have the full text in a predominantly homophonic texture, suggesting unity.

“By and By” is marked “Joyously, with light swing.” Geter sets the tone for this section with syncopated eighth-note figures in the cello. He assigns the melody to the soprano and bass choral voices and indicates that the soloist should improvise while the altos and tenors sing accompaniment material, often repeating fragments of the text (Figure 3).

At the first ending, the chamber singers interject, “And by and by, oh,” Geter’s addition to the text. In the repeat of this section, the chamber singers have high, *forte* interjections, evoking excitement. The chamber singers are often offset from the choral parts in an improvisatory style. Geter notes that he consciously

included the spontaneous-sounding figures: “This is a song that we sang at church as a kid.... I remember all the inflections that people used to throw in there and everything, [and] some of them are in the piece.”¹⁵

The movement ends peacefully. The soloist sings the first half of the first phrase of “There is a Balm in Gilead,” sustaining the final note for three measures. The phrase fragments further in the soprano and alto chamber voices, repeating the text and motive, “There is a balm.” The sustained notes and gentle repetition suggest that the balm remains within reach but is not yet fully realized. This conclusion reinforces the cantata’s broader themes of resilience and the journey toward hope.

V. Hope

After four movements of tension and reflection, *Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow* comes to its final moments in the aptly titled movement, “Hope.” Like movements two and four, “Hope” is scored for SATB choir with *divisi*, soloist, and cello. It has an ABA’ form with an introduction and coda (Table 6 on the next page).

The musical score for Figure 3 shows measures 36-38 of Movement 4, "The Resolve," from *Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow*. The score is for Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), Bass (B), and Cello (Vlc.). The key signature is two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and the time signature is 2/4. The tempo/mood marking is *mf* (2nd time *f*). The lyrics are: "By and by, oh, when the morn-ing comes." The Soprano and Bass parts have a melody, while the Alto and Tenor parts provide accompaniment. The Cello part has a syncopated eighth-note figure.

Figure 3. Damien Geter, *Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow*, Movement 4, “The Resolve,” mm. 36–38.

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This movement features the poem "Continuities" by Walt Whitman.¹⁶ Whitman uses natural imagery, including aging bodies, dimming light, the sun's rise and fall, and the return of spring. This imagery helps to convey the theme of renewal and transformation that permeates this movement.

In this poem, the speaker reflects on the enduring nature of life, emphasizing that "nothing is ever really lost, or can be lost." This assertion highlights the belief in continual existence, even when appearances change or circumstances shift. Whitman describes time, space, and "the fields of Nature" as "ample," meaning that each is vast and offers the possibility of transformation and regeneration. The references to the aging body, "sluggish, aged, cold," and the dimming "light in the eye" speak about the natural progression of life, including Whitman's belief that these life forms will "duly flame again." This cyclical view of life is further affirmed in the imagery of the rising sun and the return of spring, bringing "grass and flowers and summer fruits and corn." In the context of this work, the poem suggests that although COVID-19 caused significant loss, renewal will follow and transformation is inevitable.

The first two lines of the poem are presented in the introduction, sung by the sopranos and altos in homophony. Here, the cello line evokes a dream-like quality, oscillating between an A^b and B^b in a continuous

sixteenth-note figure. The tenors are introduced high in their range in measure three, creating a light texture with the three upper voices for the hopeful text. The basses enter in the A section.

As the tempo quickens to 100 bpm in Section A, Geter revisits the opening lines of the poem, reinforcing the main message that "nothing is ever really lost." The melody is in the solo voice and the choral parts accompany it in lively, syncopated rhythms, often in eighth-note figures. The compositional approach is similar to that in the other movements. Text fragments are set in the lower choral voices, which later join the soloist to amplify the main message of the text. In this movement, the cello is treated as one of the choral voices, setting it largely in the same rhythm, which contributes to a feeling of unity. The harmonic language in this section predominantly features major chords, which sound particularly hopeful in contrast to the dissonant and extended chords used throughout much of the rest of the work.

In Section B, Geter musically highlights the stark imagery in lines six through eight of the poem. He uses a melodic major seventh interval in the soprano line, harmonized with dissonant chords to paint the harsh reality of the aging body and the dimming of life's light. Beneath this, the cello part stirs uneasily with tumultuous sixteenth notes, in stark contrast to its earlier dream-like oscillations. The composer recalls the

Table 6. Musical overview of "Hope"

	Intro	A	B	A'	Coda
Measures	1-6	7-26	27-47	48-56	57-61
Lines of Text	1-2	1-5	6-8	1, 9-10, "Hope"	1
Meter	4/4		4/4, 3/4	4/4	
Tempo	Tranquillo Q=75	Hopeful Q=100	Slightly slower Q=75, Q=100, Q=75	Q=75	Q=70

lamento basso in the bass part on the lines, “the embers left from earlier fires.” The final phrase of Section B builds to *fortissimo* at the word “rises” on a powerful tonic chord that spans four octaves, which affirms an optimistic future. The ascending melodic line and the repeated word, “continual,” create a sense of inevitability, and strongly communicate hope and renewal.

In Section A', Geter reprises the opening melodic figure, now with the text, “To frozen clods ever the spring's invisible law returns,” brilliantly creating a musical picture of the textual idea of renewal. This metaphor suggests that just as the barren earth of winter inevitably gives way to fertile soil in spring, so life's moments of strife transform into times of renewal. This theme is further emphasized by bringing back the soloist to deliver the cantata's central message: “Nothing is ever really lost.”

The coda brings the movement to a climactic moment, punctuated by the addition of the title word, “Hope!” on a strong tonic chord. Following this, the final phrase features the choir humming a tonic chord while the soloist gently reiterates for the last time, “Nothing is ever really lost.” The score indicates *diminuendo al niente* in all parts, combined with the instruction for the cello to “Continue as if moving further into the distance.” This creates a fading effect that lingers beyond the choir's release. The optional extension of the cello's ostinato contributes to the effect, with each repetition growing quieter. The cello's ostinato symbolizes the perpetual flow of life, time, and hope. These final measures encapsulate Geter's masterful portrayal of continuity and transformation. As the music gradually fades, it conveys that although individuals experience physical death, the cycle of life endures beyond what is immediately visible or perceptible.

Conclusion

Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow is a powerful musical response to the COVID-19 pandemic that charts a journey from fear to hope. The first movement, “Fear,” portrays the physical and emotional manifestations of anxiety. “The Prayer” and “Breathe,” the second and third movements, focus on meditative practices intended to calm the body and mind, while the fourth movement, “The Resolve,” and the final movement, “Hope,”

emphasize resilience and the belief in a brighter future despite present struggles. The work's contrasting textures, text-painting, and harmonic choices amplify these themes. It is a composition with universal relevance that merits attention not only for its artistic and technical excellence but also for the profound message it conveys. 

Editor's note: Composer headshot on page 68 by Rachel Hadiashar

NOTES

- ¹ The voice part of the soloist is not specified in the score; however, the range is well suited for a soprano or tenor.
- ² Merrin Guice and Damien Geter, *Music in Historical Context: An Examination of Western European Music Through a Sociopolitical Lens* (Kendall Hunt Publishing Company, 2014).
- ³ The film was produced by The Washington Chorus with executive producers Eugene Rodgers and Stephen Beaudoin. “Cantata for a More Hopeful Tomorrow,” The Washington Chorus, <https://thewashingtonchorus.org/cantata-for-a-more-hopeful-tomorrow>.
- ⁴ “A Note from Composer Damien Geter,” <https://thewashingtonchorus.org/cantata-for-a-more-hopeful-tomorrow>.
- ⁵ Megan Leivad, *Why We Live in the Dark Ages* (Tavern Books, 2014).
- ⁶ Megan Leivad, *What Have I to Say to You* (Tavern Books, 2018).
- ⁷ Gay Wilson Allen and Alexander Norman Joffares, “Walt Whitman,” Encyclopedia Britannica Online, Last updated March 2024, www.britannica.com/biography/Walt-Whitman.
- ⁸ Damien Geter, Zoom interview with author, April 2024.
- ⁹ Damien Geter, Zoom interview.
- ¹⁰ Damien Geter, Zoom interview.
- ¹¹ Aminata Sei, e-mail correspondence with author, 2024.
- ¹² Damien Geter, Zoom interview.
- ¹³ Damien Geter, Zoom interview.
- ¹⁴ The score does not specifically indicate that the soloist should join the alto line (which has the melody). However, the soloist in the premiere recording did so, and in correspondence with the author, Geter shared that this decision is up to the conductor.
- ¹⁵ Damien Geter, Zoom interview.
- ¹⁶ Walt Whitman, “Continuities,” *New York Herald* (March 20, 1888).