

Be sure to check the notes at the end.



# Rainy Days and Mondays:

**A musical lesson in life, love and grief**

Sierra College Choral Department

November 30, 2016

7:30pm

Dietrich Theater

# Sierra College Choral Department Presents:

## Sierra College Vocal Jazz

Tim Stephenson, director

Centerpiece

Lambert, Hendricks and Ross

The Nearness of You

Carmichael/Washington, Arr. Julia Dollison

Tenor Madness

Sonny Rollins, Arr. Michelle Weir

## Sierra College Choirs

Sarah McQueen Cunningham, director

Esperanto

Vince Mendoza/Kurt Elling, Arr. Kerry Marsh

Solos: Mitch Wersky, Greg McLaughlin

Sierra College Jazz Singers

In My Life

Lennon/McCartney, Arr. Greg Jasperse

Sierra College Concert Choir

Oh How Beautiful, This Finely Woven Earth

Willis-Owen/ Jasperse

Sierra College Chamber Choir

Requiem

Eliza Gilkyson, Arr. Craig Hella Johnson

Sierra College Concert Choir

Aurora

Hans Zimmer, Arr. Gavin Greenaway

Solo: Jessica Sowinski

Combined Choirs

**In Remembrance**

**Eleanor Daley**

**Sierra College Chamber Choir**

**Rainy Days and Mondays**

**Williams/Nichols Arr. Kerry Marsh**

**Sierra College Jazz Singers**

**Light of a Clear Blue Morning**     **Dolly Parton, Arr. Craig Hella Johnson**

**Solo: Jessica Sowinski**

**Sierra College Chamber Choir**

**1000 Beautiful Things**

**Annie Lennox, Arr. Craig Hella Johnson**

**Solo: Amanda Nordberg**

**Sierra College Concert Choir**

**Poor Wayfaring Stranger**

**Traditional. Arr. Swingle Singers**

**Solos: Ben Taylor and Angelina Romero**

**Vocal Percussion: Mitch Wersky**

**Bass: Cole Wersky**

**Sierra College Jazz Singers**

## **Sierra College Rhythm Section**

**Piano: Greg McLaughlin**

**Bass: Brett Cole**

**Drums: Tim Stephenson, Patrick Lema**

**Choir Accompanist**

**Haley Mitchell**

The choral department would like to thank the Interim- Dean of Liberal Arts, Lynn Mederios, Greg McLaughlin and the Sierra College Theatre staff for their continued help and support.

If this concert moved you, please consider donating this Holiday Season to one of Marsha's favorite non-profit organizations:

Sweet Dreams Foundation

<http://sweetdreams-foundation.org>

Mission of Grace

<http://www.missionofgracehaiti.org>

Reconciliation Singers Voices of Peace

<http://rsvpchoir.org>

**Sierra College Music Department**

[www.sierracollege.edu](http://www.sierracollege.edu)

or find us on Facebook

Hello and thank you for coming to *Rainy Days and Mondays: A Musical Lesson in Life, Love and Grief*. This is a deeply personal concert and I am so thankful you came to hear our/my story.

On October 8<sup>th</sup> 2015 my beautiful mother, Marsha Mills McQueen, died from septic shock at the age of 59. It is a loss I am still reeling from. I can't quite wrap my head around the fact I've lost her. My mother was the best of woman who fiercely loved her children (my brother and I) and her four granddaughters (Sha's girls). She was thrilled to know she was going to have a grandson, my boy Tanner. She died five days after we found out he was Tan Man.

This year has been one of major transition for my family and me. We've lost our compass and the glue that held us together. We have had to find a new way to forge ahead in this new life. This concert is that journey.

**Esperanto** is a light-hearted song that asks the existential questions that one asks when they haven't experienced much loss. Questions such as, Do the bees feel vertigo? When I die, where does time go? How old is old November?

When you are living life without experiencing a major loss, we often recognize relationships matter and, if we lost someone of importance, we would hurt, emotionally and physically. **In My Life** is a song that represents that idea. I knew my mom was important and, in theory, I knew my life would be shattered without her, however, I didn't understand it because "in my life, I loved her more."

As a musician and educator, I am often in situations where I must speak words of comfort to hurting souls. In **O How Beautiful This Finely Woven Earth**, the text rallies us as a race to bind together in threads of joy, grief and soul. "Give me your sorrows and I will stretch across to you," speaks to our sympathetic and hypothetical need to grieve and carry each other's burdens.

**Requiem** was written for the victims of the 2004 Tsunami that rocked much of Asia. This piece speaks to the acknowledgement and sympathy one has when they see devastation and loss on such a grand scale. It takes the message of the last song and calls the listener to respond. Hypothetically, we feel each other's loss and, with good intention, pray for those who are suffering.

**Aurora** is the event. The personal loss. It is no longer hypothetical. It is darkness and fear. This piece was written for the victims of the Aurora Colorado movie theater shooting. It is the depiction of an abrupt, painful and useless loss.

In the days and months following my Mother's death, many people would say to me, "she's still with you" or "you can feel her, right?" While sincere in their intentions, those statements didn't help. I couldn't hear her anymore. And yet, looking back, I can see that there were moments she was talking to me. I just needed to listen in a

new way. I struggled on where to place **In Remembrance** in the program. It is the voice of my mother. I decided on placing it here, because our loved ones do still speak to us in different ways. Even in the moments after they pass, they communicate with those they've left, even if we can't hear them.

I took a leave of absence after Mom passed. I was six months pregnant when she died and my doctor wanted me home. For eight months, I adjusted to life with a "new normal" without Mom. In July, I had to start asking myself if I was going to come back to work. I spoke with many family members, friends, and mentors. To my dismay, NO ONE would give me the answers. I had to figure this out on my own. My good friend, Kerry Marsh, contacted me and asked, "What's your plan?" Was I going back? Did I want to make music again? I thought long and hard and made the choice to return to my job. However, there would be some changes. I would be open and honest just like she was. After many phone/text conversations, I told Kerry I was ready and I wanted him to arrange my Mom's favorite Carpenters song, **Rainy Days and Mondays**. I told him I wanted it to be my story. He knows me. He heard my heart. His arrangement is so detailed and multifaceted, it would take an entire book to explain it...maybe some day I'll write it. What you need to know is that it symbolizes grief in song. Sometimes the chords are disjointed and don't fit, and other times there is unity, often it feels very isolated. That is grief. It's an exhausting journey filled with ugliness and beauty.

Grief for me is like a dense fog. Some days I'm surrounded with no visibility and other days it's just foggy and gloomy. **Light of a Clear Blue Morning** is the ray of light that has begun to poke through the fog as I've confronted my grief.

**1000 Beautiful Things** is a piece that speaks to the beauty of living. I've learned (and am still learning) life without Mom is beautiful. It's beautiful because she was. It's beautiful because her tenacity and integrity lives on in my sweet daughter and nieces. It's beautiful because I can see her eyes in my son. It's beautiful.

Every day, I wake up and thank God that I had a Mother who instilled her faith into my brother and I. **Poor Wayfaring Stranger** is my hope.

Again, thank you for coming to this important and healing concert. I would like to thank my beautiful and wonderful students for telling my story with such love, compassion, gentleness and humor. I asked them to do something deeply challenging and they rose to the occasion. My Mom loved millennials and so do I!

Happy Birthday, Mom. I hope you heard us tonight.

All my love,

Sarah