

Dr. Catherine Roma Women Composer Commissioning Project Information for COMMISSIONING CHOIRS

October 1, 2018



“Struggle is a never ending process. Freedom is never really won, you earn it and win it in every generation.” – Coretta Scot King

“In celebrating the 100th anniversary of the passage of the 19th amendment we must renew our efforts to protect the right for all to vote and to use that vote to create a more just and equal society”. – Dr. Catherine Roma

Background and Composition Description

“A year ago six women (an historian of American Women’s History, a musicologist, activists, and several women conductors) gathered to discuss the GALA Roma Commission in light of the upcoming 100th anniversary of the 19th Amendment giving women the right to vote. Whereas we recognize the passage of the 19th as a major event, countless women remained, and remain, disenfranchised. How might we capture the complexity of this issue in a commission? Lots of conference call meetings!

We considered work samples of many composers and decided that [Joan Szymko](#) would be the woman to carry the torch. The commission, *Lifting As We Climb*, will incorporate 3 movements which open with the current climate of voting rights today, then look back in celebration of the struggles women endured in order to win the right to vote, and finally looking ahead to ask how we can engage and activate real change for all women of all colors in this unjust and soiled world.” – **Dr. Catherine Roma**



Composition Parameters

- Joan Szymko’s composition, *Lifting As We Climb*, honors the 100th anniversary of women’s right to vote which occurred in the US in 1920 and close to this time in Canada and England.
- SSAA composition with optional piano and/or 1-2 instruments, 1 soloist and 4 story-tellers. The composition will include a choral/piano version
- Length 15-20 minutes. Three movements including spoken narrative woven through the movements.
- An accompanying school curriculum exploring the 100th anniversary of women’s right to vote will be provided. Performing choirs are encouraged to partner with local schools for collaboration and performances utilizing the curriculum as a teaching tool.

Commission Timeline

Oct 2018	Commission Consortium Applications open. Apply here .
Jan 1, 2019	Commission Applications close
Mar 2019	Commission text draft distributed to commission consortium choirs
Aug 2019	Commission and school curriculum completed and distributed to choirs
Fall 2019	Performed locally in fall 2019 and spring 2020 in collaboration with schools
July 4-8, 2020	Performed at GALA Festival 2020. Commissioning choirs arrive in Minneapolis a day early to rehearse with Joan Szymko and Cathy Roma.

Performances

The commission will be performed individually by SSAA GALA choruses in their hometowns across North America between September 2019 and June 2020 and then performed as a mass chorus at the GALA Choruses Festival in Minneapolis July 4-8, 2020 and conducted by Dr. Catherine Roma.

Any SSAA chorus that is a member GALA Choruses is eligible to apply to participate as part of this commissioning consortium. Because stage space is limited at the GALA Festival we may need to limit the number of singers for that performance but we're working creatively to solve that issue.

Participating women's choirs will

- Pay a sliding fee of \$300-750 to support the commission process. Includes score and school curriculum.
- Premiere the commission in your own city between September 2019 and June 2020
- Collaborate with at least one local school for performance and curriculum exploration.
- If possible, perform the commission as part of a mass chorus at GALA Festival 2020, as space allows. Consortium choruses will arrive a day early to work with composer, rehearse and have time to network and connect with other SSAA choruses.

Featured Composer – Joan Szymko



Joan Szymko is widely regarded as an outstanding composer of choral music in America today. Abundant lyricism, rhythmic integrity and exquisite attention to text are hallmarks of Szymko's diverse and distinctive choral writing. With a catalog of over 100 published choral works, her music is frequently heard at regional, national and international choral festivals and competitions.

The American Choral Director's Association recognized Szymko's lasting impact on the choral arts in America by awarding her the prestigious Raymond W. Brock Memorial Commission in 2010. In addition to the works published on this site, Joan Szymko's choral works are found in the catalogs of Santa Barbara Music Publishing, Roger Dean Publishing, Walton Music earthsongs, Treble Clef Press and Yelton Rhodes Music. She is a founding member of the Independent Music Publishers Cooperative. More at www.joanszymko.com/about

Questions may be addressed to Jane Ramseyer Miller AD@GalaChoruses.org

About Dr. Catherine Roma

For over 40 years, Dr. Catherine Roma has created vibrant choral communities that reach across barriers of race, religion, class, sexual orientation and age. She works to translate the values of social justice and inclusion into fundamental experiences of community for both audience and singers. She does this through music that spans a wide variety of styles and cultures and through strategic efforts to develop membership and audiences that reflect rich diversity.

Cathy Roma was one of the founding mothers of the women's choral movement, an international network of over 70 women's choruses, when she started Anna Crisus Women's Choir in her native Philadelphia in 1975. She founded MUSE Cincinnati's Women's Choir in 1984 after coming to Ohio to do graduate work at the University of Cincinnati's College-Conservatory of Music where she completed her Doctor of Musical Arts Degree in 1989.

Catherine is Professor Emerita of Music at Wilmington College. Through her association at Wilmington, Catherine founded and directed UMOJA Men's Chorus at Warren Correctional Institution, in Lebanon, Ohio for 23 years. She is Minister Emerita of Music at St. John's Unitarian Universalist Church in Cincinnati, and is retired as co-founder and director of the Martin Luther King Coalition Chorale.

In her retirement Roma now conducts three prison choirs (one women's and two men's), and is a founding member of OPAC (Ohio Prison Arts Connection). She is founder and artistic director of the 100-voice World House Choir that just completed its fifth season with four performance of Steve Millroy's *Bayard Rustin: The Man Behind the Dream*, attracting audiences of over 1,500 people in three Ohio cities. Still "on the go" Roma is excited to reimagine a world where justice for all is the reality of the land.



Roma Commission Consortium Mission

The mission of the Dr. Catherine Roma Women Composer Commissioning Project is to fund new collaborations between GALA member choruses and women composers, resulting in new works that celebrate diversity, promote social justice, and stir the human spirit. Project participants will honor the work of Catherine Roma by:

- Giving all GALA chorus members the opportunity to participate in commissioning a work of music by a woman composer.
- Helping to nurture, support and cultivate women composers by valuing their talent, giving them exposure, performing their music, and giving them a platform to compose music that explores topics that make a difference in the lives of women.
- Build community by connecting choirs across the nation as they co-commission a work to be performed in their home towns and on the GALA stage – a shared experience that guarantees multiple performances of a new work.

Who is GALA Choruses?

GALA Choruses, the Gay and Lesbian Association of Choruses, leads the North American LGBT choral movement. Our 170-plus member choruses and 8,000 singers look to us for support and leadership. We are dedicated to providing organizational support and helping our choruses to be strong both artistically and professionally. We serve choruses that range in size from five to over 250 singers; member choruses are located throughout the United States, Canada and Mexico. GALA Choruses' signature event is our quadrennial Festival, which brings together over 130 choruses and 6000 singers for the world's largest LGBT performing arts event. www.GalaChoruses.org

Joan Szymko's composition honors the 100th anniversary of women's right to vote which occurred in the US in 1819 and a year earlier in Canada and England. The composition is designed in three movements: 1) reflections on our present, 2) stories of the past, 3) moving toward the future. The three movements are woven together by spoken stories and quotes. The composition acknowledges that the right to vote was a victory mostly for white women with rights for black, indigenous and other women of color occurring much later in our history.