

# MARGARET BONDS

Credo *W.E.B. Du Bois* | Simon Bore the Cross *Langston Hughes*



THE DESSOFF CHOIRS | MALCOLM J. MERRIWEATHER  
*Janinah Burnett soprano* | *Dashon Burton bass-baritone*

# MARGARET BONDS 1913-1972

## CREDO Text: W.E.B. Du Bois 1868-1963

ed. Rollo Dilworth

1	I.	I Believe in God	2.30
2	II.	Especially Do I Believe in the Negro Race	3.23
3	III.	I Believe in Pride of Race	3.03
4	IV.	I Believe in the Devil	1.32
5	V.	I Believe in the Prince of Peace	6.10
6	VI.	I Believe in Liberty	4.24
7	VII.	I Believe in Patience	2.19

## SIMON BORE THE CROSS Text: Langston Hughes 1901-1967

ed. & arr. Malcolm J. Merriweather

8	I.	Prelude	4.55
9	II.	I Find No Fault	1.54
10	III.	The Trial	5.34
11	IV.	Who Is That Man?	4.02
12	V.	Don't You Know, Mary?	4.06
13	VI.	Walkin' to Calvary	8.38
14	VII.	The Crucifixion	4.18
15	VIII.	Postlude: Resurrection	5.34

**62.58**

**Janinah Burnett** *soprano solo* (2, 11, 13)

**Dashon Burton** *bass-baritone solo* (6, 9, 13)

**THE DESSOFF CHOIRS & ORCHESTRA**  
**MALCOLM J. MERRIWEATHER**

The career of Margaret Bonds extended from the 1930s through the 1960s, a period in which the nation's cultural and political landscapes were dramatically shaped by the Harlem Renaissance, the Chicago Renaissance, and the modern civil rights movement. *Simon Bore the Cross* and *Credo* were written during the last decade of her life and in many ways reflect the unique musical language of a seasoned composer.

Over ninety percent of Bonds's works contain text, confirming the importance of words and ideas to the composer. Inspired by her culture, she often set the words of black writers while incorporating black musical idioms in her compositions. *Simon Bore the Cross* was created with her longtime friend and collaborator Langston Hughes, while *Credo* is based on text by W.E.B. Du Bois. Although *Simon Bore the Cross* draws from the passion story and *Credo* is based on a prose poem by Du Bois of the same name, both texts reflect Bonds's belief in racial uplift. By centering black historical figures and setting words by black writers, she honors the accomplishments of her ancestors and contemporaries.

Hughes began working on the text for *Simon Bore the Cross* in September 1962, and Bonds commenced setting it to music in January of the following year. Because of a number of other ongoing projects (including work on *Credo*) and international trips for the busy collaborators, Bonds did not complete the piano-vocal score until 1965. Despite lengthy plans for both the publication and premiere of the work, neither was achieved during the composer's lifetime.

*Simon Bore the Cross* focuses on Simon of Cyrene from North Africa, who carried Jesus's cross on the way to Calvary. By establishing Simon as a central character in the passion narrative, Bonds and Hughes gave African American audiences the opportunity to see themselves in the Crucifixion story. In the movement 'Don't You Know, Mary' Hughes writes, 'Black men will share the pain of the cross, Black men will share the pain'. Through such direct language, and the use of the African American spiritual 'Crucifixion', *Simon Bore the Cross* enabled African American audiences to honor the suffering of their enslaved ancestors.

When Bonds and Hughes completed *Simon Bore the Cross* in 1965, the two friends were living in Harlem. Two years later there came a turning point for Bonds: she premiered the piano-vocal version of her later large-scale choral work *Credo* with great success. But that was also the year her dear friend and artistic partner Langston Hughes passed away. The time had come to begin a new chapter, so she left the city of her childhood dreams and moved to Los Angeles, California. There she worked for community music organizations and continued to write. But these years were difficult. Her marriage was strained, her depression and alcoholism worsened, and, in 1972, she passed away at the age of 59. One month after her death, excerpts of an orchestrated version of *Credo* were performed by the Los Angeles Philharmonic with Zubin Mehta conducting. The music bears Bonds's clear, evocative vocal writing style infused with elements from various black musical genres. In 1972, the *Los Angeles Times* praised the music as 'simple, lush and lyrical'. The first complete performance was given one year later, also to rave reviews: 'The *Credo* verified her talent, her sensitivity, her proficiency as orchestrator and her concern for the Negro spiritual' (*Los Angeles Times*).

Bonds believed *Credo* had a universal message. In a letter she wrote to Du Bois's widow, Shirley Graham Du Bois, Bonds looked 'forward to a time when *Credo* will move all over the world.' Her Pan-African-inspired philosophy of racial equality is one that transcends time and place and very much resonates with her other large-scale vocal works from this period: *The Ballad of the Brown King* (1960) and *Simon Bore the Cross* (1965). In a letter to Langston Hughes she expressed, 'It is a great mission to tell Negroes how great they are.' Together, *Simon Bore the Cross* and *Credo* encourage all to embrace the 'true concept of Brotherhood toward people of color throughout the world' – a powerful message that remains poignant and relevant for audiences today.

**Dr. Ashley Jackson**

**The Dessooff Choirs**, one of the leading choruses in New York City, is an independent chorus with an established reputation for pioneering performances of choral works from the Renaissance era through the 21st century. Since its founding in 1924, Dessooff's concerts, professional collaborations, community outreach, and educational initiatives are dedicated to stimulating public interest in and appreciation of choral music as an art form that enhances the culture and life of our times.

With repertoire ranging over a wide variety of eras and styles, Dessooff's musical acumen and flexibility have been recognized with invitations from major orchestras for oratorios and orchestral works. Past performances include Britten's *War Requiem* and Mahler's Symphony No.8 with Lorin Maazel in his final performances as Music Director with the New York Philharmonic. Over the course of its near-100-year history, Dessooff has presented many world premieres, including works by Virgil Thomson, George Perle, Paul Moravec, and Ricky Ian Gordon; the first American performance in nearly 100 years of Montemezzi's opera *La Nave* with Teatro Grattacielo; and the American premieres of Philip Glass's Symphony No.5 and John Tavener's all-night vigil, *The Veil of the Temple*.

Dessooff's recent discography includes *Margaret Bonds: The Ballad of the Brown King and Selected Songs*, a debut recording of Margaret Bonds's crowning achievement, which was cited as a 'Best Classical Recording of 2019' by WQXR-FM Radio; *Reflections*, featuring music by Convery, Corigliano, Moravec, and Rorem; and *Glories on Glories*, a collection of American songs featuring composers from Billings to Ives.

The Dessooff Choirs is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council and by funds from the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature.

**[dessooff.org](http://dessooff.org)**

**Sopranos**

Anna Bredikhina  
Jen Crawford  
Tina Davis  
Christina Fairweather  
Halley Gilbert  
Olanna Goudeau  
Rebecca Hargrove  
Rada Hastings  
Amanda Kelly  
Asha Lindsay  
Sylvia Maisonet  
Emily Nash  
Angela Owens  
Julie Siegmund  
Kathryne Singleton  
Tara Tisch-Wallace  
Katherine Fox Wolf

**Altos**

Vianca Alejandra  
Karen Geer  
Kirsten Gorsak  
Catherine Handy  
Helen Kapstein  
Kayla Logar  
Paola Nunez del Prado  
Christina Peter  
Barbara Scharf Schamest  
Carol Shapiro  
Charlotte Small-Chestnut  
Cyndee Socci  
Anna Suessbrick  
Michelle Trinidad

**Tenors**

Carter Baxter  
Charles Curtis  
Christopher Ebert  
Michael Hegedus  
Kaleb Hopkins  
Steve Kass  
Jon Lowy  
Rayvon Middlebrooks  
Christopher R. Miller  
Emerson Sieverts  
Rodari Simpson  
Andrew Willett

**Basses**

Courtney Carey  
Charles Carter  
Richard Hadsell  
Don Harrison  
Angelo Johnson  
Steven Kirby  
Richard Lippold  
Francis J. Menton  
Ryan Mesina  
Ian Milliken  
Christopher M. Platt  
Michael Prachthausen  
Jonathan Stewart  
John Stolen  
Steve Winn

Conductor and baritone **Malcolm J. Merriweather** enjoys a versatile career with performances ranging from the songs of Margaret Bonds to gems of the symphonic choral repertoire. The baritone can be heard on the GRAMMY®-nominated recording of Paul Moravec's *Sanctuary Road* (Naxos). Hailed by *Opera News* as 'moving...expertly interpreted', *Margaret Bonds: The Ballad of the Brown King & Selected Songs* (AVIE) has earned considerable praise around the world.

He is Director of the New York Philharmonic Chorus and Music Director of New York's Dessoff Choirs, known for their performances of great choral works from the pre-Baroque era through the 21st century. An Associate Professor, Director of Choral Studies and Voice Department Coordinator at Brooklyn College of the City University of New York, he has also joined the faculty at Manhattan School of Music. He was the founding Artistic Director of 'Voices of Haiti', a 60-member children's choir in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, operated by the Andrea Bocelli Foundation.

Merriweather has been featured as a soloist with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, The Dessoff Choirs, the New York Choral Society, and Bach Vespers Choir and Orchestra at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church in New York City. The baritone has premiered contemporary solo works by Eve Beglarian, John Liberatoro, Juri Seo, Douglas Fisk, and James Adler. He has been a fellowship recipient at the Norfolk Chamber Music Festival and at the Tanglewood Music Center.

Merriweather holds a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Conducting from the studio of Kent Tritle at the Manhattan School of Music, where his doctoral dissertation, *Now I Walk in Beauty, Gregg Smith: A Biographical Essay and Complete Works Catalog*, constituted the first complete works list for the composer and conductor. He received Master of Music degrees in Choral Conducting and in Vocal Performance from the studio of Rita Shane at the Eastman School of Music, as well as his Bachelor of Music degree in Music Education from Syracuse University, summa cum laude.

Bass-baritone **Dashon Burton** has established a vibrant career appearing regularly throughout the US and Europe in favorite pieces, including Bach's *St. John* and *St. Matthew Passions* and the Mass in B minor, Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, Beethoven's Symphony No.9, Brahms's *Ein deutsches Requiem*, Handel's *Messiah*, and Mozart's Requiem. A multiple award-winning singer, Mr. Burton won his second GRAMMY® Award in March 2021 for Best Classical Solo Vocal Album with his performance featured in Dame Ethel Smyth's masterwork *The Prison* with the Experiential Orchestra (Chandos). As an original member of the groundbreaking vocal ensemble Roomful of Teeth, he won his first GRAMMY® Award for their inaugural recording of all new commissions, including Caroline Shaw's Pulitzer Prize-winning *Partita for 8 Voices*. His other recordings include *Songs of Struggle & Redemption: We Shall Overcome* (Acis), the GRAMMY®-nominated recording of Paul Moravec's *Sanctuary Road* (Naxos); *Holocaust 1944* by Lori Laitman (Acis); and Caroline Shaw's *The Listeners* with the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra.

Visionary performance artist **Janinah Burnett** is a versatile singing actor, musician, writer, arranger, and educator. Janinah is in demand and has thrilled audiences internationally with signature roles including Mimì in *La Bohème*, Leïla in *Les Pêcheurs de perles*, Donna Anna and Donna Elvira in *Don Giovanni*, Micaëla in *Carmen*, Marguerite in *Faust*, Violetta in *La traviata* and many, many more. An original cast member of Baz Luhrmann's *La Bohème* on Broadway as Mimì, Janinah received a Los Angeles Theater Alliance Award and appeared on the Tony Awards with this production. More recently, she was a principal artist at the Metropolitan Opera for eight seasons, and at the end of 2022 she started appearing as Carlotta Giudicelli in *Phantom of the Opera* on Broadway. In February 2021, Janinah released her debut album, titled *Love the Color of Your Butterfly*, which features her own musical arrangements and collaborations with some of the world's finest jazz musicians. Released on her own record label, Clazz Records, the album is an amalgamation of Jazz, Opera, Art Song, Oratorio, R&B, and Spirituals and has been featured in numerous publications including the *Financial Times*, *Playbill*, *Broadway World*, *DownBeat* and *Opera News*.

## **The Orchestra**

### **Violins I**

Kelly Hall-Tompkins  
Chelsea Smith  
Mark Chien  
Angela Wee  
Haesol Lee

### **Violins II**

Jen Liu  
Emma Frucht  
Elaine He  
Jessica Park

### **Violas**

Bethany Hargreaves  
Andrew Griffin  
Jeremy Kienbaum

### **Cellos**

Mitchell Lyon  
Maddy Fayette  
Peter Sachon

### **Double Bass**

Mike Kuennen

### **Flutes**

Amir Farsi  
John Romeri

### **Oboes**

Kathy Halvorson  
Lucian Avalon

### **Clarinets**

Graeme Steele Johnson  
Yasmina Spiegelberg

### **Bassoons**

Remy Taghavi  
Nanci Belmont

### **Horns**

Nicolee Kuester  
Wil Dannenberg

### **Trumpets**

Brian Olson  
Erik Larson

### **Trombones**

Oliver Barrett  
Connor Rowe

### **Bass Trombone**

Jahi Alexander

### **Tuba**

Samantha Lake

### **Percussion**

Brandon Ilaw  
Stella Perlic

### **Harp**

Ashley Jennifer Jackson

### **Organ**

Nathaniel Gumbs

## **CREDO**

### **I. I Believe in God**

- 1 I believe in God  
who made of one blood  
all nations that on earth do dwell.  
I believe that all men,  
black and brown and white, are brothers,  
varying through time and opportunity,  
in form and gift and feature,  
but differing in no essential particular  
and alike in soul  
and the possibility of infinite development.  
I believe.

### **II. Especially Do I Believe in the Negro Race**

- 2 Especially do I believe in the Negro race:  
in the beauty of its genius, the sweetness of its soul  
and its strength in that meekness  
that shall yet inherit this turbulent earth.  
I believe, I believe, I believe.

### **III. I Believe in Pride of Race**

- 3 I believe in pride of race and lineage and self:  
in pride of self so deep as to scorn injustice to other selves:  
in pride of lineage so great as to despise no man's father;  
in pride of race so chivalrous, as neither to offer  
bastardy to the weak nor beg wedlock of the strong.  
Knowing that men may be brothers in Christ,  
even though they be not brothers in law.  
I believe in Service, humble, rev'rent service.  
From the blackening of boots to the whitening of souls:  
for work is Heaven, Idleness, Hell,  
and wage is the 'Well done!' of the Master,  
who summoned all them that labor and are heavy laden,  
making no distinction between the black,  
sweating cotton hands of Georgia  
and the first families of Virginia, since all distinction  
not based on deed is devilish  
and not divine.

#### **IV. I Believe in the Devil**

- 4 I believe in the Devil and his Angels,  
who wantonly work to narrow  
the opportunity of struggling human beings,  
especially if they be black;  
who spit in the faces of the fallen,  
strike them that cannot strike again,  
believe the worst and work to prove it,  
hating the image which their Maker  
stamped on a brother's soul,  
hating the image which their Maker  
stamped on a brother's soul.

#### **V. I Believe in the Prince of Peace**

- 5 I believe in the Prince of Peace,  
I believe that War is Murder.  
I believe that armies and navies are at bottom  
the tinsel and braggadocio of oppression and wrong,  
and I believe that the wicked conquest  
of weaker and darker nations by nations whiter and stronger  
but foreshadows the death of that strength.  
I believe in the Prince of Peace.

#### **VI. I Believe in Liberty**

- 6 I believe in liberty for all men,  
the space to stretch their arms and their souls,  
the right to breathe and the right to vote,  
the freedom to choose their friends,  
enjoy the sunshine, and ride on the railroads,  
uncursed by color, thinking, dreaming,  
working as they will in a kingdom of beauty and love.  
I believe in liberty, working as they will  
in a kingdom of beauty and love.  
I believe in the training of little children, black even as white,  
the leading out of little souls into green pastures  
and beside the still waters, not for pelf or peace,  
but for life lit by some large vision of beauty and goodness and truth;  
lest we forget and the sons of the fathers like Esau  
for mere meat barter their birthright in a mighty nation.  
Thinking, dreaming. I believe in liberty.

### **VII. I Believe in Patience**

7 Finally, finally, finally, I believe in Patience,  
patience with the weakness of the Weak  
and the strength of the Strong.  
The prejudice of the Ignorant  
and the ignorance of the Blind.  
I believe in Patience,  
patience with the tardy triumph of Joy  
and the mad, mad, mad chastening of Sorrow.  
Patience, patience, patience,  
Patience with God!

### **SIMON BORE THE CROSS**

#### **II. I Find No Fault**

9 And Pilate said of Jesus,  
I find no fault in him at all  
tell me your demands.  
Release him to us that he die, you say,  
release him to us that he die.  
I wash my hands, I wash my hands.  
Take him and judge him  
according to your laws,  
I wash my hands, I wash my hands.

### **III. The Trial**

10 'Twas on a hot and dusty day,  
Pilate washed his hands.  
And told the mob to have its way.  
Pilate washed his hands.  
The soldiers took my Lord  
and dragged him away.  
They cursed him, they kicked him,  
they took my Lord and cursed his name.  
They took my Lord,  
and they beat him with staves.  
They put a crown of thorns on his head,  
they gave him vinegar and gall to drink.  
Oh my Lord, oh my Lord, oh my Lord.

#### **IV. Who Is That Man?**

11 Who is that man who goes to help my son,  
who is he? Who is he?  
I never saw him before. Who is that man?  
I never saw him around.  
Now he's come to help my son  
bear the burden of his heavy cross.  
Who is that man?  
Who shares the suff'ring of my Jesus,  
the glory of my precious son.  
Who is that man? So dark, so beautiful his face.  
Look at his face so strong and full of grace.  
Who is he? Who is he?  
Never in the marketplace have I beheld him,  
Could my prayers have sent him here?  
God keep him strong, and bless his soul,  
the dark one. Who is that man?

#### **V. Don't You Know, Mary?**

12 Don't you know, Mary?  
The dark man's name is Simon.  
Simon of Cyrene bears the cross for Jesus.  
Oh, Mary don't you know, don't you know?  
Oh, Mary, don't you know?  
Don't you know, Mary?  
The dark man's name is Simon.  
Simon of Cyrene came to help your Jesus,  
Oh, Mary don't you know?  
Did you hear, did you hear, did you hear, Mary,  
Simon has come to share his heavy load,  
did you hear, Mary?  
Though high the hill before them  
and the road ahead is long.  
Don't you cry, don't you cry, Mary.  
Simon cries with you, Mary,  
Simon cried with you, Mary.  
He is strong and fearless,  
and he heard a mother's prayers,  
his name is Simon. Simon takes the cross.  
Now, Mary, see the cross,  
see him raise the cross on his back.

Did you hear, did you hear, Mary,  
the dark man came from Cyrene?  
God has sent his servant to walk with Jesus,  
black men will share the pain of the cross,  
black men will share the pain.  
In a world, in a world, Mary,  
that's filled with trials and troubles,  
Simon out of Africa shares your sorrow.  
Black men will share the pain of the cross,  
Simon bears the cross, Mary, Simon bears the cross!

## **VI. Walkin' to Calvary**

**13** Walkin' to Calvary  
Heavy-laden and weary of heart,  
Jesus and Simon, stumbling and stagg'ring,  
the Christ bore his burden as a man.  
Never once did he cry out  
for God to set him free,  
when the mob that had cursed and reviled cried,  
'Crucify him!', Brother Simon was by his side.  
Heavy-laden and weary of heart,  
Jesus and Simon, brothers together, they walked,  
and the African was strong,  
trudging on in the dust of humanity's disgrace.  
Jesus faltered and Simon the strong  
now gave him comfort.  
Brother Simon bore the cross.  
Jesus, po' little Jesus, walkin' in the Valley  
of the Shadow of Calvary. Simon, Simon, sturdy black,  
walkin' right beside him with the cross on his back.  
Onward to the cross.  
March onward to the cross with its arms of love,  
onward to the cross with its roots in the earth of life,  
onward to the cross as a symbol of life,  
onward to the cross as a symbol of life eternal,  
onward to the cross that he carried to Calvary.  
Black Simon bore the cross.

Heavy-laden and weary of heart,  
on to Golgotha.  
Why should the good have to die  
for the sins of such a lot.  
Simon thought as he marched,  
'What a pity and a shame.'  
Now the king of the Jews had to die,  
death was his glory,  
the Cyrenian bore the cross,  
the African bore the cross,  
the cross to save our souls,  
the cross for you and me.  
Give us mercy, Lord.  
Jesus, Jesus, po' little Jesus,  
step aside, Simon, he has to walk alone now.  
Jesus, Jesus, tired and weary,  
walkin' all alone now, walkin' all alone.  
Thank you, brother Simon.  
Thank you for helping brother Jesus.  
Jesus, walkin' all alone.

### **VII. The Crucifixion**

- 14 They crucified my Lord  
and he never said a mumblin' word,  
not a word.  
They nailed him to a tree  
and he never said a mumblin' word,  
not a word.  
They pierced him in the side  
and he never said a mumblin' word,  
not a word.  
He bowed his head and died  
and he never said a mumblin' word,  
not a word.  
And he never said a mumblin' word.

### **VIII. Postlude: Resurrection**

- 15 Then there came that morning  
when they rolled the stone away,  
rolled away death and darkness,  
rolled away yesterday, rolled the stone away,  
rolled away, rolled away.  
Jesus rose that morning in the glory of the day,  
now my heart takes wing this morning  
like a bird that flies away,  
flies away, flies away.  
Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia,  
Wings of morning, Alleluia,  
Amen, amen, amen.

We wish to thank the following individuals and organizations without whom this project would not have been possible:

The Dessoff Choirs Board of Directors

Karen Geer, Interim Director of Operations

Church of the Heavenly Rest:

Janet Yieh, Director of Music

The Rev. Matthew Heyd, Rector

Lucas Thorpe, Director of Program Organizing & Online Production

Mother A.M.E. Zion Church, Harlem, NY:

The Rev., Dr. Malcolm J. Byrd

Steven Ryan

Vianca Alejandra *assistant conductor*

Bryan Lin *assistant conductor*

Union Theological Seminary

Program and Liner Note Editor: Katherine Wolf

Program Cover Design: Bottlerocket Design Group

We wish to acknowledge the heirs of Margaret Bonds who generously granted us the rights to perform and record these works:

Doris Coulter

Frances Miley

Cassandra Richardson

Orestes Richardson

William Richardson

Recording: 30 April & 1 May 2022, Church of the Heavenly Rest, Manhattan, New York

Recording Producer and Recording, Mixing & Mastering Engineer: Marlan Barry

© 2023 The copyright in this sound recording is owned by The Dessoff Choirs

© 2023 The Dessoff Choirs [dessoff.org](http://dessoff.org)

Marketed by Avie Records [avie-records.com](http://avie-records.com)

*Supporters:*



**The Aaron Copland  
Fund for Music** 

*This project is supported in part by an award from the*



*The Dessoff Choirs is supported in part by the*



*with the support of the Office of the Governor of New York  
and the New York State Legislature.*

*This project is sponsored in part by public funds from the*



*Department,  
in partnership with the City Council.*

*The Rea Charitable Trust*



AVIE

AV2589

822252258929