

Engaging Students with New Composers



Composer, Melissa Dunphy visits a classroom.



Students ask composer, Saundar Choi, for an autograph during a school residency.

Seattle Pro Musica, a choral organization in Washington State, places a strong emphasis on sharing choral art and building community through education programs in the Seattle area. In celebration of their 50th anniversary, they commissioned five BIPOC composers to write works for them to perform in their 2022–2023 season. Funding from Chorus America allowed them to expand their education programs to bring these five composers for residencies with eleven K–12 schools in the area. Students at participating schools were also invited to come to the Seattle Pro Musica concerts and pre-concert talks with the composers.

This program enabled the composers to go into classrooms during the school day to work with the students so that all would be able to participate. All of the composers are BIPOC and had different musical areas of focus, thus exposing students to a range of musical styles and techniques. One of the composers, Marques Garrett has a strong background in spirituals and gospels, and also worked with students on one of his own pieces. Additionally, he shared his knowledge of non-idiomatic choral music by Black composers with music and arts teachers for the Seattle Public Schools and gave them resources they could use. Indian-

American composer, Shruthi Rajasekar, uses a mix of Carnatic music and Western classical music influences in her music. During her sessions with the students, she taught them ragas, melodic modes used for improvisation in Indian classical music.

One of the major benefits of the program was that students had the opportunity to interact with these composers and learn about their life experiences and paths, in addition to learning about a range of musical styles. When talking about the impact of this program, Katie Skovholt, the Executive Director of Seattle Pro Musica said “We feel like we are actually making a direct impact on singers of the future. While you can offer free concert tickets to students, that’s not the same as doing something with a direct, emotional impact. And that’s going to change lives.”

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