



LOS ANGELES MASTER CHORALE
LAGRIME DI SAN PIETRO (TEARS OF ST. PETER)

Saturday, September 15, 2018, at 7:30pm
Foellinger Great Hall

PROGRAM

LOS ANGELES MASTER CHORALE: *LAGRIME DI SAN PIETRO (TEARS OF ST. PETER)*

Grant Gershon, conductor and artistic director
Peter Sellars, director
James F. Ingalls, lighting designer
Danielle Domingue Sumi, costume designer
Pamela Salling, stage manager

Orlando di Lasso
(1530-1594)

Lagrimae di San Pietro (Tears of St. Peter)

- I. Il Magnanimo Pietro (When the generous Peter)
- II. Ma gli archi (The bows, however)
- III. Tre volte haveva (Three times already)
- IV. Qual a l'incontro (No one should boast)
- V. Giovane donna (Never did a young lady)
- VI. Così talhor (As it happens)
- VII. Ogni occhio del Signor (The eyes of the Lord)
- VIII. Nessun fedel trovai (I found none faithful)
- IX. Chi ad una ad una (If one could retell one by one)
- X. Come falda di neve (Like a snowbank)
- XI. E non fu il pianot suo (And his crying)
- XII. Quel volto (That face)
- XIII. Veduto il miser (Realizing that he felt)
- XIV. E vago d'incontrar (wishing to find someone)
- XV. Vattene vita va (Go, life, go away)
- XVI. O vita troppo rea (O life, too guilty)
- XVII. A quanti già felici (To how many)
- XVIII. Non trovava mia fé (My faith would have not failed)
- XIX. Queste opre e più (These events)
- XX. Negando il mio Signor (By denying my Lord)
- XXI. Vide homo (See, O man)

This concert will be performed without an intermission.

The Los Angeles Master Chorale production of *Lagrima di San Pietro* is made possible with generous underwriting from the Lovelace Family Trust and is dedicated to the memory of Jon Lovelace in honor of the special friendship he shared with director Peter Sellars. The touring production is supported by Kiki and David Gindler, Philip A. Swan, Laney and Tom Techentin, Jerrie and Abbott Brown, Cindy and Gary Frischling, Marian H. and John Niles, Frederick J. Ruopp, and Eva and Marc Stern.

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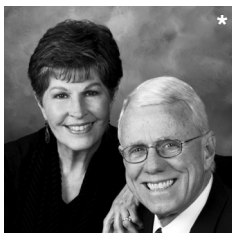
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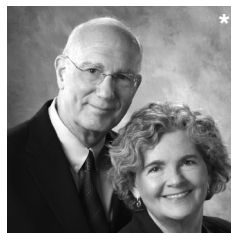
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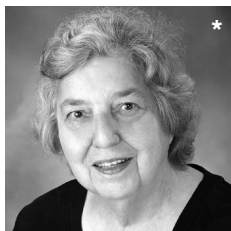
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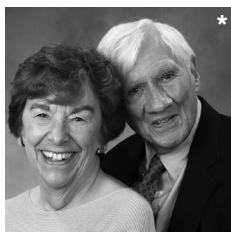
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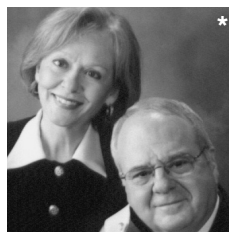
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PROGRAM NOTES

A SAINT'S REMORSE LISSO'S HIGH RENAISSANCE MASTERPIECE

What's the correct way to refer to one of the most extraordinary musical minds in history: Orlande/Orlando/Roland de Lassus/di Lasso? There's a Franco-Flemish form and an Italianized one; sometimes the two get mixed together. There's even a Latin option intended to standardize the situation. The very profusion of variants points to the internationalism and cross-pollination across borders that marked the era of the High Renaissance in Europe.

This was a time in which a young musician born in the Netherlandish part of the Habsburg Empire (in what is nowadays Belgium) could find himself posted to positions at major courts and churches in Italy while still in his early twenties, travel back north for a brief spell (possibly in France and even England), and then be lured at around age 26 to join the ambitious court of an aristocrat in Munich (the Duke of Bavaria), where he happily settled for almost four decades until his death in 1594—while still undertaking trips to Vienna and Italy and picking up on the latest developments in musical style.

Such, in brief outline, is the life story of Orlando di Lasso. (Let's simplify and stick to the Italian spelling, the one used on the title page of many of his published works, including the first edition of *Lagrima di San Pietro*.) During his long, productive years in Munich, he became an international celebrity. Lasso was born at just the right time to benefit from the new technology of printing, which disseminated his prolific output at an astonishing rate (about two publications of his music a year). Hopeful young composers traveled

far and wide to learn from him—the Gabrielis from Venice may have been among them—and Lasso was honored by emperor and pope alike.

"What you have is the iTunes of the High Renaissance: Everyone is hearing each other's releases, in different languages, some in pirate versions, and mixing them together," says director Peter Sellars. "All these versions of Orlando's name evolved because he was active in different music centers. It feels like today, when there isn't a single way music has to happen, and everyone is listening to everyone else."

Lasso was particularly revered for the variety and extent of his output across vocal genres (curiously, instrumental music is missing from his vast extant oeuvre), as well as for the depth of his knowledge of the grand tradition of Renaissance polyphony that was just about to reach its end. In the century that dawned a few years after Lasso's death, the new genre of opera would flourish, and its champion Claudio Monteverdi would pioneer a dramatically different musical language—a language from which modern Western music emerged.

Another contemporary artist, the French poet Pierre de Ronsard, raved: "The more-than-divine Orlando . . . like a bee has sipped all the most beautiful flowers of the ancients and moreover seems alone to have stolen the harmony of the heavens to delight us with it on earth, surpassing the ancients and making himself the unique wonder of our time."

Visualizing the Polyphony

Into his swan song, *Lagrima di San Pietro*, Lasso distilled all of that wisdom, experience, and complexity. "Polyphony of this kind of depth and

detail is totally sculptural,” observes Sellars. He notes that *Lagrime* was composed only 30 years after the death of another towering artist of the High Renaissance: Michelangelo. “You also get this muscular intensity in Lasso’s writing that is reminiscent of this expressive language we know so well, visually, from Michelangelo.” Both artists convey visions of an “embodied spirituality: the muscle of spiritual energy and striving against pain to achieve self-transformation.”

“The genesis of this project began in 2011 when Peter and I were working together on Vivaldi’s *Griselda* at the Santa Fe Opera,” recalls Los Angeles Master Chorale’s Kiki & David Gindler Artistic Director Grant Gershon. “I’ve always been especially moved by the way that he guides singers to connect their deepest and most complex emotions to the music.” Gershon imagined the potential that could be tapped by having Sellars stage an entirely a cappella work, “where there is no buffer between the singers and the audience. The pure sound of the human voice would convey all of the structure, the colors, the textures, and the feeling of a major work.”

And *Lagrime di San Pietro* presented “the perfect piece” with which to try out this approach—but also a set of formidable challenges. Explains Gershon: “The problem that the piece has had over the years is that this highly emotional, even anguished music has historically been performed in a very buttoned down, extremely reverential style. (Frankly, there are several perfectly lovely recordings of the work that are also unbelievably dull.) Peter and I felt that the truth of this music could be unlocked with movement and with an intense focus on the poetry.”

Lasso’s creation of this complex vocal cycle clearly stands apart within his oeuvre with regard to chronology and purpose. Widely admired and imitated by his contemporaries, that oeuvre

encompasses on one side sacred works that are both traditional (masses) and wildly original (the celebrated motet cycle *Prophetiae Sibyllarum*) and, on the other, heartily profane compositions in multiple languages.

Lagrime di San Pietro comes at the very end—he completed the score with a dedication to Pope Clement VIII on May 24, 1594, and died in Munich on June 14. In that dedication, Lasso remarks that “these tears of Saint Peter . . . have been clothed in harmony by me for my personal devotion in my burdensome old age.”

A Special Kind of Madrigal

In terms of genre, the numbers comprising *Lagrime* are classified not as motets but as *madrigale spirituali*—a term that straddles the usual distinction between vocal compositions for the sacred (motet) and secular (madrigal) spheres. Motets, composed in Latin, were suitable for use in liturgy; madrigals set words in the vernacular language, frequently involving erotic and pastoral topics, and were intended for private courtly or academic gatherings (much as the first, court-produced operas) or, when the topic related to a public figure or occasion, for ceremonial contexts. Yet while taking advantage of the innovations (and lack of restrictions) of the secular madrigal, “spiritual madrigals” were devoted to religious topics. They were not suitable for liturgical usage, however—by definition, such madrigals set vernacular rather than Latin texts.

For *Lagrime*, Lasso found his text in a devotional epic by the Italian Renaissance poet Luigi Tansillo (1510-1568), who came out of the great Petrarchan tradition. (Like Lasso, incidentally, the humanist Petrarch devoted his art to secular and sacred causes—his poetry praising the Virgin Mary inspired Lasso’s contemporary Palestrina to write a famous set of *madrigale spirituali*.) Tansillo, curiously, had been on the Vatican’s

Forbidden Index. His *Lagrime* obtained an official pardon from the Pope. Although Tansillo died before managing to complete the epic, the published *Lagrime* is a lengthy collection of eight-line stanzas in *ottava rima* (the rhyming scheme ABABABCC), from which Lasso chose 20 for his madrigal cycle.

Peter's Threefold Denial

The dramatic content centers around a topic that will be familiar to anyone who knows J.S. Bach's Passions, where it occurs as just one episode within the long sequence of the Passion story (though it inspires one of the most moving moments in the *St. Matthew Passion*—the alto aria "Erbarme dich"). It's the topic of several masterpieces in painting as well, by such artists as Rembrandt and Caravaggio. The Gospel narratives of the Passion recount the Apostle Peter's fearful reaction to the terror of the night of Jesus' arrest. Three times he denies knowing the accused—exactly as Jesus, during the Last Supper, predicted Peter would do, "this very night, before the rooster crows." This is of course the very Peter who would be claimed as the founder of the Catholic Church, the first in its succession of popes. Tansillo's poem unfolds as a highly wrought, emotional sequence of self-accusation and remorse for what cannot be undone, as the elderly Peter attempts to come to terms with his anguish. The imagery is elaborate, its references to mirrors and reflections revealing a characteristic Renaissance preoccupation, and boldly figures what transpires in the central image—the communication through Jesus' transfixing glance on the Cross—to the unspoken knowledge shared by lovers.

The cycle Lasso fashions from this resembles a psychodrama, a kind of psychological Stations of the Cross Peter endures internally: the eternally

present moment of betrayal and the recollections of a man approaching and longing for death intersect as he seeks reconciliation, realizing he can never forgive himself but can rely only on divine grace. Lasso gives Peter—and us—no easy answers, and no easy way out. He concludes the cycle of 20 stanzas from Tansillo's poem with a 21st number (madrigal) from another source: a Latin motet by the 13th-century French poet Philippe de Greve representing the final word from Jesus himself ("Vide Homo, quae pro te patior"—"See, o man, how I suffer for you"). Here Jesus only reaffirms what has been tormenting Peter: the knowledge that his betrayal has caused more "inner agony" for the savior than his outward suffering on the cross. Even the repetitive rhyme scheme for all eight lines enhances the sense of recursive entrapment. Through his overall tonal scheme using the old church (i.e., Gregorian) modes, Lasso further underscores the sense of irresolution by omitting some of those eight modes as he progressively cycles through them; for this final motet he shifts to a mode outside the normal system. You don't have to understand the musicological jargon to hear the remarkably austere impact of the final number.

Structurally, *Lagrime* also reflects the kind of theological numerological symbolism that is so all-pervasive in Bach's masterpieces. Each stanza is written for seven separate parts. (Some performers opt to complement the voices with instruments, citing performance practice of Lasso's era.) Seven is the number of perfection and creation, but also a number with a dark side, as in the Seven Deadly Sins. Three is the number of the Trinity, but it, too, has a negative shadow in the three times Peter denies Jesus. Lasso's overall cycle comprises 3×7 stanzas (yielding 168 lines of poetry, a sum evenly divisible by 7).

Pared Down Simplicity

For this staging, Gershon and Sellars decided to perform with three singers on a part resulting in an ensemble of 21. “We wanted the size of the ensemble to balance the need for clarity and transparency of the individual voices with the idea of this also being a community coming together,” explains Gershon. “We also talked about keeping a real simplicity to the whole look and feel, without any set or props or extra performers. Peter’s work with the singers would be complemented by Jim Ingalls’ lighting and some chairs onstage; the wardrobe is basically shades of grey—clothes that look like they could come out of anyone’s closet.”

“This is music that has a real austerity,” Gershon adds. “*Lagrima* is old composer’s music, like the late Beethoven string quartets or the Adagio from Mahler’s Ninth or Tenth. Things are stripped away, until there is nothing extraneous: there are very few melismatic passages.” For Sellars, *Lagrima* is composed “with an incredible concision, with sheer essence and focus. There’s a harmonic density but at the same time it’s stated as simply as possible, without a single extra note.”

We know that in his final years Lasso had been ailing, seeking relief for a condition described as “melancholy,” and he even dedicated one set of his madrigals to the court physician who took care of him.

“At this point in his life,” according to Sellars, Lasso “does not need to prove anything to anyone. He is [composing *Lagrima*] because this is something he has to get off his chest to purify his own soul as he leaves the world. It’s a private, devotional act of writing, but these thoughts are now shared by a community—by people singing to and for each other.”

While the *Lagrima* project represents his first time staging an entirely a cappella performance, Sellars considers it a continuation of themes he has been recently revisiting in his collaborations with conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen involving choral works by Igor Stravinsky. For the conclusion of Salonen’s tenure with the Los Angeles Philharmonic in 2009, Sellars staged Stravinsky’s *Symphony of Psalms* and *Oedipus Rex* as a double-bill, and the conductor and director reprised it in February 2018 to crown a Stravinsky series with the Philharmonia Orchestra in London.

As in the Stravinsky double-bill, in *Lagrima* the chorus “carries the drama forward”—drama according to the ancient Greek understanding of tragedy, says Sellars, “which I could also call an African understanding, where an individual crisis is also a crisis of the community. Even though we hear one man’s thoughts, it is the community that absorbs them and has to take responsibility: a collective takes on this weight of longing and hope.”

Inner Dialogue, Light, and Darkness

That interplay between the individual and the collective has suggested thrilling possibilities for staging. For Sellars, “the voice is not something disembodied but is part of the body which is testifying. The sheer physical intensity of the singing joins with this collective dawning through the inner dialogue of the composition, as these voices have their moments of revelation.”

And beyond the Stravinsky, *Lagrima* can be viewed as a continuation of Sellars’ engagements with the Passion story, from his acclaimed stagings of the classic Bach Passions to his work on contemporary variants by John Adams (*The Gospel According to the Other Mary*, in whose world premiere the Master Chorale and Gershon took part) and Kaija Saariaho (*La Passion de Simone*, recently reintroduced in a chamber version as part of the 2016 Ojai Festival).

"*Lagrime* has one foot in this world and one foot in the next world—it's music written by somebody who is in pain," says Sellars. "It shares the giant discovery of lighting in Renaissance painting that was echoed in poetry and music: this understanding that light and darkness are deeply intertwined in God's creation and are necessary for each other. Taken together, they create chiaroscuro. That's how we perceive depth."

Through all its pain, says Sellars, the challenge in *Lagrime* "is directed towards oneself. Instead of challenging the world, you challenge yourself—that is the real meaning of *jihad* in Islam, the war within yourself. In an analogous act to Michelangelo's and Rembrandt's self-portraits, Lasso has created this host of recording angels who can detail the fluctuations and razor-edge refinements of his art, his moral quandaries, and lifelong regret for failed moments. That crystal clear, relentlessly honest moment is a crisis known to every human being on earth. In the case of Lasso, he can't forgive himself, but the music is suffused with a divine compassion and illumination that reaches the very heart of hell."

The result of this powerful collaboration turned out to make a milestone in the history of the Master Chorale. "What neither Peter nor I could fully anticipate was the overwhelming emotional vulnerability that our singers would bring to this project," says Gershon. "Ostensibly this piece is about Peter the Apostle and his lifelong sense of remorse over denying Jesus before the crucifixion. What we came to realize as we all worked together is that Lasso was delving into much more universal themes surrounding growing old, losing the things and people that we care about, experiencing extreme shame and regret but also some possibility of benediction. We all came away from the initial performances of this work convinced of two things: that *Lagrime di San Pietro* is one of the towering masterpieces of Western music, and that this project represents for each of us some of the most important work that we have ever embarked upon. This is a piece that people need to hear, to see, and to experience."

—Thomas May

Thomas May, program annotator for the Los Angeles Master Chorale, writes about the arts and blogs at memeteria.com. Reprinted with permission.

PROFILES

The **LOS ANGELES MASTER CHORALE** is widely recognized as the country's leading professional choir and one of Southern California's most vibrant cultural treasures. Hailed for its powerful performances, technical precision, and artistic daring, the Master Chorale is led by Grant Gershon, artistic director, and Jean Davidson, president and CEO. Grammy-winning composer Eric Whitacre currently serves as the ensemble's Swan Family Artist-in-Residence. Created by legendary conductor Roger Wagner in 1964, it is a founding resident company of The Music Center and choir-in-residence at Walt Disney Concert Hall. Chorister positions are highly sought after and the fully professional choir is a diverse and vocally dynamic group showcasing the many voices of LA.

Presenting its own concert series each season, the Los Angeles Master Chorale performs choral music from the earliest writings to contemporary compositions striking a balance between innovation and tradition. It also frequently performs with the Los Angeles Philharmonic at Disney Hall and the Hollywood Bowl. This season, the Master Chorale embarks on national and international tours with its acclaimed production of *Lagime di San Pietro* directed by Peter Sellars. The Master Chorale has been awarded three ASCAP/Chorus America Awards for Adventurous Programming as well as Chorus America's prestigious Margaret Hillis Award for Choral Excellence. In 2017 it was inducted into the American Classical Music Hall of Fame. The Master Chorale has an esteemed recording catalog and has appeared frequently on film scores and soundtracks, most recently *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*.

Committed to community engagement and fostering music education in schools, the Los Angeles Master Chorale's education programs include Voices Within residencies that encourage students to write and perform their own songs, and an expansive Oratorio Project for high school students. The Master Chorale presents an annual High School Choir Festival bringing teenagers from around the Southland to perform in Walt Disney Concert Hall. The Festival celebrates its 30th year in 2019. In June 2016 the Master Chorale hosted Big Sing LA, bringing people of all ages and abilities to Grand Park for a communal singing event. In July 2018 this initiative expanded with Big Sing California engaging singers from throughout the state and culminated in a concert livestreamed worldwide.

GRANT GERSHON (conductor and artistic director) is currently in his 17th season as the Kiki & David Gindler artistic director of the Los Angeles Master Chorale. The *Los Angeles Times* has said the Master Chorale "has become the most exciting chorus in the country under Grant Gershon," a reflection on both his programming and performances, as Gershon has been hailed for his adventurous and bold artistic leadership and for eliciting technically precise and expressive performances from musicians.

During his tenure Gershon has led more than 200 performances at Walt Disney Concert Hall. A fervent champion of new music, he has led world premiere performances of major works by John Adams, Esa-Pekka Salonen, David Lang, Louis Andriessen, Christopher Rouse, Steve Reich, Morten Lauridsen, Ricky Ian Gordon, Gabriela Lena Frank, Shawn Kirchner, Ellen Reid, and Chinary Ung, among many others.

Gershon is the resident conductor of LA Opera. He made his acclaimed debut with the company with *La Traviata* in 2009 and has subsequently conducted *Il Postino*, *Madame Butterfly*, *Carmen*, *Florencia en el Amazonas*, *Wonderful Town*, *The Tales of Hoffmann*, and *The Pearl Fishers*. He will conduct the West Coast premiere of Philip Glass' *Satyagraha* for LA Opera in fall 2018. In November 2017 he conducted the world premiere of John Adams' *Girls of the Golden West* for San Francisco Opera with "rhythmic buoyancy and vigor" (*Classical Voice North America*). *Girls of the Golden West* was directed by Peter Sellars. In New York Gershon has appeared at Carnegie Hall and at Trinity Wall Street, as well as on the *Great Performers* series at Lincoln Center. Other major appearances include performances at the Ravinia, Aspen, Edinburgh, Helsinki, Salzburg, and Vienna Festivals. He has worked closely with numerous conductors, including Claudio Abbado, Pierre Boulez, James Conlon, Gustavo Dudamel, Lorin Maazel, Zubin Mehta, Simon Rattle, and his mentor, Esa-Pekka Salonen.

His discography includes two Grammy Award-nominated recordings: *Sweeney Todd* (New York Philharmonic Special Editions) and Ligeti's *Grand Macabre* (Sony Classical); six commercial recordings with the Master Chorale; and two live performance albums. He has also led the Master Chorale in performances for several major motion picture soundtracks including *Star Wars: The Last Jedi* at the request of composer John Williams.

PETER SELLARS (director) has gained international renown for his groundbreaking and transformative interpretations of artistic masterpieces and for collaborative projects with an extraordinary range of creative artists. He has staged operas at the Canadian Opera Company, Dutch National Opera, English National Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, Opéra National de Paris, and the Salzburg Festival, among others.

He has collaborated on the creation of many works with composer John Adams, including *Nixon in China*, *The Death of Klinghoffer*, *El Niño*, *Doctor Atomic*, *A Flowering Tree*, and *The Gospel According to the Other Mary*. Inspired by the compositions of Kaija Saariaho, Sellars has guided the creation of productions of her work that have expanded the repertoire of modern opera.

Recent projects include an acclaimed production of *La Clemenza di Tito* at the 2017 Salzburg Festival, a concert staging of *The Cunning Little Vixen* with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, and the premiere of the latest Adams/Sellars collaboration, *Girls of the Golden West*, at San Francisco Opera. This summer Sellars created a new production of *Doctor Atomic* for the Santa Fe Opera.

Sellars has led several major arts festivals, including the 1990 and 1993 Los Angeles Festivals and the 2002 Adelaide Arts Festival. In 2006 he was artistic director of New Crowned Hope, a month-long festival in Vienna for which he invited artists from diverse cultural backgrounds to create new work in the fields of music, theatre, dance, film, the visual arts, and architecture for the celebration of Mozart's 250th birth anniversary. He served as the music director of the 2016 Ojai Music Festival.

He is a distinguished professor in the Department of World Arts and Cultures at UCLA, a resident curator of the Telluride Film Festival, and was a mentor for the Rolex Arts Initiative. Sellars is the recipient of a MacArthur Fellowship, the Erasmus Prize for contributions to European culture, the Gish Prize, and is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. In 2014 he was awarded the prestigious Polar Music Prize and named Artist of the Year by Musical America.

JAMES F. INGALLS (lighting designer) made his LA Master Chorale debut with *Lagrima*. His other work in Los Angeles includes *The Beauty Queen of Leenane*, *The Price*, and *A Parallelogram* (Mark Taper Forum); *The Gospel According to the Other Mary*, *Canata Criolla*, *Oedipus Rex/Symphony of Psalms*, and *El Niño* (Los Angeles Philharmonic); Carmen de Lavallade's *As I Remember It* (Wallis Annenberg Center); and *Tribu*, choreographed by Melanie Rios Glaser (RedCat). Recent designs for dance include *Concertiana*, *Half Life*, and *The Beauty in Gray* (Paul Taylor's American Modern Dance), *Giselle* (Finnish National Ballet), and George Balanchine's *The Nutcracker* (Miami City Ballet). Recent design for opera includes the world premiere of Kaija Saariaho's *Only the Sound Remains* (Dutch National Opera and Paris Opera/Garnier) and *La Clemenza di Tito* (Salzburg Festival), both directed by Peter Sellars. Recent theatre includes *Waiting for Godot*, *Sive*, and *King of the Castle*, all directed by Garry Hynes (Druid Theatre/Galway). He often collaborates with The Wooden Floor dancers in Santa Ana, California.

DANIELLE DOMINGUE SUMI (costume designer) is native to New Orleans, Louisiana, and a Los Angeles-based apparel artist and art psychotherapist. Sumi's artistic expression is inspired by spirituality and humility with elements of multicultural diversity and social justice. She is committed to promoting social well-being through expressive arts including increased understanding, recognition, and response to multiethnic heritage.

Sumi is treasured for her creativity and leadership skills in theatrical costume production. Since 2005 she has worked on staff and independently with fashion, theatres, and opera companies including FIDM, Los Angeles Opera, Kirk Douglas Theater, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Perm Opera and Ballet Company, Teatro Real Madrid, English National Opera, and Music Academy of the West. She was previously assistant head of wardrobe with Los Angeles Opera.

Sumi finds great joy in collaborating with director Peter Sellars, including designing *Lagrima di San Pietro* with Los Angeles Master Chorale and bringing life to other projects including *Desdemona* at CAP UCLA, *The Indian Queen*, and *The Gospel According to the Other Mary* on tour with Los Angeles Philharmonic. Recently she was assistant costume designer for Los Angeles Philharmonic's production of Bernstein's *Mass* and supervised *Allegiance*, a Broadway musical production with East West Players and the Japanese American Cultural Center in Los Angeles.

LOS ANGELES MASTER CHORALE

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