

WEST VALLEY SYMPHONY
Unity: A Musical Journey
Kayoko Dan, Guest Conductor
January 12, 2025
Program Notes

The West Valley Symphony features three magnificent works that unite in a diverse program, showcasing a rich tapestry of musical expression. Coleman's work celebrates unity and solidarity through vibrant melodies, rhythmic vitality, and powerful harmonies. Theofanidis's "Rainbow Body" explores mystical themes with shimmering orchestration and evocative textures, drawing listeners into a world of spiritual contemplation and transcendence. Tchaikovsky's inspirational Symphony No. 5 completes the journey with its dramatic arcs and emotional depth, offering a symphonic narrative that transforms from darkness to triumphant resolution.

Valerie Coleman (1970-) *Umoja: Anthem for Unity*

Valerie Coleman is an American composer and flutist, known for founding the wind quintet Imani Winds, named after the Swahili word for "faith," the principle of the final Kwanzaa day. Recognized as a distinguished artist, she was named Performance Today's 2020 Classical Woman of the Year and listed among the "Top 35 Women Composers" by the Washington Post.

Umoja, pronounced "oo-MOH-juh," is a Swahili word meaning "unity" and represents the first day of Kwanzaa. Valerie Coleman originally composed *Umoja: Anthem for Unity* in 2001 for a women's choir. The initial version featured a repeated melody and a call-and-response format, inviting "children of ALL" to "hear the winds call" for unity. Coleman described this piece as embodying "tribal unity," reminiscent of a drum circle where participants share oral histories.

Since its inception, Umoja has seen drastic evolution. Coleman reworked Umoja for Imani Winds, making it one of their signature pieces. Over the years, she adapted Umoja for various ensembles, including flute choirs and orchestras, with the orchestral version in 2019. This latest iteration maintains the original's melodic simplicity while delving deeper into the theme of unity, featuring innovative percussion techniques and a dynamic interplay between instruments that symbolizes the clash of injustices, ultimately culminating in a powerful anthem echoing the original melody.

Christopher Theofanidis (1967-) *Rainbow Body*

American Composer Christopher Theofanidis is a graduate of Yale, the Eastman School of Music, and the University of Houston. He has received numerous awards, including the Masterprize, the Rome Prize, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and the Charles Ives Fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. A former faculty member at the Peabody Conservatory and Juilliard, he currently teaches at Yale. His works have been performed by world's leading orchestras including London Symphony, Atlanta, Baltimore, Pittsburgh and more.

In 2000, Theofanidis composed *Rainbow Body*, inspired by a chant from Hildegard of Bingen, who was canonized by Pope Benedict XVI in 2012. Theofanidis describes the music as simple yet powerful, capturing the intimate communication with the divine found in Hildegard's melodies. The piece starts mysteriously and features the primary melody presented directly by the strings. It

contrasts fragments of the chant with turbulent passages, creating a dramatic arc. Ultimately, the work symbolizes an arch—like a rainbow—anchored by Hildegard’s song.

Tchaikovsky (1840-1893) Symphony No. 5 in E Minor, Op. 64 (1888)

Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky composed his Symphony No. 5 in the summer of 1885, completing it on August 26. During this time, he also worked on a “Fantasy-Overture” based on Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, finishing that piece on October 19. Tchaikovsky conducted the premiere of Symphony No. 5 in St. Petersburg on November 17, 1888. While he claimed that the symphony lacked a program, its central leitmotif and progression suggest a struggle with Fate, a theme he explored in his other symphonies.

Unlike his previous two symphonies, this work does not have a clear program. However, similar to Symphony No. 4, this work is cyclic in nature, with the main fate motive heard in every movement. The first movement of Tchaikovsky’s Symphony No. 5 is simple yet rich in theme and melody. It balances moments of dark contemplation, childlike joy, and exuberant triumph, with the opening clarinet melody representing “complete resignation before Fate.” This motive recurs throughout the symphony, evolving in character. The second movement, marked *con alcuna licenza*, allows for freedom in tempo, starting with a soulful solo horn. A lively middle section revisits the themes, interrupted by a violent return of the motive. In the third movement, Tchaikovsky subverts the traditional waltz feel, with a syncopated melody with a scherzo-like middle section. The movement ends with a reminder of the “fate”, leading into the Finale, which transforms it into a majestic major mode of E-Major. This dramatic conclusion features bold gestures, culminating in a triumphant return of the march theme, rounding off the symphony on a powerful resolution.

-Kayoko Dan

kayokodan.com

Director of Orchestral Studies, [Sam Houston State University](http://SamHoustonStateUniversity.com)
Music Director Emeritus, [Chattanooga Symphony & Opera](http://ChattanoogaSymphony.com)