



WOMEN WARRIORS: THE VOICES OF CHANGE

BY ADRYAN RUSS

THE DREAM

Have you ever had a dream—a vision of something you feel in your heart and soul you would like to make happen that you sense could make a difference in the world?

AMY ANDERSSON, pre-concert. Photo by Catherine Joy



AMY ANDERSSON, founder, music director and conductor of Orchestra Moderne NYC, had such a dream. Her vision resulted in a concert at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall on September 20, 2019, where the documentary she created, *Women Warriors: The Voices of Change*, scored by outstanding composers and performed by top-notch musicians and vocalists, played to a full house.



Photo by Derek Brad

The dream began when Amy read an article in *The Guardian*, October 2017, about the life of Fannie Lou Hamer, an African American women's rights and voting rights activist. When Fannie tried to register to vote in Mississippi in 1962, she was arrested, thrown in jail, and brutally beaten by police—told that women of color could not vote in Mississippi. Fannie Lou testified on television in 1964 and named her accusers. "I became obsessed with her story," says Andersson, "mesmerized by her dignity, pride, strength and incredible courage. Her testimony struck me as a 'Me Too' moment, a Black Lives Matter moment, as well as a human and civil rights moment." Andersson put Hamer's photo on her desktop and promised she would make history come alive again and that the phrase 'We stand on the shoulders of those who come before us' would guide her in unearthing the women upon whose shoulders Hamer was standing.

Andersson spent two years at her dining room table researching female activists from as far back as medieval 13th-century Europe. Over centuries of women's history, she discovered the lives of hundreds of unrecognized women who had played a crucial role in the evolution of human and civil rights for women and girls. The difficulty was

then in deciding which she would choose, how to reveal the historical relationship between these women, and construct a narrative that was not only historically correct, but also relevant to young people.

What resulted was the construction of the historical lineage of 800 years of feminist activists that would fill an 80-minute live-to-screen concert program of 19 pieces. "Armed with this historical perspective and the promise I made to Fannie Lou Hamer," says Andersson, "I was determined to remain a humble, artistic servant devoted to honoring the lives of these women, as I brought their voices to life during a live symphony concert."

Orchestra Moderne NYC was founded by Andersson in April 2017.

The heart of its mission is to perform symphony orchestra concerts that connect young people to the thrill of the live orchestral experience, while expanding their understanding of the world in which we live. Music Resonates Inc. funds their concerts, which feature women and minority composers and performers. Andersson began a disciplined and determined letter-writing campaign to find sponsors, pressing her case for the value of this project. She also created a two-year GoFundMe campaign that went directly to their New York registered Music Resonates Inc. 501(c)3, which raised funds from individual donors. All composers who contributed to this nonprofit project did not get paid, including Andersson. All donations went to fund the concert production ([https://](https://orchestramoderne-nyc.com/support/)

orchestramoderne-nyc.com/support/).

THE REHEARSAL

Two years later, Andersson is at Carroll Studios in Manhattan, with a baton in her hand, composers sitting beside her, and 71 musicians sitting in front of her with their instruments.

It's the day before the concert, and no documentary video is available for the musicians to see, which causes Andersson to insist that, despite the musicians' sense of passion for what they are playing, they need to follow her. "You are musicians and not machines," she says, "but I have to go with the click track, and we have to follow." They find missing pieces, a few mistakes to correct in the parts, and at times need to run music out of order. Most of the musicians are playing these scores for the first time, so Andersson explains what each piece is about. She stops at one moment and simply says, "My heart and whole bone marrow are in this project." One can feel the players respond.

Andersson and the musicians have the opportunity for a bit of a run-



FROM FAR END OF TABLE: Lolita Ritmanis, Catherine Joy, Miriam Cutler, Sharon Farber, Nathalie Bonin, Starr Parodi, Amy Andersson conducting the orchestra. Photo by Derek Brad

through the day-of, before the concert. Would we know at the concert that there had been anything to fix the day before? Not at all.

This was Andersson's first project as documentary creator; she worked on it alone for two years. Many of the musical pieces were world premieres. No one ever saw this 80-minute documentary in its totality until the premiere at Alice Tully Hall on September 20, 2019. "I completely relied on both my musical and gut instincts," she says.



AMY ANDERSSON, creator, producer, conductor, at the rehearsal. Photo by Derek Brad

THE CONCERT

After she chose which women in history to feature, she began the construction of a silent documentary using moving and still images, frame by frame creating a wordless visual story over time. "It was like composing music for me," she says. "I focused on the line, the arrival points, forward momentum, breath, tension, release, buildup, structure, anticipation and resolution. My goal was to compose a visual dance that could be paired with breathing, free-flowing music, creating empathetic and emotional content that would connect the viewer to the authentic lives of these women."



Photo by Derek Brad

Envisioning the documentary as a story to be told, Andersson divided it into 12 chapters. Because she was starting to hear music in her head, she began searching for composers whose musical style would work for this new genre she named a "DocuSymphony," conducting Orchestra Moderne NYC, a group of New York's finest musicians.

The concert begins with an introduction by Masih Alinejad, founder of My Stealthy Freedom, a campaign against wearing the compulsory hijab, and author of *The Wind in My Hair: My Fight for Freedom in Modern Iran*, in which she encourages women to wear white scarves instead of compulsory hijabs, and to post photos of themselves unveiled.

"This is my first time opening a concert," she says, showing her beautiful black hair topped by a fluff of blond curls, and everyone is instantly with her. On behalf of Orchestra Moderne NYC, she thanks SOCAN, MPATH, BMI, APM, the Alliance for Women Film Composers (AWFC), and The Society of Composers & Lyricists for their support. "I'm a women's rights activist and a troublemaker," she says, and the audience cheers her.

Alinejad has been living in exile and has not seen her family in 10 years. More recently we learn family members have been blindfolded and arrested due to her speaking out. "Tonight," she requests, "be my family," and the applause resounds.



MASIH ALINEJAD. Photo by Derek Brad

"Tonight we are honoring the strength and courage of female activists who have hoped for centuries for healing and civil rights," she says. More applause. "Many of the women you see tonight have been denied their place in history books or have simply been ignored altogether. These incredible women risked their lives, many to fight for gender equality, environmental conservation, reproductive rights, freedom of speech, LGBTQ rights, and for the right of every single girl to have an education. Many women around the world have been jailed or killed for refusing a forced marriage or refusing compulsive wearing of the hijab, requesting a divorce, or for going to school. More than 100 million girls around the world are denied an education because of their gender—or to even learn how to write their own name. Think of the contribution these girls could make to humanity," she implores, "by being teachers, scientists, leaders of a nation. The truth is that when you educate girls, you lift the whole nation. As democracy crumbles, dictators rise," she warns. "Freedom of the press becomes limited. Human rights are curtailed. We need the greatest natural resource in the world: women." She's applauded again. Her final request: "Be the change you want to see in the world."

THE COMPOSERS

Conductor Amy Andersson then comes to the stage, appropriately applauded, and the music and documentary begin. The devastation of the battles women have fought over time are bitterly sad and unquestionably moving; the music performed takes us on a journey of anger, despair, hope and joy, as we get to hear an array of compositions by a variety of talented composers.



LOLITA RITMANIS, 10-time Emmy Award nominee, and 2002 Emmy Award winner for the Warner Bros. series *Batman Beyond*, one of the founders of the Alliance for Women Film Composers and founding member of Dynamic Music Partners, was asked to score the Prologue and Chapter One, *The Long Road*. "How does one comment musically on such a

broad overview of the collective 'long road' while paying homage to individual achievements, obstacles, and battles won and battles lost?" she asks. Ritmanis chose to compose a double concerto, featuring flute, violin, French horn and cello. "Throughout Chapter One, the quartet shines through the orchestra, as soloists, as a quartet, all the while receiving support from the orchestra. We not only celebrate women's journeys throughout history, but embrace a deeper concept—that *The Long Road* is not only a thing of the past, but a living, breathing road that we are all paving together."



MIRIAM CUTLER, Emmy nominated for two documentaries, was invited to score Chapter Two: *Women Unite*, which features footage of the feminist struggle to achieve equality. Says Cutler, "I was in college when the second wave of feminism exploded into our culture. I have tried to express the outrage, excitement, and hope we all felt

as young women participating in that revolutionary vision of a better and more just future." Cutler, who currently serves on the Executive Committee of the Documentary Branch of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, was also asked to score Chapter Seven: *Earth Activists*. "Climate Revolutionaries," she says, her piece for this chapter, "is meant to underscore the real connection women have with the Earth, and the understanding that we need to heal ourselves and our planet—and the reality that we now must come together on a global scale to fight for Earth justice and life itself." During this piece, an image of young activist Greta Thunberg appears onscreen, and the applause is thunderous.



Photo by Derek Brad

Says Andersson, "When the audience saw Greta onscreen, they shouted! Miriam's stunning climate change-ticking-time-bomb score was perfectly aligned with the subject." And what are the odds that the concert would take place on the day that millions of people, mostly schoolchildren around the world, put on a "climate strike" to protest the political inaction that threatens Planet Earth?



PENKA KOUNEVA, game and film composer, was invited to score several chapters. Born and raised in Sofia, Bulgaria, her music is a blend of her Eastern European upbringing, classical training and modern film and game music. For Chapter Three: The AIDS Crisis, she focuses on HIV-positive people she had met.

"Their incredible resilience, willpower and commitment to heal touches me deeply. My music has urgency and drama, but also compassion and hope expressed in soaring melodies."



Photo by Derek Brad

Malala, Laxmi Agarwal and other African female leaders are honored in Chapter Eight: Our Truth, presenting women around the globe who have overcome profound traumas in their lives and are role models in their communities. Her music for this chapter, says Kouneva, "has overtones of curiosity and humanity."



For Chapter Five: Build Peace, Kouneva focuses on "love, care and humility at the power of the human spirit to rise above conflict, hatred and profound differences. This chapter," she says, "celebrates the peace movement of Israeli and Palestinian women working to heal two communities. I strived for the music to have a timeless and universal sound."

Chapter Seven: Standing Rock features peaceful protestors at Standing Rock and their fight over water. "Water is our most precious resource on our planet," she says. "Human life would be impossible for more than three days without water, yet millions of people around the world have no access to clean drinking water." She uses "pounding chords and drums" to capture her rage at the unjust violence against those protestors.



Photo by Derek Brad

When she moves to Chapter Eleven: Me Too, Kouneva chooses to make her track "extremely intense with seething anger and rage, and a big breakthrough toward the end, symbolizing that this issue has finally come out in the open."

For Chapter Twelve: We Will Honor Her, the documentary highlights mothers, sisters, daughters, grandmothers of all races and cultures who have propelled humanity forward with their courage, vision, integrity and selfless care for their fellow humans. "My composition," says Kouneva, "co-composed with Fred E. Smith, begins with soulful solo cello and then goes into a jubilant orchestral celebration inspired by Beethoven's 'Ode to Joy'—it is one of the most positive, uplifting and joyful compositions I have ever written."

"Their incredible resilience, willpower and commitment to heal touches me deeply. My music has urgency and drama, but also compassion and hope expressed in soaring melodies."

—Penka Kouneva

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APOLO 11

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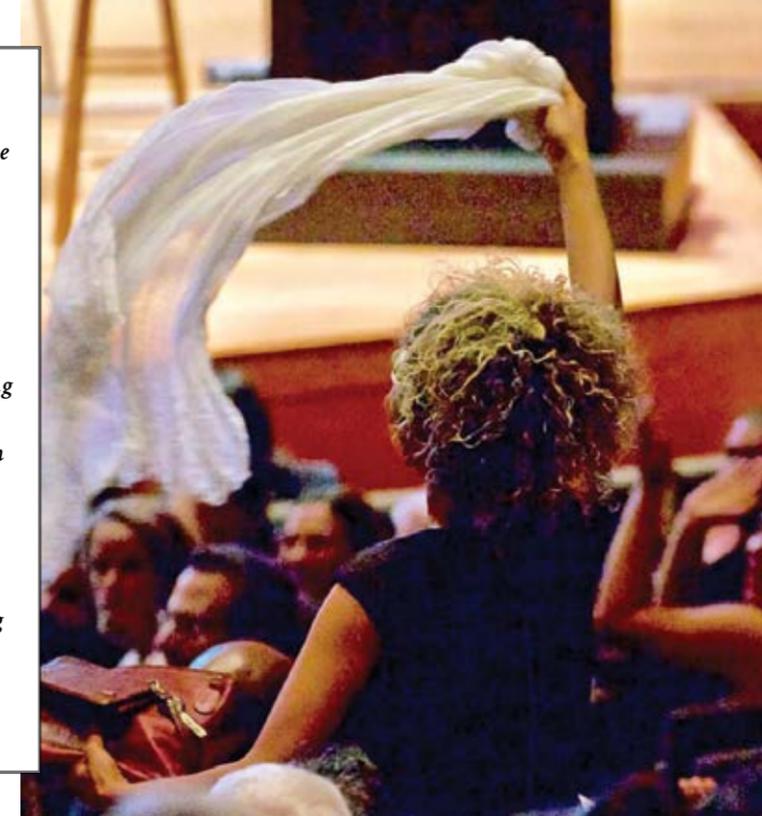
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STARR PARODI, multi-award-winning composer, current President of the Alliance for Women Film Composers, and the first woman to have her orchestral works performed in the 85-year history of the Laguna Pageant of the Masters, scored *Chapter Four: Joy of the Waters*. She celebrates being able to highlight such important causes as LGBTQ rights and gun control.

Joy of the Waters is a celebratory piece about when the Supreme Court reached a decision on marriage equality. "Love is love, love is joy, love is tears, love is what we all seek and what makes us whole," she says.

She also orchestrated a piece for her daughter Isolde Fair's song "Rise," which Isolde performs over the Parkland chapter of the documentary—as survivors painfully endure their moment of silence.



MASIH ALINEJAD, waving her scarf. Photo by Derek Brad



SHARON FARBER, Emmy Award nominee, former SCL Board member, and current member of *The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences*, scored *Chapter Six: Hurriya*. "In this piece," she says, "I was immersed in the struggle for freedom of women in Iran." She honors the concert's guest speaker Masih Alinejad, author of *The Wind in My*

Hair: My Fight for Freedom in Modern Iran, in which Alinejad encourages women to wear white scarves instead of the compulsory hijabs and to post photos of themselves unveiled. Punishment for women doing such a thing can include them being hung by that scarf. "To feel 'the wind in my hair'—such a simple request—here in the U.S. we take this freedom for granted."

Farber takes this opportunity to create a fusion of Middle Eastern rhythms, sounds and instrumentation, representing this struggle with the rich sound of the orchestra representing freedom, as well as one female voice, which she performs herself, asking for hurriyah—freedom.

At the end of the piece, Alinejad rises from the audience, waving her white scarf in the air, loudly crying, "Thank you!"

Farber was also invited to score *Chapter Nine: Say Their Name*, a piece demonstrating the pain and suffering of the women of Black Lives Matter. "I cannot imagine the heartache of losing a child. Every life is precious, and we should all be treated equally—it is a basic human right." Farber says, "The cello for me is as close as it gets to the human voice. In *Say Their Name*, it represents a single, yet universal mother's voice. She is me. She is you. She is all of us. The orchestra portrays the fight and quest for change so that the names of those who died will not be forgotten."

"To feel 'the wind in my hair'—such a simple request—here in the U.S. we take this freedom for granted."

—Sharon Farber



NATHALIE BONIN, violin soloist for Chapter Five: *Women Build Peace*, composed by Penka Kouneva, says her soulful violin solo “transcends nations, religions and ideologies while speaking the language of brotherhood, peace, and reconciliation.”

Award-winning composer and multifaceted artist as well as soloist, Bonin scored

Chapter Seven: *Tender Dismay*, “a combination of light melody accompanied by multiple layers of string effects creating a somewhat innocent yet sensitive mood, combined with disturbing textures to accompany the eerie footage of mass sprayings in the U.S. of populations with DDT during the 1950s and 1960s.” This chapter honors Rachel Carson, biologist and environmentalist, who warned about its deadly effects in her book *The Silent Spring*.



MANDY HOFFMAN created the orchestral arrangement of Chapter Eight: *Prayer*, which combines her talent with that of Kouneva for *Our Truth Is Our Power* and Bonin for *Prayer*. Bonin sees this piece as a moment of mourning, reflection and hope. It’s paired with a memorial to victims of so-called ‘honor’ killings. Says Bonin, “I wanted

to create a sacred mood where we feel the loss and pain, but also the hope shining through. The strings were arranged to create the effect of the sound of a church organ.” The visuals and music reflect the disturbing reality of beautiful women and girls murdered in what should have been the prime of their lives.

Hoffman was also invited to arrange Sonita Alizadeh/Mahdi’s *Daughters for Sale* about child brides. Hoffman translated the fully electronic composition into a 71-piece orchestral arrangement. “When I attempted to put the entire song with the orchestra,” she says, “the sense of anger got lost, so I decided to keep all of the electronic instruments. While crossing genres is complicated and challenging work, I looked to masters like Quincy Jones, Kendrick Lamar and even Henry Mancini for inspiration.” Her feeling about the piece? “I have a daughter,” she says. “I cannot imagine selling my daughter because we need to keep our house.”



Photo by Derek Brad



SONITA ALIZADEH/MAHDI, born in Afghanistan under the Taliban regime, grew up as an undocumented refugee in Iran. Her *Daughters for Sale* is a piece she wrote when she was a child that became a homemade music video. She appears as a rapper soloist for this piece dressed in a white bridal gown, to point up the plight of all girls, around the globe, being sold into

forced marriage at a rate of more than 20 girls per minute. “I escaped this fate twice,” she says. Rapping was illegal for her as a girl in Iran, but music became her outlet for expression and hope. “My vision is a world where every girl is allowed to reach her full potential, make her own choices, and live the life she chooses for herself.” She believes that together we can end forced marriage in one generation, and is working to make that a reality.



SONITA performing *Daughters for Sale*. Photo by Derek Brad



THE ELEPHANT QUEEN



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ANNE-KATHRIN DERN, German film composer, Board member of the Alliance for Women Film Composers, known for orchestral scoring animation and children’s movies, was invited to contribute *He Is Not Coming Back* as part of Chapter Nine: Seeking Justice and Equality. This piece, originally written for a Mongolian open-air stage play, appears as part of the memorial in the Black Lives Matter section of the program. Originally it was composed as a memorial for a warrior who has to leave home to ride into battle, and his family must realize that he is not coming home. She believes that this piece’s participation in this concert gives it even deeper cultural meaning. Unable to attend the concert, Dern writes, “It is an honor to be featured among such esteemed peers of mine, and as someone who frequently fights for gender equality in our particular industry.”



Photo by Derek Brad

“At the helm of this great ship,” says Amy Andersson, “was Orchestra Moderne NYC,” as we sailed uncharted waters—new production, new documentary, new music, eight composers, two singer/songwriters, 19 pieces, 17 world premieres—and arrived safely across the ocean to a standing ovation!

“My gift to the composers,” reveals Andersson, “was the opportunity to unleash their musical talents without restraint. It was absolutely paramount for me that the music receive equal billing with the picture and not be relegated to only underscore. I was determined not to subjugate the music to serve the needs and ego of the film. I gave free rein to the composers to create either completely original music, use existing material as is, or to rework existing material to fit the timing of the picture. My goal was the unbridled passionate union of music and visuals, which would create an ecstatic and profound emotional experience for the concert audience as they connected to the lives of these remarkable women. I trusted,” says Andersson, “that if I was still moved to tears by the music and picture after two years, my audience would be, too.” The standing ovation that went on for several minutes proved her right.

THE FUTURE

“You know what was great? Amy smiles after the concert. “There was never any

competition between any of us. We were all rowing together in the same boat, giving birth to the same dream, with the same love, the same focus and the same care. We all had each other’s back. That is the true sisterhood of women. That is who we really are.”

Andersson and her fellow composers are working on their next dream—a tour of this magnificent evening. Will they make it happen? Stay tuned. Dream in progress.



ISOLDE FAIR, a 15-year-old composer, lyricist, and student at a performing arts school in the Los Angeles area, contributed her song “Rise” to Chapter Ten, which, she says, “speaks to the need to keep using your voice, without giving up, so that you are heard.” She started playing violin when she was in preschool at the age of 5. Her song echoes the misgivings and fears of many young people who must deal with the reality of gun violence in their schools. As she performs her song, we see video from the Parkland Memorial of survivors doing their best to endure the tragedy that has befallen them.



PARKLAND MEMORIAL. Photo by Derek Brad

“We rise,” Isolde writes, “until we’re standing, we rise until we’re strong, our dreams are never-ending, so we rise until we’re standing.”

Finale: *Women Hold Up Half the Sky* was composed by Lolita Ritmanis and lyricized by Amy Andersson, with the song “We Rise,” echoing Isolde’s “Rise,” stirringly performed by vocalist Gillian Hassert and the Riga Cathedral Girls’ Choir TIARA conducted by Aira Birzina on film, along with live supporting vocalists, bringing the concert to a feverish pitch with a moving finale.

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THE SCL SEMINAR

The night before the concert, SCL New York partnered with the Alliance for Women Film Composers at New York University's Provincetown Playhouse to host a seminar, *From Screen to Concert Hall: Dramatic Storytelling for Orchestra*, introduced by SCL NY

Steering Committee's Ron Sadoff, SCL President Ashley Irwin, and moderated by SCL NY Board member Greg Pliska. The composers on the panel: Starr Parodi, Miriam Cutler, Sharon Farber, Nathalie Bonin, Lolita Ritmanis, and Mandy Hoffman. In the audience were Amy Andersson, Isolde Fair, Catherine Joy, and the NYU and SCL community.

STARR PARODI, president of the Alliance for Women Film Composers (AWFC), began the panel by announcing the AWFC's policy as an open organization—"so guys can join, too," she says. NYU attendees were invited to join both the AWFC and The SCL.

GREG PLISKA then acknowledged that all the women on the panel are not only composers, but also orchestrators, conductors, performers, mentors, and teachers. Every one has a multi-hyphenated career, working on narrative features, documentaries, television, trailers, commercials, musical theater, recordings, art installations—and at least two circuses, the last of which causes laughter. They are also leaders in their communities—presidents, founders—and two former SCL Board members among them.

After showcasing the trailer for the concert, underscored by Penka Kouneva who is not present but who will be at the concert, Pliska asked each composer to talk a bit about her section of the concert.

STARR PARODI mentioned her piece that is a tribute to when the Supreme Court reached a decision on marriage equality. Miriam Cutler took cues from two documentaries she scored and adapted them for the concert, with the help of orchestrator Catherine Joy.

SHARON FARBER, originally from Israel, wrote music for *Hurriyah (Freedom) Wind in My Hair*, about the women of Iran who do not wish to wear the hijab (a head covering worn in public in Iran and other Muslim countries, and enforced by the government).

Her second piece, *Say Their Name*, portrays the agony of mothers of Black Lives Matter who have lost their children. I have a daughter, and the thought of losing a child in such circumstances is horrible.

NATHALIE BONIN's first piece Andersson chose was for the environmental chapter honoring Rachel Carson, who worked on banning DDT. "She was laughed at," says Bonin, "but people—kids—were being sprayed with it." Her second piece was more personal for her—a piece she wrote to heal herself during a period of grief as a hopeful prayer through which "I was going to see light." She wanted to create an effect of a church organ sound so the notes are very sostenuto and blend into one another as it would with an organ in a church reverb environment. "This was to add a certain sacred aspect to the piece."

LOLITA RITMANIS says, "Amy shared her idea for this project with me about two years ago. My initial reaction was: You want to do what? *How* many topics do you want to cover in less than two hours? *How* many chapters? *How* about we do one chapter for the entire concert? It has been quite a ride, but an absolute thrill to be involved in

this project since its inception." Ritmanis scored the *Prologue*, intended to get people riled up, the way she felt when she walked in the Women's March with her family, and went with her daughters to vote, certain that we were going to have a woman president. Ritmanis also scored *The Long Road* covering 800 years of history in a nine-



BACK ROW: Ron Sadoff, Miriam Cutler, Starr Parodi, Sharon Farber, Nathalie Bonin, Lolita Ritmanis, Mandy Hoffman, SCL Board member Greg Pliska. **FRONT ROW:** SCL Board member Elizabeth Rose, SCL President Ashley Irwin, conductor Amy Andersson, SCL Board member Adryan Russ

minute double concerto featuring French horn, flute, violin, and cello. The final piece of the program, for which Amy wrote beautiful lyrics, is called *We Rise*. "I am Latvian," says Ritmanis, "we knew we wanted to have a choir as part of the finale, and we had an opportunity to record and film the wonderful girls' choir TIARA in Latvia that you will see and hear onscreen, along with a wonderful soloist, Gillian Hassert, in front of the Orchestra Moderne NYC," she says. "Hopefully you will all stand up and be charged up with our mission!"

MANDY HOFFMAN arranged Sonita Alizadeh's electronic song about child brides, *Daughters for Sale*, for the orchestra. "Today," she says, "along with Sonita, I finally got to hear it for the first time with the orchestra, and like me, she was blown away. It was powerful. Sonita took this terrible thing that happened to her and became an activist, to tell people what's happening. Not only are child brides happening on the other side of the world, but happening everywhere, in every kind of culture, even in the U.S., even here in New York and New Jersey."

GREG PLISKA: *Scoring for a concert, even when you have all the details, is vastly different from scoring for film. What are the compositional and creative opportunities you had for this concert that you wouldn't have working with a director, scoring for picture?*

SHARON: "When scoring films, we are composing music that will bring to life the vision of the director. In the concert world, on the other hand, it's always you—your imagination, your vision, your creative spirit. This concert is a combination of both realms—we were provided with short films, but there's no dialogue, no sound effects—it's just a pure emotional reaction to what's on the screen, and only the music speaks. It's a wonderful experience—a fusion, really, of two different creative outlets."

MIRIAM: "I work primarily on documentaries, which tend to have more intimate scores—chamber kind of instrumentations and anything else that fuels the narrative—which gives me tremendous freedom to choose instruments. Having the opportunity to re-imagine music with a full orchestra is spectacular. For films, I have to be aware of understatement. Here I can try something new—like wow, that would work great with brass! I never use brass—maybe as a solo instrument—otherwise it would be way too much for what I usually do. I like working with small ensembles, but this concert is ambitious and audacious."

STARR: "When you're scoring to picture, you have the chance to record the music, you get a chance to make sure everything is right—to aim for perfection and to make sure this is your vision. I find that doing concert work is a process of letting go as well, because it's collaborative with the conductor, who may explore a tempo different from what you intended. Some of the musicians may play in a different way than you would have. To be open to that is exciting. It was wonderful to hear the pieces today."

SHARON: "Most people go to the theater to see a film and don't even listen to the music. When people come to a concert, though, they come to hear what you have to say as a composer, as opposed to accompaniment to a film. It's a wonderful feeling, and you get to work with live musicians, which is the best."

GREG: *What opportunities do you have working with an orchestra in a concert setting, and what challenges do you have?*

NATHALIE: "I'm a violinist and I have a way of playing things and I hear the strings in a certain way. The challenge for me is that I have to accept that when a piece I compose is performed, it will be performed in a different way than I would. I track my music, but in performance when someone else plays, it never sounds like I tracked it. I learn from this."

MIRIAM: "I think when collaborating with anyone, the most important thing is to be as open-minded as possible, because a lot of composers are anal and controlling—because we can be! I can control every single note that's recorded, and if there's something I don't like, I can fix it later. There's an amazing thing that can happen—when people see that you are welcoming their contributions, all kinds of magic can happen. That, to me, is the magic of live musicians, whether for a live recording or concert. If you can de-stress enough to allow those moments, there can be some amazing surprises."

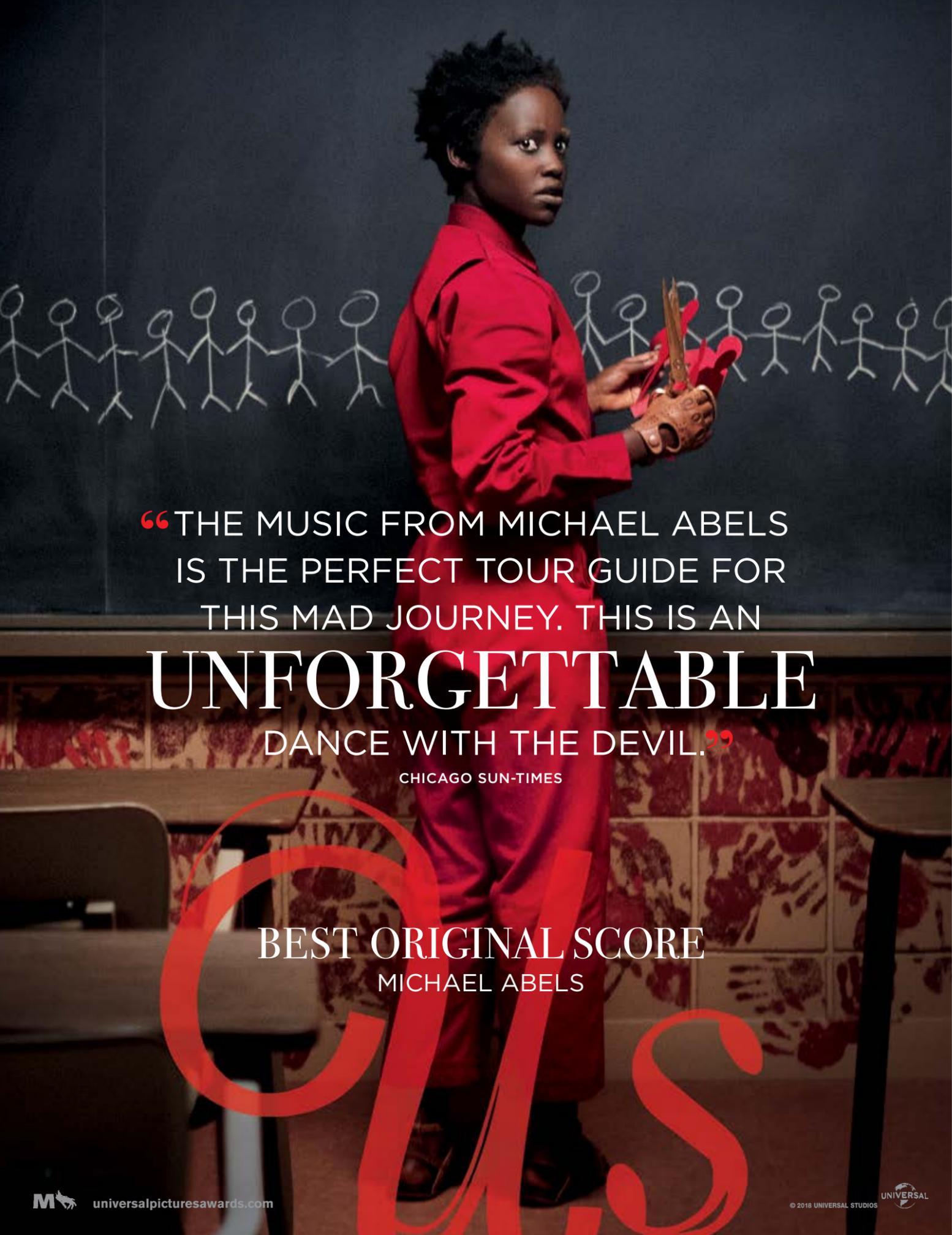
STARR: "I have so much admiration for musicians who can look at a new piece of music and play something one time and not only play it right, but get the feeling of the music as well. This orchestra was so into each story. Amy, before playing each piece, would tell the orchestra what each piece was about, so they could visualize the story. But this is an incredible time challenge, too."

MANDY: "This concert gave me such a great opportunity to step outside my normal media composing career and get back to my songwriting roots. It was a huge challenge to take a loop-based electronic song and translate it to the orchestra, and I learned immensely from it. It is so important to keep an open mind when it comes to musical or creative careers, as a split off your main path can take you to wonderful, unexpected places. I know this experience will lead to something else exciting, and anytime you push yourself to face a new challenge, you will find that you not only evolve as a composer, but as a human."

MIRIAM: "It's also financially challenging, and there are union rules. You need real discipline and leadership to figure out what's important and what isn't. My piece didn't get played much in rehearsal because it's musically less complex. It's really interesting to watch Amy conduct the musicians, and let go."

LOLITA: "Unlike being able to start and stop a take in a studio scenario, you have to be mindful about the arc of each musician's part. You have to give a musician space, room to breathe. I find that it's educational to look at the instrumental parts, after the parts come off the stands, and see, for example, what's been scratched out, or where there's a question mark. Articulation and dynamics—all these details are important—somebody might have a tied-over 8th note and somebody may not. With MIDI stuff, it's dangerously easy to write incorrectly for the orchestra, because of how the samples sound. Hearing your music with a live orchestra is a great learning tool, but I must admit, after all of these years, not a surprise, but still a tremendously great joy for me. When you witness not only the audience having a positive reaction to the work, but observe the musicians fully embracing the music you have composed, that is a rewarding feeling. Our hope is that this concert will get to live on and these pieces will be performed again."

SHARON: "You need to be very careful and detail-oriented. If you make one mistake, you're in the clear. Two mistakes or more, the musicians will not trust you and will start to ask about every little thing! That's why we always need another set of professional eyes that might be able to catch little things that we've missed."



“THE MUSIC FROM MICHAEL ABELS IS THE PERFECT TOUR GUIDE FOR THIS MAD JOURNEY. THIS IS AN UNFORGETTABLE DANCE WITH THE DEVIL.”

CHICAGO SUN-TIMES

BEST ORIGINAL SCORE
MICHAEL ABELS

GREG: *Did you work with orchestrators? Do your own orchestrations? And did you mock up these pieces?*

NATHALIE: “I mocked up both pieces and Amy said, oh, let’s do a little extra here, a little more there.”

MIRIAM: “Yes filmmakers will do that for you. That’s why I like to get involved early in documentaries.”

STARR: “I did mock up everything before. I have the wonderful fortune of having my daughter Isolde be a violinist. I did the orchestration. One piece “Rise” is a pop song that she wrote, so I wanted to adapt it for the orchestra while keeping some of the rawness I wanted. At one point all four percussionists are playing snare drums. I thought that would sound really cool. I told her, when you hear all the drums and the full orchestra behind you, don’t be alarmed and jump.”

SHARON: “I wrote everything out—I always do—but Catherine Joy, an amazing orchestrator in her own right, did my MIDI transcription and music preparation, and I am so grateful to her!”

LOLITA: “I make all of my own orchestration choices when I compose in Digital Performer: melody, harmony, counterpoint, orchestration techniques, etc., but when I have the luxury to work with an orchestrator, I turn to Larry Rench. Larry and Steven Rader both worked on the Sibelius scores for my three works. It’s great to have that second or third pair of eyes taking care of all the extremely important details. Everything does get mocked up, and in this case, the mockups were very elaborate. I don’t know any of my colleagues who get away with not having to mock up their work.”

MIRIAM: “This has been a really amazing experience. We launched the Alliance five years ago with the hope that after five years it wouldn’t be needed anymore. Now we’re saying ten years. Having been on the SCL Board for many, many years, I’ve seen that there is a collegiality in our community. When I first came into the industry, it felt scary and alienating; everybody seemed to be making a lot of money, and I couldn’t figure out how they were doing that. As it turned out, not everyone was. (laughter) Over time, The SCL has become a tremendous resource, a place for people to network, create all kinds of bonds and working situations. The Alliance is building on that. We have a specific issue, which is the lack of diversity. Here with my friends and colleagues, in a situation where I am less experienced writing for orchestra, I can ask questions. It feels very supportive, and I want to thank you all.”

SHARON: “I was the very first mentee of The SCL. I met wonderful people, and it opened doors and connections. Later on, I served on the Board for, 10 years. When you have the opportunity, remember to give back. Go serve on boards, speak to students, invite an intern to work with you—and treat your intern nicely! Treat the people around you like you want to be treated.”

MIRIAM: “Networking is important. Ours is a lonely profession. We’re in our studios alone a lot. Having comrades is great. It’s important to be able to get the support you need. I am also glad I was a street musician and worked with my own bands and Oingo Boingo because it is part of who I am and has affected the work I do now. My personal experience is what makes my voice unique.”

LOLITA: “You have so many opportunities to make friends with people who could potentially be your employers. Often composers who are high achievers just want to get everything done themselves and avoid collaborating! Do the group project! See how it is to work with different personalities—it’s really going to help you develop the skills needed to survive and thrive in this industry. Demos—whether you’re a singer/songwriter, or film composer—play your music for people, sit there and watch their body language while they listen to your music. That will help you put your reel together. Never send more than a few minutes of your work to anyone, unless they ask you to send a longer reel, and start with something strong. People skip ahead, and have a very short attention span.”

SHARON: “Be happy for others, because you want others to be happy for you when you succeed. If someone you know gets a job you wanted, say, ‘Good for her (or for him) and truly congratulate them. Next time, they’ll do the same for you, because we are all one community.’

“How do you go about composing without pictures? It’s just a matter of exploring—exploring your mind, your imagination, your background and musical influences, until you come up with something that you feel is worth exploring and developing further.

“People ask how I started my parallel career in concert music. It’s called ‘legwork’! I started sending music to competitions and won some. After I had a premiere with the Los Angeles Master Chorale, for example, people started approaching me and I started receiving commissions, but I continued to be assertive—even today. If you’re a young composer and you’d like to compose concert music, start by going online and Google: ‘Composition competitions for young composers.’ You will find a huge amount of information and many opportunities. There are lots of competitions—including international competitions. There are conferences you can go to. And when you go, come with something ready. If you don’t have a commission, create your own—maybe three to five minutes of music that is you, your style, your passion—you. And a word of advice: If you compose to text, look for public domain text, or write it yourself—it will make life much easier for you when the music gets published!

“Reward yourself when you’re done (get a massage!), and then send it out as much as possible. Have some Israeli *chutzpah*, and go do it!”

GREG: *What piece of advice would you give—what do you wish you knew when you were first starting out?*

MANDY: “When I first started out in film music, I felt I couldn’t do my own thing. I didn’t have a name yet or a huge body of work, and I would often get hired to sound like a different composer that they couldn’t afford. ‘Can you write something that sounds like that?’ they would direct. I was so worried about getting the job and pleasing others, and I found that I had to get out of that. I had to learn it’s okay to trust myself, and eventually learned how to re-direct the musical direction so that I had a stronger sense of collaboration. Now when I’m hired, I’m usually asked upfront for my opinion on the direction. I also think it’s okay to be inspired by other people, especially if you’re starting out and haven’t yet found your voice. If you want to borrow something from Ravel and mix it with something borrowed from Tchaikovsky, for example, then you’ll come out sounding like you—not them. We naturally take outside inspiration and re-process it to become our own voice.”

F O R Y O U R C O N S I D E R A T I O N

FORD v FERRARI

(LE MANS '66)

BEST PICTURE

BEST ORIGINAL SCORE MARCO BELTRAMI & BUCK SANDERS

“THE SCORE BY MARCO BELTRAMI AND BUCK SANDERS IS **PROPULSIVE AND DYNAMIC**, BRINGING YET ANOTHER LAYER OF EXPERT CRAFTSMANSHIP TO THE TABLE.”

— ADAM CHITWOOD, COLLIDER



LOLITA: “The thing I would obsess over when I was younger, which was a complete waste of time, was thinking about who had made it, and those who had not. I thought there was this magic thing that would happen, and then if you made it, you were ‘there.’ It’s really not that way, of course. Getting ‘there’ is a constant evolutionary process, and if you don’t try to enjoy the ride throughout your career—then maybe you shouldn’t be doing this kind of work. If you create joy in your daily life, and look for balance, the journey will go so fast. You will wake up one day and sit where I’m sitting and say, ‘Wow! How did that happen so quickly? What’s next?’”

NATHALIE: “I wish I knew that a goal was a direction—I know now that I may have a direction, but I may not go exactly in that direction, but actually I might go to a place I like better. You have to trust what your heart is telling you to do, and you may get somewhere even better than what you originally thought of.”

SHARON: “When you start out, you want to do everything; you don’t know how to live with rejection—which you’ll have a lot of—we all do—but one day, when I had a lot of stuff going on, I got a call from a friend who kept calling and begging us to get together. I kept turning her down. I realized at one point that she disappeared from my life. I met her one day and said, ‘What happened? Where did you go?’ And she said, ‘You never had time for me.’ I lost a friendship because I couldn’t take two hours to have coffee with my friend. So, now I stop to have dinner with my husband, and now that I have a child, I will read her a story before she goes to bed, sing her a song until she falls asleep, because this time is not going to come back. We take everything for granted. A month ago, I had a car accident in which I could have died. So, what I learned is to appreciate every moment in life.”

MIRIAM: “When I first started, I was working on a lot of horror movies, industrials, basically anything I could get. After about 10 years, I was making a living, and I thought, I’m doing this but I’m miserable. What is my life about? At that point, I thought, okay, when I’m older, in my 50s and 60s, when I look back at my life, what am I going to think about my choices? How did I spend my time on this planet? And I decided to turn stuff down that wasn’t making me happy. If I didn’t work as a composer anymore, then it wasn’t meant to be. More and more, I started to discover my passions. This led to an understanding that there are things that are very important to me. I have to take care of that part of myself, because that’s where the creativity comes from. I realized that I needed to share values and work with people with an ethical compass, contributing to a better understanding of our world—and that’s how I found my home in documentary film. I found something I could dedicate myself to—believe in. And now in my 60s, which I am now, I look back on my life and say, ‘Wow! Look at

“ Believe in yourself, trust your instincts and get in touch with what matters to you—seek it out, like a ballistic missile. ”

—Miriam Cutler

what I did! I’m proud of it. There is a spectrum—some people are more business-oriented, some more creative. You have to be everything to have a career in this business—be an entrepreneur, a visionary. I decided that I like documentary filmmakers—I’m going to go meet them all. I’m going to become part of their community and the work they do. Believe in yourself, trust your instincts and get in touch with what matters to you—seek it out, like a ballistic missile. Don’t waste your time and talent on nonsense.”

STARR: “Oh my gosh! How do I follow all of this? Two things: Always be open to the unexpected. My life has had a crazy trajectory. I’ve done so many types of musical projects—and I wonder—can I do all the things I want to do. It’s a blessing and a curse to love a lot of things. I’m a performer and a pianist, a composer, a mom, a mentor, a wife to my wonderful husband. I don’t think you have to give up one thing to do another thing. Some people have told me, if you want to be a composer, you have to give up being a player. Because everything takes so much time. If you want to play well, you have to practice. If you want to be a composer, you have to write music! I am finding that I don’t have to give up anything—I love all types of music, I love collaborating, and I love these people sitting on the panel with me. I feel that being open to the unexpected has led to an interesting life, and, like Miriam, I am loving my life and able to say that I’m happy with how I’m living. It’s a wonderful thing to be able to say.”

ADRYAN RUSS is a composer, lyricist, songwriter and SCL Board member, heading the SongArts Committee for SCL songwriters. She is writing songs with fellow SCL members and developing two musicals. As a former Peace Corps Volunteer, she was honored to attend and report on this inspiring concert.



STANDING OVATION, composers onstage. Photo by Derek Brad