

PRESS RELEASE

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L O S A N G E L E S

MASTER CHORALE

**Los Angeles Master Chorale to Perform West Coast
Premiere of Reena Esmail's *This Love Between Us:
Prayers for Unity* in Concert with Bach's *Magnificat***

**Sunday, November 18, 2018 – 7 PM
Walt Disney Concert Hall**



Los Angeles Composer Reena Esmail. Photo by Arnaud Pyvka.

**TICKETS AVAILABLE FROM \$39
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(Los Angeles, CA) October 4, 2018 – When Los Angeles composer Reena Esmail created *This Love Between Us: Prayers for Unity*, she envisioned it as a contemporary counterpoint to Bach's *Magnificat*, using the same Baroque instrumentation, but seeking new textures to convey a specific message. The two works will be performed by the Los Angeles Master Chorale and Grant Gershon, Kiki & David Gindler Artistic Director, on **Sunday, November 18 at 7 PM** in Walt Disney Concert Hall. The concert will feature 62 singers, orchestra, and soloists.

This Love Between Us: Prayers for Unity for chorus, orchestra, sitar, and tabla was premiered by Yale Schola Cantorum and Juilliard415 at the Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall in New York City in March 2017 and called a "powerful piece of music" by *Opera News* magazine. The work juxtaposes words from the seven major religion traditions of India — Buddhism, Sikhism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Jainism, and Islam — to explore how they each approach the topics of unity and harmony. The title comes from the 15th-century Indian mystic saint-poet Kabir, who wrote, "This love between us cannot be annihilated," a phrase Esmail says she felt encapsulated the nature of unity, namely, love and friendship between people.

"The work looks at the way each religion frames that love and that friendship. I subtitled it 'Prayers for Unity' because I want it to be clear that this is a religious work; prayer is a ritual that these religions have in common," says Esmail. "I had to dig into the depths of my soul to write this piece. I come from a multi-religious family, Catholic and Muslim. Because I've always been surrounded by different religious traditions, I was able to express my broad conception of religion through the piece. Also, music and religion are so related in both Western and Indian sacred traditions: Hindustani music is to Hinduism what Western classical music is to Christianity."



The texts for the seven movements come either straight from canonical religious writings or from poets who write through the lens of their religion. Esmail says she initially focused on texts about darkness and light but then felt the need to bring more purpose to the work: “I started to feel as if the world was falling apart around me. And I realized that I don’t just want to put beauty out into the world; I also want to create real meaning. So, I scrapped it all and started again, looking to the world’s religions and what they say about unity, about just being good to each other. In the darkest times, sitting there with those texts side-by-side, it was incredibly uplifting to see these seven religions all saying so clearly that we should be good to one another.”



Grant Gershon, Kiki & David Gindler Artistic Director, & members of the Master Chorale.
Photo by Tao Ruspoli/Marie Noorbergen.

The Master Chorale performance on November 18 will be the work’s West Coast premiere and Esmail’s Master Chorale and Walt Disney Concert Hall debut. It will be the first Master Chorale performance of Bach’s *Magnificat* — the composer’s musical setting of the canticle of the Blessed Virgin Mary — since 2012.



“We are deeply honored to present the West Coast Premiere of Reena Esmail’s powerful and profound work,” says Grant Gershon. “Reena is an artist who infuses everything that she creates with her strong sense of empathy and her commitment to justice. It’s fascinating to me that Reena wrote *This Love Between Us* as a companion to Bach’s *Magnificat*. The poetry of the *Magnificat* (sung by Mary in the Gospel according to Luke) is an ecstatic vision of a world transformed by social justice: ‘For behold . . . he hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away.’ Our singers and I are thrilled to present these two transcendent works together at Disney Hall.”

Esmail, who was born and raised in Los Angeles, is currently Composer-in-Residence for Street Symphony which serves people in the city disenfranchised by homelessness, poverty, and incarceration. Several singers from the Master Chorale perform as part of the Street Symphony Chamber Singers, including working with women at the California Institution for Women with Esmail. As part of her Street Symphony residency, Esmail has made her choral piece [Take What You Need](#) available for free download. Esmail is also the Co-Artistic Director of [Shastra](#), a non-profit organization that promotes cross-cultural music that connects the great musical traditions of India and the West. Two of her frequent Shastra collaborators, Rajib Karmakar (sitar) and Robin Sukhadia (tabla) will perform as soloists in *This Love Between Us*.

Esmail, who studied Hindustani music in India in 2011-2012 on a Fullbright-Nehru Scholarship and whose Yale School of Music doctoral thesis was titled *Finding Common Ground: Uniting Practices in Hindustani and Western Art Musicians*, says each movement of the work creates a dialogue between the Indian and Western musicians which can be compositionally challenging: “A choir and an orchestra have basically the same musical language, but Indian classical musicians are improvisers; their style of practice is very different, and they don’t read music in the same way Western musicians do. Writing for that rehearsal process is a major



logistical challenge. For example, just think about the sightlines; some people are sitting on the floor, some are sitting in chairs and the conductor is standing above them all. How can you make someone feel like they are part of an ensemble if they can't even make eye contact with the other musicians? So the piece accommodates people who have very different ways of communicating.

“In many ways, it is a musical microcosm of what we're facing in our world right now. The musicians are trying to express themselves, but that can't happen if there isn't a process in place that allows cross-cultural communication. As the person who is engineering this environment, I love being the catalyst for really great collaboration between the musicians so everyone is coming from their own place of strength.”

This performance made possible with generous support from the Dan Murphy Foundation.

[**ABOUT THE LOS ANGELES MASTER CHORALE**](#)

[**ABOUT GRANT GERSHON**](#)

[**ABOUT REENA ESMAIL**](#)

[**ABOUT THIS LOVE BETWEEN US: PRAYERS FOR UNITY**](#)

CALENDAR EDITORS:

WHAT:

LOS ANGELES MASTER CHORALE

[BACH'S MAGNIFICAT](#)

Program:

Johann Sebastian Bach | *Magnificat* in D Major

Intermission

Reena Esmail | *This Love Between Us: Prayers for Unity* (West Coast Premiere)

Grant Gershon, conductor

Magnificat soloists:

Emma-Grace Dunbar, soprano



Julia Metzler, soprano
Adriana Manfredi, mezzo-soprano
Jon Lee Keenan, tenor
Luc Kleiner, baritone

This Love Between Us: Prayers for Unity soloists:

Elissa Johnston, soprano
Shabnam Kalbasi, mezzo-soprano
Adam Faruqi, tenor
Abdiel Gonzalez, baritone

Rajib Karmakar, sitar
Robin Sukhadia, tabla

62 singers, orchestra

WHEN:

Sunday, November 18, 7 PM

6PM: ListenUp! Pre-concert talk with Grant Gershon, Reena Esmail, & KUSC's Alan Chapman in BP Hall.

WHERE:

Walt Disney Concert Hall, 111 S. Grand Ave.

TICKETS & BOX OFFICE INFORMATION:

Tickets are available now, starting from \$39:

Online: lamasterchorale.org

Phone: 213-972-7282

Tickets can be purchased in-person at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion Box Office Monday – Saturday, 10 AM – 6 PM.

On concert days, box office staff can be reached at 213-972-7282 beginning at 10 AM and the Disney Hall Box Office will be open for will call and sales beginning 2 hours prior to curtain time. Group rates are available. Los Angeles Master Chorale offers \$10 Student Rush Tickets at the box office 2 hours prior to the performance, subject to availability. Student ID required; 1 ticket per ID. Please call for additional details.

Please note: children under the age of six are not admitted to Los Angeles Master Chorale concerts.



LOS ANGELES MASTER CHORALE MEDIA CONTACT:

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High res photos available from the online [Press Room](#).

Reena Esmail quotes from an interview with Danika Paskvan for The Juilliard Journal. Read the full interview [here](#).

