

# MUSIC ACCORD

## RICHARD DANIELPOUR, MUSIC AND RITA DOVE, TEXT *Standing Witness* (2021)

### Program Notes

In 2018, I approached the great American poet Rita Dove about an idea that I had been seriously considering. I wanted to compose a work setting 13 or 14 poems for mezzo-soprano Susan Graham with a chamber ensemble. These poems would involve a woman who stands witnessing, giving testimony to the events of the last 50 years, including all the highlights and lowlights within that half-century. The work would culminate with two last songs about what was happening in our country at the time of the work's composition in 2020, and ultimately a revelation of the identity of our Standing Witness. Although the result of her identity involves a bit of fantasy and metaphor, it is in keeping with the function of art that employs those two devices as a matter of course.

I was thrilled when Rita decided to collaborate with me on this project, and equally delighted when Susan agreed to sing this work. Copland House and its Artistic and Executive Director, Michael Boriskin, played an essential role in making this project a reality; they arranged for a commission of the work through Music Accord, a consortium of top-tier American concert presenters, and graciously agreed, before one note of the score was written, to premiere and tour the work.

A few lines in the various poems were omitted, so these are designated in the printed text by an ellipsis. And for several reasons, we decided that an instrumental elegy, without words, would be a more appropriate reflection on the events of September 11, 2001.

This musical document, both historical and artistic in nature, has been created in order to ask two questions: where have we come from as Americans, and where are we going?

– Richard Danielpour

### Reviews

*Sardonic and reflective, A Standing Witness is a work for the present era. While simultaneously a musical experience and a quasi-biographical commentary, it makes one requirement: One must have lived through many of the events that the iconic woman recounts in order to fully appreciate the piece. Within the final line of the epilogue, Graham sang the words, "Who among you is ready to listen?" - Arts ATL*

*Showcasing the resonant voice of mezzo-soprano Susan Graham, the song cycle of "A Standing Witness" is a ravenously ambitious piece that dares to produce a sweeping retrospective of American history across the last half-century - The Albuquerque Journal*

### Standing Witness

Composer: Richard Danielpour, Music and Rita Dove, Text

Instrumentation:  
flute/clarinet/violin/viola/cello/piano and singer

Premiering Artists: Susan Graham, Mezzo Soprano  
Music from Copland House: Carol Wincenc, flute; Benjamin Fingland, clarinet; Suliman Tekalli, violin; Melissa Reardon, viola; Alexa Pia Gerlach, cello; Michael Boroskin, piano

Duration: 65"

### Publisher Contact

Lean Kat Music Rentals  
Inquiries regarding commissions for new works or music written since 2009.  
[www.billholabmusic.com](http://www.billholabmusic.com)

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### Artist Contact

for Susan Graham

<http://susangraham.com/contact/>

for Music from Copland House

[www.dworkincompany.com](http://www.dworkincompany.com)

Richard Danielpour



Rita Dove



Susan Graham

### About Music Accord

Comprised of top classical music presenting organizations throughout the United States, Music Accord is a consortium that commission new works in the chamber music, instrumental recital and song genres. The Consortiums goal is to create a significant number of new works and to ensure presentation of these works in venues throughout this country and, if the occasion arises, internationally. Music Accord awards commissions principally to performers who are US citizens or reside in the US and assists these performers in selecting composers who are United States citizens or who reside in the United States.

**CMS** Chamber Music Society of America

**HANCHER** Center for the Performing Arts

**LIBRARY OF CONGRESS**

**Kranert Center**