

Oakwood University President's Spring Message Sets Stage for New Musical Composition

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The Oakwood University Church sanctuary was packed to capacity on Sabbath, April 18, when President Delbert Baker delivered an inspiring Spring Message entitled, "Simon of Cyrene – Crossing Point." The sermon focused on how life events that seem at the time to be interruptions or disruptions to our daily routines can become the signal incident that saves our very lives.

It offered a close-up of the encounter that Simon of Cyrene, a black man from North Africa, had with Jesus when he was called on to assist the Savior with the cross after He had fallen beneath its weight on His way to Calvary—a divine interruption that became the crossing point in Simon's life.

Dr. Baker's 20-minute sermonette provided the backdrop for the Passion oratorio that was to follow. It was truly the icing on the cake, performed by the Aeolians, the Oakwood University Wind Ensemble, and the Belmont University (Nashville, Tenn.) Chamber Ensemble, and conducted by Aeolians director, Jason Max Ferdinand. The elaborate musical composition, entitled *Crossing Over*, was

dramatically narrated by OU alumnus Timothy Allston and was written by OU music department adjunct professor and piano accompanist Adriana Perera as part of her Master's

what inspired such a soul-stirring composition with family members, friends, and guests who had traveled to OU's campus that Sabbath to hear the first official public performance of

the composition. It was inspired, she said, by a private moment spent with family one evening at the foot of the Monument to Service, an 8-foot bronze statue in the center Oakwood's Centennial Square that depicts Simon of Cyrene assisting Jesus with the cross. The statue, which was sculpted by Alan Collins and dedicated in the fall of 2006, evoked such deep feelings of appreciation for the biblical account of Simon's personal encounter with Jesus on the way to His crucifixion that it became the theme of her Master's thesis on Negro spirituals.



Simon of Cyrene Oakwood University
Alan Collins, sculptor

thesis on Negro spirituals. It received two standing ovations and called many a handkerchief out of obscurity.

At a private luncheon reception held later that afternoon, Perera shared a few thoughts about

Perera, who is the daughter of missionary parents, drizzled snippets of Negro spirituals throughout this new composition. Having lived in South America and Spain during her childhood and adolescence, she was always fascinated by spirituals.

When asked why she chose this musical genre as the subject of her thesis, she responded, "It is a very special music, and has been translated

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into about 300 different languages. There's something about how each of these spirituals has its own story. I think God has somehow protected that music. ”

However, when she shared the subject of her thesis with her graduate professor at Belmont University, he didn't like the topic. “He felt I didn't have enough of a background,” she explained. But the gifted Uruguayan composer

persevered and gained access to many of the original musical manuscripts.

After diligent prayer and study, Perera took on the four-month challenge of writing the musical score that would trace the steps of Jesus on the Via Dolorosa, all the way to Calvary. It took another month, Perera said, to write the lyrics for the composition in English, her

second language. With the support of Oakwood Music Department chair Audley Chambers, Ph.D., Aeolians conductor Justin Max Ferdinand, and vice president for Academic Affairs John Anderson, Ph.D., what has resulted is a moving contribution to the music arena that will surely find its rightful place among the annals of inspired compositions.
