

Celebrating Zora

A COLLABORATIVE CONCERT PAYS TRIBUTE TO THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF ZORA NEALE HURSTON.

BY JESSICA CHAPMAN

Every January, the city of Eatonville celebrates the life and work of Zora Neale Hurston at a festival named in her honor, but the cultural contributions of the writer, anthropologist and folklorist extend far beyond Central Florida. So when Christopher Wilkins, music director of the Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra (OPO), and N.Y. Nathiri, director of multidisciplinary programs for the Association to Preserve the Eatonville Community (PEC), were discussing possible collaborative projects, they knew it had to be something that communicated Hurston's global impact.

To fund a large-scale project that fit their mission, Nathiri applied for and received a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts. The Pabst Charitable Foundation for the Arts also supported the idea. "I love supporting collaborative efforts across multiple disciplines," says Margery Pabst, president of the Pabst Charitable Foundation for the Arts. The awards from both groups enabled OPO and PEC to commission a narrative from librettist Elizabeth Van Dyke and an original composition by Adolphus Hailstork.

Van Dyke, an award-winning actress and director, first wrote the storyline, then gave the script to Hailstork. A professor of music and eminent scholar at Old Dominion University, Hailstork is one of the most prominent African-American composers of today.

The result is "Zora! We're Calling You," which will premiere as part of OPO's *American Voices* at the Bob Carr



ON NOVEMBER 12, the Orlando Philharmonic Orchestra will present *American Voices*, a special concert that celebrates Zora Neale Hurston and her cultural contributions. The performance will include an original composition by Adolphus Hailstork.

DAVID WHITFIELD

Performing Arts Centre on Saturday, November 12, at 8 p.m. The concert will also include Hailstork's "Celebration," Frederick Delius' "Appalachia" and Aaron Copland's "Appalachian Spring." In addition to performances by OPO and Van Dyke, the "Negro Spiritual" Scholarship Foundation Master Singers and the Florida Opera Theatre Chorus will also take the stage for a truly momentous musical experience.

Van Dyke's script covers most of Hurston's life, from her experiences in Eatonville, the oldest African-American municipality in the U.S., as well as the time she spent in New York City, where she was a major cultural figure during the Harlem Renaissance.

Touching on Hurston's affinity for folklore, Van Dyke also incorporates two folk tales into the storyline, which she will narrate during the concert. Although

classically trained, Hailstork says, "I like that folksy writing," describing Van Dyke's work as one that uses colorful language to eloquently tell Hurston's story. As far as creating the composition, he says, "We want to make sure the music is a vivid and honest description of the script."

The other pieces that will be performed that evening are in keeping with the flavor of the commissioned work. "Appalachia" reflects the time Delius spent in Florida in the late 1800s and was one of the first American compositions to be considered a truly great work. "I think people are going to be humbled by the music and pieces," says Wilkins. "They show an almost reverential tone about this area, the people and place together. I think people will be surprised by how much cultural pride they feel."

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