

Alice Smith: The Sound of Freedom

Thursday, April 11, 2019
Bovard Auditorium
University of Southern California



Photo (Alice Smith): Alex Elena

ABOUT ALICE SMITH

- Alice Smith is a singer/songwriter/producer who blends rock, pop, and R&B with soul, gospel, and go-go inflections.
- She has released two albums, *For Lovers, Dreamers, and Me* (2006) and *She* (2013).
- She was raised between Washington, D.C., and Augusta, Georgia.
- This concert was created in honor of the 80th anniversary of Marian Anderson's concert at the Lincoln Memorial, and inspired by those who have lent their voices to struggles to end systemic oppression and uplift the freedom of all people.

MARIAN ANDERSON AT THE LINCOLN MEMORIAL

On April 9, 1939, the singer Marian Anderson stood in front of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., and sang "My Country 'Tis of Thee." This seemingly simple act was revolutionary.

One of the most celebrated singers of the twentieth century, Anderson had performed in major venues throughout Europe and the United States when she was invited by Howard University to sing in Washington, D.C. The venue they found that was large enough to accommodate the crowd expected for Anderson was owned by Daughters of the American Revolution (D.A.R.), who refused to let Anderson perform in their building. D.A.R. had a white-artist-only clause in the contract for their segregated venue. Marian Anderson was black.

First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt was a Daughter of the American Revolution who was so outraged that she resigned from the group in protest. Still, D.A.R. refused to let Anderson sing in their venue. The NAACP suggested an outdoor concert, and the performance was moved to the National Mall, where Anderson performed for an integrated audience of 75,000 people.

Anderson followed "My Country 'Tis of Thee" with two opera songs and three spirituals. The concert, broadcast to a national audience via radio, significantly raised awareness about the problems of racism and segregation in America. Still, it was not until 1955 that Anderson was invited to become the first African American to sing at the Metropolitan Opera in New York. She later served as a UN Human Rights "goodwill ambassador" and sang at the 1963 march on Washington for civil

rights. Anderson was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom, a Congressional Gold Medal, a Kennedy Center Honor, and a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award.

When Marian Anderson sang "My Country 'Tis of Thee" before the Lincoln Memorial, she changed the phrase "of thee I sing" to "of thee we sing." She later explained, "We cannot live alone. And the thing that made this moment possible for you and for me has been brought about by many people whom we will never know."

FREEDOM SONGS

Across cultures and historical periods, music has been used as a form of resistance, resilience, and inspiration for social change. The U.S. civil rights movement consciously drew on this tradition with "freedom songs" that served as a means of communication, community building, and stoking and sustaining hope and commitment to the movement. Many of these songs were derived from gospel songs or African American spirituals—songs that expressed the horrors and hardships of slavery and sometimes spoke to a way out of it. During the civil-rights era, freedom songs were sung at meetings, sit-ins, and marches, in jails and at kitchen tables, by grassroots activists as well as famous musicians like Nina Simone (whose "Mississippi, Goddamn" was a movement anthem).

Freedom songs that were central to the civil-rights movement include:

We Shall Overcome	I Love Everybody
Go Tell It On the Mountain	Lift Ev'ry Voice and Sing
A Change Is Gonna Come	To Be Young, Gifted, and Black
Mississippi, Goddamn	Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Us Around
Keep Your Eyes on the Prize	We Shall Not Be Moved
This Little Light of Mine	

FOR FURTHER REFLECTION

- Is there a tradition of music as resistance, or freedom music, in your culture or community?
- Were you particularly moved by any songs tonight? Which ones? Why do you think they spoke to you so strongly?
- Why is music so effective in inspiring hope or motivating action?

IF YOU LIKED THIS EVENT, YOU MIGHT WANT TO CHECK OUT:

- **Alice Smith online**
alicesmith.com
- **Alice Smith's NPR Tiny Desk Concert**
youtube.com/watch?v=-ZOW4CvYAZ4
- **Concerts, Performances, and Events at USC**

The Los Angeles Times Festival of Books at USC, April 13–14

Musical performances at the USC Stage by the Trojan Marching Band, The Trojan Men, Ashley Chanel, Remi Wolf, I See Hawks in L.A., Maddie Ross, Urban Voices Project, Jensen McRae, Ify Anene, Lily Waters, and SoCal VoCals
events.latimes.com/festivalofbooks

USC Thornton School of Music Jazz Night: Jazz Honors Combo, April 15, at 7 p.m.
calendar.usc.edu/event/jazz_night_jazz_honors_combo_7118

Jails and Justice: Rethinking Public Safety through the Arts, April 16, at 7 p.m.
visionsandvoices.usc.edu/events/listing.php?event_id=1603133

Visions and Voices Experience L.A. Trip to Lackawanna Blues (USC students only) on Wednesday, April 17, at 7 p.m.
visionsandvoices.usc.edu/events/listing.php?event_id=1305826

Lackawanna Blues at Center Theatre Group, running now through Sunday, April 21
centertheatregroup.org/tickets/mark-taper-forum/2018-19/lackawanna-blues

- **USC Thornton School of Music — Popular Music Program Showcases**

First-Year Showcase: Wednesday, April 24, at 8 p.m.
calendar.usc.edu/event/popular_music_first-year_showcase_9073

Second-Year Showcase: Friday, April 26, at 8 p.m.
calendar.usc.edu/event/popular_music_second-year_showcase_8434

Third-Year Showcase: Saturday, April 27, at 7 p.m.
calendar.usc.edu/event/popular_music_third-year_showcase_3374

- **EnClaveLA**
enclave.la

DISCOVER MORE AT THE USC LIBRARIES

ANTHONY ANDERSON of the USC Libraries selected the following resources to help you learn more about Marian Anderson and tonight's event. Those with a call number (e.g., books) are physical items which you can find in our campus libraries. Those without a call number (e.g. e-books, journal articles, and databases) are electronic resources, which you can access through the search bar on the USC Libraries homepage at libraries.usc.edu.

RECOMMENDED BOOKS

Anderson, Marian. *My Lord, What a Morning; An Autobiography*. New York: Viking Press, 1956.
Music Library: ML420.A6 A3

Arsenault, Raymond. *The Sound of Freedom: Marian Anderson, the Lincoln Memorial, and the Concert That Awakened America*. New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2009.
Music Library: ML420.A6 A77 2009

Feldstein, Ruth. *How It Feels to Be Free: Black Women Entertainers and the Civil Rights Movement*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.
Doheny Library: E185.86 .F4342 2013

Levy, Peter B. *Let Freedom Ring: A Documentary History of the Modern Civil Rights Movement*. New York: Praeger, 1992.
Doheny Library: E185.61 .D64 1992b

Rabaka, Reiland. *Civil Rights Music: The Soundtracks of the Civil Rights the Civil Rights Movement*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016.
E-book

