



GOT
MY
WINGS

GOT MY WINGS
A NEW WORK
INSPIRED BY
THE LIFE AND
WRITINGS OF
JARVIS JAY
MASTERS
AN INNOCENT
MAN ON
DEATH ROW

MUSIC BY DANIEL BLAKE
CHOREOGRAPHY BY TODD HALL AND TOMIKO MAGARIO
FEATURING WESTCHESTER BALLET COMPANY

PROGRAM NOTES

Got My Wings began as a reflection on the profound societal changes that emerged out of the Covid pandemic. In searching for a way to process all of this, my mind quite naturally turned to Jarvis Jay Masters, whose life and writings embody a virtuous force known in some circles as "compassionate action". Having spent the last three decades on death row for a crime he did not commit, Masters has developed a devoted spiritual practice under the most difficult circumstances imaginable. His very being emanates, by way of the written and recorded word, far beyond prison walls to exude a profound sense of safety and protection. I felt when listening to or reading Jarvis that a better world really is possible.

Got My Wings is a reference to Masters' 2009 memoir *That Bird Has My Wings*. The sincere desire to "fly away" and be exonerated from an unjust death sentence is up against the very real and present need to meet life exactly where it is right now. "Where do we find our freedom?" is a question that reverberates in my mind as I go through each day, thanks to Jarvis. There are three perspectives on this question, drawn from his writings and statements, that form the separate movements of this work. For this performance, the first stage in a longer process realizing this work, each movement is pre-recorded and will be preceded by a musical interlude performed live:

I. **Home Is Wherever the Heart Can Be Found:**

"Welcoming the morning light, I realize, like seeing through clouds, that home is wherever the heart can be found." I asked him what he means by "home" when his circumstances are so plainly unjust and cruel. Bird sounds bring in the dancers, who hint at a spiritual ground of safety, tinged with the anxiety of hope.

II. **Does anybody want to know how badly I want out of prison?**

During his incarceration, Jarvis Jay Masters fell in love and married, but the relationship was dealt a brutal setback when Masters' state appeal was denied in 2016. Reflecting on the decision to end the marriage in David Sheff's *The Buddhist On Death Row*, Masters said: "I thought I was freeing her, but I was freeing myself, too. I was having to hold her up, act like I was sure I'd get out...The problem isn't love. I love her, and I know she loves me. But what if I choose not to focus on getting out but on where my life is?"

Love is expressed here by an imaginary chorus, with a rising intensity that dissipates suddenly. A trio of dancers builds momentum once again only to be stuck in the middle, until a single dancer slowly returns to where love began.

III. Just Because You're Out Doesn't Mean You're Free

The guiding question for Got My Wings is one posed by Jarvis in this movement: "where do we find our freedom?" He shares the hard-won insight that "putting hope on Front Street" may get us into trouble, and that it is better to "quit trying to chase after what you don't know". The conclusion here is that "just 'cause you're out doesn't mean you're free".

The movement begins with clapping, a symbol of unity, but here there is also disorientation and confusion as well. Eventually, we hear Masters' voice who speaks to the ensemble, and throughout the movement the ensemble becomes increasingly aware of what he is saying. Perhaps the rest of us will as well...

While his personal story and hard-won insights provide the inspiration for this piece, we must not lose sight of the extraordinary urgency of Masters' campaign to win his exoneration. As Masters has written recently: "No amount of money will end the death penalty. No more naively appealing to humanity or blind faith that the public can magically change. Instead, the abolitionist movement needs to concentrate on amplifying the voices of death row exonerees and Life Without Parole survivors."

TEXT HEARD IN MOVEMENT 3:

"When it comes down to your freedom after so long, you really deep down inside, you don't want this. You wanna win this. And it caught up to me that the idea of losing is one more long, long time of being in prison for zero, for nothing."

"I don't wanna get into what hope is s'posed to do for me right now, you know? I don't think hope's gonna help me. In other words, I don't wanna put hope on Front Street."

"The idea of not expecting anything, work with that. Quit trying to chase after what you don't know! That's a very comfortable space if you can control it, if it can be maintained. That's what practice is: you get better at it, you discover more, it becomes more of a way of thinking, it creates balance in your life. I mean that's just the way I see it in prison..."

"Where do we find our freedom? Someone has a very beautiful home right off the beach, great job, a trained dog, and how their lives are so miserable. And to think that you have all these opportunities to find your own freedom, to be blessed. Learn from the misery that you see other people have when they're alcoholics, when they're dope fiends, when they're very abusive to their spouse, when violence is right next door and not necessarily on the streets. Just because you're out doesn't mean you're free. That's a myth, that's a very clear myth to me. That's something I can directly relate to."

Learn more about the campaign to exonerate Jarvis Jay Masters and his publications at www.freejarvis.org

Through this work, I also came into contact with Sing Sing Family Collective, an organization doing important work here in Ossining to connect families of incarcerated individuals with important resources, fresh food, and community.

<https://www.gofundme.com/f/sing-sing-family-collective-sweet-freedom-farm>

@sing_sing_family_collective

Credits:

Got My Wings

All music composed and performed by Daniel Blake
Choreography by Todd Hall and Tomiko Magario

Westchester Ballet Company Dancers:

Sianna Biem, Cynthia Cai, Kyra Durham,
Ada Hossfeld, Amelia Lightfoot, Kylah Nee,
Kerri Nichols, Julia Pellon, Lily Rivera,
Madeline Rohde, and Cameron Virrill.

Westchester Ballet Company Board of Directors

representatives: Amy Harte and Margaret Yawman

Lighting design: Andrew Irons

Videographer: Will Armstrong

Assistant camera: Tristen Stafford

Graphic design: Amy Harte

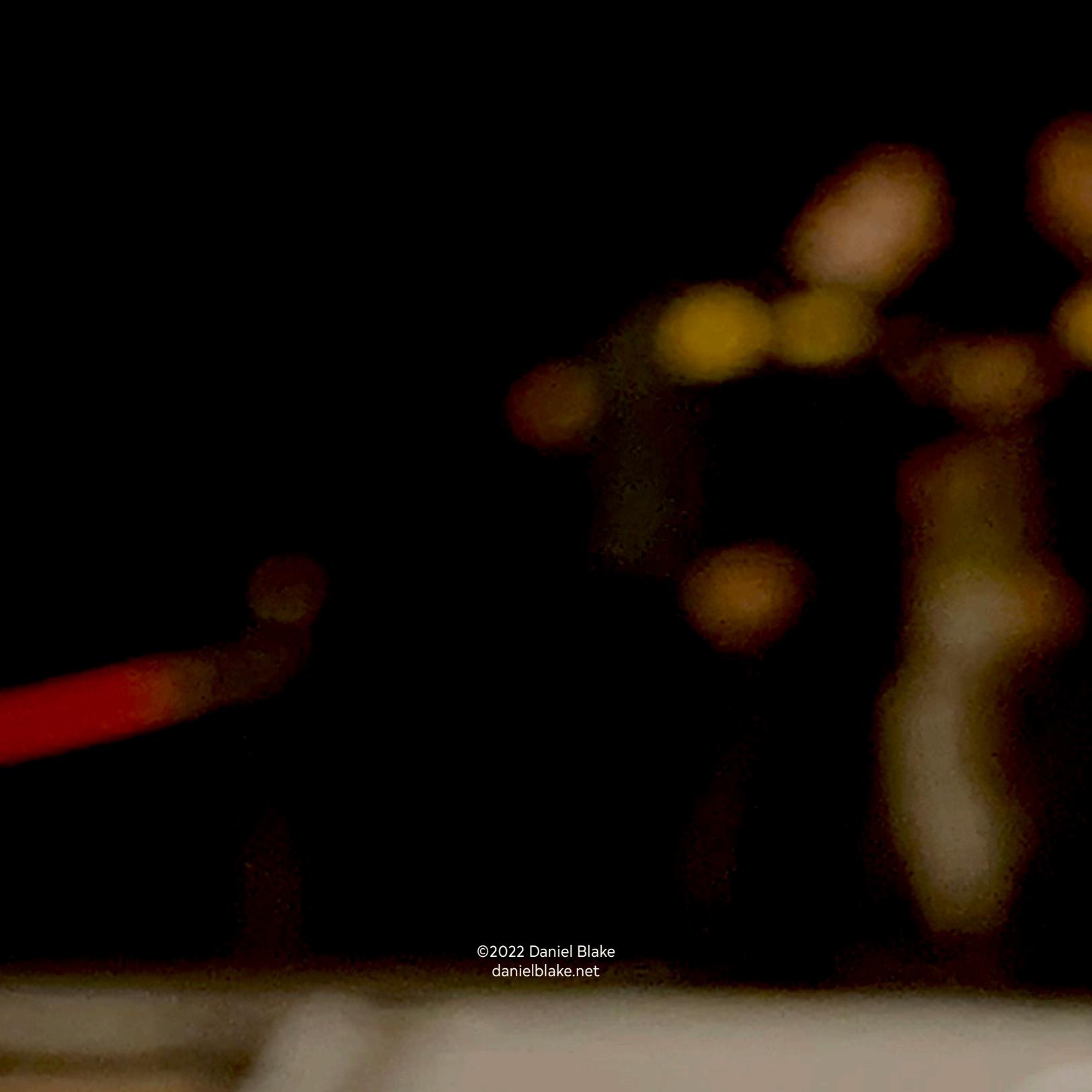
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Bethany Arts Community, Executive Director:

Abigail Lewis

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Renée Davis-Wilson

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