

# a more convenient season

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UAB's *alys* STEPHENS  
PERFORMING ARTS  
CENTER  
*presents*

# a more convenient season

WORLD PREMIERE

Saturday  
September 21, 2013  
8pm

*Commissioned by architect and philanthropist Tom Blount  
Produced by UAB's Alys Stephens Performing Arts Center*



# A MORE CONVENIENT SEASON

*Composed by Yotam Haber*

**I - TIMING**

**II - QUESTIONS**

**III - NEGATIVE PEACE/POSITIVE PEACE**

*Featuring the Alabama Symphony Orchestra  
conducted by Michael Morgan*

*Philip White, electronic music*

*David Petersen, filmmaker*

*David Harris, choral director*

*Quint Harris, choral director*

*Eliza Warden, soloist - soprano 1*

*Racquel Williams, soloist - soprano 2*

*Lillian Davis, soloist - alto 1*

*Kristin Deneen, soloist - alto 2*

*Mississippi State University Choir*

*Tuskegee University Choir*

*Vocalists from Birmingham's groups and choirs,  
including 16th Street Baptist Church*

*Special thanks to Sue Samuels and the UAB Department of Music*

Note: There will be no pause between movements.

The performance will run approximately 75 minutes without intermission.

*To maintain the artistic integrity of the piece, the performance begins promptly at 8pm and there will be no late seating.*

## ABOUT THE COMPOSER, YOTAM HABER



Hailed by *New Yorker* critic Alex Ross as “deeply haunting,” and chosen as one of the 30 composers under 40 by Orpheus Chamber Orchestra’s Project 440, Yotam Haber was born in Holland and grew up in Israel, Nigeria, and Milwaukee. He is the recipient of a 2013 Fromm Music Foundation commission, the 2007 Rome Prize and a 2005 John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship. Recent commissions include works for Pritzker Prize-winning architect Peter Zumthor; new works for New York-based Contemporaneous, Gabriel Kahane, Either/Or, and Alarm Will Sound; the 2012 and 2014 Venice Biennale; 2012 Bang on a Can

Summer Festival; the Neuvocalsolisten Stuttgart and ensemble l’arsenale; FLUX Quartet, JACK Quartet, Cantori New York, the Tel Aviv-based Meitar Ensemble, and the Berlin-based Quartet New Generation. He is currently working on *Voice Imitator*, an evening-length cycle of piano works with visual artist and MacArthur Fellow Anna Schuleit. Haber is the Artistic Director of MATA, the non-profit organization founded by Philip Glass, that has, since 1996, been dedicated to commissioning and presenting new works by young composers from around the world. This year, he serves as Visiting Professor of Composition at the University of New Orleans. His music is published by RAI Trade.

## ABOUT PHILIP WHITE

Philip White is a performer and composer of experimental electronic music. Based in Brooklyn, N.Y., his work straddles the fields of contemporary classical, free jazz, and noise music.

## ABOUT DAVID PETERSEN

David Petersen films are in the permanent collections of The Museum of Modern Art, National Gallery of Art, and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, and have received many awards, including an Academy Award nomination. He is currently an assistant professor of Media Culture at City University of New York in Staten Island.

*We at UAB's Alys Stephens Performing Arts Center would like to thank UAB President Ray L. Watts and Dr. Shirley Salloway Kahn, UAB Vice President for Development, Alumni and External Relations, for their unwavering support and their steadfast commitment to curating original works, such as A More Convenient Season, which can be shared with the local community and beyond. Their tireless efforts helped make this evening's much-anticipated program a reality. We also would like to thank architect and philanthropist Tom Blount, who commissioned this piece, for his generosity and abiding support of the arts.*

## FROM THE COMPOSER, YOTAM HABER

*A More Convenient Season* falls between an oratorio and an opera.

The dramatic arc to this work was conceived after spending time in Birmingham and speaking with a diverse cross-section of the city's citizens: young and old, black and white, Christians and Jews, people who were heroes and foot soldiers in the Civil Rights Movement, as well as those who did not experience those years of turmoil. Nearly every person I met told me the same thing: We've had enough images of dogs and water hoses, and it is time to have hope, to celebrate Birmingham for the strides it has made, and for her shining future. I've tried to write a piece that moves from that dark, fear-filled time to a brighter present. Usually, when a composer is commissioned to write an orchestral work, he is not told much more than the instruments he will have at his disposal and the duration required. This work, however, had a different genesis.

From the beginning it was conceived not just as a piece for an orchestra to perform, but also as a work of public art; I wanted to create something for the community of Birmingham. Ultimately, this music is not only for Birmingham; it is for those who visit the city with an interest in its past; it is for anyone interested in the history of Civil Rights; it is for all of us today who have faced fear and oppression. This is not an abstract work, open to any sort of interpretation; this piece is about something. But it is not only about the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church on September 15, 1963. If I had to pin down what that something is, I would say that this piece is dedicated to a question: What do people do when faced with injustice?

Because this is not just a piece of concert music, I wanted to remove some of the usual trappings of the classical tradition. As soon as you enter the lobby, you are made aware that this isn't the usual orchestra piece: There is no clapping for a tuning concert master; the conductor is already up on stage; everyone is ready to play; the music had already begun before you and I arrived. You heard a seamless transition between the soundscape playing in the lobby and what you heard as you walked through the doors into the hall. You've been hearing a tapestry of low electronic tones created in conjunction with my collaborator, Philip White, melded with voices from the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute's Oral History Project – heroes and ordinary folks. These are the words that make up the libretto of my work.

Once the orchestra begins playing, a silent film created by director David Petersen begins. The film, created specifically for *A More Convenient Season*, incorporates both historical footage and images captured by David Petersen during his visits to Birmingham.

**Timing**, the first movement, begins with members of the orchestra and chorus unable to speak, let alone sing. We hear an almost hyperventilated breathing, preparing for what's to come. When the chorus finally begins, they are still not singing, but whispering words that at the same time are heard in the archival recordings from the BCRI's Oral History Project. This is music reflecting a climate of fear, from which a story of healing and courage will ultimately emerge.

The second movement, **Questions**, begins without pause. We hear two sets of questions: the first, those asked of bombing suspects by the FBI, in polygraph tests that have an inherent dramatic arc, beginning with rather

innocuous tones, ratcheting up in tension and specificity, but – in my work – never arriving at the final question. The second set of questions heard here are the impossible-to-answer ones asked of African-Americans who tried to register to vote. “How high is height? How far is distance?” these citizens were once asked. Out of these questions arises a closing chorus to the movement, which quotes Psalm 133: “Behold, how good and how pleasant for brothers to dwell together in unity.”

**Negative Peace/Positive Peace**, the third movement, begins with a 25-second clip of an archival recording of the civil rights song, “*We Shall Overcome*.” This very short clip has been digitally stretched out to 12 minutes, and in doing so each breath and each quaver of the voice is magnified, forming massive waves of sound and power. Words lose their immediate intelligibility through this process, but we gain a new sense of this song's meaning. I transcribed what I heard in this slowed-down version, and you'll hear the orchestra and chorus essentially playing catch-up with the recording; they are attempting to overcome. The intensity, power, and speed required in the task of overcoming is what I am aiming to achieve. At the peak of volume and motion, everything suddenly drops away, and we are left with the chorus, who are by themselves for the first time in almost an hour. They are repeating the phrase: “We are not afraid.” This very quiet, yet very fast, mantra forms a bridge to the final chorus of the movement: a setting of a fragment from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s “*Letter from a Birmingham Jail*.” Dr. King's words are hopeful, yet steadfastly realistic; powerful and uplifting, still rooted in an understanding of human fallibility.

### I AM GRATEFUL TO SO MANY GOOD & COURAGEOUS PEOPLE WHO MADE THIS PROJECT POSSIBLE:

Tom Blount for his vision and generosity; Theresa Bruno and the miraculous team at UAB's Alys Stephens Performing Arts Center for their unflagging support; Jessica Simpson and Katrina Watson for their tireless help and wisdom; Pierre Ruhe and the great Alabama Symphony Orchestra; Laura Anderson from the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, whose knowledge and insight into the oral histories of the people who lived through the Movement formed the cornerstone of my work; Jim Baggett at the Birmingham Public Library for leading me in the right direction; Cynthia Levinson for her incredible interview with Pamela Walbert Montanaro, whose words I set; the electronic composer Philip White for his deeply felt and beautiful musical contributions and collaboration; filmmaker David Petersen for the extraordinary images he's brought to this project; Quint and David Harris for their heroic music-making; Michael Morgan for his leadership; and lastly to my wife, Anna, who has stood with me through this unforgettable journey.

A special thanks also to B.J. Love King, Myrna Carter Jackson, Bishop Calvin Woods, and Sol Kimerling for graciously sitting down with me and speaking about your extraordinary lives.

I will never forget these conversations.



WATCH THE VIDEO OF YOTAM  
HABER AND ERIC ESSIX DISCUSSING  
*A MORE CONVENIENT SEASON*





**A MORE CONVENIENT SEASON  
FILM CREDITS & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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David Petersen

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Tom Blount  
Theresa Bruno  
Jessica Simpson  
The entire staff of UAB's Alys  
Stephens Performing Arts Center

*Composer*  
Yotam Haber

*Associate Producers*  
Tony Bingham  
Nicholas Price

*Supportive Organizations*  
16th Street Baptist Church  
Birmingham Civil Rights Institute  
Birmingham History Center  
Birmingham Public Library  
Birmingham African-American  
Genealogical Society

*Archival Footage Contributors*  
Birmingham Civil Rights Institute  
Corbis Motion  
National Archives

*Home Movie Footage Contributors*  
Charles Ball  
Tony Bingham  
Don Campbell  
Ruth Coleman  
Judge Helen Shores Lee  
The McGriff Family  
Rochelle Reynolds

*Time Lapse Footage*  
Randal Crow, *director*  
Tony Bingham, *production assistant*

*Dancer on Street*  
Derrick Hamby

*Research Assistance*  
Laura Anderson  
Jim Baggett  
Tony Bingham  
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Mridu Chandra  
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Courtney Haden  
Dr. Freeman Hrabowski III  
Josephine Martin  
Carolyn Maull McKinstry  
Lisa McNair  
Nicholas Price  
Rochelle Reynolds  
Katrina Watson

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Darina Karpov

*Production Assistance*  
Darina Karpov  
Salah Ismail  
Janna Topuzis

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Toni Lucatorto  
Pauline Mason  
Carolyn Maull McKinstry  
Lisa McNair  
Daphne McWilliams  
Kevin Pothuisje  
Rev. Arthur Price, Jr.  
Dave Rickey  
Sarah Collins Rudolph  
Sidewalk Film Festival  
16th Street Baptist Church  
Sixth Avenue Baptist Church  
Martha Southgate  
Jan Spruill  
Russ and Nancy Suniewick  
Philip White

**A MORE CONVENIENT SEASON  
CHORUS MEMBERS**

*Sopranos*  
Heather Batey  
Lucia Calhoun  
Cecilia Crenshaw  
Alli Davis  
Danielle Eggers  
Sadie Farmer  
Jennifer Griffin  
Krisztina Harsanyi-Jilling  
Britt Hendrix  
Susan Holt  
Sandra Hosley  
Auza Jackson  
Willa Justiss  
Kimberly Kirklin  
Sherry Lee  
Sooyeon Lee  
Mary Beth McCombs  
Dr. Lindy McLeod  
Katie Mulvaney  
Letha Raularson  
Amanda Reagan  
Julie Shum  
Diamond Sparks  
Carol Stettheimer  
Pam Thompson  
Tammara Turner  
Kalyn Williams

*Altos*  
Mattie Crisp  
Myra Hunter  
Angela Johnson  
Carye Anne Key

Nancy Lewis  
Karen Lord  
Corrine McIlwain  
McClain Miles  
Dr. Erline Patrick  
Sue Pearson  
Anna Richardson  
Tammy Shaw

*Mississippi State University*

*Sopranos*  
Brittany Bobo  
Aressa Coley  
Karen Fairley  
April Garrett  
Alexis Hannah  
Shontia Kirkland  
Canassa Phillips  
Cori Reece  
Amelia Sierra  
Bryanna Sims

*Altos*  
Korey Atkinson  
Courtney Baugher  
Fredrica Brown  
Devon Cuevas  
Morgan Daniels  
Breyounga Jackson  
Tristan Lee  
Janae Owens  
Sarah Temperilli  
Ivye Yeatman

*Tuskegee University*  
*Sopranos*  
Ceira Caston  
Christian Felton  
Leah Grayson  
Jacquelyn Harris  
Charissa Hylton  
Sherona Ingalls  
Brittany Johnson  
Adreana Robinson  
Boler Taylor  
Kyrrah Thompson  
Chasiti Walker  
Ta Naya Williams  
Barbara Wright

*Altos*  
Tania Anderson  
April Baldwin  
Breahna Bean  
Kristina Bolden  
Kristen Freeman  
Jade Johnson  
Crystal Miller  
Amber Pratcher  
Keyonte' Quillens  
Jerrica Russaw  
De'Bria Stallworth  
ViShayla Stewart  
Janice Thomas

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Dr. Gary Packwood, Director of Choral Activities, Mississippi State University;  
Karen Kregelberg, choral rehearsal pianist; Vestavia Hills United Methodist Church

*This film is dedicated to Sarah Collins Rudolph, the fifth girl. For more information, visit [SarahCollinsProject.com](http://SarahCollinsProject.com).*