Kathleen Battle, 
*Underground Railroad: A Spiritual Journey*

Joel A. Martin, piano

with
California State University, Fullerton
University Singers
Robert Istad, director
About the Artists

Kathleen Battle

Soprano Kathleen Battle’s luminous voice has been called “…without qualification, one of the very few most beautiful in the world” (The Washington Post). Yet beyond the glory of her singing, in a career filled with countless accolades, honors and major milestones, what has perhaps distinguished her most is her almost magical ability to create an unwavering emotional bond between herself, her music and her audience.

In her youth, this native of Portsmouth, Ohio, the youngest of seven children, sang in church and school, and envisioned a future as a music teacher. Fortunately for audiences around the world, she found other ways to share her love of music—and through her natural gifts, innate intelligence, and hard work, her soaring voice has carried her to the heights of the classical music world. Indeed, throughout a remarkable career that has brought her to the stages of the world’s leading opera houses and major concert halls, critics have never tired of rhapsodizing over her limpid, unmistakable sound. In quite poetic terms, they have compared it to “the ethereal beauty of winter moonlight” (The Washington Post), “a paradoxical meeting of earth and sky” (Philadelphia Inquirer), and “cream from a miraculous, bottomless pitcher” (The New York Times).

The range of Miss Battle’s repertoire spans three centuries from the Baroque era to contemporary works. She has enjoyed some of her greatest successes in the opera house in repertoire ranging from Handel (Cleopatra in the Metropolitan Opera’s premiere staging of Giulio Cesare) to Richard Strauss (Sophie, Zdenka, Zerbinetta). For her Covent Garden debut as Zerbinetta in Ariadne auf Naxos, Miss Battle became the first American to be honored with a Laurence Olivier Award for Best Performance in a New Opera Production. She has similarly distinguished herself as one of our generation’s finest interpreters of Mozart (Susanna, Despina, Pamina, and Zerlina), as well as the bel canto operas of Rossini (Il Barbiere di Siviglia) and Donizetti (L’Elisir d’Amore, Don Pasquale, La Fille du Regiment). In the words of critic Tim Page, “Miss Battle’s natural territory is music of sweetness, serenity, and girlish ecstasy. Within this repertoire she is all but unequaled.”

In recital, Kathleen Battle, the winner of five Grammy Awards, has mesmerized audiences around the globe with her unique artistry and vocal beauty. Of her Carnegie Hall recital debut, New York Newsday declared, “In an age when the vocal recital has practically gone the way of the dinosaur, this was a thrilling case for its return.” For the CD of this recital, released on DG, Miss Battle received one of three Grammys for Best Classical Vocal Soloist; Miss Battle has won a total of five Grammys. The Australian echoed the sentiment of critics around the world, saying, “The Sydney Opera House has played host to any number of great singers…but it’s unlikely there has ever been (or perhaps ever will be) a performance to match the recital American soprano Kathleen Battle gave.”

Kathleen Battle’s gifts as a singer extend beyond the realm of classical music. Her work as a great interpreter of spirituals is documented on a joint recital with Jessye Norman, Spirituals in Concert (DG). Her pure emotional power in this music of joy and sorrow cuts through all cultural boundaries. As the Vienna Kurier put it, “Kathleen Battle sang so beautifully in the spiritual ‘Heaven is one beautiful place,’ she came pretty close to heaven.”

Miss Battle drew considerable attention with the world premiere of Honey and Rue, a song cycle with music by Oscar® and Grammy-winning composer André Previn and lyrics by Nobel and Pulitzer Prize-
Kathleen Battle has established herself as a distinguished recording artist through a wide range of releases encompassing complete opera, concert, choral and solo albums on all major labels.

Memorable concerts recorded live and now available on CD and home video include Mozart’s *Coronation Mass* from the Vatican and the 1987 New Year’s Concert, both with Herbert von Karajan conducting; the CDs are on the DG label with the video versions on Sony. Her performance of the title role in the DG recording of Handel’s *Semele*, with Marilyn Horne, Samuel Ramey, and John Nelson conducting, earned Miss Battle a fifth Grammy. This recording commemorates a now legendary concert performance of Handel’s masterpiece, starring Miss Battle and virtually the same cast as the recording, which created such a sensation that Carnegie Hall recognized it as one of its one hundred milestones during its centennial year.

Kathleen Battle has made immeasurable contributions as an ambassador for classical music, performing for presidents and dignitaries, and attracting diverse new audiences through television broadcasts of her operas and concerts, as well as through appearances on popular network talk shows. Her performance on the PBS broadcast of the Metropolitan Opera’s 1991 season opening gala won her an Emmy® for Outstanding Individual Achievement in a Classical Program on Television. A documentary film on the recording of Sony’s *Baroque Duet* album with Wynton Marsalis and John Nelson conducting the Orchestra of St. Luke’s was nominated for an Emmy.

Miss Battle’s critically acclaimed *Metropolitan Opera Presents* performances of Mozart’s *Die Zauberflöte*, Donizetti’s *L’Elisir d’Amore*, and Rossini’s *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* are available on DG VHS and DVD, while Sony has captured her Zerlina in the DG recording of Handel’s masterpiece, starring Miss Battle and virtually the same cast as the recording, which created such a sensation that Carnegie Hall recognized it as one of its one hundred milestones during its centennial year.

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— Alex Wang

Management for Miss Battle:
COLUMBIA ARTISTS MANAGEMENT LLC
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Ms Battle records for CBS/Sony Classical,
Deutsche Grammphon, EMI/Angel, Decca/
London, RCA, Vox Cum Laude, and Telarc.
Joel A. Martin

Joel A. Martin is the creator of Jazzical®, a marriage of classical music and jazz, and more. In the last couple of years he has collaborated with and/or written music for Grammy® Award winners Kathleen Battle, Fergie of the Black Eyed Peas, Brooklyn Youth Chorus, cellist Eugene Friesen of the Paul Winter Consort, and Rock and Roll Hall of Famer Jaimoe of the Allman Brothers, among many other artists.

Joel was the youngest pianist ever, and the first African American pianist, to compete in the 1985 Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. He has appeared as soloist with the New York Philharmonic, El Paso Symphony, Springfield Symphony Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, New Hampshire Festival Orchestra, Cab Calloway Orchestra, and the Hartford Symphony.

In Oct. 2013 Joel released his 7th Jazzical® CD, Jazzical Meets Menken, honoring multiple Oscar®/Grammy/Tony® Award-winning Disney/Broadway composer Alan Menken (Aladdin, Little Mermaid, Little Shop of Horrors, Enchanted, Pocahontas). With stellar performances by Broadway legends Liz Callaway, Amanda McBroom, Christine Pedi and the Gay Men's Chorus of Los Angeles, Jazzical Meets Menken featured 14 songs including two world premieres penned by Alan Menken specifically for this CD.

On July 18, 2014—the capstone event of International Mandela Day celebrations at the United Nations—Joel produced “Footsteps of Mandela,” an all-star tribute concert to Nelson Mandela at NYC's Riverside Church. Special guest artists included MET operatic bass/baritone legend Simon Estes and Broadway singer Liz Callaway. A second “Footsteps of Mandela” concert was held in Feb. 2015 in Bridgeport, Connecticut, at the Klein Memorial Auditorium to an enthusiastic audience of 1,000 people.

Plans for 2016 include the debut concert and national tour of Joel’s “Footsteps of Peace” in Palm Beach Florida (March 2016), concerts around the world with live house music band Tortured Soul, two symphonic commissions, and the release of the 8th CD in the Jazzical series, Jazzical Rocks! featuring the Jazzical Symphony Orchestra.

For more information: www.jazzical.com, www.footstepsofpeace.com

University Singers

California State University, Fullerton’s University Singers, directed by Dr. Robert Istad, rank among the nation’s premiere collegiate choral ensembles. The University Singers have performed throughout the world on its own and regularly perform with a variety of professional orchestras, such as the Los Angeles Philharmonic, the Pacific Symphony, the Hollywood Bowl Orchestra and the Boston Pops Esplanade Orchestra. They have earned praise for their work with conductors Carl St.Clair, John Mauceri, John Williams, Eugene Kohn, Sir Neville Marriner, James Conlon, and Keith Lockhart. Internationally acclaimed for their exquisite musicianship, they have been invited to perform at conferences organized by the American Choral Directors Association and the Music Educators National Conference. Most recently, the University Singers have performed at the 2013 National Collegiate Choral Organization Conference, the 2013 National Conference of the American Choral Director’s Association, and the 2012 Western Division Conference of the American Choral Director’s Association. The ensemble was in residence in Paris in June 2015 for a series of performances, and performed a concert of Tarik O'Regan’s music in Carnegie Hall in November 2015. Recent international concert tours have included stops in Austria, Germany, Italy, Eastern Europe, Spain, and Australia. They have sung at the Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest, Hungary, for UNESCO in Pisa, Italy, and at the Ottobeuren and Eingen Festivals of Music in Germany. The University Singers have also recently performed with Juanes, M83, Andrea Bocelli, Beck, Beach House, Sean Lennon and can be seen in the PBS production The Legend of Zelda: Symphony of the Goddesses. This season, the CSUF University Singers will perform with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Pacific Symphony Orchestra, Andrea Bocelli, Kathleen Battle, record an album with composer John Williams and Sony Classical, and tour Scandinavia, the Baltic States, and Russia.
Robert Istad

Robert Istad is Professor of Music and Director of Choral Studies at California State University, Fullerton. He is Associate Conductor of the Pacific Chorale, and has been named Artistic Director Designate, beginning in the 2017–2018 Concert Season. Istad is also the Artistic Director of the Long Beach Camerata Singers and Long Beach Bach Festival.

Mr. Istad’s 2016–2017 season includes debuts with the Long Beach Symphony Orchestra, and return engagements with Pacific Chorale, Pacific Symphony Orchestra, Musica Angelica Baroque Orchestra, Long Beach Opera, and the Long Beach Camerata Singers.

Istad has prepared choruses for a number of America’s finest conductors and orchestras, including: Gustavo Dudamel and the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Carl St.Clair and the Pacific Symphony Orchestra, Esa-Pekka Salonen and the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Nicholas McGegan and the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra and Keith Lockhart and the Boston Pops Esplanade Orchestra, as well as conductors Vasily Sinaisky, Sir Andrew Davis, Bramwell Tovey, Thomas Wilkins, John Williams, Eugene Kohn, Steven Mercurio, Richard Kaufman, Eric Whitacre, William Lacey, Giancarlo Guerrero, Marin Alsop, George Fenton, Case Scaglione, Robert Moody, and David Lockington. In June 2016, Istad made his debut with Berkshire Choral International and the Santa Rosa Symphony Orchestra.

At California State University, Fullerton Istad conducts the University Singers and Women’s Choir in addition to teaching courses in conducting, advanced interpretation and literature. Istad was recognized as Cal State Fullerton’s Outstanding Professor of the Year in 2016. This year, he and the University Singers will perform with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, Pacific Symphony Orchestra, Andrea Bocelli, Kathleen Battle, record an album with composer John Williams and Sony Classical, and tour Scandinavia, the Baltic States, and Russia. He and his singers performed a concert of Tarik O’Regan’s music for Distinguished Concerts International New York at Carnegie Hall in November 2015. They performed at the 2013 ACDA National Conference in Dallas, Texas and the 2012 ACDA Western Division Conference in Reno, Nevada. Istad’s University Singers also performed for the 2013 National Collegiate Choral Organization National Conference in Charleston, SC. Istad and the CSUF University Singers have performed all over the world, including a 2015 residency and performances in Paris, France, engagements at the 2012 Ottobeuren Festival of Music in Germany, the 2012 Eingen Festival of music in Germany, a 2010 performance for UNESCO in Pisa, Italy, and in 2008 at the world-famous Liszt Academy of Music in Budapest, Hungary.

Under his leadership, the Long Beach Camerata Singers has performed with the Long Beach Symphony Orchestra, Pacific Symphony Orchestra, Musica Angelica, and Long Beach Opera. Istad’s innovative programming and dedication to musical excellence has propelled the Long Beach Camerata Singers reputation “as arriving in the forefront of Long Beach performing ensembles” (Jim Ruggirello, Long Beach Grunion Gazette, 1/2/13).

Istad received his Bachelor of Arts degree in music from Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois, his Master of Music degree in choral conducting from California State University, Fullerton and his Doctor of Musical Arts degree in choral music at the University of Southern California. He studied conducting with Dr. William Dehning, John Alexander and Dr. Jon Hurty. Istad is President-Elect of the California chapter of the American Choral Director’s Association, and is in demand as an adjudicator, guest conductor, speaker and clinician throughout the nation.