

King Defined by Rousing Speeches, Letters

His words continue to have relevance today

BY BEVERLY CORBELL
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Though he wrote five books and delivered up to 450 speeches a year, Dr. Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. is often defined by his most famous speech, “I Have a Dream” delivered at the Lincoln Memorial during the 1963 March

on Washington, and his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” written in the same year.

The words of America’s foremost civil rights leader stirred great emotions across the country and the world at the time, and are still so relevant even today. An excerpt from the “I Have a Dream” speech illustrates his commanding use of language to illustrate the racial divides and the hopes for progress, ending with its most well-known passage.

“In a sense we have come to



Dr. Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. delivers a speech in Montgomery, Alabama in 1965.

suit of happiness.

“As we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall always march ahead. We cannot turn back. There are those who are asking the devotees of civil rights, “When will you be satisfied?” We can never be satisfied as long as the Negro is the victim of the unspeakable horrors of police brutality.

“I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.”

His “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” is also relevant, especially when we consider the last year’s student-led Climate Strike demonstrations and the earlier Women’s March.

“We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have yet to engage in a direct action campaign that was ‘well timed’ in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word “Wait!” It

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our nation’s capital to cash a note to which every American check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory

note to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pur-



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HIGHLIGHTS THIS SPRING

MOVING MUSIC FORWARD

AT THE OREGON SYMPHONY



BERIO'S SINFONIA BY ROSE BOND

March 14, 15 & 16

A musico-cultural portrait of life in the late 1960s, Luciano Berio’s monumental Sinfonia includes a powerful movement in response to the assassination of civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. This lamenting tribute is a bubbling crucible of sounds, styles, ideas, texts, and moods that creates something completely unique and individual.



AN AFRICAN AMERICAN REQUIEM

May 23

Oregon Symphony and Resonance Ensemble join forces to present the World premiere of An African American Requiem, Portland composer Damien Geter’s bold, thought-provoking musical response to violence against African Americans in the United States. Combining traditional Latin Requiem texts with civil rights declarations, poetry, and the famous last words of Eric Garner, “I can’t breathe,” this performance will honor past and present victims of racial violence and spur reflection on how to build a more hopeful future.