

Soprano Katherine Jolly, BlueWater Chamber Orchestra, and Cleveland Chamber Choir unite for “I Believe!”

by Stephanie Manning



Since joining the Oberlin Conservatory voice faculty in 2019, soprano Katherine Jolly has kept up with her performing career. But doing so usually takes her outside of Northeast Ohio.

“I travel a lot for my outside engagements,” she said in a recent interview. So, being the featured soloist on a program with both the BlueWater Chamber Orchestra and Cleveland Chamber Choir “is pretty special.”

On Saturday, May 17 at 7:30 pm, the two local ensembles will collaborate to present “I Believe! Knitted Voices of Justice and Faith.” The concert at Cleveland’s Trinity Cathedral concludes both groups’ anniversary seasons: the 15th for BlueWater and the 10th for the Chamber Choir. Pay-what-you-wish tickets are available [online](#), and the event will also be [live streamed](#).

Jolly will be featured in both of the evening’s works: Margaret Bonds’ *Credo* and Mozart’s “Great” *Mass in c minor*. “For some organizations, this pairing would seem unusual, yet it makes a whole lot of sense to me,” the soprano said, noting that Cleveland Chamber Choir artistic director Gregory Ristow champions diverse programming. Ristow — who also directs Oberlin’s choral ensembles — connected Jolly to this opportunity, introducing her to the work by Bonds.

“It’s incredibly lyrical and powerful,” the soprano said of *Credo*, which takes its title and text from a 1904 prose poem by W.E.B. Du Bois. In it, the Black American sociologist shares his viewpoints about racial equality, pride, liberty, and more. The first sentence of each stanza includes the phrase “I believe” — the inspiration for the concert’s title.

“It’s a wonderful work for people who might not know Margaret Bonds very well,” Jolly said. The vocalist was already familiar with the composer’s art songs and settings of Spirituals, and she says those influences can also be felt in the *Credo*. Performing the

piece in 2025 is “a really important time for the core message that I’m a fully realized person in this nation, regardless of what you see when you look at me.”

Jolly is also “thrilled” to sing Mozart’s “Great” *Mass in c minor*, a piece that lies close to her heart. Right after finishing her master’s degree at the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music, she landed the opportunity to perform the work with the Sacramento Choral Society and Orchestra. “It was a big deal, and I just fell in love with this piece. I’m still in love almost 25 years later.”

Mozart never completed the expansive work, leading to a variety of editions and reconstructions. “It’s so grand, and you can hear a lot of Bach and Handel in it,” Jolly said. It’s also a piece that keeps a singer in good shape, because “it requires so much agility, incredible breath management, and musicality.”

Finding parallels between Mozart and Bonds’ works is really up to the individual listeners, she said. “To me, there’re a lot of connection points in believing in the good, believing in things being reborn, and believing in the life cycle. But depending on where you’re coming from and your belief system, you could take away all sorts of things.”

For Jolly, performing at Trinity Cathedral is magical. “Their programming is so inclusive — it’s a beautiful environment in which to sing both of these works.” All things considered, “I think the message of ‘I Believe!’ is one that we all need right now.”

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