

Dear First Parish Choir and Congregation,

I'm writing to share my deepest gratitude to you all, for the warmth of community and caring that you have offered me during my time as a Hunsaker Soloist at First Parish.

I began singing with the First Parish Choir in my role as a Hunsaker Soloist in Fall of 2017 and wow, it has been such a journey of life these past six years. I truly don't know what I would have done without the kind, caring and musical community of First Parish. Being with you all, a few times a month for so many months, even (especially) virtually during the height of the pandemic, offered me so much support and opportunity for growth and artistic and spiritual sustenance.

But, I write to you because my life has changed quite a lot since the pandemic and I am juggling many more responsibilities and have some artistic and musical goals that could benefit from focused attention and time, before time slips away. I've also been thinking a lot about how best to support artists in a post-pandemic era and feel that it is likely time for another singer to receive the support and growth opportunities which you so lovingly offer. And so it's with a melancholy, yet overwhelmingly grateful heart that I share that Sunday, June 4th will be my last Sunday at First Parish as a Hunsaker Soloist.

I'm so grateful to Tim for his musical camaraderie and direction, and for all of the rich musical projects that we have engaged in at First Parish together - he is truly a gift to this community and it has been such an honor to sing under him and with the amazing souls in the choir whom I all count as dear friends now. So as I write these words of farewell to you, I also wanted to share one of the most meaningful musical creations which developed as a direct result of my time at First Parish, sitting in the pews one Sunday morning before singing a solo, in the right place at the right time.

Some of you may know that in the past few years I have produced a recital project of songs by women composers, called Project 2020 featuring 20 women composers in songs composed within the past 20 years. As part of that project, I have also commissioned new songs. The very *first* song I commissioned for the project was the result of one of Laurel Whitehouse's talks given on a Sunday in October 2019, when she was Director of Religious Exploration. You may remember "Let us Gather", about two rocks who felt the pains of isolation and pondered the need for and benefits of community. It moved me so very much back then, (pre-pandemic) that I emailed Reverend Lisa and Laurel to see if it was written down and if I could

one day have a composer set it to music, years before launching the commissioning project.

Fast forward two and a half years and “A Time in Isolation” was created from Laurel’s text by composer, Nailah Nombeko. We also made a donation in Laurel’s name, to Peronia Adolescente, an organization that was close to her heart. Laurel wrote that it was "a program in Guatemala which brings art, community, and hope to street teens. These teens have such cause for despair and they blossom so when given the opportunity for connection and self-expression. They are the perfect group to benefit from your work." I connected with their director Anna and learned that at the time of the donation, the teens were in the process of making a documentary to promote women’s rights in the community through art and performance. So it turned out that the project created to support the work of women composers ended up having farther reaching impact because of the gifts I received at First Parish.

As a farewell and in honor of all you gave me, I want to share the full song performance from our World Premiere last March 2022 with you in the links below, along with the final song text. This is not a public link, but one that I share just with you.

Thank you for your care, your kindness and your support of my musical gifts. As a solo artist, I can tell you that this has meant so much to me along the way and I know that I am the artist I am today, because of you all and this very special community at First Parish. I promise to stay connected and please feel free to keep in touch as well.

And on Sunday, June 4th, as an in person farewell and homage to all you have inspired within me, Tim and I will perform the most recent song which I commissioned for my project called “Courage”, composed by Lauren Spavelko with text by author Elizabeth Gilbert (*Eat, Pray, Love; Big Magic*).

With warmth and deepest gratitude,

Jennifer Sgroe
Hunsaker Soprano Soloist 2017-2023
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A Time in Isolation: World Premiere Performance - March 2022

Program One: From Isolation to Inspiration as part of **Project 2020: A View of 21st Century Women Composers**

Nailah Nombeko, Composer

Laurel Whitehouse, Text

Jennier Sgroe Soprano & Eric Sedgwick, Piano

Speaking Introduction

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/aw187lqzjm9vv4s/A%20Time%20in%20Isolation%20Speaking.mp4?dl=0>

Full Song Performance

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/z4bk3c9s7iz856c/A%20Time%20in%20Isolation.mp4?dl=0>

A Time in Isolation (c. 2021)

What if none of us gathered? What if no one came together to hear each other's joys, sorrows and concerns? Showing up for each other is part of being in a community. Alone, we become lonely and discouraged. We can get lost in sadness and stress. Together we can make connections and build community. We can open our hearts to the spirit of life. In the silence of our circle we create sacred space between and within us. When we come together to share our journey we create deep bonds that lead to hope in this time of rapid change and loss. We can renew our trust in one another, explore the wisdom within each of us and build energy and courage. When we speak our truth and are heard we begin to heal. Alone we despair but together we find courage and inspiration and possibility. We can be a pathway to the future we want to see.