Program Notes by Chris
Morrison Reno Chamber
Orchestra
“Celestial Voices” – November 21 and 22, 2026

Nokuthula Ngwenyama

Born: June 16, 1976, Los Angeles, California

One of the best-known violists in the world today, Nokuthula Ngwenyama, known familiarly as “Thula,” first won prominence when, at age sixteen, she won both the Primrose International Viola Competition in 1993 and the Young Concert Artists International Auditions in 1994. Since then she has performed all over the world as a soloist and chamber musician, including at the Louvre, Suntory Hall and the White House, and she has received the prestigious Avery Fisher Career Grant. Her compositions have been performed by leading orchestras and chamber ensembles in North America, Africa and Asia. Ngwenyama attended the Crossroads School for Arts and Sciences and the Colburn School for the Performing Arts before graduating from the Curtis Institute of Music. As a Fulbright scholar, she studied at the Conservatoire National Superieur de Musique et de Danse de Paris, and received a Master of Theological Studies from Harvard Divinity School. Born of Zimbabwean and Japanese parentage, her names are Zulu for “Mother of Peace” and “Lion.”

Primal Message

Composed: 2018/2021
Duration: 8 minutes
Instrumentation: harp, percussion, strings

Co-commissioned by the Chamber Music Northwest Commissioning Fund and the Phoenix Chamber Music Society, *Primal Message* was given its premiere in 2018 in its original version for string quartet with viola (there are additional arrangements for string orchestra with and without harp and percussion). According to the description Ngwenyama shared with the audience at its premiere, *Primal Message* is “based on the idea of communicating the things we learn to communicate with each other: our intelligence, our emotions, our goodness.” Among her inspirations was the Arecibo Message, an interstellar radio message with information about Earth and humanity that was sent into space in 1974 – she called it the “first message we sent into space, knowing what we were sending.” The number sequence 2-3-5-7 suffuses the work's rhythms and melodies, as does its central melody, which she refers to as “Il Cuore,” or “The Heart.” As Ngwenyama describes it, “there is a certain sort of ecstasy to the melody, all the hopes, dreams, and passions of humanity.”

Domenico Cimarosa

Born: December 17, 1749, Aversa, Italy
Died: January 11, 1801, Venice, Italy

Domenico Cimarosa wrote over eighty operas, some of which, like his masterpiece, *Il matrimonio segreto*, were among the most popular of his time. From a poor working class background, Cimarosa’s musical talent was quickly recognized, and, thanks to a scholarship, he studied for about a dozen years at the Conservatory of Santa Maria di Loreto in Naples. His first operas were written for theaters in Naples, Rome and Florence, but his music soon attracted audiences throughout Europe. In 1787 he was