

Outstanding composer chosen to be finalist at forum

Hurricane Andrew changed many lives forever. It inspired composer Lettie Beckon Alston of Lathrup Village.

Her work, "The Eleventh Hour," was one of four selected to be performed by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra during the Detroit Symphony Orchestra Hall Unleashes African-American Composers Forum April 23 to May 1.

It will be performed during an open reading session that is open to the public, 12:30-2 p.m. Thursday, April 29 at Orchestra Hall, 3711 Woodward, Detroit. There is no charge to attend.

After this session, one of the four works will be selected to be performed at Detroit Symphony Orchestra subscription concerts on April 30, May 1 and May 2 at Orchestra Hall. For ticket information, call 833-3700 or Ticketmaster, 645-6666.

Alston will perform "Moods for Piano," in a premiere performance at the 1993 Unleashes African-American Composers Forum and Symposium Chamber Music Concert 8 p.m. Thursday, April 29, at Orchestra Hall. This concert is also open to the public.

Alston, who has been assistant professor of music at Oakland



Outstanding composer: Lettie Beckon Alston's "The Eleventh Hour" was selected for the Detroit Symphony Orchestra Hall's Unleashes African-American Composers Forum and Symposium.

University in Rochester since 1991, said she wrote "The Eleventh Hour," for the Pontiac Oakland Symphony's Thanksgiving concert.

"One tends to not think about how great God's power is until

'I observed this power greater than man in the storm and compared it with the written word.'

Lettie Beckon Alston

something like a storm hits," she said. "The appearance of a rushing wind out of nowhere disrupting the lives of many, affected me tremendously, right at a time when I was in search of spiritual peace," she said.

"As this storm rushes through with no warning, I rushed through the readings of the Bible, to aimlessly get a quick understanding of my life and my existence here on earth. I observed this power greater than man, in the storm and compared it with the written word."

Alston just recently received a commission to write a work for the Great Lakes Men's Chorus. She wrote "Conquest of Jericho," for the Lyric Chamber Ensemble in 1990 and "Portrait in Black" for the Oakland University Ensemble in 1992.

As a pianist she has performed throughout the Detroit area as a soloist and accompanist. She

received her bachelor and master's degrees in composition from Wayne State University in Detroit. Alston entered the doctoral program at the University of Michigan in 1979, and completed the Doctor of Musical Arts degree

in Composition with cognates in piano, theory, history and multimedia in August, 1993. The other composers, and their works, to be featured at the forum are "Crosscurrents," by Anthony Kelly, of Durham, North Carolina; "Fantasy Overture," by Leo Edwards of New York City; and "Symphony for the Sons of Nam," by James Kline Williams of Chicago, Illinois.

The four finalists were selected from 30 submissions on the basis of an anonymous review of their

compositions by a panel of adjudicators that included nationally renowned musicians and composers.

Alston is the first Michigan woman composer to be chosen as a finalist.

The forum now in its fourth year, was created as an ongoing program to assist in the identification of significant orchestral works by African-American composers. For more information about the forum and symposium, call 833-3362.

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If Hirschenfang is relegated to implore the Egyptian God Ptaha from off stage, a reluctant thespian Brian Moon will be on stage in the Triumphant Scene, playing a four and one-half foot "Aida" trumpet.

"I would rather be in the pit," said Moon of Birmingham. "On stage you have to wear body make-up to be dark like the Egyptians."

MOT is using four of these "herald" trumpets played on stage during the Act II Scene II Triumphant March. These long, dramatic instruments, designed by Verdi for the premiere of Aida in 1871, are straight on both sides of the valves. Moon says MOT is using four B flat instruments, not

the usual six trumpets. "You probably couldn't tell the difference between the sound of these trumpets and today's trumpets," said Moon, a professional musician with the Livonia Symphony and the MOT Orchestra, and a graduate in music from Curtis Institute of Music.

While Moon is playing the famous Trio melody, engineer Richard Jerjan of Beverly Hills will probably be marching in front of him and the gigantic New Orleans Opera sets carrying a spear as one of those dark skinned Egyptian conquerors or dragging himself across the stage as a defeated Ethiopian slave.

"I think this is fun," said Jer-

yan, a veteran supra of four operas. "It is far more interesting than sitting in the audience."

Audiences have always found Aida interesting. It tops the list for every major opera company for number of productions. Yet, this is only the second time in its history MOT has produced it.

"This opera is the superlative opera — wonderful music, a love triangle, religious ceremonies, conflict, repentance," said Krueger. "The third act surpasses any other Verdi work."

Mary Jane Doerr of Troy is a full-time teacher and freelance writer who specializes in opera and musical theater.

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