

The poem *Legacy* by Megan Neville-Jellen is a stark reminder of both the horror of the tragic events of May 4, 1970 at Kent State University, as well as how deeply universal they were. Neville-Jellen's poem is outwardly about the iconic, Pulitzer Prize-winning photograph taken by John Filo of a 14-year-old Mary Ann Vecchio kneeling over the body of Jeffrey Miller. Miller was one of the four students shot and killed by the Ohio National Guard; nine others were injured during a protest of America's recent invasion of Cambodia. But there is a turn to the end of the poem that draws the famous, now almost iconic photograph down to the real and the everyday: Neville-Jellen tells the reader that the unknown figure wearing a plaid shirt, to the left of Vecchio and walking into the frame, is none other than her father. What was an artifact of historical grief suddenly becomes that much more poignant, that much more real, because it is universal: Neville-Jellen's father could have been anyone's father, dead or injured on that day. Alive now only because of chance.

Oberlin College & Conservatory student composer Natsumi Osborn was commissioned to write a new choral work for the Cleveland Chamber Choir's *We March On! Music of Social Justice* concert to specifically commemorate the Kent State Shootings. The commission came to her because the Choir performed her prize-winning composition *Autumn Reflections* in March of 2019. Artistic Director Scott MacPherson asked her to consider a number of poems about the shootings, and she was drawn immediately towards Neville-Jellen's *Legacy*. "It stood out to me as both powerful and moving," Ms. Osborn stated, "and as soon as I read it, it was clear that this would be the one I used. Every time I worked on the piece I felt like I discovered another layer of meaning underneath the text; within the several weeks I spent on the composition setting the poem and revising the music, I became more sympathetic to the text and it became ever more personally moving."

Setting it helped her hone and develop her musical language. While the earlier *Autumn Reflections* adapted an easy, consonant style which made it one of the most beloved works at the March, 2019 concert, Ms. Osborn found that setting *Legacy* demanded a more complicated interpretation. "My first instinct was to take the dark themes of the poem within more tonal harmonies, but since there was so much grit to the words – sometimes harsh, sometimes not – a more dissonant language helped bring this out ... working on setting the poem helped me find ways to experiment with my musical language."

The experiments helped Ms. Osborn picture "how violent and shaking to the victims the event was." But Ms. Osborn's setting is not all bleak. Like the life that remains and is sustained within Neville-Jellen's poem, Ms. Osborn's setting shifts "between dissonant chords and foreign sounds which are then resolved in a more comforting, familiar manner ... to help do justice to the everyday aspects of grieving in remembering the tragedy and its victims."

Ms. Osborn is a third-year student at Oberlin, working on majors in both composition and economics. While she attends a school with a long history of working on social justice causes (including reacting to the events on May 4, 1970 at Kent State University) setting *Legacy* was her first foray into linking music and social justice. "Working on Megan Neville-Jellen's *Legacy* made me realize that making music on larger and more impactful themes – themes that reach a greater community – is an exceptional experience. And working with a professional group like

the Cleveland Chamber Choir has made me want to be more inclined to do such work in the future.”