



***We Gather* Film Notes**

Prepared by Orchestra Santa Monica

Background: The film presented is *We Gather: Black Life in Santa Monica told through Music, Visuals, and Narrative* (vimeo.com/orchestrasantamonica/we-gather). Also referred to simply as *We Gather*, the concept of this film came into being in early 2021 through Santa Monica's Art of Recovery Program (Restorative Justice). For this project, [Orchestra Santa Monica \(OSM\)](#) wanted to bring recognition to the Black community and honor it in a way OSM best knew how... through music. But beyond the music, we began to learn that there were important stories and history to tell, and a community to get to know and share with others. The project blossomed into a collaborative partnership to bring music, art, and history together into this film. OSM partnered with Robbie Jones, owner of Santa Monica Black History Tours, music composer Derrick Skye, fine arts painter Kevin McCants, and recruited film director Philip Holahan. Community members and organizations shared images, family histories, recollections, and stories which vividly relate elements of Black life in Santa Monica. The making of this film was truly a collective group effort and the title *We Gather* aptly captures this spirit.

Production: Project members went on Jones' tour in late April 2021, learning about local Black history, visiting various key sites, and listening to numerous fascinating stories. Skye arranged a follow-up tour with Jones where he recorded her talking about memories of growing up in Santa Monica, culminating in his inspiration to compose the original music *We Gather*, which serves as the soundtrack to our film. Led by OSM Music Director Roger Kalia, twenty-one musicians recorded Skye's music in studio recording sessions in July and September. Challenging yet exciting steps in the production of this film included locating and creating appropriate and meaningful images, building a narrative through research and interviews, and weaving these together into the musicians' performances, matching the changing musical moods and tempos, to ultimately tell compelling stories.

Music: *We Gather* is a musical composition in three movements. Viewers are invited to enter this musical realm leading to a unique perspective of Santa Monica Black life.

I. ***Mending the Chasm:*** The music of this movement represents displacement caused by infrastructure. A low rumbling electronic sound can be heard as the freeway or any other dividing force. The flute and oboe carry on a conversation, and various moods (e.g., melancholy, angst) are evoked together with the percussion and electronics, the latter instrument not typically included in music performed by orchestras.

II. ***Front Porch View:*** This music reflects a tradition in the Black community of people sitting out on their front porch to socialize with community members and visitors as they pass through the neighborhood. Elements of blues style improvisation can be heard as well as groove-based electronic music.

III. ***Bay Street Beach:*** Years ago, Bay Street Beach was a place where Black people gathered to enjoy the oceanside without fear of harassment. The movement begins with Robbie Jones describing her memories of approaching the beach as young child. The music moves through different emotions, from playfulness mixed with anxiousness, to joy, and finally to a quiet meditative state.

This film is made possible in part by Art of Recovery, an initiative of the City of Santa Monica Cultural Affairs, santamonica.gov/arts/artofrecovery. Additional funding provided in part by the Los Angeles County Board Supervisors through the Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture.

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