

The Music of NYC Composer Jim Papoulis

January 28, 2004
1pm

WNYC'S afternoon talk show about music and culture,
Soundcheck 93.9FM
Hosted by John Schaefer

The WNYC Young People's Radio Chorus
Members of the [Young People's Chorus of New York City](#)
Francisco J. Nunez, conductor

[Jim Papoulis](#), Special guest

Here is information about the songs from composer Jim Papoulis' **SOUNDS OF A BETTER WORLD = small voices calling** CD trilogy, choral sheet music, and concert series. The songs performed today are from this series: **GIVE US HOPE, CAN YOU HEAR, OYE, AND WHEN I CLOSE MY EYES.**

We include:
Biographical Information
Composer notes on each of the songs
Questions for your students to consider



Papoulis rehearses Young People's Chorus of New York City at Opening Assembly of the United Nations Special Assembly on children. Photo: MC Cell

GIVE US HOPE

Composer Notes:

GIVE US HOPE is from the CD trilogy and music concert series entitled

SOUNDS OF A BETTER WORLD = small voices calling, a series of songs focusing on children, which examines their world and how small steps can be made by each of us to improve it. When this journey began for me almost seven years ago, I was very disturbed to learn of various incidents around the world where children were being subjected to extremely adverse conditions. I began to wonder how they could possibly develop into caring, responsible adults, with such hardship defining their childhood.

As I read more and explored our attitudes as a society toward children, I began to feel that we (as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said) "...must ask ourselves how responsible we are for the well-being of others..." Do we have the courage to feel responsible? What ideals do we strive for? How can we find innovative ways in which the personal and social problems of childhood can be overcome? Can music be utilized as a potential bridge to reach out and address these issues?

What I have come to understand is that we must send the best part of ourselves into the future through our children. If we want society to evolve, we need to understand the importance of childhood, and how vital our role should be in doing whatever we can to nurture every child. We should all be aware of our powerful influence on their minds. Through this incredible journey that **Sounds of a Better World** has taken me on, I hope to have somehow addressed these issues and to have embraced the joy that children can bring to this world.

GIVE US HOPE was written with lyricists Leo Schaff and Regine Urbach. The opening spoken words reflect the composer's realization that

ADULT: "Of all the feelings that a young person can have, there is one that makes life seem desolate...empty...

And sometimes not even worth living...When it is not there: Hope

Hope for the future...Hope to be loved...Hope to be heard...

When children are without hope, they are robbed of one of the most defining parts of their childhood...

We must never underestimate the power of giving hope to a child.

CHILD: The whispers of my heart speak so softly...

Are they really there if no one hears them?

My voice is so small, and so soft...can you hear me?

Give us hope, and we'll show you the way..."

It was first recorded in Kristiansand, Norway with the Children's Choir of Norway just after Norway had opened its borders to refugees from the wars in Kosovo. Many of the refugee children of the former Yugoslavia met with Papoulis to talk about what their new life was going to be like---without prompting all mentioned that their need for hope was great.

Give Us Hope, My voice is calling. Can You see? Look in my eyes. Can you hear?

My Voice is calling. Give us hope, and we'll show you the way.

www.soundsofabetterworld.org

music/track 5/mp3

Vital Records release CAN YOU HEAR (VR CD 2002)

CAN YOU HEAR

Composer Notes:

SOUNDS OF A BETTER WORLD = small voices calling began as a creative journey, exploring through music how we can encourage a better future for our children. As the enormity of the tragedy that occurred on September 11, 2001 in our city and country settles in, I have been, as a parent and an artist, challenged to again reassess where my priorities lie. I have discovered that **SOUNDS** has taken myself and my family on a journey that is beyond music; the hours I have spent with fellow musicians, collaborators, children, choir directors, parents, film makers, editors, engineers, teachers, hoteliers, and professionals from many fields, has surprised me with the complex subtleties of being human.

In the wake of 911 was a pause on a philanthropic concert tour of **SOUNDS** throughout Asia. In the months directly following, I found strength in the music that I had composed with and for children in preparation for concerts worldwide. The song **CAN YOU HEAR** was the first song on the choral album of its name to receive immediate positive response from collaborator Francisco J. Nunez.

My collaboration with Francisco J. Núñez, Artistic Director of the Young People's Chorus of NYC, has become a professional relationship of collegial support, like-mindedness, and belief in the power of choral music to resonate with a certain truth and beauty that can open many hearts.

And so much has happened along the way: a Foundation was borne, Hyatt International Hotels is presenting a **SOUNDS** worldwide concert tour and series of songwriting workshops for children, the choral music is being published, and I have come to experience firsthand that music can bridge cultural, generational, and ideological boundaries—a concert becomes a collective celebration of life, of adults and adults working together, children and adults working together, all towards a common good.

SOUNDS OF A BETTER WORLD = Can You Hear is a natural extension of these incredible experiences. I found that in listening to the voices of children, no matter how small, to their fears and dreams, we enable them to believe in their own power to change the world—that there is hope, there is a future, there is a better world.

The boundaries of their world, and mine, are extended to new friends, new ways of thinking, and new sounds.



Choristers from five boroughs perform CAN YOU HEAR
In Bryant Park for Arts Day, 2003. photo: MC Cell

www.soundsofabetterworld.org

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WHEN I CLOSE MY EYES

Composer Notes:

It seems to me now that we are all struggling with an increasing amount of negative influences in the lives of children. They are bombarded by information that ultimately erodes their sense of self, from many sources.

In the classroom, in the rehearsal hall, I have been fortunate to speak with children from diverse cultures and backgrounds. I have heard their songs and their silences, and what they have shared has made me clearly see that in order for a child to feel strength and to believe in him or her self, it must come from within... "When I close my eyes then I can see, and I am not afraid."

I began this song after my first trip to mainland China, for Hyatt International Hotel's benefit concert in Hong Kong. I was to meet the children from Hong Kong's Center for Early Childhood's Chorus. I was intrigued by the children's desire for connection with nature; they often spoke of their dreams and fears in analogies with images from the natural world—mountains, seas, flowers, shadows, and light.

Upon my return, I wove these images into bedtime stories that I told my own children, and their connection was immediate. Here we were, thousands of miles from China, and the same imagery stirred and soothed them. It made sense to me that stories, images, and music could all cross oceans, especially *When I close my eyes*.



The Choristers of CECES at the Hyatt Regency Hong Kong in rehearsal.



Composer Notes:



Papoulis conducts Young People's Chorus of New York City performing OYE.
Photo: MC Cell

While working in Mexico, I had the opportunity to work closely with young children from economically challenged areas. The children from one particular inner city school program at Colegio MacGregor were part of a Small Voices Songwriting Workshop that Hyatt Regency Acapulco sponsored. The children spoke little English but were easily reached through the music and rhythms I played; with the help of enthusiastic translators we connected further.

When I asked them if they had a message that they would want to convey to the world in song, their answer was very simple: to listen. The translation of "listen," or "listen up," is "OYE." This seemed like a wonderful, easy word to sing, and our "OYE" is a result of those experiences.

When I hear this song performed, I am suddenly transported back to the streets where these children walk, go to school, live with little, and dream; they dream that somehow, somewhere, their small voices will be heard. Of the many children who touch my heart, there was one little boy who was especially moved by the experience of working with and having a living composer listen to his innermost thoughts.

For little Fernando, his friends and teachers at Colegio MacGregor, I remain an ardent listener.

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