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I DREAM

The Story of a Preacher from Atlanta

A fusion of classical and popular musical traditions and Rhythm & Blues

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I Dream's focus is the last 36 hours of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s life and a series of dreams, premonitions, and reminiscence all leading up to the April 4, 1968 assassination at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee.

Statement of Intent

It is important for us to reflect on our history. We can't talk about where we want to go as a society without understanding where we've been. The intent of *I Dream* and the community dialogues surrounding the performances is to explore our society's recent history and struggle for equality for all citizens by examining the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and his family, all of whom continue to provide inspiration, courage and hope for the future.

It's not just Black history; it's American history.



Douglas Tappin

Composer & Librettist



Douglas Tappin is a writer and composer who was born and educated in the United Kingdom. A former Commercial Attorney and member of the Honorable Society of Lincoln's Inn, he practiced as a Barrister in England for eleven years. Tappin earned an additional postgraduate degree from Atlanta's McAfee School of Theology, culminating in the dissertation *That There Might Be Inspiration* – a critical examination and articulation of transformative music-drama, including through the historical and contemporary works of Handel, Wagner, Puccini, Sondheim, Lloyd Webber and Rice, Boublil and Schönberg.

Tappin's unique approach to writing and composition is full of innovation and authenticity, arising from his inquiring, analytical mind, literary background and gifted musicianship that has included work in collaboration with Greg Phillinganes (musical director for Stevie Wonder and the late Michael Jackson) and Grammy nominated orchestrator Carl Marsh.

Tappin is currently writing and composing *Becoming Othello*, based on Paul Robeson's year playing Othello at London's Savoy Theatre, in 1930. Tappin has also written and composed six other significant musical-dramatic works including *Deliverer*, *Diva*, and *2042*.

Tappin lives in Atlanta, Georgia with his wife and two children.

“*...I wrote and composed I Dream to honor the life and work of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the movement he inspired, to unite diverse individuals and institutions in understanding the prophetic message of Dr. King and, by remembering Dr. King's dream in the midst of contemporary culture, to inspire those who experience I Dream to live that dream...by loving as Dr. King did.*”



Introducing *I Dream*

The life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is often shared from one vantage point. A vantage point which ignores the fact that, rather than being infallible, Dr. King was human. When this consideration is taken, Dr. King's legacy is all the more impressive and inspiring.

I Dream is a new work by composer & librettist Douglas Tappin that fuses classical, jazz, Gospel and Rhythm & Blues to share the story of Dr. King's life inclusive of the humanizing habits and conflicts that the man who would become an American icon endured, framed through a series of dreams, reminiscences, and premonitions.

I Dream is the story of courage, leadership, and family in the face of a higher calling at odds with a society that sees otherwise. *I Dream* is a story that asks "Will it always be this way?" in the context of the Civil Rights Movement and begs the dual questions of "is it still this way?" and "what will it take to change our ways?"

- THE WAY...
- IT WAS, IS, WILL BE...

- Dr. King's days were filled with ways that denied Americans of color or their freedom rights - to use equal facilities, to have status and voice in this country, and to live as an equal member of society.
- Many argue that much progress has been made, while many also argue that not enough has been achieved.
- Where do you stand on the progression of equal rights for all's current status?

Video: Will it always be this way?

Not long into the opera, the era's sentiment and enduring question is posed and ripples throughout the rest of the opera.



Remembering Childhood



Dr. King's childhood home.

Born in 1929 on the cusp of the Great Depression, [Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s](#) destiny was telegraphed in his early life.

With one of his earliest memories being that of standing in a breadline, he received an early lesson on racial injustice's “inseparable twin”, economic injustice. And his family lineage was generations deep in ministering, so it came as no surprise when he continued the tradition in early adulthood. Dr. King self-cites growing up in a comfortable life: while his family and community were neither wealthy nor poor, his household provided an environment filled with genuine examples of love between his mother and father, and his special relationship with his grandmother.

This strong family life instilled in the young Martin a sense of “somebodiness” countered with the need to face a system constantly declaring him less than, or unequal to others. As he grew through childhood, disparaging experiences mounted, challenging the loving environment that surrounded him at home.

While, in his own words, Dr. King cites early incidents like being refused service in a shoe store while with his father, and being ordered to give up his seat on a bus, and the lack of support from his chaperoning “dear teacher” after winning an oratorical contest with the subject “The Negro and the Constitution”, it is composer Tappin's choice to focus on the death of his grandmother, [Jennie Williams](#) as the defining point in his struggle to reconcile unconditional love and social injustice.

In *I Dream*, Martin reminisces on a promise he makes to his grandmother to not bow to the anger and hatred that was simmering beneath his surface, but rather to fight hate and injustice with love. This love -a Godly love- develops into one of the work's main themes.

Video: My Sweet Grandma

Martin reflects on the love of his Grandma, Jennie Williams, who was one of the shaping forces in his life. Ultimately, he promises her he will not bow to hate, but rather serve through love.



Remembering College

While I Dream's third scene is set during Dr. King's studies in Boston, it is important to note that this scene combines all of his schooling into one episode rather than covering each phase of his education. This is the poetic license granted creative artists like Douglas Tappin.

Dr. King's undergraduate degree was earned at Atlanta's Morehouse College (1944-48) and his theological studies took place at Pennsylvania's Crozier Theological Seminary (1948-51). During his pre-doctoral studies, King accepted his calling to "serve humanity" and began to firm up his own religious beliefs.

While studying at Boston University's School of Theology, Dr. King refined his ability to express his religious views with precision and zeal. It was in Boston where Martin met [Coretta Scott](#) of Marion, Alabama, who was studying voice at the New England Conservatory of Music.

Introduced by a friend of Coretta's, they were married just one year later in 1953. With Coretta's activism in their local chapter of the [NAACP](#) and other Race Relations and Civil Liberties Committees, there was a shared interest in social justice between them. Mrs. King continued working to advance the legacy of her husband's work after his death.

As evidenced in *I Dream*, and an aspect rarely showcased, Martin and Coretta's marriage was not without struggle. While Martin was "protected from the worst" growing up, it seems his own family is pushed into the issue by virtue of his calling to the cause, and his choice of non-violence and love as a means for change. Much of Coretta's presence in *I Dream* reveals her as the spine to his actions and, ultimately, his legacy, constantly challenging and encouraging him to move forward.

FROM THE SCORE



Martin

...This is costing us!

Coretta

So, what then... You wanna quit?

Martin

If this is what leadership is...

Coretta

Too much?

Martin

Yes!

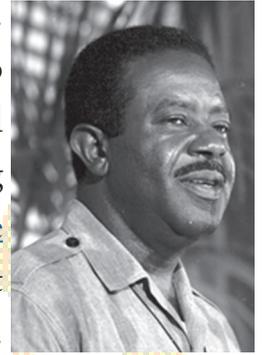
Coretta

Didn't marry no quitter!



Montgomery Years

A native of Linden, Alabama, [Ralph David Abernathy](#) and Dr. King met long before Dr. King's studies in Boston and his marriage to Coretta. The two met at Ebenezer Avenue Baptist Church in 1950 and Abernathy took the young aspiring minister as his mentee. Following Dr. King's ordination at Ebenezer Avenue and the arrests of [Claudette Colvin](#) and [Rosa Parks](#), Abernathy assembled the Montgomery Improvement Association to protest Parks' arrest. His chosen leader of the MIA: Dr. King.



Ralph David Abernathy

As shown in this scene, the two worked together, along with former head of Montgomery's NAACP, [E.D. Nixon](#), to enact the year-long bus boycott. This successful venture marked the first use of Dr. King's nonviolence tenet.



Rosa Parks being fingerprinted after her arrest.

In the midst of the year-long bus boycott, the case of [Browder v. Gayle](#) was filed, challenging and ultimately ruling against the constitutionality of the Alabama statute segregating intrastate busing. One of the plaintiffs included in the case was Ms. Colvin (Parks was excluded). The enactment of this ruling led the MIA to end the bus boycott the very day following the victory.

Video: Do you remember?



The arrests of the feisty Ms. Colvin and steadfast Mrs. Parks highlight another example of how non-violent protest is effective. In this song, Martin and Ralph remember the roots of Martin's non-violence stance and plan how to move it forward.

Birmingham Beginnings

The success in Montgomery was a victory, indeed, but Dr. King, Abernathy, and Nixon agreed that was just the beginning of the Freedom Revolution. The next steps included challenging [segregated dining laws](#).

The next scene in *I Dream* features a lunch counter sit-in (inspired by the Rich's department store in Atlanta) in which Dr. King participated. Prior to the lunch counter incident (and not portrayed in this work), a group of 4 students led the famous Woolworth's sit-in in Greensboro, North Carolina. This occasion, along with the creation of the [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee \(SNCC\)](#), marked the spread of Dr. King's action through non-violence philosophy, particularly among young leaders.



Hosea Williams

As a result of the sit-in, Dr. King and Abernathy are arrested and jailed. Also present in the scene is [Hosea Williams](#). While Hosea has been introduced in earlier scenes he was not actually in the jail cell. In fact, Hosea Williams and Dr. King did not meet and work together for another couple of years, when Williams began working with the NAACP. Williams' presence in this scene is to serve as a counter-conscience of Dr. King's nonviolence tenet (see excerpts lower right); Williams was a war veteran, known for his lunch-time speeches and protests, and was coined the "thug" of the SCLC by Dr. King himself. King hired Williams on to the SCLC, personally backing him, and put Williams' zeal and protest organizing skills to work. Williams even began teaching nonviolence as part of the protests he organized.

Video: I Dream

After Hosea shares his experiences and questioned Martin's non-violent approach, Martin responds with a sentiment that is the foundation of his legacy.



FROM THE SCORE

Williams' challenge:

I faced Nazi troops in war
As the noise of battle roared.
When the lynch mob tried to kill me
Their worst beating I endured.
Though I feel the things you feel,
Need the things you're preaching of,
I have never won no victory by love.

Martin's response:

One side of me is apathy
Complacent compromise
Then there are men like you
With murder in their eyes
I know the way of love
Will break this harsh regime
That is how I dream.

Selma

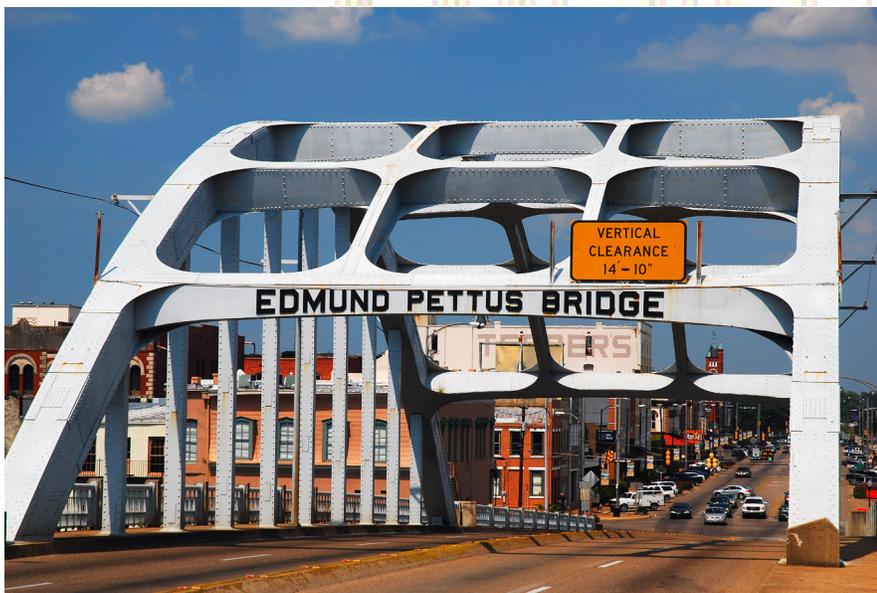
This scene begins with Martin's latest arrest behind him and the movement proceeding forward, King received the Nobel Peace prize, which was also accompanied by an investigation by the FBI. Numerous petitions for help and new challenges to overcome came flooding in. Next, was the march on Selma and the struggle for voting rights for all.

The Selma protest was designed as a [march from Selma to Montgomery](#). The initial attempt on the march resulted in brutal beatings of protestors on the Edmund Pettis Bridge, known as Bloody Sunday. The 5-day, 54-mile march was postponed and picked back up some two weeks later, with success this time. Between the first and second attempt, a wave of campaigning was set into motion by Dr. King, and some 10 days later President Lyndon Johnson addressed voting rights legislation in a speech to Congress. The scene closes five months later when the [Voting Rights Act of 1965](#) became the law of the land.

The FBI Investigation

Following the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the [FBI began investigating](#) Dr. King, under J. Edgar Hoover's administration.

The justification for the investigation was Dr. King's relationship with [Stanley Levison](#), who supported the boycott financially, and continued to advise and assist with administration of the movement following. Levison, a Jewish attorney, was believed to be a Communist officer.



Above: map detailing march route from Montgomery to Selma

Left: The Edmund Pettus Bridge, site of “Bloody Sunday” during the first attempted Selma to Montgomery March

The End of Dreams

The final scene of *I Dream* takes place at the Lorraine Motel in Memphis, Tennessee. Suggested in the scene are the years between the Voting Rights Act and his assassination, which marked a prolonged period of struggle for King, as he weighed whether to press on or to end his work with the victory just achieved. King pressed on to voice his concerns over militarism with anti-Vietnam War messages, and over poverty by beginning the [Poor People's Campaign](#), which led him to Memphis -the location of the final scene and the last hours of his life- to lead the Memphis Sanitation Workers' Strike.



This final scene features Martin reflecting on his work, his promises made, and his dreams and the ultimate success, or possible lack thereof. *I Dream* does not sensationalize Dr. King's assassination. This American tragedy is handled with the deft hand of an author who reveres the legacy of Dr. King, and who respects the power of the audience's imagination.

After Dr. King's assassination on the evening of April 4, 1968, the work ends with Coretta contemplating whether she will take over the leadership of the movement and a reflection on his ultimate dream, demonstrating how Martin's courageous leadership shaped the dream into a growing reality, to this very day.

.....
I Dream is a work about yesterday for today.
.....

Audio: The Finale



Timeline: Dr. King's Life and Times

- **January 15, 1929**
Martin Luther King, Jr. born in Atlanta
- **February 25, 1948**
Martin Luther King, Jr. ordained at Atlanta's Ebenezer Baptist Church
- **January 1951**
Martin Luther King, Jr. meets Coretta Scott in Boston
- **December 1, 1955**
Rosa Parks arrested in Montgomery, Alabama after her refusal to move to the back of the bus. Montgomery Bus Boycott begins shortly afterward
- **June 5, 1956**
U.S. District Court rules in Browder *et al v.* Gayle case
- **January 1, 1957**
Southern Christian Leadership Conference founded, Martin Luther King, Jr. elected President of SLCC on February 14, 1957
- **October 19, 1960**
Martin Luther King, Jr. arrested at sit-in at Rich's Department Store in Atlanta as part of the lunch counter sit-in movement
- **August 28, 1963**
March on Washington, D.C.
- **c. January 4, 1965**
Martin Luther King, Jr. receives anonymous letter, believed to be from the FBI
- **March 7, 1965**
Voting Rights Act protestors are beaten on Selma's Edmund Pettus Bridge
- **August 6, 1965**
1965 Voting Rights Act becomes law
- **April 4, 1968**
Martin Luther King, Jr. makes his final public speech at Memphis' Mason Temple; he is assassinated later that same evening
- **May 18, 1941**
Jennie Parks Williams (Dr. King's grandmother) dies
- **Summer 1950**
Martin Luther King, Jr. meets Ralph David Abernathy for the first time (at Ebenezer Baptist)
- **March 2, 1955**
Claudette Colvin arrested in Montgomery, Alabama after her refusal to move to the back of the bus
- **January 30, 1956**
King family home in Montgomery is bombed.
- **November 15, 1956**
U.S. Supreme Court affirms Browder *et al v.* Gayle, ruling bus segregation laws unconstitutional
- **c. 1960**
Martin Luther King, Jr. meets Hosea Williams for the first time
- **April 12, 1963**
Martin Luther King, Jr. and Ralph David Abernathy are jailed in Birmingham, Alabama.
- **December 10, 1964**
Martin Luther King, Jr. awarded Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, Norway
- **January 27, 1965**
Martin Luther King, Jr. honored at Nobel Peace Prize recognition dinner at Dinkler Plaza Hotel in Atlanta.
- **March 25, 1965**
Selma to Montgomery March
- **March 28, 1968**
Martin Luther King, Jr. leads Memphis march that ends in riots (following 1967 launch of Poor People's Campaign and anti-Vietnam war speeches)



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