

# CORDOVA APPEAL

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## Opera based on Dr. King helps keep dream alive

Special to Cordova Appeal

*"Something is happening in Memphis, something is happening in our world."*

— Dr. Martin Luther King  
With these words from his "Mountaintop speech," Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. speaks about the rise of the masses. These words still further his message even after his too-early 1968 death in Memphis.

Will we learn?  
Will we heed his words?  
Will we live his example?

"The Promise," an opera based on the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. with music and libretto written by composer and Cordova resident John Baur, will bring Dr. King's message to light again, while hoping the audience will ask the same questions.

The opera will have a world premiere in October.  
**John Baur**



Recently scenes from the "The Promise" were staged during student workshops at The University of Memphis. Baur said he had strong inspiration for writing the opera.

"There are three reasons for 'The Promise': First is education, telling a story that has to be told over and over so new generations will know what happened and what the world was like," he said. "In the world the way it is today, it's hard for people less than 50 years old to understand what it was like under Jim Crow laws."

"Secondly, it is an incredibly dramatic and compelling story. It has all of the elements that make good drama and good opera: love, death, extreme conflict — with incredible passion on



**Prior to the premiere, doctoral student Allen Todd played Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in student workshop scenes from "The Promise."**

both sides, which helps to propel the whole dramatic scene. Dr. King's own words are so wonderfully eloquent that they work extremely well in a musical context."

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## Promise

Third: "There's still a great deal of healing yet to be done, both in Memphis and the worldwide community as a whole," Baur said.

"I'm hoping this piece will, in some small way, help that healing process and provide an opportunity to come together."

"The Promise" will make its world premiere Oct. 22-23 and 29-30 at Germantown Performing Arts Center.

The two principal roles of the opera are Dr. King and his wife, Coretta.

Singing the respective parts will be the acclaimed singer Nmon Ford and University of Memphis doctoral candidate Valetta Brinson.

On Oct. 29, the role of Dr. King will be sung by Allen Todd, also a University of Memphis doctoral student who has contributed much during workshop performances.

Baur is associate director of

graduate studies in the Rudi E. Scheidt School of Music at the University of Memphis and head of composition/theory. This is his second opera.

Dr. Patricia Hoy, director of the School of Music, said, "The opera in its entirety is more than a simple biography of the incredible life of Dr. King. The biographical material is presented with tremendous imagination and brings forth a full range of emotions from each performer. It is sure to elicit a powerful and beautiful emotional response from the audience. The opera honors Dr. King's life and offers a opportunity for all of us to heal."

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