

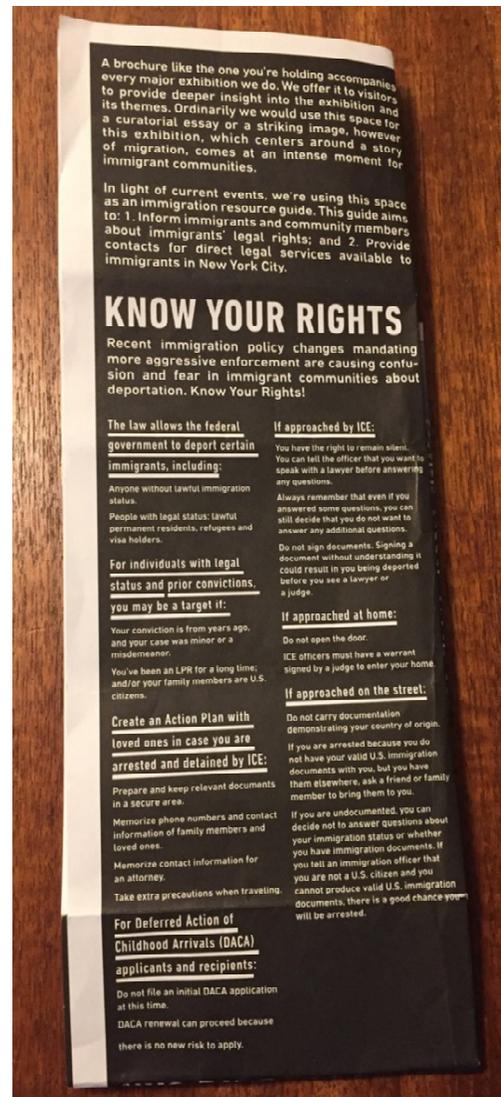
Remain Program Note by Randall Eng

When Ted first described the “Our America” concept to me last fall, a flood of ideas hit me. Most of my professional life has been spent in opera and theatre, and while I absolutely love composing from the perspective of other characters, this past year I’ve really wanted to write a piece that comes more directly from me. The time frame for opera from conception to production is many long years, and there’s something happening in this country right now that seems worth engaging with on a more immediate level.

Knowing that this piece would happen in a few short months, and would be performed by a large group of powerful, amazing singers, I headed down to the Museum of Chinese in America for inspiration. I’d wanted to write something that deals more explicitly with the Chinese-American portion of my identity for a while, and had spent time in the voluminous MoCA archives digging around for possible texts to set. The featured temporary exhibition at the museum was *FOLD: Golden Venture Paper Sculptures*, which is still running now. The exhibit is a stunning collection of intricate sculptures made by the survivors of the *Golden Venture* shipwreck while in immigration prisons; awaiting word on their asylum and immigration status for years, they used their time in prison to create detailed works of art out of magazines and glue.

I was moved by the story of the *Golden Venture* survivors, and picked up the exhibition pamphlet to learn more. Where ordinarily there would be essays about the exhibition, the MoCA curators had instead decided to devote the bulk of the pamphlet to concrete information on what immigrants should do if approached by immigration officers. This text struck me as direct, important advice—powerful words with lasting effect. The act of putting it into the exhibition pamphlet seemed to be saying something about the way that art, history, and the immediate lives of ordinary people intersect.

The curators had taken a space usually reserved for discussion about art and used it to address a pressing need. My setting of the pamphlet attempts to take that concrete information and transform it back into the realm of art, while keeping one foot in the here-and-now. *Remain* is a pretty faithful setting of the text, with few amendments. The one big tool I allowed myself to use was to re-order, repeat, and truncate the text, but I did not add any other words. The text of the piece is reproduced below.



The line in the pamphlet that spoke most to me is:

“If approached by ICE, you have the right to remain silent.”

First, there’s the historical concept of silencing the voices of others, reframed as a choice that can be made in strength—a really interesting thing to think about in a piece of vocal music. But it was only after setting that line several times that I realized that I could eventually truncate the line to:

“You have the right to remain”

and then an imploring to simply

“Remain, remain, remain”

This became the heart of the piece, and encapsulated what I wanted to say about America and immigration. *Remain* does not take a stand on illegal vs. legal immigration, but it argues for a vibrant America that has uniquely prospered because it has always been made up of immigrants. At a time when certain kinds of immigrants (both legal and illegal) and their descendants are looked at with increasing suspicion, *Remain* tries to advance the case for creating an environment that welcomes immigrants, and celebrates the amazing country that we are because of them. The “Our America” concert displays the richness of American music, created by immigrants and their descendants, and I am honored to place *Remain* in that context.

Text of *Remain*

From a pamphlet created by the Museum of Chinese in America to accompany the exhibit *FOLD: Golden Venture Paper Sculptures*.

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS!

Recent immigration policy changes mandating more aggressive enforcement are causing confusion and fear in immigrant communities about deportation. Know Your Rights!

If approached by ICE: (US Immigration and Customs Enforcement)

You have the right to remain silent.

You can tell the officer that you want to speak with a lawyer before answering any questions.

Always remember that even if you answered some questions, you can still decide that you don’t want to answer any additional questions.

Do not sign documents. Signing a document without understanding it could result in you being deported before you see a lawyer or a judge.

If approached at home:

Do not open the door.

ICE officers must have a warrant signed by a judge to enter your home.

If approached on the street:

Do not carry documentation demonstrating your country of origin.

If you are arrested because you do not have your valid U.S. immigration documents with you, but you have them elsewhere, ask a friend or family member to bring them to you.

If you are undocumented, you can decide to not answer questions about your immigration status or whether you have immigration documents. If you tell an immigration officer that you are not a U.S. citizen and you cannot produce valid U.S. immigration documents, there is a good chance you will be arrested.