

VA

aka **VIRGINIA SCHENCK**
("shank")
"BATTLE CRY"
Airborne Ecstasy AE1114



SUGGESTING:

in 1, 2, 5, 7, 9
out 4, 6
spoken word 3, 8

1. **Bali Hai 4:38** - Oscar Hammerstein, Richard Rodgers
(Schenck, Jordan, Patton)
2. **Sackful of Dreams 5:10** - Gary McFarland, Louis Savary
(Schenck, Bales, Jordan, Patton)
3. **Gettysburg Address 3:14** - Abraham Lincoln
(Schenck, Patton, Benson)
- 4/5. **America the Beautiful/ Abraham, Martin, & John 12:16**
- Katherine Lee Bates, Samuel Ward **6:57** (4:50 vol...)
- Richard Holler **5:18** (Schenck, Bales, Jordan, Patton, Williams)
6. **Strange Fruit 4:16** - Lewis Allan
(Schenck, Jordan, Williams)
7. **Hear My Battle Cry 6:31** - Virginia Schenck
(Schenck, Bales, Jordan, Patton, Lollar)
8. **Pledge of Allegiance 0:43** - Francis Bellamy
(Schenck, Patton)
9. **America the Beautiful Reprise 4:39** - Samuel Ward
(Bales, Jordan, Patton) instrumental

Musicians:

VA Virginia Schenck - vocals
Kevin Bales - piano
Rodney Jordan - bass
Marlon Patton - drums, percussion, & synthesizer

Guests:

Kebbi Williams - alto sax (tracks 5 & 6)
Rick Lollar - guitar (track 7)
James Benson - vocals (track 3)

Produced by VA Virginia Schenck, Airborne Ecstasy, LLC
Recorded at Oak Avenue Studios, Atlanta, GA on August 14, 15, & 16,
and September 26, 2018
Mixed, Engineered, & Mastered by Marlon Patton

Graphic Design: Parlee Teague @ Parlee Teague Productions
www.parleeteagueproductions.com

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Kevin Bales - piano www.kevinbales.com
Rodney Jordan - bass www.rodnejordanmusic.com
Marlon Patton - drums www.marlonpatton.com
Kebbi Williams - saxophone <https://www.facebook.com/pg/Kebbi-Williams-120767941338478/about/>
Rick Lollar - guitar www.ricklollar.com
James Benson - Atlanta's WRFG 89.3 FM Announcer

"I consider myself a messenger," says vocal artist and social justice champion Virginia Schenck, who adopted the moniker "VA," bestowed upon her by an Atlanta DJ from WCLK 91.9FM a few years ago. "What I sing matters. What I say matters. I see myself as a peacemaker and networker, someone who weaves worlds and people together. In 2016, my vision changed."

VA literally has advocacy and activism in her DNA. Her grandmother, a suffragette in Philadelphia, was pregnant with her mother while campaigning for the right of women to vote in the 1920s. In 2016, the election of a new President signaled the crossing of a threshold, a call to emotional and intellectual arms, which prompted in VA a renewed commitment to combatting a surge of regressive politicking, divisive inequities, and racial friction.

"I thought we already had gone through this and done so much positive work," VA says. "Instead, my eyes were opened to a shadow side of America from which a backlash emerged. Our democracy, liberty and freedom were being challenged. I was flabbergasted and could not keep quiet."

VA's response to that challenge, *Battle Cry*, will be heard.

To carry out *Battle Cry's* mission, VA recruited from her home base a squad of supremely talented veterans of Atlanta's vibrant jazz scene. Pianist Kevin Bales, Grammy-nominated accompanist (Rene Marie) and faculty member of Georgia State University; bassist Rodney Jordan, Grammy-winning member of the Marcus Roberts Trio and faculty member of Florida State University; and drummer Marlon Patton (Lonnie Holley, Trey Wright Trio) have been VA's core working band for the past decade. Tenor saxophonist Kebbi Williams, best known as a member of Tedeschi Trucks Band, leads his own jazz ensemble Wolfpack. Guitarist Rick Lollar recently joined Jimmy Herring and the 5 of 7. VA met spoken word artist James Benson at community radio station WRFG (FM 89.3).

Battle Cry is a powerful salvo, which packs the explosive authority of an artist who, in 2018, co-led a pilgrimage to the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture with Rev. Kimberly Jackson, an ordained LGBTQ+ Episcopal priest and candidate for the Georgia Senate in 2020, and Dr. Catherine Meeks, executive director of the Absalom Jones Center for Racial Healing.

On *Battle Cry*, VA fires off familiar songs, such as Donny Hathaway's "Sackful of Dreams," Dion's "Abraham, Martin and John" and "Bali Hai" from the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical *South Pacific*, with precisely targeted interpretation, imaginative improvisation, swing and soul. Her evocative renderings of "America the Beautiful" and "The Pledge of Allegiance" prompt fresh evaluation of time-honored symbols of national pride. A harrowing version of "Strange Fruit," sung in wailing, dissonant passages, honors and embellishes the protest song immortalized by Billie Holiday with wrenching poignancy, made all the more potent by Jordan's deeply rooted bass and Williams' spine-tingling sax accompaniment.

Then there is "Hear My Battle Cry." Propelled by a disarmingly bright, deliciously funky groove, the album's one original song delivers the singer's bullseye message: Can we find the path to freedom by the truth in our lives/Find the courage, strength and hope to stand tall/Resurrect ourselves, correct ourselves, and pay our due/Hear my battle cry: I will live in truth or die.

"My music is my resistance," says VA. "*Battle Cry* is my plea for us to step up to the plate and do what is right for this country, to make America a better place."

- Doug DeLoach, music journalist

Bali Hai - Oscar Hammerstein, Richard Rodgers
(Schenck, Jordan, Patton)

My cousin had been encouraging me for years to do this “South Pacific” standard with bass and voice. When I told him the trajectory of this project, he reminded me that the whole premise in “South Pacific” centered on mixed relationships. “Bali Hai” in particular focuses on a white American male not able to release his own societal norms to commit his love to the woman of his dreams, a Tonkinese. Can our dreams save us? Can we rise above? Can we venture to Bali Hai?

Sackful of Dreams - Gary McFarland, Louis Savary
(Schenck, Bales, Jordan, Patton)

When I first heard Jamison Ross cover this great tune made most famous by Donny Hathaway, I knew I had to sing it. I do have a “sackful of dreams”. Like Mahalia Jackson leaning over to Martin Luther King on the National Mall, whispering in his ear “tell them about the dream, tell them about the dream”. I’m still dreaming.

Gettysburg Address - Abraham Lincoln
(Schenck, Patton, Benson)

Abraham Lincoln’s epic speech. Still moves me. “for the people, by the people”... That means all of us. I first met James Benson/vocal talent at Atlanta’s WRFG 89.3 FM where he was making announcements for a jazz organization. As soon as I heard his deep, rich voice, I knew he was the one for the job!

America the Beautiful / Abraham, Martin & John
Katherine Lee Bates, Samuel Ward/Richard Holler
(Schenck, Bales, Jordan, Patton, Williams)

I love my country! I love “America the Beautiful” in particular about my country. It captures the vastness, beauty, and diversity of its land which is also exemplified in our people.

I find this 1968 classic “Abraham, Martin & John” still speaking to me. We need leaders who can stand up. We need courageous folk. We need able bodies, minds, and hearts to aid us in humane and integrous relationships. We need everyone to do their part. I look around and I’m not seeing it...and I ask myself every day “Am I doing my part?”.

Strange Fruit - Lewis Allan
(Schenck, Jordan, Williams)

I first heard this song while hanging out with my friend, Jaimoe, of the legendary Allman Brothers Band. We spent hours listening to jazz in his studio. He truly enlightened me to jazz beyond music school. When he played “Strange Fruit” for me I nearly fainted. I’m certain I gasped.

Lewis Allan (aka Abel Meeropol) wrote this song in the 1930s as a lynching protest song. Being a Jewish immigrant, he felt similar pain. Obviously, he felt the need to change his name. He took the song to Billie Holiday who then made it quite famous. It is straightforward and cuts no slack.

Rev. Kimberly Jackson asked me to sing this at a Lynching Memorial site service of healing. I was really taken aback ~ and then so honored to be asked. I am a white woman and never felt it was even right for me to touch this song. I quickly realized that perhaps my singing it is even more pertinent. I did - a cappella.

When in concert, and on this recording, I sing it with Bass & Sax. Rodney laid down the perfectas foundation and Kebbi “responds” to my wails on sax in great support. Finding this song so intently painful, I called each of them to ask their permission and willingness. These two men of color are behind me 100%. It still makes me tear up just writing about it. Together, may we heal the wounds.

Hear My Battle Cry - VA Virginia Schenck
(Schenck, Bales, Jordan, Patton, Lollar)

Spring of 2018 found me attending lectures and symposiums on civil discourse. The Refrain for this song came to me immediately. When looking for inspiration for the main body, I turned to Marianne Williamson’s “Healing the Soul of America,” in particular her chapter on “Dreams & Possibilities”. It is my belief that in order for us to move forward as a healthy nation, we must first look inside and heal our own beliefs and perceptions.

On this matter, there is no going back for me. I will do my utmost best at all times to stand in “Truth”. As the phrase I’ve written states: “I will live in Truth ~ or die.”

Pledge of Allegiance - Francis Bellamy
(Schenck, Patton)

As a child, at my public school every morning we stood, hand over our heart, and recited the Pledge of Allegiance. I loved this ritual and always felt so reverent and proud. Today, I wonder what we are pledging? And why do we pledge it to a flag? How about pledging allegiance to Truth, Integrity, Justice, and Community!

America the Beautiful Reprise - Samuel Ward
(Bales, Jordan, Patton)

Step out of the studio for a minute, and listen to what happens! I returned to hear the band taking off with this joyous upbeat version of America the Beautiful. God bless them! Thank you for reminding me that this truly is a wonderful country full of hope and possibility. I wish this for all of us.

Remember the Dream ~ and Keep Dreaming!



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Virginia Schenck, known by the stage name VA, is an accomplished international vocal artist and jazz performer, utilizing both straight-ahead, spoken word, and free improvisation. VA is an imaginative vocalist with a broad stylistic reach. She can soothe her audience with a beautiful ballad, invigorate them with a re-imagined standard and challenge them with a powerful blast of free improvisation. Yet all of these aspects exist within one singular and unique voice.

VA often spices up her shows with world music influences from her own vocal exploration and CircleSinging, which she studied under the legendary Bobby McFerrin. Last year, she was honored to perform with McFerrin as part of his Atlanta, Ga., *CircleSongs* concert. In addition to performing with him, Virginia was handpicked to put together the exclusive 12-voice ensemble that led McFerrin's *CircleSongs* for the concert.

A Florida native, VA came to Georgia after graduating from Florida State University. While her degree was in Music Therapy, she studied jazz piano, voice and dance. She started singing jazz gigs while in school, and continued to perform after she launched her music therapy career. Her love of jazz was enriched through a friendship with drummer Jaimoe of the Allman Brothers Band.

Performing regularly in Atlanta's top jazz and music venues, her recent appearances also include New York & Seattle for a play with totally improvised music, "The Gift", with aerial dancers at The Robert Mondavi Ctr/UC-Davis, St Patrick's Cathedral/Dublin, IR, Chartres Cathedral/France, Kripalu Yoga and Retreat Center, and Rome, Italy.

VA has released three critically acclaimed albums, which showcase her artistry. Her debut CD, *VA (2012)*, generated serious buzz with jazz fans, immediately receiving global airplay with such artists as 2012 NEA Jazz Master, Sheila Jordan, who exclaimed, "*Wonderful CD... Wonderful singer!*" Her CDs, *Interior Notions (2015)* and *Aminata Moseka: an Abbey Lincoln Tribute (2017)* have followed similar suit. Her fourth album, *Battle Cry (2020)*, is set for release on January 3.

VA's grandmother, a suffragette in Philadelphia, was pregnant with her mother while campaigning for women's voting rights in the 1920s. Almost a century later, the election of a new President in 2016 touched off a clarion call to arms, which, for Schenck, prompted a commitment to speaking, singing, and advocating in opposition to a rising tide of anti-democratic forces.

Stirred and moved by the current need for civil and human rights action, VA created her latest album *Battle Cry (2020)* to use the power of music to generate change. The message of the new album is not only of resistance, but also of peace, unity, and hope. "Jazz is built on a democratic system and music is my resistance," VA says. "In my song 'Hear My Battle Cry,' I sing, 'I will live in truth or die.' For me, there is no middle ground."

In 2018, VA co-led a pilgrimage to the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture with Rev. Kimberly Jackson, an ordained LGBTQ+ Episcopal priest and candidate for the Georgia Senate in 2020, and Dr. Catherine Meeks, executive director of the Absalom Jones Center for Racial Healing. She was invited to sing "Strange Fruit," the protest song immortalized by Billie Holiday, in a memorial service for Georgia's historic lynching victims at the Absalom Jones Center for Racial Healing on the Atlanta University campus.

So many of the messages we hear today speak of division and of exclusion. My role as a vocal artist is not only to entertain and to soothe, but also to challenge, to provoke," says Schenck. "If music is resistance, then jazz is freedom. Resistance is my mission, and freedom is my goal."

For more information, go to VirginiaSchenck.com. Follow Virginia Schenck/VA on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/VASchenck) and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/VASchenck).

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BATTLE CRY

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