

A man wearing a patterned shirt and a fedora hat stands on a stage, facing away from the camera with his hands raised. He is positioned in front of a keyboard on a stand. To his left, a group of people are seated on the stage, watching him. The background features a large, modern building with blue and purple lighting. The text "Prior Presents 2024-2025" is overlaid in white. The words "BOROUGH'S THEATRE" and "FOLEY SCENE" are visible on the building's facade.

Prior Presents

2024-2025

BOROUGH'S THEATRE

FOLEY SCENE

Curricular Engagement with The Prior



The Wanderer's Tethering (Boston Lyric Opera), 2024

The Prior Performing Arts Center supports meaningful engagement with the arts for students across the College, advancing Holy Cross' commitment to inclusive excellence by exposing students to models of creative practice that emphasize process, experimentation, and risk. To date, more than half of the College's 64 academic units have hosted or required attendance at events at The Prior. We look forward to partnering with colleagues from every department to foster innovative experiential learning opportunities inspired by the multidisciplinary arts, and we welcome your ideas about ways you might draw on the center's unique resources in your teaching.

This guide introduces opportunities related to the 2024-2025 Prior Presents series. Prior Presents is the keystone of the center's public-facing programming, merging thrilling live events by visiting artists with robust educational and outreach activities. Defined by exceptional artistic quality, interdisciplinary impulses, and the potential to spark both wonder and reflection, this annual series celebrates artistic risk-taking and the exchange of ideas and perspectives from around the globe.

For each event in the Prior Presents series, we are pleased to offer a brief, accessible resource guide offering multiple points of departure for preparation and conversation. Email Marta Beyer at mbeyer@holycross.edu for the guide related to any event of interest in the upcoming season.



Over the past two years, Prior staff have facilitated the following engagement with the Prior Presents series:

- Brought artists into classrooms for student-driven, course-specific Q&As.
- Produced faculty-led dialogues with artists.
- Designed a cluster-wide Monsterrat event including self-reflection, group movement, and other participatory activities.
- Hosted up-close demonstrations.
- Conducted art-making activities.
- Supported faculty in designing assignments connected to specific live events in the series.
- Suggested relevant possible readings and model texts to inspire follow-up assignments.
- Facilitated masterclasses and writing workshops.

Prior staff are also available to:

- Visit your class to offer pre-event preparation or lead a post-event discussion.
- Work with you on pre- or post-event lesson plans to supplement students' experience with an artist-in-residence.
- Engage through another format of your choice.

Why include performance?



Compagnie Hervé Koubj, 2024

How can engagement with live performance enhance student learning of topics that may be far removed from a given art form? Put another way: Why include live events from Prior Presents in your syllabus?

Consider whether any of the following **impacts of live events** overlap with your learning goals for students.

01

Live events provide another mode for instruction, an experiential one that can enliven the routine of reading, lecture, and note-taking. They can provide a new entry point into course material. They mobilize unconventional, often non-verbal, modes of communication and sense-making. They have the capacity to enchant and to invite participation.

02

Live events are always cultural productions in context, speaking to a particular cross-section of time, place, culture, and personality.

[Material on this and the next two pages adapts very closely, with only minor changes, a [faculty guide](#) produced by UMS, a performing arts presenter at the University of Michigan and a winner of the National Medal of the Arts. UMS's other white papers for faculty on integrating the arts into curriculum include [Performance as a Tool for Inclusive Teaching and Discussing Performance in the Classroom](#). If you are interested in accessing or working with Interim Director Kyle Frisina on Holy Cross-specific resources in this vein, please reach out to kfrisina@holycross.edu.]

Why include performance?



Reginald Dwayne Betts, 2024

03

Live events ask students to absorb and analyze high degrees of complexity.

Performances are dynamic, complex systems, encompassing the interaction of performers with each other, performers with technical aspects of theater, performers with audience, performers with “text,” performance with the culture at large, and more. Students must pay attention to detail, and quickly assess which details are important.

04

Live events require physical and mental presence for an immediate, multi-sensory experience; they are distinct from screen-based representation and abstract theory. As one professor says, “It’s live, and it’s real.”

05

Students must actively engage in making sense rather than passively reviewing information. This sense-making can itself be a creative act.

06

Live events often support multiple viable interpretations. The outcome may be ambiguous, encouraging personal meaning-making for the individual, and questions and conversation among the group.

Why include performance?



LaToya Ruby Frazier, 2023

07

Live events demonstrate innovation. Performances are artists' creative answers to questions; they are the embodiment of new ideas. Performances frame familiar issues in new ways, challenging students' habits and certitude.

08

Live events require empathy, an appreciation of the human condition, and recognition of the "other." They invite audience members to inhabit worlds distant from their own.

09

Live events can provide a memorable experience for students, contributing to the development of the whole person. Many students have never seen a live concert, theater or dance performance, or lecture in a space like the Boroughs Theatre or the Luth Concert Hall.

10

Live events build community. Students share a unique, unifying experience.

Email Kyle Frisina (kfrisina@holycross.edu) and Marta Beyer (mbeyer@holycross.edu) to discuss what engagement with Prior Presents would be a benefit to your class!



Prior Presents 2024-2025

Camille A. Brown & Dancers

I AM

RESIDENCY: September 9-13, 2024

CONCERT: September 12, 2024

ABOUT: Four-time Tony Award-nominated choreographer and director Camille A. Brown continues her meteoric rise creating new work on stage, TV, and film. A “prodigious” (VOGUE) Bessie, Obie, and Princess Grace Award-winning choreographer and director, Brown made history as the first Black director at the Metropolitan Opera to direct a mainstage production when she co-directed *Fire Shut Up In My Bones* (2021). With the Broadway revival of *for colored girls...* in 2022 (which earned her a Tony nomination for Best Direction of a Play), she became the first Black woman to direct and choreograph a Broadway play since Katherine Dunham in 1955.

Following her work as the choreographer of the new Alicia Keys musical *Hell's Kitchen*, which led to a Tony Award nomination for Best Choreography, Brown returns to the roots of her own dance company, deepening her exploration of Black joy in her latest work, *I AM*. The Prior is delighted to offer Brown and her company the opportunity to further develop *I AM* after its world premiere at Jacob's Pillow this summer and to involve the Holy Cross community in these artists' creative process.

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS: In addition to the concert, Camille A. Brown & Company will hold two open rehearsals and a community-wide Q&A. The residency's themes include Black expression and culture, choreography, creativity across multiple mediums, and artistic/collaborative process.



Prior Presents 2024-2025

Johnny Gandelsman

This is America

RESIDENCY: September 23-26, 2024

CONCERT: September 26, 2024

ABOUT: In response to the despair, alienation, and turbulence of the COVID-19 era, Grammy Award-winning violinist and producer Johnny Gandelsman developed *This Is America*, a commissioning and recording project featuring over twenty new works for solo violin. *This Is America* celebrates our country's rich cultural tapestry and its myriad perspectives, offering a vivid counterpoint to the idea that this land can be understood through a singular, dominant point of view. Each composition reflects on the current state of American society in a personal and intimate way, looking unflinchingly at universal topics like separation, loneliness, hope and love. *This Is America* also represents the possibilities that spring up between two people entering into creative dialogue with one another. The suite is thus also inspiring as a platform for investigating other forms of dialogue: civic, social, and more. Bridging diverse perspectives can at times feel impossible. As Gandelsman has found, however, meaning exists in the trying.

The Prior is pleased to present Gandelsman's "This Is America" through the lens of the strategic plan's fourth pillar, "In and of Worcester." In addition to giving a full concert at The Prior, Gandelsman will perform briefer segments of the suite across the city in collaboration with community partners: *This Is America* becomes *This Is Worcester*.

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS: We are excited to work with faculty to design activities that encourage students to try on one another's voices, engage in creative experiments, and collaborate on the challenges of our day. In addition to these subjects, Gandelsman is able to speak with students about using art to create dialogue on difficult matters. He is also available for masterclasses with musicians.



Prior Presents 2024-2025

Aimee Nezhukumatathil

RESIDENCY: October 2-4, 2024

MONTSERRAT EVENT: October 2, 2024

PUBLIC LECTURE: October 3, 2024

ABOUT: Aimee Nezhukumatathil is a *New York Times*-bestselling essayist and poet whose environmentally attuned work explores how we live in the world she finds rich with wonder. Following on *World of Wonders: In Praise of Fireflies, Whale Sharks, and Other Astonishments*, her forthcoming collection, *Bite by Bite: Nourishments and Jamborees*, blends reporting, research, and memoir to celebrate food as “a locus for care, grief, desire, nostalgia.”

Nezhukumatathil's four poetry collections lend inventive attention to issues of environmental concern. Her writing is frequently cited for being just plain delightful: said Poetry Foundation of *Lucky Fish*, for example, “Nezhukumatathil’s third book affirms her reputation as one of the master miners of the curious fact in science, history, nature and culture.” The winner of numerous prizes and fellowships, Nezhukumatathil is also the first-ever poetry editor for SIERRA magazine, the story-telling arm of The Sierra Club.

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS: Nezhukumatathil's work offers a beautiful, timely, and critically expansive model of writing that draws on intimate personal experience in order to deepen its author's and readers' connection to the complexities of the world around us. She is available to connect with students on various subjects including identity, food, race, and the natural world, as well as on approaches to writing in myriad genres.



Prior Presents 2024-2025

Mfoniso Udofia

Sojourners

RESIDENCY AND PERFORMANCE: November 19, 2024

Pop-up performance from The Huntington Theatre

ABOUT: With *Sojourners*, the first chapter in her sweeping *Ufot Cycle*, nationally acclaimed playwright Mfoniso Udofia explores the collision of marriage, migration, and the pursuit of education. Set in 1978, this lively, funny play centers on a young and brilliant Nigerian couple as they arrive in Houston, looking to earn their degrees and bring insights back to their home country. But when Abasiama discovers that her husband has been seduced by Motown records and American culture, she has to choose between the Nigerian Dream and her obligations as a matriarch.

Udofia draws inspiration for the nine-play *Ufot Cycle* from her time growing up in Southbridge, MA and from meeting playwright August Wilson at Boston's Huntington Theatre. The Prior is thrilled to partner with The Huntington Theatre on this pop-up event, which brings the company's full production of *Sojourners* to Holy Cross.

Udofia's plays have previously been produced at New York Theatre Workshop, American Conservatory Theater, the Playwrights Realm, the Boston Court, and more. She also writes and produces for film and television, including on *Lessons in Chemistry*, *Let the Right One In*, and *A League of Their Own*.

"*Sojourners* offers a moving and powerful corrective to the notion that what immigrants leave behind is always awful, and that what they find is always worth the trip." – *The New York Times*

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS: Relevant themes include immigration, African American and African culture, theatrical/creative process, developing linked or extended bodies of work (*Sojourners* is one of nine plays Udofia has written on the history of Nigerian migration), and working across artistic mediums (Udofia has written for theater, film, and television and also acts). Connections with actors and staff at The Huntington Theatre will also be available as part of this unique partnership with one of the country's most significant regional theaters.



Prior Presents 2024-2025

Julia Keefe Indigenous Big Band with Mali Obomsawin

RESIDENCY: November 21-26, 2024

CONCERT: November 22, 2024

ABOUT: The Julia Keefe Indigenous Big Band (JKIBB) is an ensemble of Native and Indigenous jazz musicians from across Indian Country. Performing pieces from their under-appreciated predecessors in jazz, like Mildred Bailey (Coeur d'Alene) and Jim Pepper (Kaw/Mvskoke), alongside works by contemporary Indigenous composers, the band spotlights a vibrant, long-standing tradition of Indigenous improvised music today. Led by the celebrated vocalist Julia Keefe (Nez Perce), the ensemble bring charisma, passion, and purpose to every stage, leaving audiences both inspired and educated.

JKIBB will be supported at The Prior by Mali Obomsawin, an award-winning bassist, songwriter and composer from Odanak First Nation. Obomsawin's stunning debut *Sweet Tooth* (2022) received international acclaim and was named in "best of" lists from GRAMMY.com to JazzTimes and NPR. With an expansive background in American roots, rock, and jazz, Obomsawin carries several music traditions. Beyond the stage she is a community organizer and advocate for Indigenous rights, environmental justice and landback.

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS: Keefe and Obomsawin are available to connect with students on the historical and contemporary contributions of Native American and Indigenous musicians to jazz; on their impressively wide-ranging activist efforts; and on their other artistic projects ranging from film scoring to songwriting to acting.



Prior Presents 2024-2025

The Acting Company

August Wilson's *Two Trains Running*

RESIDENCY: February 10-11, 2025

CONCERT: February 10, 2025

Tour shared by Connecticut College and Middlebury College

ABOUT: *Two Trains Running* is the 1960s chapter of acclaimed playwright August Wilson's American Century Cycle, a decade-by-decade saga of African American life in the 20th century. We are thrilled to present this fully designed, fully staged production from The Acting Company as part of the first-ever tour authorized by the Wilson estate in partnership with Connecticut College and Middlebury College.

Amidst the activism and upheaval of the Civil Rights era, Memphis Lee's Pittsburgh restaurant is slated for demolition. While Memphis fights to sell his diner for a fair price, the rest of the restaurant's regulars search for work, love, and justice as their neighborhood continues to change in unpredictable ways. Accessible, heartfelt, and hilarious, *Two Trains Running* is a lyrical story of reinvention and reclamation: finding out where you belong and how to take your place in the world. It is also a terrific jumping off point for discussing the twentieth century roots of major contemporary challenges from redevelopment to economic justice.

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS: Actors are available to engage with students on playwright August Wilson; on their work as actors/artists; and on Shakespeare (whose work *The Comedy of Errors* tours in rep with *Two Trains Running*). We are additionally delighted to facilitate connections with faculty across departments at Connecticut College and Middlebury whose classes will also be engaging with this production.



Prior Presents 2024-2025

Jha D Amazi of MASS Design

RESIDENCY AND PUBLIC LECTURE: March 2025, dates TBD

ABOUT: MASS Design Group was founded on the understanding that architecture's influence reaches beyond individual buildings. MASS (Model of Architecture Serving Society) believes that architecture has a critical role to play in supporting communities to confront history, shape new narratives, collectively heal and project new possibilities for the future.

As a Principal at MASS Design Group, Jha D Amazi leads the Public Memory and Memorial Lab, an ongoing research and design project which asks, "How can spatializing memory support healing and inspire collective action for generations to come?" MASS Design's Public Memory and Memorials Lab has engaged communities to design projects such as The Embrace (Boston, MA), the National Memorial for Peace and Justice (Montgomery, AL), the Franklin Park Action Plan (Boston, MA), the Emmett Till & Mamie Till-Mobley National Monument Project (Tallahatchie County, MS and Chicago, IL), and the Gun Violence Memorial Project (Chicago, IL, and Washington D.C.). Across its work, the Lab honors the experiences, histories, and cultures of people historically denied representation in our memorial landscape.

Beyond MASS, Amazi is also a spoken word artist, event producer, and self-proclaimed space maker for LGBTQ+ communities of color. With an M.Arch from the University of Pennsylvania, Amazi has worked as a Designer at Sasaki and taught studio at the Boston Architectural College.

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS: Amazi is available to connect with students on themes of memory and memorialization, architecture, public space, public art, interdisciplinary collaboration, and non-profit and municipal partnerships to advance social justice.



Prior Presents 2024-2025

Sphinx Virtuosi *American Form/s*

RESIDENCY: March 30-April 1, 2025

CONCERT: March 30, 2025

Co-production with Music Worcester

ABOUT: Described by the *Washington Post* as musicians who demonstrate “immeasurable power, unwavering command and soulful beauty,” the Sphinx Virtuosi is a dynamic and inspiring chamber orchestra. It serves as the flagship performing entity of the Sphinx Organization, a Detroit-based leading social justice non-profit dedicated to transforming lives through the power of diversity in the arts. Comprised of 18 accomplished Black and Latinx artists, a critical aim of the Sphinx Virtuosi is to evolve and transform the face of classical music through artistic excellence, pioneering programming, and impassioned community engagement. As a bilingual ensemble, these artist-citizens break down existing barriers to foster connections with the broader community.

At The Prior, the Sphinx Virtuosi will present *American Form/s*, a journey through classically-framed infusions of soul, bluegrass, jazz, blues, and elements of rag. We are delighted to partner with the celebrated Worcester institution Music Worcester on this production.

CURRICULAR CONNECTIONS: Engagement opportunities range from masterclasses and workshops focused on musical history to discussions, interactive sessions, and other Holy Cross-specific activities focused on building community and achieving excellence in various cultural realms through diversity.



Gonzalo Grau and La Clava Secreta, 2024

We look forward to seeing you at
The Prior this year!

Click here to indicate your interest in this
year's Prior Presents series or reach out to
us directly with your questions and ideas.

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Rhiannon Giddens, 2024