

Johnny Gandelsman, violin

Thursday, September 26
Luth Concert Hall
Prior Presents 2024–25

PRIOR
Performing Arts Center

Welcome

Dear friends,

As Johnny Gandelsman's eloquent program note (p. 3) suggests, *This Is America* is rooted in the promise of encounter. Originating from the isolating depths of the pandemic, performed against the backdrop of global and national strife, it models the radical act of attempting—however imperfectly—to inhabit another's perspective.

The commissioning and recording efforts comprising Gandelsman's broader project are vast, yielding twenty-eight new works. Yet the project's performance is intimate: one artist interpreting the voices of others who, open-hearted, put themselves in his hands.

What Gandelsman and these composers have encountered in one another is what you will encounter tonight. In addition, you will also encounter each other. And *your* presence, the associations *you* make with the music, will create *this* version of *This Is America*.

Gandelsman has a significant history with Holy Cross, beginning with the development of new work for the Silkroad Ensemble. More recently, he has performed at The Prior as a member of the quartet Brooklyn Rider and as the featured violinist in the world premiere of Prior composer-in-residence Osvaldo Golijov's *The Given Note*. The present residency shows how long relationships with artists can unfold in new and moving ways: in this case, offering an evocative framework for deepening The Prior's and the College's ties with our local community.

In 2023, President Vincent D. Rougeau outlined a hope-filled vision for the future of the College in his strategic plan, *Aspire*. Core to *Aspire* is an emphasis on Holy Cross as an institution "in and of Worcester." In the years ahead, we hope The Prior will serve that identity as a dynamic point of exchange between the College and the City of Worcester—an exchange to which *This Is America* has, in its unique way, contributed. Inspired by the ethos of Gandelsman's project to meet collaborators where they are, this residency has included additional concerts in three key sites of Worcester community: St. Vincent's Hospital, Notre Dame du Lac Assisted Living Community, and the afterschool music education program Neighborhood Strings. Each of those concerts has featured different pieces from the larger suite: *This Is America* becomes *This Is Worcester*.

At the end of the program we'll have the pleasure of welcoming another community partner, the Worcester Chamber Music Society, to the stage. (Neighborhood Strings is, of course, their outstanding initiative.) Finally, I am honored to share that tonight's performance is made possible by the generosity of Heidi Brake Smith '82, whose belief in the impact of artists-in-residence inspires us all. I hope you enjoy tonight's performance and that you return soon to The Prior—see pages 7-9 for some of our many upcoming events!

Kyle Frisina

Nancy Savage Skinner Interim Director

Program

This Is America

Justin Messina
Music for Solitude (2022)

Èbùn Oguntola
Reflections (2021)

Matana Roberts
Stitched (2021)

Tomeka Reid
Rhapsody (2021)

Christina Courtin
Stroon (2021)

Olivia Davis
Cadenza from Steeped (2020)

Rhiannon Giddens
New To The Session (2021)

Julius Eastman
Joy Boy (1972)
Performed with the Worcester Chamber Music Society
 Krista Buckland Reisner and Rohan Gregory, violins
 Mark Berger, viola
 David Russell, cello
 Tracy Kraus, flute
 Randall Hodgkinson, piano

This program is made possible by the Heidi Brake Smith '82 Fund for the Arts.

Program Notes: *This Is America*

To say that 2020 was a difficult year for the United States would be an understatement. COVID-19 took the lives of 385,000 people. Racism and police brutality took the lives of Ahmed Arbery, George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, igniting nationwide and eventually worldwide protests. In California, the 4.2 million acres burned in 2020 were the most in a single year since records were kept, and more than the previous three years combined. Vicious election cycle rhetoric was boiling over, and conversations dominating cable news focused on what this country was, is, or should be. Unemployment skyrocketed. People were isolated, sick, scared and exhausted.

In thinking about ways one person could make a small difference, it occurred to me that in many ways amplifying voices of others, whether it's those of centuries past, or ones of today, is an essential part of being a Classical musician. I decided to commission new works for violin from American and US-based composers, asking each one to reflect in some way on the time we were all living through. Some, like Justin Messina and Christina Courtin, have been dear friends for decades; others, like Èbùn Oguntola, were new connections; all were musicians whose artistry I respected and admired.

The process of getting to know these new works was illuminating. I found comfort in works I knew how to approach; others required skills I wasn't good at, or never tried before, pushing me into directions I never thought I'd be exploring, and at times stretching my comfort level to what seemed like its absolute limits. My first reaction to those works was trepidation, and the old saying "you fear what you don't understand" rang in my head. I feel incredibly lucky to have had the composers gently guide me into their process, easing my worries with encouragement and allowing me to find my own way to bring their works to life. I wish for all of us to experience that kind of thoughtful guidance when encountering things, people, or ideas we don't understand.

I've come to think of this project as an anthology, a snapshot in time, documenting a tiny slice of the creative thought and output in this country today. I invite you to stop listening to pundits, extend your ears, open up your imagination, and trust the music to guide you into a challenging, complicated and thrilling sound world—this is America. *Johnny Gandelsman*

Justin Messina – *Music For Solitude*

Is music conceived for aloneness different than that intended for public performance?

This work was born out of the extended lockdowns and tumult of 2020 & 2021. These periods of isolation and upheaval led me to rediscover my deeply personal relationship with playing music detached from public performance. Music in solitude became a form of therapy, bolstering me against the outside world. This freed me to consider a piece less from an audience's perspective and more from that of a person alone with their instrument. My focus became the delight of making the violin ring in a rich acoustic space. I hoped any eventual performance would seem an act of witnessing an artist in a personal moment and not a public declaration.

As the piece neared completion I began to realize it was strongly rooted in an earlier large-scale series I had been unable to complete to my satisfaction. In 2014, I embarked on a field recording project at the Channel Islands in Southern California. The centerpiece of that series was Painted Cave, one of the largest sea caves in the world. The unique acoustics and sounds of the cave contribute to a sacred atmosphere and, at the time, proved too daunting for my own music. Instead I recorded a violist playing excerpts of Bach's cello suites in the cave over a period of several days. *Music for Solitude* is the piece I was unable to write then, and as such, completes the series. I'm indebted to my close friend Johnny Gandelsman for commissioning the work and allowing me to finish this journey. *Justin Messina*

Music for Solitude was generously commissioned for this project by Linda Burrows

Èbùn Oguntola - *Reflections*

Reflections is a solo violin piece that reflects upon our emotions and reactions to the multi-faceted and chaotic introduction of the new decade in 2020 onward. The piece starts off with the music illustrating the vision of someone standing and staring out at vast rubble and debris, symbolizing our reflection upon the lacerating calamities we all had to endure, that has destroyed some of the sentimental treasures we cherish, that has utterly reshaped society and the way we've structured our lives across the globe. Within the first section of the piece, constant usage of fourths create a contemplative and pensive tone, while also displaying tonal ambiguity, hesitation of a tonal center, to describe how we as people have lost our centers during this time, mentally and frantically, with endless confusion.

In the second section, the flashback begins, and the story of these grievous turns of events unfolds. The music at this point conveys our prior anticipation, excitement, and curiosity for what the future may hold in this new decade. However, the fourths in the music soon shift to tritones, one of the most dissonant intervals, to show how our prior anticipation was woefully mislead. Tension arises to delineate the tension that arose within our communities. The tension accumulates until its energy snaps our state of sanity, as the tonal center of the music becomes unintelligible, and sixteenth notes drive rampantly, to describe the boundless commotion we encountered, and double stops reappear to show our multilayered circumstances.

In the the third section, the climactic moment of chaos has declined just enough for us to slightly ease our hyperventilations, slow down, and reflect upon what happened. Musical ideas are repeated, though altered, to illustrate us analyzing our predicaments and circumstances through a mournful perspective, that transitions us to our current state in time. The fourth section is the recapitulation of the beginning to signal the end to this flashback. Although similar, slight subtleties allude to details previously overlooked, but brought back to our attention after deep reflection.

It is imperative that we take methods to recuperate from such exigent experiences, and reflecting on them helps in doing so. There is no grounded resolution of the piece to show our story isn't necessarily finished yet. We are still being affected by these events, but we will take steps to resolve them. *Èbùn Oguntola*

Reflections was generously commissioned by Chamber Music Pittsburgh (Pittsburgh, PA)

Matana Roberts - *Stitched*

I make music for the purpose of illuminating and supporting the inner lives of many different types of listeners and sound practitioners. It is service work that I feel so privileged to have in my creative life. This piece structure is a complex representation of the hope, joy and sadness we have collectively traveled through and are still traveling through, as global citizens in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Through the worst of times and the best of times, sound continuously resonates. A sob, a cry, a laugh, a whimper, a guffaw, a sigh and all the many types of joyful outbursts that are intrinsic to the human experience, regardless of the various boundaries that are used to separate and distract us. It is my hope, that in a listening or performance rendering of this piece, we are reminded that opposites exist for a reason, that any ending, no matter how painful, is a new beginning, and that the unwavering vastness of human spirit is what holds us together as a collective humanity, regardless of dire circumstance. Hope is not dependable, but the thought of it is there for the taking, whenever one might dare to ask...I wish you strength, faith and a limitless sense of hope. *Matana Roberts*

Stitched was generously and jointly commissioned by Celebrity Series & Boston Symphony Orchestra (Boston, MA)

Tomeka Reid - *Rhapsody*

Rhapsody for solo violin was commissioned for violinist Johnny Gandelsman. Composed during the pandemic in 2021, the piece opens with an emotionally reflective yet lyrical statement that returns in various forms throughout the composition. Initially, the statement seems to ask a question. It repeats itself higher yet, there is still no response. (continues on next page)

Tomeka Reid - *Rhapsody* (continued)

Continuing, the theme becomes a bit manic and anxious. Throughout, there is a sensation of "wheels spinning while stuck in place" and the piece ends with a sort of resolve that is neither sad nor without hope. *Tomeka Reid*

Rhapsody was generously and jointly commissioned by the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society (Philadelphia, PA) & the Portland Chamber Music Festival (Portland, ME); in partnership with the Maine College of Art (Portland, ME) in memory of Christopher Marrion

Christina Courtin - *Stroon*

When I was given the task to write *Stroon*, the reflection period was a heavy one. I was on a journey to find a path that would somehow lead me to another. Needless to say, I hit many dead ends. For me the piece has landed in two worlds of mine, the lyrical and the searching. The singing aspect is throughout, but especially at the beginning and, of course, with the help of the dancers. The flowing sixteenth notes are just a vehicle for the endless searching and questioning of what anything/everything means, not unlike so many other pieces of music out there today. The last year and a half have been absolutely devastating for so many reasons, and for me personally it made me very quiet. I did not write, I did not sing, I just read the news with an anxious mind. I was so grateful for the opportunity from The Vail Dance Festival because it forced me to get into music again, to try and reconnect with myself, and to try and put music to the madness that is still our reality. *Christina Courtin*

Stroon was generously commissioned by the 2021 Vail Dance Festival, Damian Woetzel - Artistic Director (Vail, CO)

Olivia David - *Cadenza* from *Steeped*

Steeped is a personal reflection and response to the time that we live in, including but not limited to the pandemic that has flipped "normal" upside down, and a political and social climate in the United States that has done the same. The concept of steeping—whether it be tea or something else entirely—as a representation for these situations surrounding us acts as the catalyst for this piece's inspiration. Each movement's title draws from more traditional Italian musical terms, while playing on the meanings of each of those terms in a way that corresponds to "steeping" situations in my world. The final movement is a cadenza, which not only plays with the traditional structural placement of a cadenza (now it is ending a piece), implying that we are not truly finished with any of the aforementioned situations—we are only so far going—but allows the performer to contextualize the Self in all that has been happening and beyond, as cadenzas truly are about the individual. The ending—regardless of which ending the performer chooses (as there are multiple endings I have given the performer to choose from), is meandering and somewhat lost (as I have sometimes felt during this last year); it is expressionist; it is exhausted, yet there is potential for and yearning for hope and betterment. *Olivia Davis*

Steeped was generously and jointly commissioned by the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society (Philadelphia, PA) & Gabriela Lena Frank Creative Academy of Music (Booneville, CA)

Rhiannon Giddens - *New To The Session*

I began my fiddling journey as an apprentice to a dance musician, and pretty late in life, as violinists go—so my repertoire and style is rhythmic and melodically simple, and always with a dancer in mind. They say write what you know—so when this opportunity came to create a piece for Johnny Gandelsman, I was thrilled to see what came out of my strings and off my bow. It's called *New to the Session* because as a beginner fiddler I would sit in on Irish sessions sometimes and feel like I was in a whirlwind—no more than twice through each tune and it seemed like everybody knew everything but me; I wanted to capture a bit of that feel with the journey through the melodies. *Rhiannon Giddens*

New To The Session was generously commissioned by the 2021 Vail Dance Festival, Damian Woetzel - Artistic Director (Vail, CO)

Biographies

Johnny Gandelsman

Called "*A violinist who can do anything*" by *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Grammy-winning violinist and producer **Johnny Gandelsman** integrates a wide range of creative sensibilities into a style unique amongst today's violinists. Richard Brody of *The New Yorker* has called Johnny "revelatory" in concert, placing him in the company of "radically transformative" performers like Maurizio Pollini, Peter Serkin and Christian Zacharias. As a founding member of Brooklyn Rider and a former member of the Silkroad Ensemble, Johnny has worked closely with such luminaries as Bela Fleck, Martin Hayes, Kayhan Kalhor, Yo-Yo Ma, Mark Morris, Anne Sofie Van Otter, Alim Qasimov & Fargana Qasimova, Joshua Redman, Suzanne Vega, Abigail Washburn and Damian Woetzel. He has appeared with Bono, David Byrne, Renée Fleming, Rhiannon Giddens, I'm With Her, Christian McBride, and many others.

Johnny's recording of the complete Bach Sonatas and Partitas for Solo Violin, which reached #1 on the Billboard Classical Chart, and made it onto *New York Magazine* and *New York Times* Best of the Year lists, was described by *The Boston Globe* as "...sparklingly personal Bach, shorn of grandeur, lofted by a spirit of dance, and as predictable as the flight of a swallow."

In 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic and wildfires in California raged and America reckoned with entrenched systemic racism, police brutality and a deeply polarized presidential election, Johnny created the project *This is America* as a form of creative documentation and response to a time of disruption and disconnection. Working with twenty presenters across the country, he invited twenty-two US-based composers to reflect on the time they were living in. The resulting anthology was called "*profound and engaging*" (NPR music), "*A new vision for classical music*" (Pitchfork) and "*potentially one of the important recordings of our time*" (Gramophone). Now expanded to include 28 works, Johnny has performed *This Is America* throughout North America, including year-long residencies with the Hopkins Center at Dartmouth during the '23-'24 season and with Carolina Performing Arts at the University of North Carolina during the '24-'25 season.

A passionate advocate for new music, Johnny has premiered dozens of new works, including music by Lisa Bielawa, Tyondai Braxton, Daniel Cords, Christina Courtin, Reena Esmail, Bela Fleck, Gabriela Lena Frank, Bill Frisell, Osvaldo Golijov, Gonzalo Grau, Ethan Iverson, Vijay Iyer, Colin Jacobsen, Gabriel Kahane, Rubin Kodheli, Angel Lam, Ljova, Dana Lyn, Nico Muhly, Padma Newsome, Shara Nova, Edward Perez, Matana Roberts, Kyle Sanna, Gregory Saunier, Caroline Shaw, Kojiro Umezaki, Dmitri Yanov-Yanovsky, Du Yun, Evan Ziporyn and John Zorn. Johnny has been producing records since founding his label, In a Circle Records, in 2008. Recent credits include the Silkroad Ensemble's critically-acclaimed recording of Osvaldo Golijov's tone poem in voices *Falling Out of Time* (In a Circle Records); Brooklyn Rider's *Healing Modes* and *The Wanderer* (In a Circle Records); Magos Herrera & Brooklyn Rider's *Dreamers* (Sony); Johnny's own recordings of JS Bach's complete Cello Suites & complete Sonatas and Partitas for violin, and *This Is America* (In a Circle Records); and two albums with the Silkroad Ensemble and Yo-Yo Ma: *The Vietnam War*, an album of music recorded for the documentary film by Ken Burns and Lynn Novick; and *Sing Me Home*, a Grammy-award winner for Best World Music album (Sony). Johnny also produced music for Ken Burns, Lynn Novick and Sarah Bottstein's film *The U.S. and the Holocaust*.

Johnny was born in Moscow into a family of musicians. His father Yuri is a violist, his mother Janna is a pianist, and his sister Natasha is a violinist as well. He lives in New York and is represented by Broadband Collective.

Worcester Chamber Music Society

Hailed as a group with imagination, style and chops, the **Worcester Chamber Music Society** took the Worcester scene by storm with its initial concert in 2006. It has become a recognized cultural presence within the Greater Worcester area by presenting sold-out concerts to captivated audiences, receiving consistent critical acclaim, building new young audiences, and training rising musicians through its Neighborhood Strings and ChamberFest summer programs. Worcester Chamber Music Society strives to cultivate an appreciation for classical music and build a vibrant, inclusive, and diverse community through inspiring concerts and education.

The Prior Performing Arts Center

An uncommon commons for transformative experiences with the arts

2024–25 Prior Presents Season

Prior Presents is the keystone of the Prior Performing Arts 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. Short- and long-term visiting artist residencies include performances, artist talks, installations, workshops, and experiential learning opportunities for Holy Cross students and the greater Worcester community.

The internationally acclaimed artists of the 2024–25 season embody our vision for artist residencies at The Prior Performing Arts Center. Their performances and lectures offer an exhilarating complement to the creativity and innovation of emerging student artists and Holy Cross faculty and staff also featured in our season this year.

Coming Soon to Prior Presents:

Aimee Nezhukumatathil

"Within two pages, nature writing feels different and fresh and new." — *New York Times*

Poet and essayist **Aimee Nezhukumatathil** is the author of the *New York Times*-bestselling *World of Wonders: In Praise of Fireflies, Whale Sharks, and Other Astonishments*. Her essay collection, *Bite by Bite: Nourishments and Jamborees*, blends reporting, research, and memoir to celebrate food as a locus for care, grief, desire, nostalgia.

Join us at The Prior for a free public lecture from Nezhukumatathil on the theme of wonder across her work. Books will be sold by our friends at Worcester's Tidepool BookShop.

Thu Oct 3 @ 6:00 PM
Free Entry, Ticket Required



Scan to purchase tickets and learn more about our schedule of upcoming presentations.



Coming Soon to Prior Presents:

Mfoniso Udofia's *Sojourners* | Pop-up from The Huntington Theatre

"Extraordinary [...] 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. — *New York Times*

A young Nigerian couple arrives in Houston looking to earn their degrees and bring insights back to their home country. This pop-up production is brought to The Prior by the Huntington Theatre as part of Boston's nine-part celebration of playwright Mfoniso Udofia. Free entry courtesy of Boston's Mayor Wu.

Tue Nov 19 @ 7:00 PM
Free Entry, Ticket Required

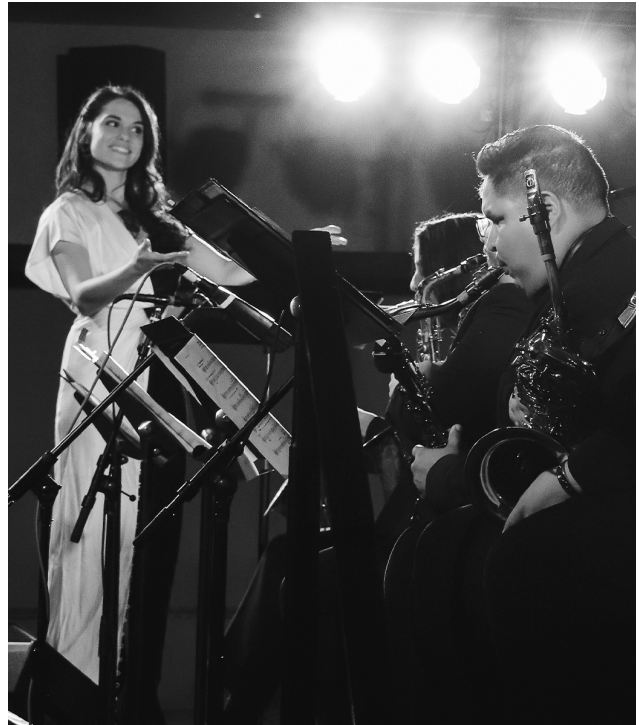
Coming Soon to Prior Presents:

Julia Keefe Indigenous Big Band with Mali Obomsawin

"Jazz is a uniquely American art form. The Julia Keefe Indigenous Big Band...takes that one step further."
— *Olympian*

Led by celebrated vocalist Julia Keefe (Nez Perce), The Julia Keefe Indigenous Big Band is an ensemble of Native and Indigenous jazz musicians from across Indian Country. Opening act by Mali Obomsawin (Odanak First Nation), an award-winning bassist, songwriter, and composer whose debut album "Sweet Tooth" has received international acclaim.

Fri Nov 22 @ 7:30 PM
Save 20% on tickets with code JKIBB20!



Scan to purchase tickets and learn more about our schedule of upcoming presentations.

Coming This Spring to Prior Presents

August Wilson's *Two Trains Running* | The Acting Company

As their neighborhood changes in unpredictable ways, a beloved Pittsburgh diner owner and his customers seek work, love, and justice in this heartfelt and hilarious play. *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.

Mon Feb 10 @ 7:00 PM

Jha D Amazi of MASS Design

A free public lecture from the head of the Public Memory and Memorial Lab at the pathbreaking MASS Design Group. The lab's projects honor the experiences and cultures of communities historically underrepresented in our memorial landscape, with works including The Embrace in Boston and the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama.

Tue Mar 18 @ 6:00 PM

Sphinx Virtuosi | *American Form/s*

A journey through classically-framed infusions of soul, bluegrass, jazz, blues, and rag from the dynamic and inspiring chamber orchestra Sphinx Virtuosi, *American Form/s* is a co-production with Music Worcester.

Sun Mar 30 @ 4:00 PM

Currently at the Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Art Gallery

Blue Profundity: Contemporary Artists Revisit A Color

This exhibition features contemporary artists Adam Chau, Ifé Franklin, Michelle Samour, Heather Evans Smith, and Andrea Pettway Williams, who incorporate blue in their work to highlight the color's symbolic and historic meanings.

Open now through Dec 20

Upcoming Events from Academic Arts

Irish Traditional Music Hour in Worcester

DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC. Traditional Irish musicians Diarmuid Ó Meachair and Sorcha Costello will deliver a very special afternoon performance at Brooks Concert Hall.

Sun Sep 29 @ 3:00 PM

Working Writer Series: Allegra Hyde

CREATIVE WRITING PROGRAM. Fiction writer Allegra Hyde is featured in this Working Writer Series event sponsored by the Creative Writing Program.

Thu Oct 24 @ 7:30 PM

Cymbeline by William Shakespeare

DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE & DANCE. Ed Isser directs this Shakespearean fairy tale filled with action and song about an ancient British king married to a wicked queen who conspires against his daughter, Imogen.

Oct 31 - Nov 10



Scan to purchase tickets and learn more about our schedule of upcoming presentations.

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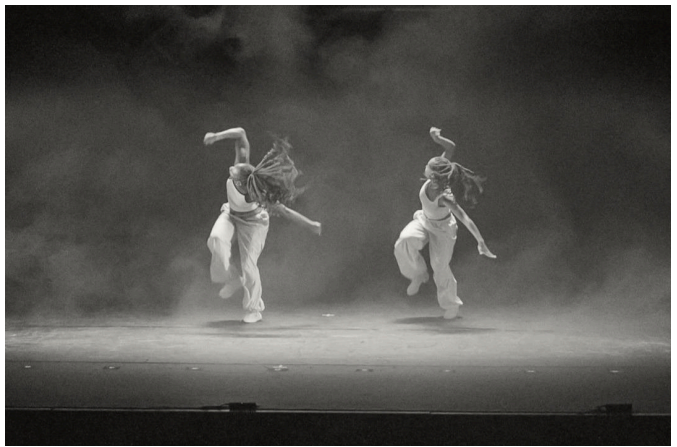
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NEW! Refreshments at the O'Connor Family Café

We're delighted to have that patrons may now **visit the O'Connor Family Café** on the ground floor (the Beehive) of The Prior to purchase **delicious coffee, tea, Italian sodas, and snacks**. The Café will be open until show time before all Prior Presents events and on select other occasions.

priorperformingartscenter.org



Camille A. Brown & Dancers

Thursday, September 12, 2024 at The Prior

Photography by Troy B. Thompson