

American Form/s

Sphinx Virtuosi

Sunday, March 30

Luth Concert Hall

Prior Presents 2024–25

**MUSIC
WORCESTER**

PRIOR
Performing Arts Center

Welcome

Dear friends,

Embodying musical excellence, groundbreaking programming, and a commitment to expanding both the reach and inclusivity of classical music, the Sphinx Virtuosi is among the most vital chamber orchestras performing today.

Music Worcester and The Prior are thrilled to engage the Sphinx Virtuosi for its first visit to Central Massachusetts, where its artists will awe and delight us here in the Luth Concert Hall this evening and inspire future generations of musicians and music-lovers through educational residency activities across the city.

In *American Form/s*, listeners will experience a rich interplay of styles, from the energetic spirit of early American orchestral works to the rhythmic complexity and global perspectives woven into more contemporary pieces inspired by the experimentation of prior generations. This beautifully curated program showcases the interplay of history and innovation in the ongoing evolution of American music.

This evening's concert also highlights the growing collaboration between The Prior Performing Arts Center and Music Worcester, which began in 2023 with the co-presentation of renowned violinist Vijay Gupta. Both institutions share a commitment to fostering meaningful artistic experiences with world-class artists while also creating opportunities for engagement, education, and dialogue. Stay tuned for the next installment of our partnership in the 2025-26 season!

In the meantime, we invite you to immerse yourself in the music of the extraordinary Sphinx Virtuosi.

Sincerely,

Adrien Finlay, Executive Director, Music Worcester
Kyle Frisina, Interim Director, Prior Performing Arts Center

Program

American Form/s

Sphinx Virtuosi

Featuring Josh Jones, percussion

Overture from *Treemonisha* †

Scott Joplin (arr. Jannina Norpoth) (1868-1917)

Selections from *Four Novelletten*, Op. 52 **

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875-1912)

I. Allegro Moderato

III. Valse, Andante con Moto

INTERMISSION

Drill for Prepared Drumset and Strings *

Curtis Stewart (b. 1986)

Hané (Story) **

Juantio Becenti (b. 1983)

Serenade for Strings

Teresa Carreño (1853-1917)

Finale, Tempo di Marcia

Daydreaming (A Fantasy on Scott Joplin) *‡

Levi Taylor (b. 1980)

* - Commissioned by The Sphinx Organization

** - Arranged for Sphinx Virtuosi by the composer

† - From *Treemonisha* A Musical Reimagining commissioned by Volcano Theatre Libretto Leah-Simone Bowen, Cheryl A. Davis; Co-arranger/orchestrators Jessie Montgomery & Jannina Norpoth. String orchestra version commissioned by The Sphinx Organization for Sphinx Virtuosi

‡ - Daydreaming (A Fantasy on Scott Joplin) was commissioned with a gift from the Keith and Renata Ward Emerging Composer Fund.

Sphinx Virtuosi are represented by MKI Artists: 70 S Winooski Ave. #318, Burlington, VT 05401

Program Notes

American Form/s

American Form/s is a musical tapestry depicting the many sounds of American classical music. Vibrant, varied, storied, and new, the self-conducted string orchestra Sphinx Virtuosi takes audiences on a journey through classically-framed infusions of soul, bluegrass, jazz, blues, and elements of rag. Works range from reimaginings of Joplin's joyous landscapes to the complex rhythms of Curtis Stewart and brilliant influences of immigrant composers like Teresa Carreño. Experience the intricate harmonies and world influences of Derrick Skye's writing, as well as modern interpretations of soul-stirring spirituals and more in this program carefully and collaboratively curated to celebrate the richness of the American musical landscape.

Overture from Treemonisha | Scott Joplin (arr. Jannina Norpoth)

In 1911 Scott Joplin used his life savings to register a copy of his beloved opera Treemonisha with the Library of Congress. Ahead of its time, the work combined classical form and operatic vocal stylings with the genre he is notably famous for, Ragtime. Despite several revivals many decades after his death and a 1976 Pulitzer Prize, Joplin never saw the work published or performed during his lifetime.

The Overture performed by Sphinx Virtuosi is an excerpt from a contemporary re-imagining commissioned by Toronto based experimental theater company Volcano. This newly realized adaptation brought together an international creative team of black women in homage to the opera's namesake and protagonist Treemonisha - a young black woman who leads her community through conflict and turmoil.

Volcano's version features an updated libretto and storyline from acclaimed playwright and broadcaster Leah-Simone Bowen along with Emmy-nominated co-librettist Cheryl A. Davis. Co-arranger/orchestrators are Grammy-winning composer Jessie Montgomery, and two-time Grammy nominee Jannina Norpoth.

The Overture depicts a plantation near Texarkana, Arkansas in the year 1864. A young enslaved woman named Priscilla flees with her newborn baby. Desperate and pursued by her enslavers, she knocks on the doors of nearby houses for help to no avail. She places the baby inside a hollow tree, hiding a small bag of luck within the child's clothing. Moments later, Priscilla is shot and killed. The infant is found and adopted by Monisha and Ned who name her Treemonisha and raise her as their own. The overture concludes with the entrance of adult Treemonisha, twenty years later on her wedding day, sitting peacefully reading beneath the very tree her mother left her under with hopes for her survival.

Volcano's Treemonisha received its debut in 2023 at the Luminato Festival in Toronto. The work premiered to critical acclaim, and was subsequently named one of the year's best performances by the New York Times. It received 6 nominations at the Canadian Dora Awards - one in every eligible category. The full opera receives its American Debut this coming May 2025, at Harris Theater in Chicago (with a few Sphinx Alumni in the ensemble)! —Jannina Norpoth

Selections from Four Novelletten, Op. 52 (Mvt 1 and Mvt III) | Samuel Coleridge-Taylor

Dive into the rich, melodic world of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor with selections from his Four Novelletten, Op. 52. These charming movements for strings are a testament to his talent for eloquently blending lush harmonies well-suited for the string medium.

Coleridge-Taylor crafted this piece with a deep understanding of the instrument, allowing the solo violin to shine in moments of virtuosic brilliance while seamlessly weaving in the full ensemble to create a powerful, unified sound. The Novelletten were dedicated to Ethel Barns, an English pianist, composer, and violinist who brought Coleridge-Taylor's works to life.

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor was a trailblazer in more ways than one. Born to a white English mother and a Sierra Leonean father, he grew up in his grandfather's household under the care of his single mother. His exceptional musical talent was evident from a young age, leading to a scholarship at the Royal Conservatory. It was here that he began to explore his heritage and the broader concept of Pan-Africanism, which inspired him to delve into the history of Africans in America—a passion that notably influenced his writing.

In addition to his composing, Coleridge-Taylor led the London Handel Society in the early 1900s and taught composition at both the Guildhall School of Music and Trinity College of Music. Though his life was tragically cut short at just 37, his remarkable contributions to the classical music world continue to resonate, inspiring new generations and ensuring his legacy endures.

Prepare to be captivated by the timeless beauty and emotional depth of Coleridge-Taylor's Four Novelletten, where every note tells a story, and every movement evokes introspection. —Afa S. Dworkin

American Mirror: Part One | Derrick Skye

American Mirror reflects on the coming together of cultures in our society, which consists of many generations and descendants of refugees, immigrants, and enslaved people, and how intercultural collaborations are essential to the well-being of American society. Melodically, the piece draws from West African, North African, and Eastern European vocal techniques and ornamentations, in addition to modal scales. Underneath these melodies, American Mirror uses open harmonies commonly found in Appalachian folk music, and also includes drones, an accompaniment practice found in many musical cultures. —Derrick Skye

Drill for Prepared Drumset and Strings | Curtis Stewart

The roar of burnt tire.

The heat - much better than stale apartment air.

We sit pointedly in new outside dining, waiting for the next bang, the next explosion, the squads.

Pop Smoke revelation. Inwood. Washington heights. Memories drilled into personality.

Wait.

During the pandemic, the phenomenon of outside dining swept New York. Being outside was much respite from being stuck in our crowded Inwood apartment - We would sit on Broadway, and let the chaos of the outside world soothe our restless souls, including the muscular roars of passing motorcycles and the wide cadence of "Drill music" up and down Broadway. I associate this music with outside, with release, despite its intricate, violent and chaotic outer layer.

This work for prepared drumset and strings is my "summer music," my "hunter's call," my "field recording."

What happens when we bring that outside music, inside - into our concert halls and onto our stages. When the outside becomes the inside, how will it ring in our walls? —Curtis Stewart

Hané (Story) | Juantio Becenti

"It's really strange. I just had that desire, almost since I can remember," Juantio Becenti recalled in an interview for the Navajo Times. Of Diné (Navajo) descent, Becenti grew up in Aneth, Utah, near the Four Corners, Navajo Nation. As a child he would stay late at school to practice on the piano and took lessons from a teacher who traveled to give him instruction. Driven to absorb all he could, he would order CDs and scores for study, eventually moving toward composing around age 12. By age 15, Becenti received his first commission from the Moab Music Festival. Since then, he has been commissioned by artists Dawn Avery (North American Indian Cello Project), Raven Chacon (Native American Composers Apprenticeship Program), Michael Barrett (New York Festival of Song), amongst others, and had his works performed by the St. Petersburg String Quartet, Chatter, and the Claremont Trio at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.

Hané (Story) has a special place in Becenti's heart, as it was composed during a summer he spent at the Walden School for Young Musicians in New Hampshire, which he attended on full scholarship, when he was 17 years old. Since then, Becenti has been largely self-taught to preserve and express the intuitive nature of his individual compositional style.

Serenade for Strings (Finale, Tempo di Marcia) | Teresa Carreño

Teresa Carreño, born in Caracas, Venezuela in 1853, was a prodigy nurtured in a deeply musical family. Her father, Manuel Antonio Carreño, was not only a politician but also a musician, and her mother, Clorinda García de Sena y Toro, came from a lineage of musicians, setting the stage for Carreño's development. Her father served in various governmental roles in Caracas, where an unstable political climate ultimately led the family to flee to the United States in 1862. At just nine years old, Carreño performed for President Abraham Lincoln at the White House. Over her illustrious career, she performed with prestigious ensembles, including the Berlin Philharmonic, and composed over 80 works, significantly contributing to the musical landscape alongside contemporaries like Fanny Mendelssohn and Clara Schumann.

Composed in 1895 while residing in the idyllic Austrian village of Pertisau, Carreño's Serenade for Strings reflects her deep emotional expression and compositional skill. The fourth movement, a vibrant and joyful march, transports listeners to the lush, mountainous landscapes of the Tyrol region. The movement's rhythmic vigor and bright melodies evoke the spirit of a festive procession, perhaps symbolizing a connection between the vibrant life of her Venezuelan homeland and the serene Austrian setting. Despite its brilliance, this work remains underrepresented in the canon, and Carreño's contributions as a composer deserve much greater recognition. —Bill Neri

Daydreaming (A Fantasy on Scott Joplin) | Levi Taylor

For Daydreaming (A Fantasy On Scott Joplin) I had the wonderful task to put to music my adoration and curiosities of Joplin and his music, while still maintaining freedom of expression and exploration on my own sonic musings. This is where the piece derives its title, as I enjoyed ruminating on Joplin and then letting my imagination soar from the inspiration.

Right away the listener will notice a few nods towards Joplin's music: The opening brings us in with a glimpse of The Entertainer followed by light rhythmic movements inspired by Joplin's fun and syncopated rhythms. Included are also a few "odd" notes here and there along with energetic countermelodies that aim to bring the listener closer to Joplin's style.

From there the piece begins to unfold more into my own personal musings on how Joplin's music inspires me, while occasionally dipping back to remind the listener where the inspiration comes from. Different sections evoke different general feelings around Joplin's music. One moment the piece will reflect on the exquisite and playful sound of some of Joplin's music, while in the next it will explore some of the more intimate and robust qualities I've enjoyed especially in pieces such as his opera, Treemonisha. Throughout all of the various moments of "daydreaming" in this piece, there remained one consistent ambition: To embody the bold, ambitious, and authentic expression that I find in all of Joplin's music. —Levi Taylor

Biographies

Sphinx Virtuosi

"[The performance] opened with a propulsive, richly hued interpretation...which demonstrated the ensemble's polish and tonal allure." – *The New York Times*

The Sphinx Virtuosi is a dynamic and inspiring professional self-conducted chamber orchestra and serves as the flagship performing entity of the Sphinx Organization – the leading non-profit dedicated to transforming lives through the power of the arts. Comprised of 18 accomplished Black and Latino artists who reflect the highest level of musicianship in America, a critical aim of the Sphinx Virtuosi is to evolve the breadth and impact of classical music through artistic excellence, pioneering programming, and impassioned community engagement. Its members serve as cultural ambassadors for audiences and communities around the United States and abroad.

Since 2004, the Sphinx Virtuosi's concerts have been presented by leading arts organizations, including annual return visits to Carnegie Hall as an established highlight of the fall season. Frequently selling out venues, the ensemble has garnered effusive accolades, including from *The New York Times*, which has described the group as "top-notch...more essential at this moment than ever...a vibrant, assured performance." Their debut album, *Songs for Our Times*, was released on Deutsche Grammophon in July 2023 and represents the rich history of the Sphinx Organization and the vibrant future of classical music by centering the artistry of extraordinary composers and artistic visionaries.

In an effort to expand its repertoire and engage new audiences, the ensemble commissions new works annually. Commissions have included major new works from Michael Abels, Terence Blanchard, Valerie Coleman, Xavier Foley, Ricardo Herz, Jimmy Lopez, Jessie Montgomery, Daniel Bernard Roumain, and Carlos Simon. Outside of the classical realm, its musicians have also worked with leading international artists such as Beyoncé and Jay-Z and made high-profile appearances, including on *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon* and the broadcast of the 2022 GRAMMY Awards.

Learn more at www.sphinxmusic.org/sphinx-virtuosi.

Violin I

Alex Gonzalez (Concertmaster)
Sandro Leal-Santiesteban
Patricia Quintero Garcia
Annelle K. Gregory

Viola

Celia Hatton (Principal)
Robert Alvarado Switala
Harper Randolph
Edwardo Rios

Bass

Jonathan Colbert (Principal)
Christopher Johnson

Violin II

Maïthéna Girault (Principal)
Rainel Joubert
Thierry de Lucas Neves
Alejandra Switala

Cello

Eri Snowden-Rodriguez (Principal)
Francesca McNeeley
Lindsey Sharpe
Diana Flores

Percussion

Josh Jones

Tour Managers

Ally Price
Aaron Vaughn

Josh Jones

A native of Chicago, Illinois, Josh Jones started hitting things at age 2 and received his first drum set at age 3. Josh began his formal studies in percussion with the Percussion Scholarship Program under the direction of Chicago Symphony member Patricia Dash, and Chicago Lyric Opera member Douglas Waddell. He earned his Bachelor's in Music from DePaul School of music and was the orchestra fellow of both the Detroit and Pittsburgh symphonies. In 2022, Josh joined the Grant Park Festival Orchestra as Principal Percussionist. Josh has been featured at Carnegie Hall, on radio and television, and has had two short documentaries made about his musical development and experience. He also authored a percussion method book series, "Spatial Studies for Hitting Things", and writes musical and philosophical blogs on his website, drummojo.com. Josh really enjoys giving back to the community as well as mentoring young musicians and traveling.

Listener's Guide

Is this your first time attending a classical music concert? This page is for you!

If this is one of your first times listening to classical music or attending a live classical music performance, don't worry that you're "missing" anything because you're unfamiliar with the form. To anchor your experience—and release your imagination—let your mind drift over the following three questions while you listen!¹

Why does music sound the way it does?

- Are the notes loud or soft? High or low? Played for a long or short time?
- How do the instruments sound different from each other?
- Do you notice any patterns of rhythm or melody? If so, what are they? If not, what are you hearing instead?

How does music create meaning?

- What mood do different pieces put you in, and why?
- How do the different pieces of music performed tonight relate to or differ from one another? How does it relate to other music you know?
- What images does the music bring to mind—whether emerging from stories shared by the musicians, scenes from your own life, or something drawn from books, TV shows, news stories, or the experiences of family or friends?

What makes music socially and emotionally significant?

- How do the performers appear to be connecting with the music they're playing?
- How do the performers interact and communicate with each other?
- What connections do you feel with the performers? What about with other members of the audience?
- Why do you think people have diverse reactions to the same piece of music?

¹ Adapted from Larry Hamberlin, *The Curious Listener* (forthcoming from W. W. Norton, 2025).



Above: Sphinx Virtuosi, photography by Scott Jackson

The Prior Performing Arts Center

An uncommon commons for transformative experiences with the arts

Prior Presents

The keystone of the Prior Performing Arts Center's public-facing programming, Prior Presents merges 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 current and previous seasons 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.



1) Compagnie Hervé Koubi, *What the Day Owes to the Night* | January 30, 2024; 2) Rhiannon Giddens with Francesco Turrisi | March 14, 2024. Photography by Erika Sidor (1) and Troy B. Thompson (2).



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

Currently at the Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Art Gallery

Michael Beatty: Fabrications

Associate Professor Emeritus Michael Beatty's exhibition celebrates his sculpture practice, which investigates a hierarchy of focus and support through a dialogue between digital and handmade forms.

Open now through Apr 5

Upcoming Events from Academic Arts

Lucy Prebble's *Enron*

DEPARTMENT OF THEATRE & DANCE. How much is an idea worth? Based on real-life events, Lucy Prebble's darkly comic *Enron* shows how ambition, delusion and boy's-club insiderism caused one of the biggest financial scandals of the new millennium. Scott Malia directs.

Apr 3 - 13

Working Writers Series: Michelle Nijhuis

CREATIVE WRITING PROGRAM. Michelle Nijhuis (author, *Beloved Beasts: Fighting for Life in an Age of Extinction*) is a contributing editor of *High Country News* and a regular contributor to *The New York Review of Books*. She has reported on science and the environment for *National Geographic*, *The Atlantic*, and *The New York Times Magazine*.

Apr 3 @ 7:30 p.m.

2025 Senior Studio Concentration Seminar Exhibition

DEPARTMENT OF VISUAL ARTS. Join us for the 31st annual exhibition of artwork by senior art majors in the Iris & B. Gerald Cantor Art Gallery.

Apr 23 - May 23

Holy Cross Orchestra & College Choir | Academic Conference Concert

DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC. The Holy Cross Orchestra & College Choir join forces for their annual Academic Conference Concert in the Luth Concert Hall at The Prior.

Apr 23 @ 8 p.m.

Gamelan Gita Sari

DEPARTMENTS OF MUSIC AND THEATRE & DANCE. Professor I Nyoman Catra's eagerly anticipated biannual gamelan concerts bring together the work of his student dancers and musicians performing pieces from the classic and modern Balinese repertory.

Apr 26 @ 7:30 p.m.



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

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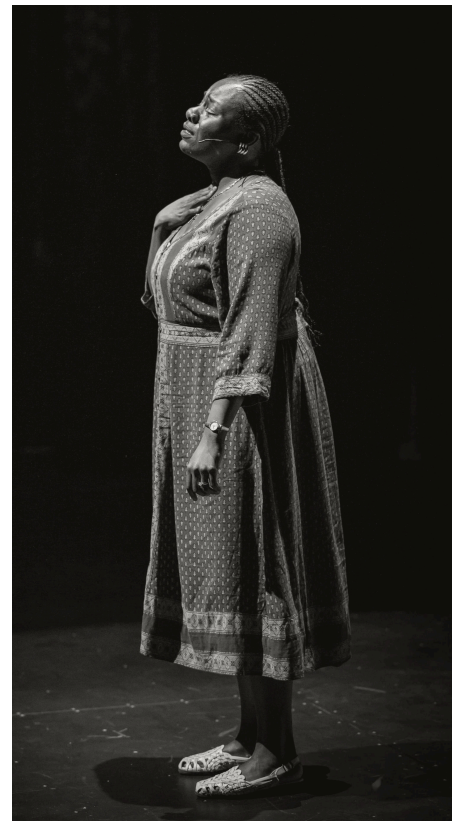
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NEW! Refreshments at the O'Connor Family Café

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

priorperformingartscenter.org



Prior Presents 2024–25

Clockwise from top left: 1) Camille A. Brown & Dancers | September 12, 2024; 2) Johnny Gandelsman, violin | September 26, 2024; 3) Aimee Nezhukumatathil | October 3, 2024; 4) Mfoniso Udofia's *Sojourners* | November 19, 2024; 5) Julia Keefe Indigenous Big Band | November 22, 2024; 6) The Acting Company (Burncoat Middle School visit) | February 10, 2025; 7) Jeremy Flower with Jeremy Udden | February 27, 2025; 8) Jha D Amazi of MASS Design Group | March 18, 2025.

Photography by Troy B. Thompson (images 1-6), Mike McMath (image 7) and Caroline Axvig (image 8).