NEC Jazz Department

presents

The Music of Max Roach

curated by Nasheet Waits

and performed by NEC students

Thursday, February 15, 2024
8:00 p.m.
Burnes Hall
Max Roach  
(1924–2007)  

We Insist! – Freedom Now! Suite
- Driva Man
- Freedom Day
- Triptych: Prayer/Protest/Peace
- All Africa
- Tears for Johannesburg

Garvey’s Ghost

- Anouk Chemla, Pitiki Aliakai, voice
- Sam Childs, Gabriel Nieves, tenor saxophone
- Lemuel Marc, trumpet
- Cooper Malinowski, trombone
- Peter Vazquez, piano
- Daniel Mayer, bass
- Nasheet Waits, drums
- Dominic Vance, Paul July Joseph,
  Carlo Kind, percussion
Nasheet Waits: Reimagining Max Roach’s *We Insist! - Freedom Now!* Suite

“We American jazz musicians of African descent have proved beyond all doubt that we’re master musicians of our instruments. Now what we have to do is employ our skill to tell the dramatic story of our people and what we’ve been through.” - Max Roach (*DownBeat* magazine)

Renowned drummer and NEC faculty member Nasheet Waits considers it an honor to reimagine Max Roach’s iconic *We Insist! - Freedom Now!* Suite, to celebrate Roach’s 100th birthday in January, 2024. When Waits began his music career following college, drummer/composer Max Roach (1924-2007) served as a mentor for him, inviting him to play in his percussion ensemble M’Boom. Nasheet’s father, Freddie Waits, was a founding member of M’Boom, along with Max Roach, Roy Brooks, Joe Chambers, Omar Clay, Ray Mantilla, and Warren Smith. Roach composed *We Insist! - Freedom Now!* Suite in 1959-60, collaborating with the lyricist Oscar Brown. At this point in his career Roach’s reputation as one of the greatest drummers in history was firmly established. He had performed and recorded with legends such as Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, Bud Powell, Miles Davis, and Clifford Brown, and he could have easily rested on his laurels and simply kept playing the same tunes in the same style for audiences, assuming an apolitical, non-confrontational, assimilationist stance. Yet this was not Max Roach. Max Roach was a passionate supporter of Civil Rights in the U.S. and the independence of African nations, and he thoroughly condemned Apartheid in South Africa. Vocalist Abbey Lincoln, (who later became his wife), was beside him in these beliefs, so when the NAACP commissioned him to write a piece for the 100th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation he accepted, and in 1959 he began composing a work about Black American history that would feature words by Oscar Brown.

Roach lived in New York City and Brown lived in Chicago, which meant that their conversations occurred over the telephone. Roach felt an overwhelming sense of urgency to complete the project and to release it to the world in the wake of the anti-segregation Greensboro, NC lunch counter sit-ins in February through July 1960, and the March 1960 Sharpeville Massacre in South Africa, which was fueled by overt and institutionalized racism. Max wrote his composition with bold strokes, and Oscar Brown’s pointed lyrics leave no room for misinterpretation. Brown’s lyrics depict themes such as Southern slavery and the history of the drum from Africa to America. Roach’s *We Insist! - Freedom Now!* Suite was recorded and released by Candid Records in 1960, and the album cover featured a picture of three Black men sitting at a lunch counter with a White waiter in the background, (in the spirit of the NC sit-ins). Roach’s message, like the album’s title, was assertive and undeniable. The album featured Roach on drums, vocalist Abbey Lincoln, tenor saxophonists Coleman Hawkins and Walter Benton, trumpeter Booker Little, trombonist Julian Priester, bassist James Schenk, and Babatunde Olatunji, Ray Mantilla, and Tomas du Vall on percussion. Although critics were divided upon its release in 1960, *We Insist! - Freedom Now!* Suite is now considered to be a masterpiece.
The performance you will hear tonight by NEC students was curated by Waits, who chose to feature the five original movements of the Suite: “Driva’ Man,” “Freedom Day,” “Triptych: Prayer/Protest/Peace,” “All Africa,” and “Tears for Johannesburg,” as well as the addition of “Garvey’s Ghost,” (in memory of Jamaican activist Marcus Garvey), which was included on Roach’s 1961 album *Percussion Bitter Sweet*. Roach’s highly nuanced music ranges from a work-song in 5/4 time to uptempo improvised solos, from blues to spiritual, from wordless vocalise to musical depictions of struggle and oppression, and from African bell patterns and hand drumming to a lament in 5/4 time. The music symbolizes a people’s struggle and their unyielding dedication to a righteous cause. The sense of community embedded within this music is both palpable and profound.

Waits first performed his reimagined version of *We Insist! - Freedom Now! Suite* on January 26, 2024 at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, where he was joined by vocalist Cassandra Wilson, saxophonist Ravi Coltrane, pianist Nduduzo Makhathini, and bassist Eric Revis, as well as by poets Sonia Sanchez and Saul Williams, and video artist Alyson Shotz. In preparing for the premiere, Waits visited the Library of Congress to study Max Roach’s original manuscripts and writings. In planning his Residency at NEC, Waits realized the power in recontextualizing Max Roach’s music and Oscar Brown’s lyrics for today’s audience. Waits described how the oppressed people of today include “...those living from paycheck to paycheck, which is akin to indentured servitude...we need to be conscious of elements of poverty around us.” Waits believes that we as human beings need to stop thinking solely in terms of division, but instead we need to find common ground. He calls this mission “a call to consciousness,” which also includes an imperative to lift each other up and communicate more skillfully (in life and in musical performances), as well as fostering a deeper consciousness of our planet and a greater awareness of our pressing need to protect the environment. These things simply can’t wait; they are urgent matters. The time to act is now - *We Insist!*

– Notes by Mark Tipton, DMA Candidate, Jazz Trumpet
Upcoming Concerts at NEC
Visit necmusic.edu for complete and updated concert and ticketing information

THE ARTHUR BERGER MEMORIAL CONCERT, Sid Richardson, curator
Works by NEC faculty Kati Agócs, Stratis Minakakis, Arthur Berger, Rodney Lister, and Sid Richardson
Thursday, February 22, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

CORETTA SCOTT KING TRIBUTE CONCERT
presented by NEC’s Black Student Union
Monday, February 26, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

PIANO DEPARTMENT CONCERT: IVES 150
Bruce Brubaker, curator of piano programming
The first in a two concert series featuring the piano works of Charles Ives;
NEC piano students perform his shorter and early works
Tuesday, February 27, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

NEC CHAMBER ORCHESTRA, Donald Palma, artistic director
Herbert Elegy; Mozart Divertimento for Oboe, Two Horns and Strings;
Bartók Divertimento
Wednesday, February 28, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

SONG AND VERSE 2, Brett Hodgdon, director
Wednesday, February 28, 2024 at 8:00 p.m., Burnes Hall

NEC JAZZ ORCHESTRA, Ken Schaphorst, conductor
“The Music of Anna Webber and Angela Morris”
Thursday, February 29, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

“CONNECTIONS” CHAMBER MUSIC SERIES, Max Levinson, director
Thursday, February 29, 2024 at 8:00 p.m., Burnes Hall

FIRST MONDAY IN JORDAN HALL, Laurence Lesser, artistic director
Ives Songs, Laura Choi Stuart and Tanya Blaich; Brahms Trio in B Major, op. 8,
Donald Weilerstein, violin; Laurence Lesser, cello; George Li, piano
Monday, March 4, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

NEC PHILHARMONIA, Shiyeon Sung, guest conductor
Gubaidulina Fairytale Poem; Hindemith Violin Concerto, Yebin Yoo ’24 MM, soloist;
Dvořák Symphony No. 6 in D Major, op. 60
Wednesday, March 6, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall
Upcoming Concerts at NEC
–continued

PERKIN OPERA SCENES
Performances by graduate students in the NEC Opera Department
Tuesday, March 5, 2024 at 7:30 p.m. & Wednesday, March 6, 2024 at 6:00 p.m.
*Plimpton Shattuck Black Box Theatre*

NEC BAROQUE ENSEMBLE
*Friday, March 8, 2024 at 8:30 p.m., Brown Hall*

TRIO GAIA
Andrew Barnwell, piano; Grant Houston, violin; Yi-Mei Templeman, cello
Resident Ensemble in the NEC Professional Piano Trio program
*Sunday, March 10, 2024 at 8:00 p.m., Jordan Hall*

NEC CHAMBER SINGERS AND NEC SYMPHONIC CHOIR, Erica J. Washburn, conductor
“Voices of NEC: Arise, be enlightened!” - Agócs *Arise, be enlightened!*
Chadwick *Commemoration Ode*; Gandolfi *Winter Light*; Pinkham *After the storm* and
*Star and pulsar*; Sanlikol *Devran* (excerpt); Sandler/von Bingen *Laus Trinitati*
Shepherd *Psalm 42*; Lingbo Ma ‘24 DMA, *Stand with us*
*Monday, March 11, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall*

MIRIAM FRIED STUDIO RECITAL
Music from Different Art Forms
*Monday & Tuesday, March 11 & 12, 2024 at 8:00 p.m., Williams Hall*

JAZZ COMPOSERS’ WORKSHOP ORCHESTRA, Frank Carlberg, director
Nicole Mitchell, Residency Concert
*Tuesday, March 12, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall*

NEC NEW MUSIC ENSEMBLE, Stefan Asbury, conductor
Turnage *Blood on the Floor*
*Tuesday, March 12, 2024 at 8:00 p.m., Burnes Hall*

LIEDERABEND LXXI
Tanya Blaich and Cameron Stowe, directors
*Wednesday, March 13, 2024 at 6:00 p.m., Williams Hall*

NEC SYMPHONY, Hugh Wolff, conductor
Esmail *Re|Member*; Thompson *An Act of Resistance*; Shostakovich *Symphony No. 5*
*Wednesday, March 13, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall*
Upcoming Concerts at NEC
–continued

SONATA NIGHT 50
Thursday, March 14, 2024 at 6:30 p.m., Burnes Hall

HUMPERDINCK: HANSEL AND GRETEL
performed by NEC Undergraduate Opera Studio, Michael Meraw, artistic director
Thursday-Friday, March 14-15, 2024 at 7:30 p.m.
Plimpton Shattuck Black Box Theatre

FACULTY RECITAL: Kenneth Radnofsky, saxophone
Monday, March 25, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

NEC SAXOPHONE ENSEMBLE: Kenneth Radnofsky, director
Tuesday, March 26, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

TUESDAY NIGHT NEW MUSIC
New music by NEC composers, performed by their peers
Tuesday, March 26, 2024 at 8:00 p.m., Burnes Hall

PIANO DEPARTMENT CONCERT: IVES 150: “IVES EXTENDED”
Bruce Brubaker, curator of piano programming
NEC piano students perform The Celestial Railroad, the Set of Five Take-Offs, works by Carl Ruggles, Lou Harrison and Henry Cowell, and rarely heard music for two pianos in quarter-tones by Ives, David Fulmer, and Georg Haas.
Wednesday, March 27, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

NEC PEYTON RESIDENCY CONCERT
Thursday, March 28, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

“CONNECTIONS” CHAMBER MUSIC SERIES, Max Levinson, director
Thursday, March 28, 2024 at 8:00 p.m., Burnes Hall

FIRST MONDAY IN JORDAN HALL, Laurence Lesser, artistic director
Mozart Ein musicalisches Spass (A Musical Joke), K. 522; Smetana Trio in G Minor, op. 15;
Bruckner Quintet in F Major, WAB 112; Ayano Ninomiya, violin; Kim Kashkashian, viola; Lluis Claret, cello; HaeSun Paik, piano; Borromeo String Quartet
Monday, April 1, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

NEC CMA HONORS ENSEMBLE: RED BIRD
Karl Henry, voice, cello; Yifei Marine Zhou, voice; Adrian Chabla, voice, piano
Jacqui Armbruster, voice, viola; Evan Haskin, guitar
Tuesday, April 2, 2024 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall
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Food and drink are not allowed in the concert hall, and photography and audio or video recording are prohibited. Assistive listening devices are available for all Jordan Hall concerts; contact the head usher or house manager on duty or inquire at the Coat Room. Latecomers will be seated at the discretion of management.

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