

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

## PROGRAM

---

**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](http://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; Lluís 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***

**Support the future of music at NEC!**

Your gift to The NEC Fund has a direct and immediate impact on student scholarships, NEC's world-class faculty, and a collaborative and innovative learning environment rooted in the highest level of musical excellence.

Please consider making a gift to support NEC at [necmusic.edu/give](https://necmusic.edu/give).

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.

Stay connected



[necmusic.edu/tonight](https://necmusic.edu/tonight)