

Welcome

NEW ENGLAND CONSERVATORY

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*Jazz and the Struggle
for Freedom and Equality*

NEC Jazz Orchestra

Ken Schaphorst and Omar Thomas '08 MM,
conductors

with special guest
Nedelka Prescod '12 MM, voice

Thursday, March 2, 2023
7:30 p.m.
NEC's Jordan Hall

PROGRAM

Duke Ellington

Black

Charles Mingus

Freedom

Charles Mingus

arr. Sy Johnson

Haitian Fight Song

Enoch Sontonga

arr. Carla Bley

Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika

Omar Thomas '08 MM

We Will Know:

*An LGBT Civil Rights Piece in Four
Movements*

Hymn

In Memoriam

Meditation

May 9th, 2012

Nedelka Prescod '12 MM, voice

Omar Thomas '08 MM, conductor

Mingus *Freedom*

This mule ain't from Moscow,
This mule ain't from the South.
But this mule's had some learning,
Mostly mouth-to-mouth.

This mule could be called stubborn, and lazy,
But in a clever sort of way.
This mule could be working, waiting, and learning and planning,
For a sacred kind of day.

A day when burning sticks and crosses
Is not mere child's play,
But a madman in his most incandescent bloom,
Whose loveless soul is imperfection, in its most lustrous groom.

So stand fast, old mule,
Soothe in contemplation
Thy burning hole and aching thigh
Your stubbornness is of the living
And cruel anxiety has begun to die.

Freedom for your daddy
Freedom for your momma
Freedom for your brothers and sisters
But no freedom for me.

Charles Mingus

Thomas *We Will Know: An LGBT Civil Rights Piece in Four Movements*

No significant social movement is without its soundtrack. *We Will Know* is my artistic contribution to and social commentary on the fight for equal rights of LGBT persons. I was first inspired to raise my voice publicly in the name of equality by the launch of syndicated columnist and author Dan Savage's inspiring and highly successful "It Gets Better Project." After numerous failed attempts to sound intelligible in my own "It Gets Better" video, I decided instead to provide a contribution in musical form. I realized that, save for a few club-thumping chart-toppers, the LGBT community lacked a universal rallying song – one that can be sung in times of celebration, reflection, mourning and protest.

The first movement, "Hymn", is intended to meet that need. It is a simple melody with universally applicable lyrics that acknowledge troubled times while looking forward and finding strength and solidarity in our fellow man to build a better, more inclusive, accepting and empathetic tomorrow. My hope for this song is that it lives on long after me, becoming a source of strength and unity for any person or persons who seek comfort in its prose.

The second movement, "In Memoriam", is a brief elegy written to commemorate the numerous LGBT people in the world who are prisoners to their hostile environments, and for those who have lost their lives to ignorance and fear. Harvey

Milk. Teena Brandon. Matthew Shepard. Mark Carson. To the millions of lives lost, and to those abandoned by the Reagan Administration's adopted silence during the AIDS crisis of the 1980s. You will not be forgotten.

The third movement, "Meditation", is about catharsis. Purposefully (and somewhat paradoxically) drawing from the black American church tradition as well as the free jazz movement of the 1950s and 60s, this movement is designed as a safe space via a hypnotic groove in which the listener and performer alike are able to express themselves, fully feeling whatever it is they need to feel. Only reading a few written cues, the musicians testify collectively as they are so moved, much like the testimonial portion of a black church service. This movement culminates in a group singing of the original hymnsong, performed freely over the groove and led by the lead cantor. The silence that follows the final perfect fifth intoned by the bass is intentional; it provides the listener an opportunity to fully absorb what has transpired over the last ten minutes, and readies the listener for the finale.

The fourth movement, "May 9th, 2012", commemorates the day that President Barack Obama publicly declared his support for same-sex marriage, becoming the first American president in American history to do so. The bombast of the opening statement recalls the feeling of elation and mania that surrounded the event. The music gradually calms into a feeling of "afterglow" which features a floating interpretation of the hymnsong first alone, then set as a counterpoint to members of the band singing Charles Albert Tinsley's iconic song of the Civil Rights Movement *We Shall Overcome*. This final movement culminates in a jubilant reharmonization of *We Shall Overcome*.

An aside: I fully acknowledge the implications of evoking the black American church, the most prominent song of the Civil Rights Movement, and the institution of jazz as inspiration, source material and backdrop for a piece touting LGBT rights. My hope is that the existence of this work and its aggressive juxtaposition of these spheres will catalyze meaningful discussions and lasting change surrounding principles of universal empathy and a singular human story.

Our work continues.

— Omar Thomas

Hymn

With the storm overhead,
Pain abounds, blood is shed.
Tread our path, forth we go,
Times of solace, we will know.

Know us not, yet they judge,
Hold us not, painful grudge.
We will rise o'er our woe,
Lives fulfilling, we will know.

Here we are, path ahead,
Hallowed ground, where we bled.
Claim our lives, smiles aglow
Equal treatment, we will know.

Heads held high, eyes with pride,
Hand in hand, forth we stride.
Hearts as one, numbers grow,
Strength in many, we will know.
Hearts as one, numbers grow,
Strength in many, we will know.

Omar Thomas

NEC Jazz Orchestra

Ken Schaphorst, conductor

Winds

Zack Bacak, alto saxophone, flute

Ben Eidson, alto saxophone

Chris Ferrari, tenor saxophone, flute, clarinet

Sam Childs, tenor saxophone

Vladyslav Dovhan, baritone saxophone

Trumpets

Mark Tipton

Lemuel Marc

Richard Stanmeyer

Isaac Dubow

Trombone

s Michael Gerace

Dylan Rogan Weza

Aiden Coleman

Jamison-Neto

Rhythm

Jonathan Paik, piano

Leo Weisskoff, bass

Thatcher Harrison, guitar

Alex Yoo, drums

Guests

Jeff Sagurton, timpani, chimes

Michele Zimmerman, violin

Described as "elegant, beautiful, sophisticated, intense, and crystal clear in emotional intent," the music of **Omar Thomas** continues to move listeners. Born to Guyanese parents in Brooklyn, New York in 1984, Omar moved to Boston in 2006 to pursue a Master of Music in Jazz Composition at New England Conservatory after studying Music Education at James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia. Hailed by Herbie Hancock as showing "great promise as a new voice of further development of jazz," Thomas was appointed Assistant Professor of Harmony at Berklee College of Music at the age of 23. Later, he served on the faculty at The Peabody Institute at Johns Hopkins University and as Assistant Professor of Composition and Jazz Studies at University of Texas Austin. He was awarded the ASCAP Young Jazz Composers Award in 2008, and in 2012 was named Jazz Artist of the Year by the Boston Music Awards. In 2019, he was awarded the National Bandmasters Association/Revelli Award, becoming the first Black composer to ever receive the honor. Thomas's work has been performed by the Eastman New Jazz Ensemble, the San Francisco and Boston Gay Men's Choruses, The United States Marine Band, the Colorado Symphony Orchestra, the Houston Symphony Orchestra and the Showa Wind Symphony. Singers including Dionne Warwick, Stephanie Mills, Chaka Khan and Dianne Reeves have performed his music. His first album *I AM* debuted at #1 on iTunes Jazz Charts and peaked at #13 on the Billboard Traditional Jazz Albums Chart. His second release, *We Will Know: An LGBT Civil Rights Piece in Four Movements*, was awarded two OUTMusic Awards including Album of the Year. He was granted the 2014 Lavender Rhino Award by The History Project.

Minister **Nedelka F. Prescod** is a singer-songwriter, educator and organizational consultant focused on Black culture, spirituality and social justice. A daughter of proud Panamanians, Minister Prescod was inspired from an early age by her family's commitment to the practice of social activism and community building through music and the Black church in the U.S., Caribbean and Central America

As a multi-genre vocalist, Minister Prescod has released three recording projects: *Manifest* (2008), *The Light* (2018) and *The Un-Silenced Voice* (2020) and performed in venues and festivals around the world, such as Joe's Pub in New York City, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, the Panama Jazz Festival, and the Muka Music Center in Shanghai. She is the founder of New England Conservatory's African Heritage Ensemble, R&B Ensemble, and Gospel Ensemble. Minister Prescod has been recognized for her artistry and community mindfulness through awards from the Boston Foundation and Brooklyn Arts Council, among others.

Minister Prescod's belief in the power of art to illuminate social issues and galvanize action has led her to found multiple community initiatives. In 2008, she founded "Progression Community Youth Choir" in Brooklyn to work with youth in her spiritual community to use music as a vehicle for activism on issues ranging from youth empowerment to food insecurity. Minister Prescod also co-founded "Conscious Uprising", a series of independent artist events used as a platform for local artists to perform, promote their art, and share information and resources with the community. She has served as a DEI consultant at New England Conservatory

and Andover Newton Seminary at Yale Divinity School, spearheading "The Sound of Andover Newton" project. In 2019, she created "The Un-Silenced Voice Project" to shed light on the trauma experienced by women and create pathways for healing through music and community dialogue.

A sought after teacher and coach, Minister Prescod has over 30 years of experience working in a range of educational settings. She began her teaching career as a teenager volunteering in a summer program at St. Edmund's Church in Brooklyn for alternately abled young people. For nearly two decades, Minister Prescod taught in NYC public schools as a full time music teacher and teaching artist, and transitioned in higher education, serving on faculty at New England Conservatory and Berklee College of Music, while maintaining a private studio in Brooklyn, NY.

Minister Prescod holds a BS and MA in Music Education from New York University and CUNY Brooklyn College's Conservatory of Music respectively, an MM in Contemporary Improvisation from New England Conservatory, and is currently pursuing an MDiv from Yale Divinity School. Minister Prescod is also co-producing the docu-series, *Black & Panamanian* (YouTube).

Upcoming Concerts at NEC

Visit necmusic.edu for complete and updated concert and ticketing information

ARTIST DIPLOMA RECITAL: Leland Ko, cello

Leland Ko '24 AD studies with Yeesun Kim and Donald Weilerstein

Friday, March 3, 2023 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

FIRST MONDAY IN JORDAN HALL, Laurence Lesser, artistic director

Ockeghem "Kyrie" from *Missa Prolationem*; Ligeti *Éjszaka, Reggel* – NEC

Chamber Singers, Erica J. Washburn conductor; Ligeti *Ramifications for 12 solo string players*; Ligeti *Aventures* and *Nouvelles Aventures* – Stephen Drury, conductor

Monday, March 6, 2023 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

NEC PHILHARMONIA, David Loebel, conductor

Coleman *Umoja: Anthem of Unity*; Dvořák *Symphony No. 7 in D Minor*; Schumann *Concerto for Cello in A Minor*, op. 129 – Jeremy Tai '23 MM, cello

Wednesday, March 8, 2023 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

"WHAT I HEAR": Anthony Davis

BSO/NEC collaboration

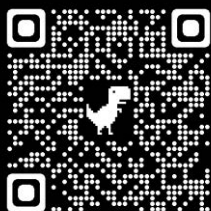
Thursday, March 9, 2023 at 5:30 p.m., Williams Hall

SONATA NIGHT 44, Pei-Shan Lee, director

Thursday, March 9, 2023 at 6:30 p.m., Burnes Hall

Support the musical journeys of NEC students!

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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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