

NEW ENGLAND CONSERVATORY and THE BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
present

“WHAT I HEAR”

A SPECIAL BSO PRELUDE PROGRAM
WITH **CARLOS SIMON**

MODERATED BY ERIC VALLIERE, BSO ARTISTIC ADMINISTRATOR
MUSICAL DIRECTION BY STEPHEN DRURY

29 JANUARY 2026 * 5:30 PM * BROWN HALL

CARLOS SIMON
(b. 1986)

Sleep Well (2011)

Yuki Yoshimi '26 MM, piano

JESSIE MONTGOMERY
(b. 1981)

Rhapsody No. 1 for solo viola (2021)

Wednesday Hsu '26 MM, viola

CARLOS SIMON

be still and know (2015)

Noga Barlev '28, violin
Yeon Soo Park '28, cello
Chaewon Lee '28, piano

Lickety Split (2015)

August Baik '27, piano
Eric Schindler '27, cello

GEORGE WALKER
(1922–2018)

from *Piano Sonata No. 1* (1953)
I. Allegro energico

Zhixuan Zhang '29, piano

CARLOS SIMON

White Only, Colored Only (2017)

Max Cannon '27 MM, saxophone
Woody Pierre '26, trumpet
Kazuki Tsubakida '26, piano
Noah Williams '27 MM, bass
Sean Perlmutter '27 MM, drums

The Boston Symphony Orchestra will perform Carlos Simon's Good News Mass tonight at 7:30 p.m. in Symphony Hall.

“My dad, he always gets on me. He wants me to be a preacher, but I always tell him, ‘Music is my pulpit. That’s where I preach,’” **Carlos Simon** reflected for *The Washington Post*. Having grown up in Atlanta, with a long lineage of preachers and connections to gospel music to inspire him, GRAMMY-nominated Simon proves that a well-composed song can indeed be a sermon. His music ranges from concert music for large and small ensembles to film scores with influences of jazz, gospel, and neo-romanticism.

Simon is the current Composer-in-Residence for the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and frequently writes for the National Symphony Orchestra and Washington National Opera. Simon also holds the position of inaugural Composer Chair of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the first in the institution’s 143-year history.

A highlight of the 2025/26 season is the world premiere of Simon’s *Double Concerto for Violin and Cello*, featuring Hilary Hahn and Seth Parker Woods, which will be premiered by the National Symphony Orchestra followed by the St Louis Symphony Orchestra, and performed by further co-commissioners in future seasons. Additional world premieres include *Lamentations for String Orchestra* (commissioned by New World Symphony/Miami City Ballet), a symphonic soundtrack to *The Unspoken Elegance of Stillness* (directed by Simon Frederick), plus works for the Boston Symphony Chamber Players and Augustin Hadelich, commissioned by Boston Symphony Orchestra.

This season also features exciting co-commissioner performances of previously premiered works such as Simon’s acclaimed *Good News Mass*, a work reimagining the traditional mass with gospel soloists, spoken word, and choir, which will receive performances from the Boston Symphony Orchestra and Chicago Symphony Orchestra at Ravinia Festival, with visual creations from Melina Matsoukas (Beyoncé *Formation*, *Queen and Slim*). Simon’s new *Zodiac: Symphonic Suite* will also be performed by co-commissioner New Jersey Symphony.

Previously, Simon has been commissioned by the likes of the LA Philharmonic, San Diego Symphony Orchestra, Washington National Opera (in collaboration with Mo Willems), New York Philharmonic and Bravo! Vail, Minnesota Orchestra, American Ballet Theatre, Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra, Cincinnati Pops Orchestra, Carnegie Hall for the National Youth Orchestra of the USA, and BBC Symphony Orchestra for the Last Night of the Proms.

As well as his composition work, Simon frequently curates concert programmes, which often highlight his own music as well as that of close collaborators. Curation concerts have recently been programmed by Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Boston Chamber Players, Tanglewood Festival for Contemporary Music, and the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Simon also curated and arranged *Coltrane: Legacy for Orchestra*, a new project co-commissioned by TO Live (for the Toronto Symphony Orchestra) and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, in partnership with the Coltrane Estate.

August 2024 saw the release of Simon’s first full-length orchestral album, *Four Symphonic Works*, composed of live concert recordings by the National Symphony Orchestra from the Kennedy Center Concert Hall, conducted by Gianandrea Noseda. Simon also composed the original soundtrack for the PBS documentary *Shame of Chicago: Shame of the Nation*, which was released as a digital album in April 2024.

In September 2023, Simon released two albums on Decca. *Together* is a compilation of solo and chamber compositions and arrangements featuring Simon and guests such as J’Nai Bridges, Randall Goosby, Seth Parker Woods and Will Liverman. The work draws on Carlos’ personal experience as an artist to highlight the importance of heritage and identity, and the power of collaborative music-making.

Simon also released the live premiere recording of *brea(d)th*, a landmark work commissioned by Minnesota Orchestra and written in collaboration with Marc Bamuthi Joseph, conducted by Jonathan Taylor Rush. “Arguably the most important commission of Simon’s career so far” (*New York Times*), *brea(d)th* was written following George Floyd’s murder as a direct response to America’s unfulfilled promises and history of systemic oppression against Black Americans.

Simon was nominated for a 2023 GRAMMY Award for Best Contemporary Classical Composition for his previous album, *Requiem for the Enslaved*. The requiem is a multi-genre musical tribute to commemorate the stories of the 272 enslaved men, women, and children sold in 1838 by Georgetown University, released by Decca in June 2022. This work sees Simon infuse his original compositions with African American spirituals and familiar Catholic liturgical melodies, performed by Hub New Music Ensemble, Marco Pavé, and MK Zulu.

Acting as music director and keyboardist for GRAMMY Award winner Jennifer Holliday, Simon has performed with Boston Pops, Jackson Symphony, and St. Louis Symphony. He has also toured internationally with soul GRAMMY-nominated artist Angie Stone and performed throughout Europe, Africa, and Asia.

Simon earned his doctorate degree at the University of Michigan, where he studied with Michael Daugherty and Evan Chambers. He has also received degrees from Georgia State University and Morehouse College. He is an honorary member of Phi Mu Alpha Music Sinfonia Fraternity and a member of the National Association of Negro Musicians, Society of Composers International, and Pi Kappa Lambda Music Honor Society. He has served as a member of the music faculty at Spelman College and Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia and now serves as Associate Professor at Georgetown University. Simon was also a recipient of the 2021 Sphinx Medal of Excellence, the highest honor bestowed by the Sphinx Organization to recognize extraordinary classical Black and Latinx musicians, and was named a Sundance/Time Warner Composer Fellow for his work for film and moving image.

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