

Sunday, October 27, 2024

# SPHINX VIRTUOSI AMERICAN FORM/S

with special guest

**JOSH JONES, PERCUSSION**

**Overture from *Treemonisha***<sup>†</sup> (1911/2023)

Scott Joplin (1868–1917)  
arr. Jannina Norpoth

**Selections from *Four Novelletten, Op. 52*** (1901-02)

Samule Coleridge-Taylor (1875–1912)

- I. Allegro Moderato
- III. Valse, Andante con moto

**American Mirror: Part One**\*\* (2018)

Derrick Skye

INTERMISSION

**Drill for Prepared Drumset and Strings**\* (2024)

Curtis Stewart

with Josh Jones, percussion

**Hané (Story)** (2000/2024)

Juantio Becenti

**Serenade for Strings** (1895)

Teresa Carreño (1853–1917)

IV. Finale, Tempo di Marcia

**Daydreaming (A Fantasy on Scott Joplin)**\*<sup>‡</sup> (2024)

Levi Taylor

\*Commissioned by the Sphinx Organization

\*\*Arranged for Sphinx Virtuosi by the composer

†From *Scott Joplin's 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

# NOTE FROM THE CURATOR

The Sphinx Virtuosi are one of the most vital and important forces in classical music today. I am proud to say they have made the Gardner Museum their home, ever since we presented their Boston debut several years ago. We are delighted to welcome them back this season.

—George Steel, *Abrams Curator of Music*

# ABOUT THE ARTISTS

## **SPHINX VIRTUOSI**

### **VIOLIN 1**

Patricia Quintero Garcia (Concertmaster)  
Clayton Penrose-Whitmore  
Sandro Leal-Santiesteban  
Annelle K. Gregory

### **VIOLIN 2**

Maiithéna Girault (Principal)  
Caitlin Edwards  
Thierry de Lucas Neves  
Alejandra Switala

### **VIOLA**

Celia Hatton (Principal)  
Robert Alvarado Switala  
Kayla Cabrera  
Edwardo Rios

### **CELLO**

Eri Snowden-Rodriguez (Principal)  
Joy Payton-Stevens  
Lindsey Sharpe  
Diana Flores

### **BASS**

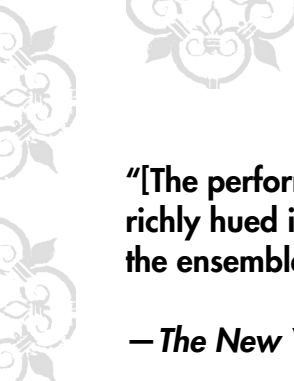
Jonathan Colbert (Principal)  
Christopher Johnson

### **PERCUSSION**

Josh Jones

### **TOUR MANAGERS**

Ally Price  
Aaron Vaughn



**“[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," and the *Washington Post*, which wrote "true to their name, the Sphinx Virtuosi call up the vision of an iconic mythological feline with its immeasurable power, unwavering command, and soulful beauty." 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.

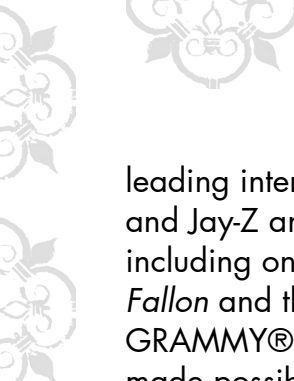
Their 2024-25 season includes performances for Washington Performing Arts and the John F. Kennedy Center, the Philadelphia Chamber

Music Society, the Symphony Center Presents in Chicago, IL, and a return performance at the New World Symphony in Miami.

Heralded for their kaleidoscopically varied repertoire and bold thematic programming, Sphinx Virtuosi concerts give prominence to historically excluded composers such as Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Alberto Ginastera, Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson, Florence Price, Heitor Villa-Lobos, and George Walker. 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.

Members of the Sphinx Virtuosi have performed as soloists with major American orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic and the Cleveland, Detroit, Atlanta, Philadelphia, Seattle, and Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestras. Members also hold professional orchestral and academic positions. The Sphinx Virtuosi's community engagement initiatives regularly extend beyond masterclasses and workshops to members leading community empowerment initiatives within arts organizations and connecting with other Sphinx programming to further the mission of achieving excellence through inclusive programming. As a bilingual ensemble, these artist-citizens frequently break down existing barriers, empowering the artform to connect with the broader community. During the pandemic, the ensemble found creative ways to connect with audiences and communities virtually through performances, panel discussions, masterclasses, Q&A sessions, and more, reaching over 30,000 people across 20 organizations.

The Sphinx Virtuosi has collaborated with major artists such as Terence Blanchard, Denyce Graves, Sweet Honey in the Rock, Damien Sneed, Will Liverman, J'Nai Bridges, and Davóne Tines, among others. 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. Sphinx Virtuosi Tours are made possible through the support of Robert F. Smith, JPMorgan Chase, and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Learn more at [www.sphinxmusic.org/sphinx-virtuosi](http://www.sphinxmusic.org/sphinx-virtuosi).

A native of Chicago, Illinois, **Josh Jones** started hitting things at age two and received his first drum set at age three. 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](http://drummojo.com). Josh really enjoys giving back to the community as well as mentoring young musicians and traveling.

**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.

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® Award-winning composer Jessie Montgomery,



and two-time GRAMMY® Award 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, 20 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 six 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

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** 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

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

“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.

—Juantio Becenti

**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

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

Kindly turn off all electronic devices during the concert and refrain from any photography or filming in the hall. Also, please note the location of the emergency exit doors: across the hall from the doors through which you entered.

# UPCOMING PERFORMANCES:

## MUSIC OF THE BELLE ÉPOQUE AND THE GREAT WAR

Sunday, November 3

## BOSTON CHILDREN'S CHORUS

Saturday, November 9 at 2:00 PM

## RAPHAËL FEUILLÂTRE, GUITAR

Sunday, November 10

## FAZIL SAY, PIANO

Sunday, November 17

## JULIUS EASTMAN X KYLE MARSHALL

Sunday, November 24

The Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum resides on the homelands of the Massachusetts Tribe, who belong to this place and continue to regard these lands and waters as sacred.

Music at the Gardner is supported by Nora McNeely Hurley / Manitou Fund. Hemenway & Barnes LLP is the lead corporate sponsor of the Weekend Concert Series. The Museum thanks its generous concert donors: The Coogan Concert in memory of Peter Weston Coogan; Fitzpatrick Family Concert; James Lawrence Memorial Concert; Alford P. Rudnick Memorial Concert; David Scudder in memory of his wife, Marie Louise Scudder; Wendy Shattuck Young Artist Concert; and Willona Sinclair Memorial Concert. The piano is dedicated as the Alex d'Arbeloff Steinway. The harpsichord was generously donated by Dr. Robert Barstow in memory of Marion Huse, and its care is endowed in memory of Dr. Barstow by The Barstow Fund. Music at the Gardner is also supported in part by New Music USA's Organization Fund, Nicie and Jay Panetta, and the Massachusetts Cultural Council, which is supported by the state of Massachusetts and the National Endowment for the Arts.



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