

GENEVA CONCERTS



PRESENTS

Symphor!a

THE ORCHESTRA OF CENTRAL NEW YORK

AMERICAN VOICES

Lawrence Loh, conductor

Awadagin Pratt, piano

Charlie Young, saxophone

Kyle Bass, narrator

Friday, March 10, 2023 • 7:30 p.m.

Smith Opera House

GENEVA CONCERTS

2022-2023 SEASON

Friday, September 16, 2022 at 7:30 pm
Cerqua Rivera Dance Theatre

Sunday, November 6, 2022 at 3:00 pm
Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra

Vinay Parameswaran, conductor; Tai Murray, violin
SIBELIUS Symphony No. 5, Op. 82 in E-flat Major
WYNTON MARSALIS Violin Concerto in D Major

Friday, March 10, 2023 at 7:30 pm
Symphoria

Lawrence Loh, conductor; Awadagin Pratt, piano

SEAN O'LOUGHLIN *Symphoria*

ROBERT SIERRA *Fandangos*

JESSIE MONTGOMERY *Rounds* for Piano and String Orchestra

DUKE ELLINGTON *Three Black Kings*

AARON COPLAND *Lincoln Portrait*

Sunday, April 23, 2023 at 3:00 pm
Symphoria

Michelle Merrill, conductor

MENDELSSOHN *The Hebrides Overture*, Op. 26

J.S. BACH *Brandenburg Concerto No. 3*

JOHANN STRAUSS, Jr. *On the Beautiful Blue Danube*

MOZART Symphony No. 41 in C Major, K. 551 (*Jupiter*)

Performed at the Smith Opera House, 82 Seneca Street, Geneva, NY

These concerts are made possible, in part, by the Williams Family Foundation, the Wyckoff Family Foundation, Hobart and William Smith Colleges, and the Statewide Community Re-grants Program of the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature and administered by Auburn Public Theater.

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Lawrence Loh, Music Director

AMERICAN VOICES

Awadagin Pratt, piano
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Symphoria

Sean **O'LOUGHLIN**

Fandangos

Robert **SIERRA**

Rounds for Piano and String Orchestra Jessie **MONTGOMERY**

Awadagin Pratt, piano

~ *INTERMISSION* ~

Three Black Kings

Duke **ELLINGTON**

- I. King Solomon
- II. King of the Magi
- III. Martin Luther King

Charlie Young, saxophone

Lincoln Portrait

Aaron **COPLAND**

Kyle Bass, narrator



Awadagin Pratt

Among his generation of concert artists, pianist **Awadagin Pratt** is acclaimed for his musical insight and intensely involving performances in recital and with symphony orchestras. Born in Pittsburgh, Awadagin Pratt began studying piano at the age of six. Three years later, having moved to Normal, Illinois with his family, he also began studying violin. At the age of 16 he entered the University of Illinois where he studied piano, violin, and conducting. He subsequently enrolled at the Peabody Conservatory of Music where he became the first student in the school's history to receive diplomas in three performance areas – piano, violin and conducting.

In 1992, Mr. Pratt won the Naumburg International Piano Competition and two years later was awarded an Avery Fisher Career Grant. Since then, he has played numerous recitals throughout the US, and has performed with the New York Philharmonic, Minnesota Orchestra, and the Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Baltimore, Indianapolis, Atlanta, St. Louis, National and Detroit Symphonies among many others. Summer festival engagements include appearances at Ravinia, Blossom, Wolf Trap, Caramoor, Aspen and the Hollywood Bowl.

A great favorite on college and university performing arts series and a strong advocate of music education, Awadagin Pratt participates in numerous residency and outreach activities wherever he appears. He is also frequently invited to participate on international competition juries.

Awadagin Pratt is also the founder and Artistic Director of the Art of the Piano Festival which every year features performances and conversations with well-known pianists and piano faculty members.

Mr. Pratt is currently Professor of Piano and Artist in Residence at the College-Conservatory of Music at the University of Cincinnati and in July 2023, joins the faculty of the San Francisco Conservatory of Music as Professor of Piano. www.awadagin.com.



Charlie Young

Charlie Young is a native of Norfolk, Virginia. Presently residing in the Washington, DC metropolitan region, he has served as Professor of Saxophone at Howard University for over 30 years, and is also Coordinator of Instrumental Jazz Studies.

In 1988, Charlie Young was recruited as a member of the Duke Ellington Orchestra where he presently serves as Artistic Director/ Conductor and lead saxophonist. Young joined the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra in 1995 serving as the ensemble's principal woodwind specialist for over 15 years. In

2013, he was appointed Artistic Director and Conductor. In addition to working with legendary ensembles, Young and his jazz quintet performed at the 1988 San Remo Jazz and Blues Festival as musical ambassador for Washington DC. In 2008, he

was invited to present an inaugural concert and lecture at the opening of the New American University in Cairo, Egypt. Mr. Young is heard on over 30 CD recordings, including his solo release “So Long Ago.”

Young is a recognized clinician in the field of jazz education as well as in classical and jazz saxophone performance. Clinic presentations in Brazil, Venezuela, Chile, Egypt, Kenya, South Africa, Singapore, and throughout the United States, Europe and Japan has earned Charlie Young a stellar reputation among the most respected in saxophone performance and education.



Kyle Bass

Kyle Bass is the author of the play *Salt City Blues* which was produced at Syracuse Stage in the 21/22 season; *Citizen James, or The Young Man Without a Country*, about a young James Baldwin, which was commissioned by Syracuse Stage; and *Possessing Harriet*, which premiered at Syracuse Stage. His newest play *Toliver & Wakeman*, commissioned by Franklin Stage Company through a Support for Artist Grant from the New York State Council on the Arts, will premiere in August. Kyle also wrote the libretto for *Libba Cotten: Here This Day*, an opera by composer Mark Olivieri commissioned by The Society for New Music, based on the life of American folk music legend Libba

Cotten. Kyle is co-author of the original screenplay for the film *Day of Days* (Broad Green Pictures, 2017) and is a three-time recipient of the New York Foundation for the Arts Fellowship (for Fiction in 1998, for Playwriting in 2010, and for Screenwriting in 2022), a finalist for the Princess Grace Playwriting Award, and a Pushcart Prize nominee.

Kyle is assistant professor in the Department of Theater at Colgate University, where he was the 2019 Burke Endowed Chair for Regional Studies. Previously, he was faculty in the MFA Creative Writing program at Goddard College, taught playwriting in the Department of Drama, and theater and dramatic literature courses in the Department of African American Studies at Syracuse University, and playwriting at Hobart & William Smith Colleges. Kyle holds an MFA in playwriting from Goddard College, and is a proud member of the Dramatists Guild of America. A descendant of African people enslaved in New England and the American South, Kyle lives and writes in upstate New York where his family had lived free and owned land for nearly 225 years.



Lawrence Loh

Lawrence Loh is the Music Director of Symphoria. From 2005-2015, he served as Assistant, Associate and Resident Conductor of the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, and he returns annually to lead a wide variety of programs. Mr. Loh’s previous positions include Music Director of the West Virginia Symphony Orchestra; Music Director of the Northeastern Pennsylvania Philharmonic; Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the Syracuse Opera; Music Director of the Pittsburgh Youth Symphony Orchestra; Associate Conductor of the Dallas Symphony

Orchestra; Associate Conductor of the Colorado Symphony Orchestra; and Music Director of the Denver Young Artists Orchestra.

Mr. Loh is active as a guest conductor, both in the U.S. and abroad. In addition to annual concerts in Pittsburgh and Dallas, his recent engagements include the Boston Pops (Tanglewood); Baltimore, Atlanta, National, Detroit, and Seattle Symphonies; Buffalo Philharmonic, and the Cathedral Choral Society at the Washington National Cathedral. In the summer of 2016, he made his debut at Tanglewood, conducting Shostakovich's 5th Symphony with the Boston University Tanglewood Institute Young Artists Orchestra, and he returned to Tanglewood in 2017 to conduct the Boston Pops.

Mr. Loh received his Artist Diploma in Orchestral Conducting from Yale, his Masters in Choral Conducting from Indiana University and his Bachelor of Arts and Certificate of Management Studies from the University of Rochester. Lawrence Loh was born in southern California of Korean parentage and raised in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. He and his wife Jennifer have a son, Charlie, and a daughter, Hilary. www.lawrenceloh.com.



Jessie Montgomery

Jessie Montgomery is an acclaimed composer, violinist, and educator. She is the recipient of the Leonard Bernstein Award from the ASCAP Foundation, the Sphinx Medal of Excellence, and her works are performed frequently around the world by leading musicians and ensembles. Her music interweaves classical music with elements of vernacular music, improvisation, poetry, and social consciousness, making her an acute interpreter of 21st century American sound and experience. Her profoundly felt works have been described as “turbulent, wildly colorful and exploding with life” (*The*

Washington Post). Her growing body of work includes solo, chamber, vocal, and orchestral works.

Since 1999, Jessie has been affiliated with The Sphinx Organization, which supports young African American and Latinx string players, and she has served as composer-in-residence for the Sphinx Virtuosi, the Organization's flagship professional touring ensemble.

A founding member of PUBLIQuartet and a former member of the Catalyst Quartet, Jessie holds degrees from the Juilliard School and New York University and is currently a PhD Candidate in Music Composition at Princeton University. She is Professor of Violin and Composition at The New School. In May 2021, she began her three-year appointment as the Mead Composer-in-Residence with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. www.jessiemontgomery.com.

Program Notes

Most of Symphoria's classical repertoire consists of what's called absolute music, music that exists without reference to anything outside it. But some of it (for instance, Beethoven's Sixth Symphony) is program music: instrumental music that tells a story or, in a less strict sense, that's anchored in something non-musical. Tonight's concert includes five examples of this looser type of program music, all by 20th-century composers from the United States. More specifically, all five celebrate people who have inspired their composers.

The most familiar is ***A Lincoln Portrait*** (1942) by **Aaron Copland** (1900–1990). It was an attempt to boost wartime spirits in difficult times; but unlike many occasional pieces, it has transcended the moment for which it was written. Stylistically, it has a lot in common with Copland's Third Symphony, written a few years later. But in spirit, *Lincoln Portrait* is more defiant, less optimistically self-confident—and in its basic material, it makes more explicit use of traditional American tunes, which Copland avoided in the Symphony. He intended the opening to convey both “the mysterious sense of fatality that surrounds Lincoln's personality” and “his gentleness and simplicity of spirit”; the middle section reflects “the background of the times he lived.” But the meat of the piece is the final part, given over to “the words of Lincoln himself,” with the music providing “a simple but impressive frame.”

Born a year before Copland, **Edward Kennedy “Duke” Ellington** (1899–1974), too, stands as one of the greatest US composers of the 20th century. He's commonly known, of course, as a jazz musician—but he disdained generic categories, and he wrote a great deal of symphonic music as well. His ballet ***Three Black Kings*** (1974) is his final work. In fact, he was still working on it in the hospital when he died (it was finished by his son Mercer). A eulogy for the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., the work begins with movements celebrating two earlier Black kings: Balthazar (one of the three Magi) and King Solomon. The first is dominated by driving rhythms; the second evokes the sensuality of the *Song of Solomon* in its outer sections, with a wilder dance between them. As for the finale: upbeat and gospel-infused, it infects us with the same kind of hope that Dr. King inspired.

The piece is crowned by sensational improvisations by the solo sax. Tonight's soloist **Charlie Young** (who began as a classical sax player before expanding into jazz as well) points out that it's “unfortunate that the art of improvisation, which was standard during Bach's time and

during the Classical period” has disappeared among classical players. As a result, many people misunderstand it, thinking that it’s just “making it up as we go along.” Rather, he starts from a “reservoir of learned things”—the musical equivalent of words—a reservoir shaped in part by his history and the spontaneity of the moment. Knowing where he is in a piece and where he wants to go allows those words to “rise to the surface and come from the instrument,” just as we find the words needed when speaking.

In *Fandangos* (2000), **Roberto Sierra** (b. 1953)—heralded by *BBC Magazine* as “the best Puerto Rican composer of all time”—takes his inspiration not from a spiritual or political leader, but from musical forbears. Specifically, he starts out from the famous Fandango for harpsichord by Spanish composer Antonio Soler, supplemented by the Fandango from the guitar quintet by Luigi Boccherini. Over the years, Symphoria has played many modern transcriptions and adaptations of earlier music: for instance, Stravinsky’s *Pulcinella* (based on music once attributed to Pergolesi) and the Bach “Suite” concocted by Mahler. Sierra does something different: Although *Fandangos* is rooted in orchestral color, it’s more than a dressing up of its sources. Rather, Soler and Boccherini—and the whole tradition of the fandango, one of the most familiar Spanish dances—serve as a springboard for an imaginative journey of Sierra’s own, one that, as the composer puts it, is “multidimensional”: “I bring [the fandango] to the present through some transformations of the musical fabric. When we are hearing something that may sound Baroque, a window into our time opens, and the piece is transformed.” Besides its brilliant veneer, its surprising shifts of perspective, and its virtuoso demands on the orchestra, it’s probably most notable for its hypnotic use of *ostinatos* (repeated musical patterns).

Ostinatos provide an aural link between *Fandangos* and our newest piece, *Rounds* for piano and strings. Composed by Symphoria regular **Jessie Montgomery** (b. 1981), *Rounds*, like *Fandangos*, takes off from art of the past—in this case poetry. Specifically, Montgomery was inspired by a passage in T.S. Eliot’s “Burnt Norton” (from *Four Quartets*) that centers on the play of opposites and that, along with the work of biologist/philosopher Andreas Weber, helped her see the “interconnectedness of all things.” While working on the piece, Montgomery also became interested in, among other things, the patterns of bird flights, the infinite design of fractals, and the playing of pianist Awadagin Pratt, for whom the piece was written and who collaborated with her as she wrote it. All these influences found their way into the music.

Given Eliot’s reputation as a difficult poet, given the complexity of fractals and bird flights, you might expect something arcane—and there’s

no doubt that *Rounds* is intricate. “Behind the scenes, a great deal of intellect went into its creation,” says Awadagin. “The craft of the piece is fantastic.” He’s been playing *Rounds* for a year; but, he says, “There are still things that I’m discovering, just in the internal mechanisms of the construction of the piece.” His phrase “behind the scenes,” though, is illuminating—because *outwardly*, “It’s not opaque. One can immediately embrace it. Even though there are a lot of things to listen for, things that a listener could focus on at a given moment, the overall thrust of where it’s going, what’s happening, is clear. The piece is not complicated to understand.” The overarching form is a rondo—a form in which a recurring section (called the “refrain”) is interrupted by contrasting music (“episodes”). And however Montgomery plays with that form, it’s easy to hear the oscillation between refrains and episodes. Then, too, the ostinatos—which drive the piece from the very beginning—give an immediate sense of purpose.

If *Rounds* is linked to *Fandangos* in its ostinatos, it’s linked to *Three Black Kings* in its turn to improvisation, since the cadenza—largely created by the soloist (Awadagin says that 99% of it is his)—is partially improvised. Since he started performing *Rounds*, “the cadenza certainly evolved. As I discover things internally, I showcase those things in the cadenza.” But changes are not limited to this long evolution—even “from a Friday to a Saturday to a Sunday, there’s going to be a 10-15% difference,” sometimes motivated by what else is on the program.

Audiences have been uniformly enthusiastic. Significantly, though, they’ve taken very different things from the music. “Some, responding to the propulsive energy of the piece, were buoyant,” says Awadagin. “Others said that it was the most beautiful thing they’d ever heard, that the music made them cry, that they went to unexpected places while listening to it.” A sign of just how rich *Rounds* is.

Our program opens with a tribute of yet another kind—a tribute to the people onstage. Pops Conductor **Sean O’Loughlin** (b. 1972) wrote his concert overture *Symphoria* back in December 2012 to launch the orchestra’s first official appearance under its current name. “The music,” says Sean, “shares the feeling of hope and joy of having orchestral music back in Central New York. The composition is an orchestral showpiece for the wonderful musicians of Symphoria and represents the spirit of ‘onward’ that has adorned the organization from the beginning.”

Peter J. Rabinowitz

Symphoria Musicians

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Sonya Stith Williams, Associate Concertmaster
Edgar Tumajyan, Assistant Concertmaster
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Noemi Miloradovic
Livi Dobrota
Asher Wulfman
Laura Smith

VIOLIN II

Amy Christian, Principal
Anita Gustafson, Assistant Principal
Yurie Mitsuhashi
Sara Silva
Linda Carmona
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VIOLA

Heejung Yang, Principal
Supported by an anonymous Friend
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