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**Kronos
*Testimony***

The presentation runs approximately 45 minutes, and it will be available for streaming from 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 14, until 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 21.

PROGRAM

**Kronos Quartet
*Testimony***

“Star-Spangled Banner” (inspired by Jimi Hendrix)...
.....Traditional (arr. Stephen Prutsman and Kronos Quartet)+
“At the Purchaser’s Option with variations”.....Rhiannon Giddens (arr. Jacob Garchik)**
“Hood Proverbs”.....spoken word by Darnell “DeeSoul” Carson
“Strange Fruit” (inspired by Billie Holiday).....Abel Meeropol (arr. Garchik)+
“Problem Child”.....spoken word by Zouhair Mussa
“Alabama”.....John Coltrane (arr. Garchik)+

Untitled.....spoken word by Cecelia “CeCe” Jordan
 “Testimony”.....Charlton Singleton**
 “back porch: a response to andrew yang’s op-ed on the pandemic”...
spoken word by Anouk Yeh
 “Campaign Song #1”.....Irving Berlin (arr. Michael Gordon)+
 “This Poem is a Riot”.....spoken word by Jarvis Subia
 “The President Sang Amazing Grace,” with special guest vocalist Meklit...
Zoe Mulford (arr. Garchik)+

* Written for Kronos Quartet

** Written for *Fifty for the Future: The Kronos Learning Repertoire*

+ Arranged for Kronos Quartet

Program subject to change.

PROGRAM NOTES

Traditional/Jimi Hendrix (1942–1970) “The Star-Spangled Banner” (1969/arr. 2003) Arranged by Stephen Prutsman (b. 1960)

On the morning of Monday, August 18, 1969, guitarist Jimi Hendrix took the stage in Bethel, New York, as the final performer at Woodstock. His legendary set included a solo guitar version of “The Star-Spangled Banner,” a former British drinking song that is now better known (with lyrics written by Francis Scott Key) as the national anthem of the United States. The controversial performance became an emblematic moment of the late 1960s.

“It’s hard to know what Jimi Hendrix was feeling when he played ‘The Star-Spangled Banner’ at Woodstock,” David Harrington says. “But that single, radical performance in a time of war gave listeners a new way to think about this song. Sometimes, what our government does in our name compels a response like ‘The Star-Spangled Banner.’”

Stephen Prutsman’s arrangement of Hendrix’s interpretation of “The Star-Spangled Banner” was written for the Kronos Quartet.

Program notes by Kronos Quartet

Rhiannon Giddens (b. 1977)
“At the Purchaser’s Option with variations” (2016)
Arranged by Jacob Garchik (b. 1976)

Singer-songwriter Rhiannon Giddens is the co-founder of the Grammy Award-winning string band The Carolina Chocolate Drops, for which she played banjo and fiddle. She began gaining recognition as a solo artist when she stole the show at the T Bone Burnett-produced *Another Day, Another Time* concert at New York City’s Town Hall in 2013. The elegant bearing, prodigious voice, and fierce spirit that brought the audience to its feet that night is also abundantly evident on Giddens’ critically acclaimed solo debut, the Grammy Award-nominated album *Tomorrow is My Turn*, which masterfully blends American musical genres including gospel, jazz, blues, and country to showcase her extraordinary emotional range and dazzling vocal prowess.

Giddens’ follow-up album, *Freedom Highway*, was released in February 2017. It includes nine original songs she wrote or co-wrote along with a traditional song and two civil rights-era songs—“Birmingham Sunday” and Staple Singers’ well-known “Freedom Highway,” from which the album takes its name.

Giddens’ televised performances include *The Late Show*, *Austin City Limits*, *Later ... with Jools Holland*, and CBS’ *This Morning Saturday* and *Sunday Morning*, among numerous other notable media appearances. She performed for President Obama and the First Lady in a televised White House gospel tribute event, along with Aretha Franklin and Emmylou Harris. Giddens duets with country superstar Eric Church on his anti-racism song “Kill a Word,” which was in the top fifteen on country radio; the two have performed the song on *The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon* and the CMA Awards ceremony, among other programs.

Giddens received the BBC Radio 2 Folk Award for Singer of the Year and won the Steve Martin Prize for Excellence in Bluegrass and Banjo in 2016. In 2017, she was named a MacArthur Foundation “Genius” Grant winner.

Giddens, who studied opera at Oberlin College, made her acting debut with a recurring role on the television drama *Nashville*, which debuted on CMT in January 2017, playing the role of Hanna Lee “Hallie” Jordan, a young social worker with “the voice of an angel.”

“At the Purchaser’s Option with variations” is an instrumental variation of a song from Giddens’ album *Freedom Highway* (Nonesuch), arranged by Jacob Garchik. She wrote the song after finding in a book a nineteenth-century advertisement for a 22-year-old female slave whose 9-month-old baby was also for sale, but “at the purchaser’s option.” This piece is inspired by that advertisement and from thinking about what that woman’s life might have been like.

“At the Purchaser’s Option with variations” was commissioned as part of the Kronos Performing Arts Association’s Fifty for the Future: The Kronos Learning Repertoire,

which is made possible by a group of adventurous partners, including Carnegie Hall and many others. Launched in the 2015–16 season, Kronos’ Fifty for the Future is commissioning fifty new works—by twenty-five women and twenty-five men—devoted to contemporary approaches to the string quartet and designed expressly for the training of students and emerging professionals. Kronos will premiere each piece and create companion digital materials, including scores, recordings, and performance notes, which can be accessed online for free.

Program notes by Kronos Quartet

Abel Meeropol (1903–1986)
“Strange Fruit” (1939, arranged 2016)
Arranged by Jacob Garchik (b. 1976)

Best known from Billie Holiday’s haunting 1939 rendition, the song “Strange Fruit” is a harrowing portrayal of the lynching of a black man in the American South. While many people assume that the song was written by Holiday herself, it actually began as a poem by Abel Meeropol, a Jewish schoolteacher and union activist from the Bronx who later set it to music. Disturbed by a photograph of a lynching, the teacher wrote the stark verse and brooding melody under the pseudonym Lewis Allan in the late 1930s. Meeropol and his wife, Anne, are also notable because they adopted Robert and Michael Rosenberg, the orphaned children of executed communists Julius and Ethel Rosenberg.

“Strange Fruit” was first performed at a New York teachers’ union meeting and was brought to the attention of the manager of Cafe Society, a popular Greenwich Village nightclub, who introduced Holiday to the writer. Holiday’s record label refused to record the song, but Holiday persisted and recorded it on a specialty label instead. The song was quickly adopted as the anthem for the anti-lynching movement. The haunting lyrics and melody made it impossible for white Americans and politicians to continue to ignore the Southern campaign of racist terror. (According to the Center for Constitutional Rights, between 1882 and 1968, mobs lynched 4,743 people in the United States, more than 70 percent of them African Americans.)

The lyrics read, in part:

“Southern trees bear a strange fruit,
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,
Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze,
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.”
(Adapted from notes by Independent Lens for the film *Strange Fruit*)

Jacob Garchik’s arrangement of “Strange Fruit” by Abel Meeropol was commissioned for the Kronos Quartet by the David Harrington Research and Development Fund.

Program notes by Kronos Quartet

John Coltrane (b. 1926)
“Alabama” (1963, arranged 2017)
Arranged by Jacob Garchik (b. 1976)

John Coltrane isn't usually the first artist who comes to mind when thinking about the politically outspoken improvisers who changed the course of jazz in the 1950s and early '60s. While vanguard bandleaders and composers such as Charles Mingus, Max Roach, and Sonny Rollins coupled their creative breakthroughs with powerful statements denouncing white supremacy and supporting the struggle for civil rights, Coltrane channeled his energy into spiritual masterpieces like “A Love Supreme” and “Meditations.” But no musician ever responded to an atrocity with more soulful, anguished humanity than Coltrane’s “Alabama,” a piece the saxophonist wrote in the aftermath of the infamous 1963 Ku Klux Klan bombing of Birmingham’s 16th Street Baptist Church that killed four little girls. Released on the 1964 album *Live at Birdland* (Impulse!), but actually recorded in the studio just weeks after the bombing, the elegy features Coltrane’s classic combo with pianist McCoy Tyner, bassist Jimmy Garrison, and drummer Elvin Jones.

Coltrane structured “Alabama” around the speech that the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. gave in the church’s sanctuary three days after the bombing, moving from unfathomable sorrow to steely determination. Kronos Quartet commissioned Jacob Garchik to create an arrangement as part of Carnegie Hall’s winter 2018 festival “The ‘60s: The Years that Changed America,” with the intention of premiering “Alabama” as an encore for that concert, “but we ran out of time,” David Harrington says. “Now we have this beautiful version, where each one of us gets to pay homage to the sound of John Coltrane.”

“Alabama” isn’t Kronos’ first ‘Trane ride. Working with tenor sax great Joe Henderson, the quartet performed a Jimmy Heath arrangement of Coltrane’s sublime ballad “Naima” in the 1980s, a collaboration that went undocumented. But Harrington only discovered “Alabama” recently after *Songlines* editor Jo Frost wrote about listening to the piece on the same day that white supremacists marched in Charlottesville, Virginia. Coltrane’s music is timeless, but “Alabama” is infuriatingly timely once again. Harrington quickly sought out the recording and was struck again by Coltrane’s elemental power, “one of the most central sounds in American music,” Harrington says. “Minutes later, I was in touch with Jacob.”

For Garchik, the assignment came as something of a surprise. Though the jazz trombonist is widely respected on the New York scene, his work for Kronos usually involves arranging “all kinds of music I’m not familiar with from faraway places,” he says. “This was close to home. I tried to capture the subtlety and simplicity of ‘Alabama’ with an arrangement that lets the quartet concentrate on the beautiful lines that Coltrane created. I kept the melody intact, but focused on the recitation part at the beginning, and accentuated its intensity. It’s a very striking and mysterious piece, unlike anything else that Coltrane wrote.”

Program notes by Andrew Gilbert

Charlton Singleton (b. 1971)
“Testimony” (2019)

A native of Awendaw, South Carolina, Charlton Singleton began his musical studies at the age of 3 on the piano. He went on to study the organ, violin, cello, and trumpet. Since graduating from South Carolina State University with a bachelor of arts in music performance in 1994, Singleton has taught music at the elementary through college levels. He is the artistic director and conductor of the Charleston Jazz Orchestra, an eighteen-piece jazz ensemble comprised of some of the finest professional musicians in the Southeast. In addition to his roles as speaker, composer, and arranger, Singleton also performs as part of Ranky Tanky, a group that specializes in jazz-influenced arrangements of traditional Gullah music, a culture that originated among descendants of enslaved Africans in the Lowcountry region of the U.S. Southeast.

About “Testimony,” Singleton writes:

“Growing up in the church (my father is now a retired African Methodist Episcopal Church pastor), I was surrounded by praise in many forms, but especially through music. Some of the things that I experienced frequently were special programs, aside from the regular morning worship on Sundays: choir anniversaries, usher anniversaries, and ‘singings.’ It was normal to be in attendance of these programs from the early afternoon into the night. As a young musician growing up around many other musicians, I naturally observed and took in a lot. One of the things that I recognized later in my life, reflecting back on my childhood musical experiences, was the level of musicality from some of the ‘ordinary’ parishioners in church. I recalled that they almost always had incredible harmonies that weren’t necessarily the norm, as well as incredible timing with regards to rhythm. Those two traits made musical experiences at church pretty awesome.

“At a lot of the ‘singings,’ where there would be choirs and other vocal ensembles from area churches, I would frequently see a prayer band. This is not an ordinary band. This band is usually three to four people who have their voices, their hands, and their feet to create music. The prayer band usually has the responsibility of getting the congregation prepared for worship. Today, it is simply known as the praise and worship band or ensemble, and they usually have a rhythm section backing them.

“Here is how the prayer band would operate: There is someone that usually ‘raises up’ (or starts singing) a song. It may be a song that is familiar to everyone or it may not be familiar at all. If it is unfamiliar, then it’s usually pretty easy for everyone to catch on quickly. At the beginning of these songs, there could be a prayer or chant where the rest of the members are humming or moaning. At the conclusion of the prayer or chant, the person leading it will start a faster song, which then leads to a lot of ‘praise and worship’ in the congregation. At the conclusion of their song, there will be another member of the prayer band that takes over, and the whole process is repeated.

“‘Testimony’ is written from the prayer band experience, and from specific rhythms in African-American churches and communities—the ‘Gullah clap’ (on beats two, two-and, and four) and the ‘half clap’ (on beat one only).”

Charlton Singleton’s “Testimony” was commissioned as part of the Kronos Performing Arts Association’s Fifty for the Future: The Kronos Learning Repertoire, which is made possible by a group of adventurous partners, including Carnegie Hall and many others.

Program notes by Kronos Quartet

“Campaign Songs #1 (God Bless America)” (2020)
Irving Berlin (1888–1989)
Arranged by Michael Gordon (b. 1956)

“Campaign Songs #1” is the first in a series of campaign songs developed by Kronos Quartet and Michael Gordon as part of Kronos’ effort to get out the vote for the 2020 presidential election. Each song presents a new take on a traditionally patriotic tune, distorting it to reflect the tumultuous time in which it was arranged. Conceived and created during the coronavirus pandemic lockdown, the original releases were recorded individually from home by the quartet and feature original video by Joshua Higgason.

Over the past thirty years, Gordon has produced a strikingly diverse body of work, ranging from large-scale pieces for high-energy ensembles to major orchestral commissions to works conceived specifically for the recording studio. Transcending categorization, this music represents the collision of mysterious introspection and brutal directness. His interest in exploring various sound textures and adding dimensionality to the traditional concert experience has led him to create numerous works for film, traditional orchestra, theatre, opera, dance, and chamber works, including *Potassium*, *The Sad Park*, and *Clouded Yellow* for Kronos Quartet.

Born in Miami Beach in 1956, Gordon holds a bachelor of arts from New York University and a master of music from the Yale School of Music. He is co-founder and co-artistic director of New York’s legendary music collective Bang on a Can.

Program notes by Kronos Quartet

Zoe Mulford (b. 1968)
“The President Sang Amazing Grace” (2016, arranged 2019)
Arranged by Jacob Garchik (b. 1976)

Raised near Philadelphia, singer and songwriter Zoe Mulford took up the guitar and fell in love with the banjo during a twelve-year stint in Durham, North Carolina. Four years in Washington, D.C., introduced her to the community of contemporary songwriters, including her labelmates at the Azalea City Recordings cooperative. In 2006, she moved to the north of England. She now divides her time between Philadelphia and Manchester, England, and tours on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean.

She has been a Kerrville New Folk Contest finalist and a Falcon Ridge Folk Festival Emerging Artist. Her songs have been recognized by the Great American Song Contest and the Mid-Atlantic Song Contest, and she appeared in *Sing Out! Magazine*. Her song “Welcome in Another Year” has become a seasonal favorite on folk radio. It has been performed by many other artists, including John Roberts and Tony Barrand in their *Nowell Sing We Clear* Christmas revue and *Four Shillings Short* in their Samhain show. She is rapidly becoming best-known as the writer of “The President Sang Amazing Grace,” which has been covered by Joan Baez and by Kronos Quartet featuring Meklit. The song was voted 2018 “Song of the Year” by Folk Alliance International.

About “The President Sang Amazing Grace,” David Harrington writes, “With this song, Zoe Mulford was cemented as one of the great songwriters of our time. Here, she plumbs a time of American trauma by entering into a singular, defining act: President Obama, standing in Mother Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, moved to lay bare his singing voice for the whole world to hear.

“‘The President Sang Amazing Grace’ could not exist but for the life’s work of Pete Seeger. If he were here today, he would be singing this song, voicing something we all hoped to express if only we knew how. Kronos drew a magnet through the memories of all the voices we had ever heard in order to find our singer. We were forcefully pulled to the voice of Meklit. When a musician becomes the work as Meklit does here, she achieves what musicians all over the world attempt with every breath, with every bowed note.”

Jacob Garchik’s arrangement of “The President Sang Amazing Grace” was commissioned by the FreshGrass Foundation for the 2019 FreshGrass Festival at MASS MoCA.

Program notes by Kronos Quartet

ABOUT KRONOS QUARTET

Kronos Quartet

David Harrington, violin

John Sherba, violin

Hank Dutt, viola

Sunny Yang, cello

For more than forty-five years, San Francisco’s Kronos Quartet—David Harrington (violin), John Sherba (violin), Hank Dutt (viola), and Sunny Yang (cello)—has combined a spirit of fearless exploration with a commitment to continually reimagine the string quartet experience. In the process, Kronos has become one of the world’s most celebrated and influential ensembles, performing thousands of concerts, releasing more than sixty recordings, collaborating with many of the world’s most accomplished

composers and performers, and commissioning more than 1,000 works and arrangements for string quartet.

Kronos has received more than forty awards, including the prestigious Polar Music Prize, Avery Fisher Prize, and Edison Klassiek Oeuvreprijs for career achievement.

Integral to the quartet's work is a series of long-running collaborations with many of the world's foremost composers, including Franghiz Ali-Zadeh, Philip Glass, Nicole Lizée, Vladimir Martynov, Steve Reich, and Aleksandra Vrebalov. Additional collaborators have included Sam Amidon, Asha Bhosle, Noam Chomsky, Rhiannon Giddens, Sam Green, Zakir Hussain, múm, Trevor Paglen, Van Dyke Parks, San Francisco Girls Chorus, Tanya Tagaq, Trio Da Kali, Mahsa Vahdat, Tom Waits, Wu Man, and Howard Zinn.

On tour for five months per year, Kronos Quartet appears in the world's most prestigious concert halls, clubs, and festivals. Kronos is equally prolific and wide-ranging on recordings, including three Grammy Award-winning albums—*Sun Rings* (2019), composed by Terry Riley for string quartet, chorus and pre-recorded spacescapes; *Landfall* with Laurie Anderson (2018); and Alban Berg's *Lyric Suite* featuring Dawn Upshaw (2003)—all released by longtime label Nonesuch Records. Among Kronos' recent releases are *Ladilikan* (World Circuit Records) with Trio Da Kali, an ensemble of Malian griot musicians assembled by Aga Khan Music Initiative; *Clouded Yellow* with Michael Gordon (Cantaloupe); *Placeless* (Kirkelig Kulturverksted) with Iranian vocalists Mahsa and Marjan Vahdat; and *Long Time Passing: Kronos & Friends Celebrate Pete Seeger* (Smithsonian Folkways) with Sam Amidon, Maria Arnal, Brian Carpenter, Lee Knight, Meklit, and Aiofe O'Donovan.

The nonprofit Kronos Performing Arts Association manages all aspects of Kronos' work, including the commissioning of new works, concert tours and home season performances, education programs, and the annual Kronos Festival. In 2015, Kronos launched *Fifty for the Future: The Kronos Learning Repertoire*, an education and legacy project that is commissioning—and distributing online for free—fifty new works for string quartet composed by twenty-five women and twenty-five men.

CREDITS

Kronos Quartet *Testimony*

Kronos Quartet is

David Harrington, violin
John Sherba, violin
Hank Dutt, viola
Sunny Yang, cello

featuring

Meklit, vocals

Original poetry written and performed by

Darnell "DeeSoul" Carson

Zouhair Mussa

Cecelia "CeCe" Jordan

Anouk Yeh

Jarvis Subia

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Song and Poetry**“The Star-Spangled Banner” (inspired by Jimi Hendrix)**

By John Stafford Smith
Arranged by Stephen Prutsman
© 2003 Inner Sunset Publishing

“At the Purchaser’s Option with variations”

By Rhiannon Giddens
Arranged by Jacob Garchik
Written for Kronos’ *Fifty for the Future: The Kronos Learning Repertoire*
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“Strange Fruit”

By Abel Meeropol

Arranged by Jacob Garchik
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“This Poem is a Riot”
By Jarvis Subia

“The President Sang Amazing Grace”
Composed by Zoe Mulford
© 2017 Zoe Mulford/SquashFlower
Arranged by Jacob Garchik

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