



SONGS OF FREEDOM

Saturday, April 7, 2018, at 7:30pm
Colwell Playhouse

PROGRAM

SONGS OF FREEDOM

Ulysses Owens Jr., musical director

Featuring Alicia Olatuja, Theo Bleckmann, and Joanna Majoko

Ulysses Owens Jr., musical director and drums

Alicia Olatuja, Theo Bleckmann, and Joanna Majoko, vocals

Mike King, piano and Fender Rhodes

David Rosenthal, guitar

Richie Goods, bass

Under the direction of Grammy Award-winning drummer, Ulysses Owens Jr., the 1960s are explored through the work of three prolific artists: Joni Mitchell, Abbey Lincoln, and Nina Simone—all of whom have made an indelible mark in music. Each artist expressed freedom in various ways. Joni composed and sang about the freedom of love, Abbey expressed freedom of her individuality and race through her lyricism, and Nina Simone demanded freedom politically through song.

Songs being presented this evening may include, but not limited to:

Oh Freedom! (traditional—instrumental only)

Borderline (Joni Mitchell)

Both Sides Now (Joni Mitchell)

Driva Man (Max Roach and Oscar Brown, Jr.)

Be My Husband (Nina Simone)

Balm in Gilead (traditional)

Everything Must Change (Bernard Ighner)

Four Women (Nina Simone)

Mississippi Goddamn (Nina Simone)

Baltimore (Randy Newman)

This performance will be presented with no intermission.

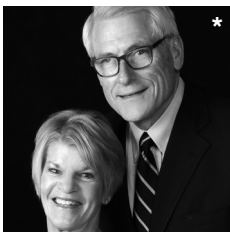
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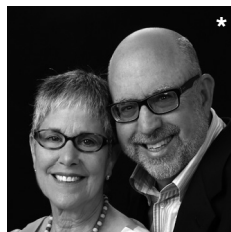
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PROFILES

ULYSSES OWENS, JR. is one of today's premier drummers and a rapidly evolving producer, composer, educator, and entrepreneur. Owens has established himself as a leader in his generation of jazz artists, admired for his sensitive, fiery, and complex playing, vivid display of textural nuance, and gift for propelling a band with charisma and integrity. Humble in person and imposing behind a kit, he is a graduate of the inaugural Jazz Studies Program at The Juilliard School, and he earned his stripes as a member of bassist Christian McBride's acclaimed Trio and Big Band. Owens received his first Grammy Award in 2010 for his performance on Kurt Elling's *Dedicated to You* and his second Grammy Award for the Christian McBride Big Band album *The Good Feeling*. He has also received four Grammy Award nominations for his work with Christian McBride and pianist Joey Alexander. Owens is incredibly versatile and has toured and recorded with artists including Wynton Marsalis, Diane Schuur, Renee Fleming, Monty Alexander, Russell Malone, and Mulgrew Miller. He has released three albums as a leader, starting in 2009 with *It's Time for U*, which featured four original compositions and arrangements. His second album, *Unanimous*, was released on the European label Criss Cross Jazz, and *Onward and Upward* was released in 2014 on D Clef Records. As co-leader of the New Century Jazz Quintet, he has released two albums with the Japanese record label Spice Of Life: *Time is Now* and *In Case You Missed Us*. In 2015 he was recommended by Wynton Marsalis and Jazz at Lincoln Center

to compose a work for the Museum of Modern Art's Summergarden series, and he premiered a seven-movement suite entitled *Stages of Us*. Owens has been honored with a 2015 Jazz At Lincoln Center Swing! Award, 2014 Global Music Award, 2013 ASCAP Plus Award, was designated a 2014 DownBeat Rising Star, and appeared as a TEDxJacksonville performer.

THEO BLECKMANN is a jazz singer and composer of eclectic tastes and prodigious gifts. The Grammy Award-nominated singer makes music that is accessibly sophisticated, unsentimentally emotional, and seriously playful. His work provokes the mind to wonder, but connects immediately with the heart. Bleckmann has released a series of albums on Winter & Winter, including recordings of Las Vegas standards, Berlin Kabarett, and popular "bar songs" (all with pianist Fumio Yasuda); a recording of newly arranged songs by Charles Ives (with the improvisational jazz/funk collective Kneebody); and most recently, acoustic *Solos for Voice and Toys*. He maintains an ongoing creative relationship with guitar phenomenon Ben Monder, John Hollenbeck, and Gary Versace (as Refuge Trio); with singers Peter Eldridge, Kate McGarry, Lauren Kinhan, and Luciana Souza (as Moss, a vocal all-star collective); and he has collaborated with musicians and composers including Laurie Anderson, Philip Glass, Sheila Jordan, Phil Kline, Michale Lang, Kirk Nurock, Michael Tilson Thomas, Julia Wolfe, John Zorn, the Bang on a Can All-stars, and

most prominently, Meredith Monk, with whom Bleckmann worked as a core ensemble member for 15 years. Bleckmann's joyous, mischievous sensibility is also manifest in his compositional work, settings set by Rumi, Emily Dickenson, and Kurt Schwitters, as well as the ineffable soundscapes built with just his voice and loop pedals. This includes a recent string quartet for JACK String Quartet, commissioned by the Slought Foundation. Bleckmann's approach to music and performance have led to recognition in unusual quarters, including a *Fresh Air* interview with Terry Gross and an article on vocal technique solicited for John Zorn's *Arcana* series, Volume III. Bleckmann's adventurous, extravagantly beautiful, and magically otherworldly choices have led to mystified accolades from such publications as *The New York Times*, *Village Voice*, and various jazz publications.

ALICIA OLATUJA was praised by *The New York Times* as "a singer with a strong and luscious tone and an amiably regal presence on stage." She has been astounding audiences with her exquisite vocals, artistic versatility, and captivating demeanor. She first came into the national spotlight in 2013, while performing as the featured soloist with the Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir at President Barack Obama's Second Inauguration. Shortly thereafter, she assembled her own jazz based ensemble and recorded her first solo album, *Timeless* (2014).

Originally from St. Louis, Missouri, Olatuja grew up immersed in a wide range of musical styles, including gospel, soul, jazz, and classical. These influences have informed her artistic journey, and she later graduated with a master's degree in classical voice/opera from the Manhattan School of Music. After appearing in numerous operatic and musical theater productions, she started to perform more regularly in gospel and jazz concerts and worked with such esteemed artists as Chaka Khan, BeBe Winans, and Christian McBride.

In 2014 Olatuja came to the attention of the acclaimed composer/arranger/pianist Billy Childs, and was brought on to be part of the touring incarnation of *Map to the Treasure: Reimagining Laura Nyro*, alongside vocalist Becca Stevens, in the 2015-16 season. Her voice has also entranced the legendary Hammond B3 organist Dr. Lonnie Smith, and she has recently performed with him at multiple events including the Charlie Parker Festival and the BRIC JazzFest. In August 2016, she was the featured soloist at the Cabrillo Music Festival, performing Osvaldo Golijov's *Oceana*, under the direction of Marin Alsop.

Olatuja's own band, over the past year, has been steadily in demand, and they have performed at the Jazz Standard, Vermont Jazz Center, Sioux Falls JazzFest, Rockport Jazz Festival, Markham Jazz Festival, Monty Alexander Jazz Fest, and the Harlem Stage Gatehouse, to name a few.

JOANNA MAJOKO is a naturally gifted and highly trained singer who has been captivating audiences with her voice since she was 14. Born to German and Zimbabwean parents, Majoko grew up in a culturally diverse home—a home that moved from Germany to Zimbabwe, South Africa, and finally to Manitoba, Canada, in 2001. Growing up, she was exposed to a rich practice of music and dance, participating in everything from choirs, musicals, and drum ensembles, to traditional Zimbabwean dance groups. At this point, she began to gain recognition for her vocal abilities. After relocating to Manitoba, Majoko involved herself in the local arts scene. Shortly thereafter, a growing love of jazz brought her to Winnipeg, Manitoba, where she graduated with a bachelor of jazz studies (Honors) degree from the University of Manitoba in 2014.

Although her greatest affinity is for jazz, Majoko is versatile within many musical genres. She has worked with numerous accomplished Canadian and American recording artists including Ron Paley, Ismaila Alfa, Les Jupes, The Lytics, Curtis Nowosad, Steve Kirby & The Oceanic Jazz Orchestra, Quincy Davis, and Derrick Gardner. As she continues to build a name for herself as a solo vocalist, she can be seen performing throughout Winnipeg and beyond. In August of 2015, Majoko participated in a three-week artist residency as part of the Banff International Workshop in Jazz & Creative Music on full scholarship, with support from the Manitoba Arts Council. Her time in Banff, Alberta allowed her to work closely with jazz luminaries such as Vijay Iyer, Billy Hart, Somi, Becca Stevens, and Mark Turner.

Most recently her vocal talents have awarded her the opportunity to travel abroad to France, touring and performing with Blue Note recording artist and New York-based drummer, Otis Brown III.