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Sistah's
Point of View

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Opera
BIRMINGHAM

JANUARY 2021 VIRTUAL CONCERT

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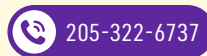
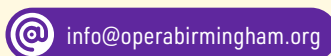
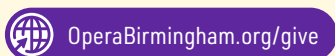
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JANUARY 2021
VIRTUAL CONCERT

FEATURING

Angela Brown
SOPRANO

WITH

Victoria Okafor
SOPRANO

Briana Hunter
MEZZO-SOPRANO

Jamez McCorkle
TENOR

Reginald Smith, Jr.
BARITONE

Marie-France Lefebvre
PIANO

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PROGRAM

Dich, teure Halle from <i>Tannhäuser</i> Angela Brown	Richard Wagner	A Quality Love from <i>Margaret Garner</i> Victoria Okafor	Richard Danielpour
Bella figlia dell'amore from <i>Rigoletto</i> Victoria Okafor, Briana Hunter Jamez McCorkle, Reginald Smith, Jr.	Giuseppe Verdi	He is By from <i>Margaret Garner</i> Angela Brown	Richard Danielpour
Seguidilla from <i>Carmen</i> Briana Hunter	Georges Bizet	Creole Girl Victoria Okafor	H. Leslie Adams
Bella nuit, ô nuit d'amour (Barcarolle) from <i>The Tales of Hoffmann</i> Victoria Okafor, Briana Hunter	Jacques Offenbach	Night Briana Hunter	Florence Price
Kuda, kuda vi udalilis from <i>Eugene Onegin</i> Jamez McCorkle	Peter Illyich Tchaikovsky	Hold Out Your Light Reginald Smith, Jr.	Lena McLin
Ciel, mio padre! from <i>Aida</i> Angela Brown, Reginald Smith, Jr.	Giuseppe Verdi	Ride On, King Jesus Jamez McCorkle	arr. Hall Johnson
		He's Got the Whole World in His Hand	arr. Margaret Bonds

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MEET THE ARTISTS



ANGELA BROWN SOPRANO

Soprano Angela Brown's multi-genre career has been lauded on the front page of *The New York Times*, CNN, CBS, in *Oprah Magazine* and *Reader's Digest*. With classical and pops engagements spanning six continents, Angela has graced the leading opera and symphonic stages of the world.

Her vocal artistry is featured on the two-time Grammy Award® winning recording *Ask Your Mama*. Her voice is the inspiration for new works including a symphonic song cycle and two principal opera roles. American composer Richard Danielpour set the poetry of Dr. Maya Angelou to create the work *A Woman's Life* that Angela has performed with Pittsburgh Symphony and Philadelphia Orchestra and recorded for the Naxos label with Nashville Symphony Orchestra. The opera roles of Addie Parker in Daniel Schneider's *Charlie Parker's Yardbird* and Cilla in Richard Danielpour's *Margaret Garner* were both written for, premiered by, and reprised many times by Angela.

Angela's most recent endeavor is the founding of Morning Brown, Inc., a nonprofit with the mission of bridging the gap between accessible, live-music programs and underserved individuals, schools, and communities. Drawing on the success of Angela's groundbreaking show, *Opera...from a Sistah's Point of View*©1997, Morning Brown, Inc., works to bring cultural experiences and awareness to cultural deserts. In Spring 2020, she launched a new podcast with Classical Music Indy and co-host Joshua Thompson titled *Melanated Moments in Classical Music* that was named Best Black Music Podcast of 2020 by the Black Podcasting Awards.



MARIE-FRANCE LEFEBVRE PIANIST

French-Canadian pianist Marie-France Lefebvre works regularly as a guest assistant conductor at major opera companies, including The Metropolitan Opera and San Francisco Opera. She was a member of the full time music staff of the Washington National Opera from 1994-2004. She has also worked with Wolf Trap Opera, Santa Fe Opera, Houston Grand Opera, Cincinnati Opera and Seattle Opera

Marie-France has worked as a prompter at Washington National Opera, The Metropolitan Opera and at San Francisco Opera, working with singers including José Carreras, Plácido Domingo, Lawrence Brownlee, Samuel Ramey, Ferruccio Furlanetto, Renée Fleming, Dame Kiri Te Kanawa, Diana Damrau, Isabel Leonard, Erin Morley, Vittorio Grigolo, Mariusz Kwiecien, and Verónica Villaroel. She has assisted, among others, Roberto Abbado, Heinz Fricke, James Levine, Louis Langrée, Nicola Luisotti, Michele Mariotti, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, Gianandrea Noseda Sir Simon Rattle, Robert Spano, Alain Trudel, Emmanuel Villaume.

Marie-France studied piano with Monique Collet-Samyn, Marek Jablonski, Dale Bartlett, Donal Nold, Artur Balsam, Joseph Seiger, Martin Katz, Arthur Greene, and Soeur Claire Dubois. She holds a DMA in Piano Accompanying from the University of Michigan and an MM in Accompanying from the Manhattan School of Music.

Prior to joining CCM in 2008, where she is a Professor of Opera, Marie-France served on the faculty of the Michigan State University School of Music (2004-2008) and, previously was a guest instructor at the University of Maryland. She worked as a guest French diction coach with The Curtis Institute of Music from 1999-2004.



BRIANA HUNTER MEZZO-SOPRANO

Briana Elyse Hunter described by *The New York Times* as “a radiant mezzo-soprano” and *Opera News* as “a mezzo-soprano of astounding vocal and dramatic range,” is rapidly emerging as an artist to watch. Her previous credits include *Blue* (Mother), *Carmen* (Carmen, Mercédès), *La tragédie de Carmen* (Carmen), *Little Women* (Jo), *Xerxes* (Arsamenes), *Die Fledermaus* (Prince Orlovsky), *As One* (Hannah after), and *La traviata* (Flora). She won the 2018 Encore Michigan Wilde Award for “Best Performance in an Opera” for her portrayal of Gertrude Stein in Ricky Ian Gordon’s *27*. She has been on the rosters of New York City Opera, Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, The Santa Fe Opera, Michigan Opera Theatre, Knoxville Opera, UrbanArias in D.C., American Opera Projects, Opera in the Heights, I SING BEIJING, Sarasota Opera, El Paso Opera, and Music Academy of the West where she sang the title role of Carmen under the tutelage of the great Marilyn Horne. She recently made her Lincoln Center Theater debut in their gala performance of *Camelot* starring Lin-Manuel Miranda. Next year she is poised to make her Kennedy Center debut with Washington National Opera as Mother in *Blue* by Jeanine Tesori and Tazewell Thompson, and return to the role of Carmen at Opera Orlando in a brand new production set in Haiti.



JAMEZ MCCORKLE TENOR

An innate musician and trained pianist, tenor Jamez McCorkle is an exciting talent whose career began at the prestigious International Opera Studio in Zürich, from where he graduated in summer 2019. Shortly after he took part in the finals of the much-coveted Neue Stimmen competition and made his Metropolitan Opera debut. Highlights this season include his house and role debut with Theatre Basel as Telemachus in a new production of *Il ritorno d’Ulisse in patria*, and the title role in the world premiere of Rhiannon Giddens’ new opera based on the life of Omar Ibn Said at the Spoleto Festival.

Engagements from previous seasons include his debut at the Metropolitan Opera as Peter the Honeyman in the hugely acclaimed production of *Porgy and Bess*; performances of Britten *War Requiem* with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra; Tamino in *Die Zauberflöte* with Kentucky Opera; Lensky in *Eugene Onegin* with Michigan Opera Theatre and at the Spoleto Festival, where he also sang Beethoven’s Symphony no 9.

His assignments in Zürich included Deux Gardes in *Manon*, Normanno in *Lucia di Lammermoor* and Maestro Trabuco in *La forza del destino*; title role (cover) in *Idomeneo*, Remendado and Don José (cover) in *Carmen* and 1st Armed Man in *Die Zauberflöte*. In 2017 McCorkle was invited to take part in the Young Artist Program of the Salzburg Festival, where he appeared as Fante del Consiglio in *I due Foscari* and covered Tito in *La Clemenza di Tito*. At Curtis Opera Theatre he appeared as Ruggero in *La Rondine*, Nolan in *Doctor Atomic* and Male Chorus in *The Rape of Lucretia*.



VICTORIA OKAFOR SOPRANO

Soprano Victoria Okafor is a native to the DC/Maryland area. She has sung with opera companies such as Washington National Opera and Cincinnati Opera. Miss Okafor graduated from Shenandoah University where she received a Bachelor of Music in Voice Performance. Her roles at Shenandoah included Belinda in *Dido and Aeneas*, Ms. Wordsworth in *Albert Herring*, and Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte*. She recently received her master's degree in Voice Performance at the Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music where she sang the role of Servilia in *La clemenza di Tito*, and was a soprano soloist for their semi-staged performance of Bach's Johannes-Passion. Miss Okafor made her Cincinnati Opera debut last summer as Barbarina in *Le nozze di Figaro* followed by the role of Alesha in *Blind Injustice*. Last fall, Miss Okafor returned to the Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music to pursue her Artistic Diploma where she sang the role of Wilhelmina in the workshop for *Castor and Patience*, and Nyomi in *Fierce*. Both of these works will premiere next year at Cincinnati Opera. Miss Okafor's 2020 season would have included Mendelsohn's *Elijah* with the Hilton Head Symphony, Papagena in *Die Zauberflöte* with CCM Opera and again as a cover with Santa Fe Opera. Due to COVID-19, these engagements have been cancelled or postponed, but you can find Miss Okafor as a featured soloist in Cincinnati Opera's documentary *Cincinnati Opera at 100*. The documentary, now streaming online, features Miss Okafor singing the poignant aria "A Quality Love" from Richard Danielpour's *Margaret Garner*.



REGINALD SMITH, JR. BARITONE

Baritone Reginald Smith, Jr. has been lauded as a "passionate performer" (*The New York Times*) with an "electric, hall-filling" (*The Baltimore Sun*), and "thrillingly dramatic" (*Opera News*) voice that is "one of the most exciting baritone sounds to come along in years" (*Opera News*). Reginald, a native of Atlanta, GA, was a Grand Finals winner of the 2015 Metropolitan Opera National Council Auditions and a graduate of the Houston Grand Opera Studio.

Reginald Smith, Jr.'s 2020-2021 season includes returns to the Atlanta Opera as Tonio in *I Pagliacci* (a role debut) and to the Dallas Symphony in a concert honoring the victims of racial violence and injustice. He will also reprise his celebrated Amonasro in *Aida* with Opera Grand Rapids.

Last season Mr. Smith made his much-anticipated debut at the Metropolitan Opera as Jim in *Porgy and Bess*, followed by Amonasro in *Aida* with the Houston Grand Opera and Jake in *Porgy and Bess* with the Atlanta Opera. His orchestral appearances included Christmas Pops Concerts with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra.

Prior to that, Reginald Smith, Jr. appeared as Jake in *Porgy and Bess* with Cincinnati Opera, Sharpless in *Madama Butterfly* with Opera Memphis, Amonasro in *Aida* with Opera Idaho, and returned to the rosters of the Lyric Opera of Chicago and San Francisco Opera. His orchestral engagements included the baritone solo in *Carmina Burana* for his return to the Houston Symphony and the bass solo in Beethoven's *Symphony No. 9* at New Jersey Symphony, West Virginia Symphony, and Symphoria.

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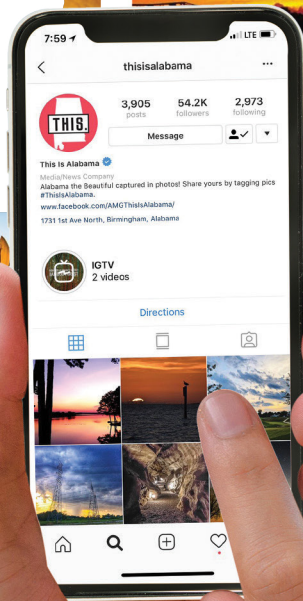
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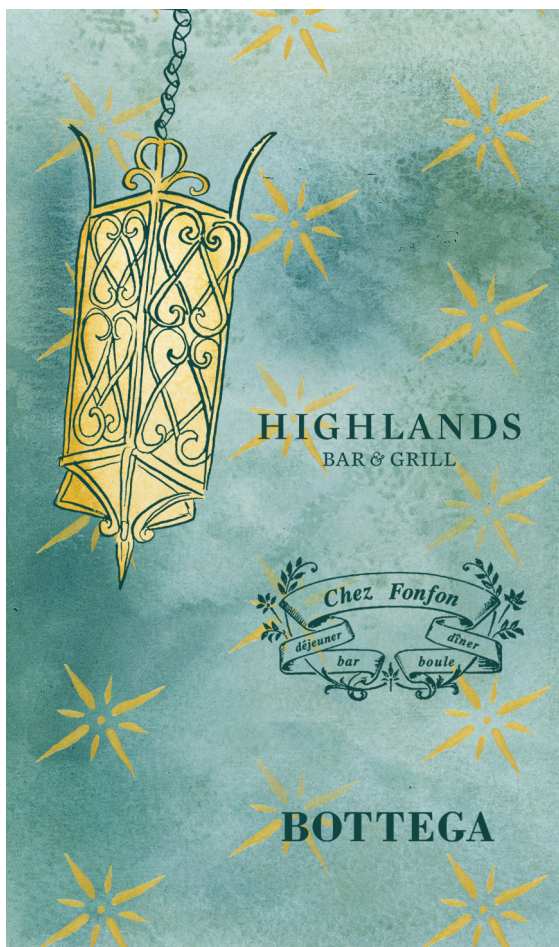
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