THE SPHINX VIRTUOSI

WITH CONDUCTOR TITO MUÑOZ AND THE MINNESOTA ORCHESTRA

Tito Muñoz, conductor Njioma Chinyere Grevious, violin

Thursday, February 1, 2024, 11AM Friday, February 2, 2024, 8PM Saturday, February 3, 2024, 7PM

Orchestra Hall

Michael Abels	Global Warming	CA. 8'
Angélica Negrón	Marejada Sphinx Virtuosi	CA. 8'
Astor Piazzolla/ arr. Leonid Desyatnikov	Winter and Summer, from The Four Seasons in Buenos Aires for Violin and Orchestra Njioma Chinyere Grevious, violin	CA. 14'
Carlos Simon	Breathe	CA. 10'
	INTERMISSION	CA. 20'
Samuel Coleridge-Taylor	Symphonic Variations on an African Air, Opus 63	CA. 20'
Silvestre Revueltas	Sensemayá	CA. 7'

PRE-CONCERT

Concert Preview with Michael Abels and Loki Karuna

Thursday, February 1, 10:15am, Target Atrium | Friday, February 2, 7:15pm, Target Atrium Saturday, February 3, 6:15pm, Target Atrium

THANK YOU

This program is presented as part of The Great Northern.

The 2023–24 Classical Season is presented by Ameriprise Financial.

Minnesota Orchestra concerts are broadcast live on Friday evenings on stations of YourClassical Minnesota Public Radio.



TITO MUÑOZ, CONDUCTOR

Tito Muñoz, now in his tenth season as music director of the Phoenix Symphony, previously served as music director of the Opéra National de Lorraine and the Orchestre symphonique et lyrique de Nancy in France. Other prior appointments include assistant conductor positions with the Cleveland Orchestra, Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra and Aspen Music Festival. Muñoz has appeared with many of North America's most prominent orchestras, including those of Atlanta, Baltimore, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dallas, Detroit, Houston, Indianapolis, Milwaukee, New York and Utah. He maintains a strong international conducting presence, including engagements with the Royal Philharmonic (London), Ulster Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra, BBC Scottish Symphony, Lucerne Festival Contemporary Orchestra, Opéra Orchestre National Montpellier, Opéra de Rennes, Auckland Philharmonia, Sydney Symphony and São Paolo State Symphony. Born in Queens, New York, Muñoz began his musical training as a violinist in New York City public schools. He made his professional conducting debut in 2006 with the National Symphony Orchestra at the Kennedy Center and made his Cleveland Orchestra debut at the Blossom Music Festival that same year. More: jamesbrownmanagement.com, titomunoz.com.



NJIOMA CHINYERE GREVIOUS, VIOLIN

Njioma Chinyere Grevious is an emerging, passionate and versatile solo, chamber and orchestral musician. She is a graduate of the Juilliard School and a winner of its John Erskine Prize for scholastic and artistic achievement. In 2023 she won both the Robert F. Smith first prize and audience choice awards in the Senior Division of the Sphinx Competition as well as joint prizes in the Concert Artists Guild/Young Classical Artists Trust auditions. She has appeared as a soloist with the Chicago Philharmonic, Western Michigan Symphony and Newark Symphony Orchestra. In November 2022, she performed in the London Symphony Orchestra as a winner of the Music Academy of the West Keston Max orchestral fellowship. A frequent chamber performer, she is a founding member of the award-winning Abeo Quartet, which has performed in the Schneider Concert Series, Alice Tully Hall, the Kennedy Center, Montreal and Oslo. She recently completed studies with Ryan Meehan and the Calidore String Quartet at the University of Delaware. Originally from Boston, she was a scholarship recipient for many years through Project STEP, a string training program for Black and Latin youth. More: njiomagrevious.com.

ONE-MINUTE NOTES

Abels: Global Warming

Composed in 1990 and inspired by the post-Cold War thaw in international relations, *Global Warming* blends elements of folk music from divergent cultures, with solo strings employing sliding pitches in ethereal opening and closing sections.

Negrón: Marejada

This piece from the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, originally intended for performance by a string quartet over Zoom, embraced the limitations of the medium by working around synchronization issues to create intriguing sounds that have taken on new life through in-person performances.

Piazzolla: Winter and Summer, from The Four Seasons in Buenos Aires

The seasonal extremes of Buenos Aires are brought to life in two selections from Astor Piazzolla's tango-flavored take on Antonio Vivaldi's classic—by turns seductive, powerful and haunting.

Simon: Breathe

Inspired by a quote from Howard Thurman, a spiritual adviser to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., *Breathe* paints a meditative soundscape that begs us all to "stay put for a spell."

Coleridge-Taylor: Symphonic Variations on an African Air

In his Symphonic Variations, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor takes the tune of the Spiritual "I'm troubled in mind" and cleverly hides it in an expansive and innovative theme and variations.

Revueltas: Sensemayá

Sensemayá, based on the Nicolás Guillén's poem of the same name, builds from soloistic passages to a riotous climax for the full orchestra before ending ominously.



THE SPHINX VIRTUOSI

The Sphinx Virtuosi is a dynamic and inspiring professional selfconducted chamber orchestra that serves as the flagship performing entity of the Sphinx Organization the leading social justice non-profit dedicated to transforming lives through the power of diversity in the arts. Comprising 18 accomplished Black and Latinx artists, the Sphinx Virtuosi evolves and transforms the face of classical music through artistic excellence, pioneering programming and impassioned community engagement. Its members serve as cultural and diversity ambassadors for audiences and communities around the U.S. and abroad. Since 2004, the Sphinx Virtuosi's concerts have been presented by leading arts organizations, including annual visits to Carnegie Hall. The ensemble's 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 of color.

Heralded for their kaleidoscopically varied repertoire and bold thematic programming, Sphinx Virtuosi concerts give prominence to historically excluded Black and Latinx composers. In an effort to expand its repertoire and engage new audiences, the ensemble commissions new works annually from composers such as 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 diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives within arts organizations and connecting with other Sphinx programming to further the mission of achieving excellence through diversity. As a bilingual ensemble, these artist-citizens frequently break down existing barriers empowering the art form to connect with the broader community. 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. Outside of the classical realm, the ensemble's 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. Their 2023-24 season includes performances for Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, Denver Friends of Chamber Music, Stanford Live, and a return performance

at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum. More: <u>sphinxmusic.org</u>, mkiartists.com.

FIRST VIOLIN

Meredith Riley Concertmaster Sandro Leal-Santiesteban Maïthéna Girault Adé Williams

SECOND VIOLIN

Clayton D Penrose-Whitmore *Principal*Caitlin Edwards
Robyn Quinnett
Scott Jackson

VIOLA

Robert Alvarado Switala *Principal* Harper Randolph Camila Berg Mario Rivera

CELLO

Eri Snowden-Rodriguez *Principal* Diana Flores Lindsey Sharpe Titilayo Ayangade

BASS

Jonathan Colbert *Principal* Christopher Johnson

PROGRAM NOTES



MICHAEL ABELS

B: October 8, 1962 Phoenix, Arizona

Global Warming
PREMIERED: May 15, 1991

 Michael Abels is one of the most successful and acclaimed classical composers working today—with the 2023 Pulitzer Prize for Music, won jointly with Rhiannon Giddens for their opera *Omar*, among many triumphs in a career that has also included his award-winning scores for Jordan Peele's films Get Out, Us and Nope. One might expect a work from his pen titled Global Warming to be newly composed and addressing today's climate headlines. Surprisingly, though, it was written in 1990, and the title has two meanings, one of them quite positive—the "warming" of international relations at the end of the Cold War. Also playing into the title were the heated confines of the work's premiere—Abels' hometown of Phoenix, Arizona, where his friend and advocate Mark Russell Smith led the premiere with the Phoenix Youth Symphony on May 15, 1991. Decades later, the music—especially the ethereal opening and close in which sliding pitches of solo violin, viola and cellos come to the fore—may call to mind alarming images of a heating world, even though the music wasn't composed with a political message in mind.

"In 1990, global warming was something that climate scientists were talking about, but it wasn't in the public eye nearly as much as it is today," Abels noted in 2016. "But also around that time, the Cold War had ended, the Berlin Wall had just come down, and it felt to me like there was greater cooperation between nations of the world than there had been before in my lifetime. In my musical life, I had been listening to a lot of world music, and I was struck by some of the similarities I heard between music of cultures from different corners of the world, so I wanted to write some music where I could explore some of those similarities....

So I took the phrase 'global warming' to mean not only the temperature rising, but also a feeling of warming between nations and cultures."

SUCCESS IN TWO WORLDS

The multiple meanings of *Global Warming* are a small duality in a career built on a larger one—highly regarded music for the concert hall and original scores for massively popular films. In addition to being the go-to composer for director Jordan Peele, Abels has written music for the movies *Bad Education, Nightbooks, Fake Famous, Beauty* and *Breaking*, and the documentary series *Allen v. Farrow*. His

works for the concert hall include the choral song cycle *At War with Ourselves* for the Kronos Quartet, the Grammynominated *Isolation Variation* for violinist Hilary Hahn, *Emerge* for the National Symphony and Detroit Symphony, and the guitar concerto *Borders* for soloist Mak Grgic. Abels and Rhiannon Giddens' Pulitzer Prize-winning 2022 opera *Omar* is based on the autobiography of Omar ibn Said, a Fula Muslim scholar born in what is now Senegal, and enslaved in the U.S. from 1807 until his death in 1864.

THE COMPOSER'S NOTE

Abels has provided these comments on Global Warming:

"Living in Los Angeles, I've been able to learn about music from around the world simply by opening the window; among my neighbors are immigrants from every corner of the world. I was intrigued by the similarities between folk music of divergent cultures, and decided to write a piece that celebrates these common threads as well as the sudden improvement in international relations that was occurring.

"The opening section of the piece is a vision of the traditional idea of global warming—a vast desert, the relentless heat punctuated by the buzzing of cicadas, and an anguished, frenetic solo violin (with help from a solo cello). This scene gives way to several episodes reminiscent of folk music of various cultures, most noticeably Irish and Middle Eastern. At the climax of the piece, a Middle Eastern melody is transformed, through gradual changes in rhythm and ornamentation, back into the Irish refrain, and many counter-melodies join in to present a noisy—yet harmonious—world village. This joyous moment is broken by a sudden return to the stark vision of the opening, leaving the listener to decide which image may more accurately reflect our future."

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes (1 doubling English horn), 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bodhran, congas, guiro, tablas, tamtam, triangle, xylophone, marimba and strings

PROGRAM NOTE BY CARL SCHROEDER.



ANGÉLICA NEGRÓN

B: 1981 San Juan, Puerto Rico

Marejada
PREMIERED: August 30, 2020

In March 2020, Puerto Rican-born composer Angélica Negrón was given a task that would've been inconceivable a month earlier: composing a piece for the Kronos Quartet to play not in person—but in isolation, with the string quartet's members connected via Zoom at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

IN AND BEYOND THE CONCERT HALL

Based in New York, Negrón is no stranger to composing music beyond a typical concert hall setting. Her hourlong 2019 work *Chorus of the Forest* is a prime example; composed for use by the New York Botanical Garden, it employs chorus, percussion and electronics for visitors to experience as they walked through a forest. She is also a founding member of the tropical electronic band Balún. Her music has also been presented in prestigious concert halls, including performances by the Seattle Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Louisville Orchestra and New York Philharmonic.

"When Kronos approached me...to write a piece for them to rehearse and perform together during this difficult moment of social isolation, I wanted to create something playful and rhythmic yet flexible and malleable that would be fun to put together," Negrón recalls. "Something that responded directly to the challenges during this time of performing music together while not being able to be together in the same room. But also something that took into consideration the limitations of the video communications platforms and use those challenges as compositional material and creative impulse. The natural delay, the canceling of sound frequencies and the inability for everyone to fully play together at the same time and in perfect synchronization, are all challenges that I decided to embrace as unique elements that make this piece thrive even within the limitations of the medium."

FROM THE KRONOS QUARTET

The Kronos Quartet, which released the online premiere of Marejada on August 30, 2020, offers this description of the music and its initial performance practices:

"Marejada is meant to be played along with a background ambient soundscape, which serves as the environment this piece lives in. Audiences are encouraged to play this ambient soundscape either in their homes (through their phone, computer or speakers) or at the performance site for the duration of the piece to immerse themselves in the environment of the piece and be together in the same space with the performers.

"Additionally, the string quartet members can each play this track on their headphones while they're rehearsing and performing via Zoom or any video conference platform. For live performances the track can be played through the speakers in the space along with the audience. The field recordings from Puerto Rico used in this soundscape come from Audiopuerto, a sound library of sounds from Puerto Rico created by Ariel Alvarado & Manuel Vázquez. This track lasts 10 min. so that performers and audiences can fade it out when they wish."

Instrumentation: string orchestra

PROGRAM NOTE BY CARL SCHROEDER.



ASTOR PIAZZOLLA

B: March 11, 1921 Mar del Plata, Argentina D: July 4, 1992 Buenos Aires, Argentina

Winter and Summer, from The Four Seasons in Buenos Aires for Violin and Orchestra, arranged by Leonid Desyatnikov **COMPOSED:** 1964, 1970

 Astor Piazzolla was a fabulously talented young man whose wealth of talent caused him some confusion as he tried to decide on a career path. Very early he learned to play the bandoneon, the Argentinian accordion-like instrument that uses buttons rather than a keyboard, and he became a virtuoso on it. He gave concerts, made a film soundtrack and created his own bands before a desire for wider expression drove him to the study of classical music. In 1954 he received a grant to study with Nadia Boulanger in Paris, and it was that great teacher who advised him to follow his passion for the Argentinian tango as the source for his own music.

REVITALIZING THE TANGO

Piazzolla returned to Argentina and gradually evolved his own style, one that combines the tango, jazz and classical music. The tango, an old Argentinian dance that had become a popular form was revitalized in his hands as he transformed it into music capable of varied expression and sharply contrasted moods.

The Four Seasons in Buenos Aires, or Las cuatro estaciones porteñas in the original Spanish, is an unusual collection of individual tangos that, taken together, form a remarkable whole. In the title, cuatro estaciones evokes The Four Seasons of Vivaldi, while porteña (or porteño), which translates as "port" area, has come to refer to the port area of Buenos Aires, birthplace of the tango, or by extension anyone or anything native to Buenos Aires. Working over several years, Piazzolla originally wrote the four tangos in his Four Seasons for the small ensemble he led in Buenos Aires: violin, piano, electric guitar, bass and bandoneon. Each tango depicts a different season in the city. Summer (Verano porteño) dates from 1964, Autumn (Otoño porteño) from 1969, and Spring (Primavera porteña) and Winter (Invierno porteño) from 1970. Piazzolla sometimes performed them as a group, and these seductive, powerful and haunting tangos have become immensely popular.

This music has been arranged for a variety of instruments, from solo piano to full symphony orchestra. Leonid Desyatnikov's arrangement for solo violin and string orchestra, of which we hear the Winter and Summer movements in these concerts, takes us even closer to the example of Vivaldi, for it is the instrumentation of his Four Seasons. Thus these tangos become a late 20th-century Argentinian counterpart to Vivaldi's famous tone portraits, which had been set in Venice more than 200 years earlier.

Instrumentation: solo violin and string orchestra

PROGRAM NOTE BY ERIC BROMBERGER.



CARLOS SIMON

B: April 13, 1986 Washington, D.C.

Breathe PREMIERED: February 25, 2022

- Contemporary American composer Carlos Simon has established himself as a pioneering voice in modern classical music. Simon—whose numerous credits include a Grammy Award and a professorship at Georgetown University—has had works commissioned and premiered the world over. He is most familiar to Minnesota Orchestra audiences as one half of the creative team behind the choral-orchestral work *brea(d)th*, which the Orchestra commissioned from Simon and librettist Marc Bamuthi Joseph in response to the murder of George Floyd. The work was premiered in May 2023 under the baton of Jonathan Taylor Rush; Decca Classics released the world premiere recording this past September.

An Atlanta native born into a lineage of preachers, Simon grew up with the sound of gospel in his ear. "Music is my pulpit," he says. "That's where I preach." His music draws on the sounds of his youth including gospel, jazz and the blues combined with a captivating neo-romantic aesthetic. He is currently composer in residence at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C., and is a recipient of the Sphinx Medal of Excellence.

Simon is a member of a collective of young Black composers self-named the "Blacknificent 7," which also includes Jessie Montgomery, Jasmine Barnes, Damien Geter, Joel Thompson, Dave Ragland and Shawn Okpebholo. The seven members created the group as a collective safe space

to share the challenges and rewards of working as Black artists in the modern classical music industry. The group was recently featured on a Chicago Symphony Orchestra MusicNOW concert curated by Montgomery, who serves as that orchestra's Mead composer in residence.

Breathe was commissioned by the Gabriela Lena Frank Creative Academy of Music for the San Francisco Chamber Orchestra. It is a quiet, peaceful meditation featuring gently moving lines and broad melodies with a serene, atmospheric background. The composer's program note begins with a quote from the American Quaker poet John Greenleaf Whittier—"Drop Thy still dews of quietness / Till all our striving cease"—then continues with Simon's own words:

"One of my favorite books to read and re-read has been Meditations of the Heart, written by renowned theologian Howard Thurman. A spiritual advisor to many, including Martin Luther King, Jr., Thurman was a prolific writer and preacher who lived in San Francisco for a large part of his life. *Meditations of the Heart* is a collection of meditations and prayers on the beauty of humanity. I was deeply inspired by one section entitled 'Still Dews of Quietness,' which urges one to 'stay put for a spell.' Through his words, I wanted to take the gesture further by writing a piece that encourages others to simply reflect and breathe."

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, suspended cymbal, mark tree, wood blocks, vibraphone and strings

PROGRAM NOTE BY MICHAEL DIVINO.



SAMUEL **COLERIDGE-TAYLOR**

B: August 15, 1875 London, England D: September 1, 1912 London, England

Symphonic Variations on an African Air, Opus 63 PREMIERED: June 14, 1906

 The music of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor has recently become something of a fixture in Minnesota Orchestra programming. Since the 2019-20 season, 13 different works (out of the nearly 90 he wrote) from the British composer's pen have been featured on 16 separate Minnesota Orchestra concert programs—including chamber music and Young People's Concerts—with that figure due to rise to 18 by the end of this season. This is an encouraging sign, given that Coleridge-Taylor's music was a staple in the Orchestra's repertoire from 1905 to 1930 but was then neglected for

well over six decades, a fate all too common throughout Western music history for composers who were not white. Throughout his life, Coleridge-Taylor was an advocate for the unity and uplift of Africans and members of the African diaspora, and many of his works seek to incorporate African melodies into Western classical music.

EXPANDING A FOLK MELODY

Symphonic Variations on an African Air was written in 1906. In 1904, Coleridge-Taylor wrote 24 Negro Folk Melodies, a set of 24 themes and variations for solo piano with each variation based on a traditional melody; in each, Coleridge-Taylor presents the original theme as a "motto" and builds variations on it as each miniature unfolds. In this program's work, Coleridge-Taylor takes one of those songs, called "I'm troubled in mind," and expands it into a full 20-minute orchestral work, packed with all the grandiosity and tenderness of early 20th-century British music.

Coleridge-Taylor took some inspiration from friend and mentor Edward Elgar and his Enigma Variations for his own work, but innovates the structure beyond the genre to create something wholly unique. In Elgar's composition from 1899, variations are mostly separate from one another and easily discernible by ear. This is not the case with Coleridge-Taylor. Here, the "motto" is not always easily recognized save for the very beginning and end—and variations flow directly from one to the next with no indication given in the score when one ends and another begins, leading to disagreements among scholars and musicians on how many variations the work contains. Despite this confusion, it's clear that Coleridge-Taylor's mastery of his craft in this work and others proved just how talented he was. Audiences of today are privileged to hear it live once again after all these years.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, piccolo, 2 oboes (1 doubling English horn), 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, triangle, harp and strings

PROGRAM NOTE BY MICHAEL DIVINO.



SILVESTRE REVUELTAS

- **B:** December 31, 1899 Santiago Papasquiaro, Mexico
- **D:** October 5, 1940 Mexico City

Sensemayá PREMIERED: December 15, 1938 (full orchestra version)

——— Silvestre Revueltas was a pivotal figure in Mexican classical music during his lifetime, which was tragically cut short when he was only 40. Born into an artistic family his siblings had varied careers in painting, acting, writing and dancing—he studied violin and composition at the National Conservatory in Mexico City. He then continued his education in the U.S., first at St. Edward College in Texas and then at the Chicago Musical College. His friend and fellow composer Carlos Chávez extended an invitation for him to serve as assistant conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra of Mexico, a post he held from 1929 to 1935.

Revueltas wrote more than 50 pieces across a variety of musical styles, including music for films, chamber music, ballets, songs, works for orchestra and pieces for solo piano. Sensemayá is perhaps his most famous work and has often drawn comparisons to another pivotal composition written over two decades earlier: Igor Stravinsky's Rite of Spring. From subject matter to the music itself, the comparison seems apt. Like Stravinsky, Revueltas found inspiration from folkloric spiritual practices and translated that inspiration into a work that explores the violence, terror and unique beauty of a ritual sacrifice to please the gods.

A STRUGGLE OF LIFE AND DEATH

Written in 1937 in a version for chamber orchestra (and expanded the following year in the full-orchestra version performed on this program), Sensemayá is based on Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén's poem of the same name. Bearing a title that translates roughly as "Chant for Killing a Snake," the poem is based on Afro-Cuban spiritual practices. The obsessive, repetitive nature of Guillén's poem is brought to bear through colorful orchestration, alternating compound time signatures and the use of expertly layered ostinato motives. The work opens with a low trill from bass clarinet representing the winding snake; distinct rhythmic motifs from the percussion and bassoon then bring to life the obsessive chanting of those gathered for the ritual. As the chant progresses, we hear distinct melodic figures from the brass and violent slashes from the winds and strings. By the end of this ritual, the neatly layered motifs fight against one another in a chaotic swirl of life and death. Despite its struggle, the snake is killed in a final, violent blow.

Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 piccolos, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, E-flat clarinet, bass clarinet, 3 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 4 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, snare drum, bass drum, suspended cymbal, bombo, claves, guiro, small Indian drum, large tamtam, tom-toms, xylophone, glockenspiel, piano, celesta and strings

PROGRAM NOTE BY MICHAEL DIVINO.