

TO AWAKEN THE SLEEPER

WORKS OF JOEL THOMPSON



KANSAS CITY
SYMPHONY

MICHAEL STERN, MUSIC DIRECTOR LAUREATE

EXIGENCE VOCAL ENSEMBLE
DR. EUGENE ROGERS, DIRECTOR

JOYCE DIDONATO, MEZZO-SOPRANO
RAYMOND SANTOS, CLARINET
YO-YO MA, CELLO

fresh!
R
REFERENCE
RECORDINGS.

A man with glasses and a dark suit stands on a stage, smiling broadly with his hands clasped in front of him. He is the central focus of the image. In the background, an orchestra is visible, with musicians playing instruments like a double bass and a violin. The setting appears to be a concert hall or a church stage. The lighting is warm and focused on the man.

TO AWAKEN THE SLEEPER

WORKS OF JOEL THOMPSON

Dear Listener,

When you dedicate your life to any artistic discipline, you contend daily with the difficulty of creation and the ease of destruction. While you toil at realizing dreams and more equitable possibilities, you watch as people, institutions, and communities repeatedly choose hate, exclusion, and bigotry. A fatigue sets in.

However, I've learned that the art itself is one of the strongest tools of resistance against that very fatigue. With the support of loved ones and the talent and labor of fellow artists, composers craft moments of sound in an attempt to capture some aspect of the human experience to facilitate some mysterious connection that affirms that we are not alone.

This album is evidence of my own well-trod journeys out of despair and into a deeper gratitude for humanity despite our brokenness. Though some tracks mourn and rage in the wake of police brutality and others celebrate those that sang for freedom in the past century, this music aims to remind us of our interconnectedness in an age of isolation, to warn of the peril of neglecting the humanity of the other, to awaken our moral fortitude for the arduous journey ahead.

Thank you to Michael Stern and the Kansas City Symphony, Dr. Eugene Rogers and EXIGENCE, Joyce DiDonato, Raymond Santos, and Yo-Yo Ma for believing in me and making my music real. Thank you to Tracy K. Smith, Dr. Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., Emma Luty, Tabitha Brandel, Josh DeVries and the estates of James Baldwin and Maya Angelou for their words and collaboration.

And thank you, dear Listener. When the music is over, let us continue to listen.

With love and solidarity,
Joel Thompson

SEVEN LAST WORDS OF THE UNARMED (2015)

Program note by Joel Thompson

In November of 2014, a Staten Island grand jury chose not to indict the officer who murdered Eric Garner. To me, the message was clear: if I were to be killed in some interaction with authority figures, my loved ones should not expect justice. There could be a video recording of my futile attempts to describe my distress — “I can’t breathe” — with the arm of the law around my neck and the life fading from my eyes, and still, my death wouldn’t matter. My death wouldn’t matter enough to warrant a formal charge of even manslaughter or negligent homicide. This was not an isolated incident — this was a trend. The color of my skin is a capital offense. *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed* wasn’t written to be heard. It was essentially a sonic diary entry expressing my fear, anger, and grief in the wake of this tragedy. I was serving as a choral conductor at a small college in South Georgia, but I occasionally composed pieces and hid them away. Finishing this work in early January 2015 was a much-needed catharsis; I felt exorcised of the emotions that had drained my spirit. However, Freddie Gray’s death the following April impelled me to try to bring *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed* to life. A Facebook post asking musician friends to sightread the work, a phone call by a friend to Dr. Eugene Rogers of the University of Michigan, a commission from Andre Dowell to fully orchestrate the work for the 20th anniversary of the Sphinx Organization, and the piece is alive several years later and I am very grateful.

Liturgical settings of the Seven Last Words of Christ are not trying to demonize the Roman soldiers that orchestrated the crucifixion, but they are designed to stir within the listener an empathy towards the suffering of Jesus. Inspired by that template, this piece is a meditation on the lives of seven black men and an effort to focus on their humanity, which is often eradicated in the media in an attempt to justify their deaths.

Listening to *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed* can be uncomfortable. As you listen, I ask that you try to remain open. It can be easy to let a spirit of defensiveness pollute the experience of the piece. I ask that you revisit the last moments of these men with fresh hearts:

- I. Kenneth Chamberlain, Sr: the retired Marine who accidentally pressed his Life Alert necklace which recorded the police calling him a n***er before he was killed. (*"Officer, why do you have your guns out?"*)
- II. Trayvon Martin: the teenage boy with his bag of Skittles being chased in his own neighborhood. (*"What are you following me for?"*)
- III. Amadou Diallo: the young immigrant who called his mother in Guinea after he had saved up enough money to pursue a degree in computer science. (*"Mom, I'm going to college."*)
- IV. Michael Brown, Jr: the recent high school graduate and amateur musician whose body lay baking in the street for four hours before being taken to the coroner. (*"I don't have a gun. Stop shooting!"*)
- V. Oscar Grant III: the young father (of a 4-year-old girl) who was shot in the back while handcuffed in a prone position at Fruitvale Station. (*"You shot me! You shot me."*)
- VI. John Crawford III: another young father who was purchasing a BB gun in a Wal-Mart in the open carry state of Ohio. (*"It's not real."*)
- VII. Eric Garner: the 43-year-old grandfather who was choked to death on camera on the streets of New York City. (*"I can't breathe."*)

Let us listen to each other with love and hope for a more just future.

TO AWAKEN THE SLEEPER (2021)

Program note by Joel Thompson

The insightful and prophetic words of James Baldwin have always been a source of solace for me, and never more so than during the last few years as the country has been forced to grapple with its identity. When commissioned to write a piece for Peter Oundjian and the Colorado Music Festival in 2020, it felt like the perfect opportunity to amplify his words. James Baldwin sought to bear witness to the country that birthed him and hated him, a country that murdered his friends (Evers, King, X) for speaking out against injustice. Despite the pain of those wounds, it is evident that, although Baldwin didn't hesitate to hold our deeply flawed society to account, his words were rooted in an impossible love of this country.

Though they were written decades ago, his words still ring true. Today, Baldwin asks us to look in the mirror and reckon with what we see. He asks us to examine the nature of power and its dependence on human will and desire. He asks us to go to "the unprotected" among us in order to examine our supposed love for justice.

I like to think that if he were to reword his proposal today, he would include the immigrant, the refugee, the trans person, those without bodily autonomy under the law, and those suffering in the thrall of poverty. Baldwin acknowledges all the messiness and failure and genocide and death that has brought us to this point and he asks us to build a new world where we truly value and support each other in all of our differences. It is in that spirit that the piece was born and I hope that same spirit can continue to move each of us toward a more perfect union.

To Awaken The Sleeper sets text from three separate James Baldwin sources: excerpts from his 1972 essay “No Name in the Street,” a speech to the National Press Club Baldwin gave in 1986, and “An Open Letter to My Sister, Miss Angela Davis,” from 1971. Thompson composed the piece for “orator and orchestra,” and the text throughout is spoken rather than sung, a choice that he explained left intact Baldwin’s eloquence as a speaker instead of “robbing the text of its inherent musicality.” Nine orchestras signed on as co-commissioners (including the Kansas City Symphony) and many more have performed it since its premiere.

The piece opens by alternating between Ivesian passages of chaos — with a snare drum and snatches of patriotic tunes — and more somber music. The orator’s first entrance gives the work its name: “So be it! We cannot awaken the sleeper, and God knows we have tried.” The music remains mostly quiet and reflective until the orator’s declaration that “ignorance, allied with power, is the most ferocious enemy justice can have.” This spurs an energetic section driven by a militaristic snare drum. The orator’s reflections on power are accompanied by an ironic theme for fife and snare drum, building to a large climax. Quiet music underpins the orator’s statement that “the excluded begin to realize ... that they can endure everything.” The longest section for orchestra alone follows, painting with notes and rhythms a vivid picture of hope in the “new world” described in the text. A sudden silence and quiet timpani roll bring the orator in for the final time, when he speaks his text over the timpani roll only. The roll continues under an impassioned passage for high strings and a reprise of the music of hope. The work ends on a loud dissonant chord, reflecting the unfinished work required to build a future in which the new world can be realized.

TO AWAKEN THE SLEEPER (2021)

Orator Text

So be it! So be it. We cannot awaken [the] sleeper, and God knows we have tried. We must do what we can do, and fortify and save each other—[...] We know that democracy does not mean the coercion of all into a deadly—and, finally, wicked—mediocrity but the liberty for all to aspire to the best that is in us, or that has ever been.

Well, if one really wishes to know how justice is administered in a country, one does not question the policemen, the lawyers, the judges, or the protected members of the middle class.

One goes to the unprotected—those, precisely, who need the law's protection most!—and listen to their testimony.


Ask any Mexican, any Puerto Rican, any Black man, any poor person—

Ask the wretched how they fare in the halls of justice, and then you will know whether or not this country has any love for justice, or any concept of it. It is certain, in any case, that ignorance, allied with power, is the most ferocious enemy justice can have.

Power, which can have no morality in itself, is yet dependent on human energy, on the wills and desires of human beings.

When power translates itself into tyranny, it means that the principles on which that power depended, and which were its justification, are bankrupt.

When this happens, and it is happening now, power can only be defended by thugs and mediocrities—and seas of blood.



The representatives of the status quo are sickened and divided, and dread looking into the eyes of their young; while the excluded begin to realize, having endured everything, that they can endure everything. They do not know the precise shape of the future, but they know that the future belongs to them. They realize this—paradoxically—by the failure of the moral energy of their oppressors and begin, almost instinctively, to forge a new morality, to create the principles on which a new world will be built.

We are living in a world in which everybody and everything is interdependent. It is not white, this world. It is not Black either. The future of this world depends on everyone in this room. And that future depends on to what extent and by what means we liberate ourselves from a vocabulary which now cannot bear the weight of reality.

THE PLACES WE LEAVE (2021)
Listening notes by AJ Harbison

Originally written for countertenor and orchestra, *The Places We Leave* was performed and recorded by mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato with the Kansas City Symphony. The text is by Tracy K. Smith, Poet Laureate of the United States from 2017 to 2019, and deals with closely looking at oneself (while, paradoxically, being art meant to be shared).

The piece opens with an ominous line in the low strings, with soft interjections by woodwinds. The first section of the poem contrasts the poet's former love of "houses built / high on hills," set to sweeping, romantic music, with how she feels now: "Now, I like to see / how vines and weeds / can ravage walls / and collapse the eaves." These lines are set sparsely with low strings; the rest of the orchestra only joins on the first appearance of the recurring line "of the places we leave."

More energy and activity leads into the second section about someone "who was always going," with subtle hints of jazz and Broadway. The poet's reflection on the contrast of the present is again set to subdued music.

The final section, which begins "I used to think love / was a form of escape," is the only one accompanied by reflective music from the outset. The orchestra plays the melody previously set to "the places we leave" while the voice is silent, before singing the last line, "from the places I've left." This final time, the melody is changed on the last word to mirror the change from "leave" to "left." Ominous music from the brass melts into a brief coda for strings and woodwinds, and the work ends with a muffled drum roll and a quiet pizzicato note for the cellos and basses.

THE PLACES WE LEAVE (2021)

Poem by Tracy K. Smith

*I used to love houses built
high on hills, windows
ice-white in daylight.*

*Down below, from the hiss
and flow of passing roads,
I thought a toehold up there*

*on spindly stilts would be
heavenly. Now, I like to see
how vines and weeds*

*can ravage walls
and collapse the eaves
of the places we leave.*

*

*I loved someone once
who was always going.
I fought to keep up—*

*walking, talking,
everything about him
left me breathless.*

*I thought if I could
leave something behind—
leave my fears, my very self*

*behind—I could keep him.
How small they always were,
or how quickly they shrink,*

the places we leave.

*

*I used to think love
was a form of escape.
A race away from*

*the opposite of love,
which is fear, perhaps,
or boredom. I'd come*

*to life after a drink,
a kiss, a drive hitting
every green light.*

*I thought love meant
All of me had to be shed.
Now I go along in reverse,*

*collecting myself bit by bit
from the places I've left.*

BREATHE/BURN: AN ELEGY (2020)

Listening notes by AJ Harbison

Thompson has described this piece for solo cello and orchestra as “an exploration of the liminal space between grief and rage in response to the tragedies afflicting the Black community in 2020,” specifically the police killing of Breonna Taylor.

The cello begins with a mournful soliloquy, with interspersed double-stops that are sometimes consonant and sometimes dissonant. When the orchestra enters, its primary motif is the simple alternation of two notes, like a slow trill, which becomes a recurring theme throughout the work. Sections of agitated music are framed by elegiac passages with a cinematic sweep.

After the climax, the music fades to nothing, and the cello reenters quietly, almost hesitatingly, leading into a final bittersweet song with the orchestra.

The ending alternates slowly between a dissonant chord in the low register and two dissonant notes in the high register, with the cello sustaining its final note throughout, leaving the elegy unresolved.





THE CAGED BIRD SINGS FOR FREEDOM (2016)

Listening notes by AJ Harbison

Illustrating Thompson's mastery of musical word painting, this work takes as its text Maya Angelou's poem "Caged Bird." The poem contrasts a free bird with one in a cage, and Thompson heightens the contrast through differences in musical material, instrumentation and texture.

The first verse, describing the free bird leaping, floating and claiming the sky, is set in major, with a soaring melodic line, flowing music for the chorus' inner voices and sweeping chords and arpeggios in the piano.

The second verse, describing the caged bird's clipped wings and tied feet, is set in minor and musically subdued until the line "So she opens her throat to sing." At this point the solo clarinet enters, symbolizing the bird's song with a simple, plaintive melody and birdlike trills.

The second free bird verse is faster, with a driving rhythmic accompaniment and coming to a climax on the text "And names the sky his own." The contrasting text for the caged bird is set in minor again, for the chorus and clarinet alone without the piano. Another climax is reached on the bird's "nightmare scream"; the clarinet dies away in a descending series of trills. The chorus quietly takes up the clarinet's last note, while a vocal soloist sings the caged bird's refrain set to the clarinet's plaintive melody for the first time. The clarinet, piano and full chorus take up the refrain and build to a threefold repetition of "for freedom."

The clarinet's and piano's final notes are the first notes of the free bird's theme from the beginning of the piece, bringing the music full circle and powerfully portraying the caged bird's struggle and ultimate hope.

THE CAGED BIRD SINGS FOR FREEDOM (2016)

Poem by Maya Angelou, "Caged Bird" from "Shaker, Why Don't You Sing"

*A free bird leaps
on the back of the wind
and floats downstream
till the current ends
and dips his wing
in the orange sun rays
and dares to claim the sky.*

*But a bird that stalks
down his narrow cage
can seldom see through
his bars of rage
his wings are clipped and
his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.*

*The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.*

*The free bird thinks of another breeze
and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn bright lawn
and he names the sky his own*

*But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams
his shadow shouts on a nightmare scream
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.*

*The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.*

JOEL THOMPSON | COMPOSER

Joel Thompson is a composer, conductor, pianist and educator whose works aim to prioritize community and facilitate connection, while creating music that is “alive and inquisitive, in constant dialogue” (*Arts ATL*) and “one of the most attractive things one has heard” (*New York Classical Review*). His work is both powerful and incisive in centering the concerns and desires of the voiceless and historically marginalized. Thompson currently serves as Houston Grand Opera’s first-ever full-time Composer-in-Residence, holding a five-year residency that commenced in 2022.

Thompson’s career honors include the 2023 Sphinx Medal of Excellence; a 2018 American Prize for his well-known choral work, *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed*; and the 2017 Hermitage Prize — an honor bestowed by the Hermitage Artist Retreat. Thompson draws inspiration from artists who transcend labels and have a clear sense of identity, such as Nina Simone, Esperanza Spalding and Cécile McLorin Salvant.

June 2025 marked the world premiere of Thompson’s *A Voice Within*, a song cycle for soprano, baritone and piano, featuring soprano Nicole Heaston, baritone Justin Austin and pianist Donald Lee III, as part of his residency with Houston Grand Opera. In July, Thompson’s *String Quartet* received its world premiere at the Ravinia Steans Institute. January 2026 marks the world premiere of Thompson’s orchestration of *African Queens*, performed by Karen Slack with the Naples Philharmonic, with subsequent performances to be announced. In March 2026, the New York Philharmonic premiered a new orchestral arrangement of Rzewski’s *The People United Will Never Be Defeated!*, featuring variations orchestrated by composers including Thompson.

Recent commissions include an expanded orchestration of *The Snowy Day*, a work originally composed by Thompson in 2020 based on Ezra Jack Keats’ children’s book of the same name. A Caldecott Medal winner, the book is celebrated as one of the

first mainstream children's books to prominently feature a Black protagonist. Thompson's recent commissions also include the January 2025 world premiere of Thompson's *On Mars* for mezzo-soprano, viola and piano which took place at Atlanta's Spivey Hall with mezzo-soprano Jamie Barton, violist Matthew Lipman and pianist Tamar Sanakidze. Performances of the work continued on a world premiere tour featuring dates at Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Celebrity Series of Boston and the Kennedy Center.

Additionally, Thompson's work, *Dove Songs*, written for and performed by soprano Renée Richardson, premiered at Houston Grand Opera in March 2024. During the same month, Jaap van Zweden and the New York Philharmonic performed the world premiere of *To See the Sky*, co-commissioned from Thompson by the American Composers Forum, Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Aspen Music Festival and Bravo! Vail Music Festival. Thompson's work *Fire and Blue Sky*, an LA Opera commission featuring a libretto by Imani Tolliver, was premiered by LA Opera in June 2024 under the baton of Resident Conductor Lina González-Granados.

Thompson holds a B.A. in Music and M.M. in Choral Conducting, both from Emory University, and is currently studying with Aaron Jay Kernis, Christopher Theofanidis, Han Lash, Martin Bresnick and David Lang at the Yale School of Music for his D.M.A. in Composition.



MICHAEL STERN | MUSIC DIRECTOR



Michael Stern has long been devoted to building highly acclaimed orchestras, bringing impeccable musicianship and creative programming, and leading collaborative and sustainable cultures that often include a vision of music as service to the community. Stern first conducted the Kansas City Symphony in 2003. Appointed Music Director in 2005, he subsequently led the orchestra through an unparalleled period of excellence and transformation. During his acclaimed tenure over almost two decades, the KC Symphony was heralded for artistic achievement, organizational development, and extraordinary audience growth.

Praised for his original programming, he introduced a wide range of repertoire including many commissioned new works. The orchestra's partnership with GRAMMY® Award-winning Reference Recordings® yielded a substantial catalogue of lauded recordings. This release is his valedictory album as Music Director, bringing together the orchestra with the collective talents of composer Joel Thompson, Dr. Eugene Rogers and the Exigence Choir, Raymond Santos, Joyce DiDonato, and Yo-Yo Ma.

Named Music Director Laureate of the Kansas City Symphony in 2024, Stern currently serves as Music Director of both the National Repertory Orchestra and Orchestra Lumos, Artistic Director and Conductor of the New York String Orchestra String Seminar, and an Artistic Advisor for the Iris Collective. Previously, Stern was Founding Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of Iris Orchestra, Artistic Advisor at the Edmonton Symphony Orchestra, Principal Conductor of the Saarbruecken Radio Symphony in Germany, and Principal Guest Conductor at both the Orchestre National de Lyon and Orchestre National de Lille in France. His active guest conducting calendar has taken him to major orchestras in America, Europe, Israel, and the Far East.

Stern is passionate about working with young musicians in music-making while encouraging their embrace of “service” in their evolution as artists and advocates. At the invitation of Yo-Yo Ma, he was Music Director of Youth Music Culture Guangdong, where he and Ma worked with students and young professionals in partnership with the Guangzhou Symphony Orchestra. He has also worked with students at the National Orchestral Institute, Music Academy of the West, and the Aspen Music Festival and School, including at American Academy of Conducting at Aspen.

Stern received his music degree from the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, where his primary teacher was the noted conductor and scholar Max Rudolf. He also worked with Charles Bruck at the Monteux School and Music Festival. Stern is a graduate of Harvard University, where he earned a degree in American history. He resides in Connecticut with his two daughters.

JOYCE DIDONATO | MEZZO-SOPRANO



Winner of multiple GRAMMY Awards® and an Olivier Award, Joyce DiDonato entrances audiences across the globe in recitals, appearances with major orchestras and on the operatic stage. Her 2025–26 season includes season-opening concerts for both the Minnesota Orchestra and Montreal’s Orchestre Métropolitain, as well as with the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra in a Kevin Puts world premiere, *House of Tomorrow*.

Joyce returned to Musikkollegium Winterthur for performances of Rachel Portman’s *Another Eve* and collaborated with Radio France for Mahler’s *Rückert-Lieder* in Paris and Dijon. She reunites with pianist Craig Terry for recitals at Théâtre de Genève and Suntory Hall Tokyo. Joyce embarked on her first major

tour of Australasia with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra, Tasmania Symphony Orchestra, and New Zealand Symphony Orchestra. In the United States, she made her Lincoln Center Theater stage debut as The Mother in *Amahl and the Night Visitors* and makes her much-anticipated role debut at the Metropolitan Opera in Kaija Saariaho’s *Innocence*. Concert appearances include Mahler’s Symphony No. 2 with Yannick Nézet-Séguin and the Philadelphia Orchestra, and Mahler’s Symphony No. 3 with Nézet-Séguin and the Berlin Philharmoniker. As Joyce’s latest project, EDEN, completed a ground-breaking 3 years of global touring, the anticipation is only building for her next album release and touring project. A newly commissioned song cycle written by Kevin Puts for Joyce and the GRAMMY Award-winning string trio, *TimeForThree*, featuring the poetry of Emily Dickinson, had its world premiere at Bregenzer Festspiele in August 2025. Further performances are planned across the USA including Kansas City, Chicago, and New York’s Carnegie Hall.

YO-YO MA | CELLO

Yo-Yo Ma's multi-faceted career is testament to his belief in culture's power to generate trust and understanding. Whether performing new or familiar works for cello, bringing communities together to explore culture's role in society, or engaging unexpected musical forms, Yo-Yo strives to foster connections that stimulate the imagination and reinforce our humanity. Most recently, Yo-Yo began *Our Common Nature*, a cultural journey to celebrate the ways that nature can reunite us in pursuit of a shared future. *Our Common Nature* follows the Bach Project, a 36-community, six-continent tour of J. S. Bach's cello suites paired with local cultural programming. Both endeavors reflect Yo-Yo's lifelong commitment to stretching the boundaries of genre and tradition to understand how music helps us to imagine and build a stronger society.



Yo-Yo Ma was born in 1955 to Chinese parents living in Paris, where he began studying the cello with his father at age four. When he was seven, he moved with his family to New York City, where he continued his cello studies before pursuing a liberal arts education. Yo-Yo has recorded more than 120 albums, is the winner of 20 GRAMMY Awards®, and has performed for nine American presidents, most recently on the occasion of President Biden's inauguration. He has received numerous awards, including the National Medal of the Arts, the Presidential Medal of Freedom, and the Birgit Nilsson Prize. He has been a UN Messenger of Peace since 2006, and was recognized as one of *TIME* magazine's 100 Most Influential People of 2020.

RAYMOND SANTOS | CLARINET



Raymond Santos has served as principal clarinet of the Kansas City Symphony since September of 2008. Previously, he was a clarinet fellow with the New World Symphony in Miami Beach, Florida. Santos has played as guest principal clarinet for the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and the Oregon Symphony.

He received multiple fellowships to the Boston Symphony Orchestra's Tanglewood Music Center, where he was awarded the Gino B. Cioffi Memorial Prize for exceptional musical achievement.

He also performed at the Music Academy of the West in Santa Barbara and the National Orchestral Institute in Washington, D.C. In addition to his orchestral activities, he has played chamber music throughout the United States, Europe, and China.

Originally from West Chester, Ohio, Santos received his Bachelor of Music degree at the University of Southern California, under the tutelage of revered pedagogue Yehuda Gilad. In high school, he studied with Richard Hawley, former principal clarinet of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra. Other principal teachers have included Monica Kaenzig and Sandra Snyder.

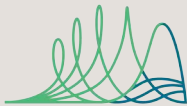
Santos is a Buffet Crampon USA performing artist and plays exclusively on Buffet Crampon clarinets.



In only its 43rd season, the Kansas City Symphony has already become one of America's most vibrant major orchestras and has gained national and international recognition. With the 2024/25 season, the Symphony welcomed conductor and composer Matthias Pintscher as its new music director. Pintscher regularly conducts many of the world's best orchestras and opera companies and ranks as one of the world's foremost composers of orchestral music. Prior to Pintscher's appointment Michael Stern served as the Symphony's music director from 2005 to 2024. His 19-year tenure was marked by artistic ascent, critical acclaim and national recognition for the orchestra. Stern was named the Symphony's Music Director Laureate in June 2024.

Continually creating live music experiences in Helzberg Hall, located in the prestigious Kauffman Center for the Performing Arts, the Symphony serves Kansas City's metro population of more than 2.2 million people as well as welcoming visitors from around the globe. The Symphony's 80 full-time musicians from around the world bring a diverse and dynamic range of musical experiences to our audiences in both orchestral and chamber music formats each season. In addition to concerts in Helzberg Hall, Symphony musicians perform throughout the region on our portable stage, the Mobile Music Box. The Symphony also serves as the orchestra for the Kansas City Ballet and the Lyric Opera of Kansas City, adding to the rich cultural experiences that these organizations offer to the community.

Top international soloists perform with the Kansas City Symphony every season, including brilliant classical musicians, popular singer/songwriters, rock bands and other creative performers. The Symphony also performs live soundtracks for a variety of fan-favorite films, with the movie projected on a giant screen above the stage.



KANSAS CITY SYMPHONY

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Gibbs[†]

Kristin Velicer^{†o}

Minhye Helena

Choi^{§o}

Nancy Beckmann²

Arianna Brusubardis

Mary Garcia Grant

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Rena Ishii

Paul Kim

Stephanie Larsen

Jinyou Lee

Sodam Lim

Francesca Manheim²

Sarah Peters²

James Zabawa-

Martinez

Zsolt Eder²

Nathan Humphrey³

Waka Kim³

Destiny Mermagen²

Ilkhom Muhiddinov

VIOLA

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Duncan Steele[†]

Jessica Nance[§]

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Marylou and John

Dodds Turner Chair

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Kayla Burggraf

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PICCOLO

Kayla Burggraf

Liz Teplitsky⁴

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Helzberg Chair*

Alison Chung‡

Matthew Lengas

Wesley Boehm²

ENGLISH HORN

Matthew Lengas

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Raymond Santos†
Bill and Peggy Lyons Chair

Silvio Guitian‡

Trevor Stewart‡º

John Klinghammer

Alex Dergal

E-FLAT CLARINET

Silvio Guitian

Trevor Stewart

BASS CLARINET

John Klinghammer

BASSOON

Ann Bilderback†
*Barton P. and Mary D.
Cohen Chair*

Thomas DeWitt‡

Maxwell Pipinich

CONTRABASSOON

Thomas DeWitt

HORN

Albert Suarez²†
David Sullivan‡º
*Landon and Sarah
Rowland Chair*

Elizabeth Gray‡º

David Gamble

Stephen Multer‡~

Benjamin Bacni

Jake Rensink²

TRUMPET

Julian Kaplan†
*James B. and Annabel
Nutter Chair*

Steven Franklin²‡

George Goad‡º

Shea Kelsay

Grant Smiley²

TROMBONE

Evelyn Carlson†
Roger Oyster²†

Porter Wyatt
Henderson‡

Jahleel Smith

Adam Rainey²

Michael Davidson²

BASS TROMBONE

Jahleel Smith
Adam Rainey²

TUBA

Joe LeFevre†
Frank Byrne Chair

TIMPANI

Timothy Jepson†
*Michael and Susan
Newburger Chair*

Kevin Clarke²

Micah Harrow¹

PERCUSSION

Josh Jones²†

David Yoon‡º

Justin Ochoa‡
*Adrian and Nancy Kay
Hertog Family Chair*

Toby Grace

Madison Shake⁴

HARP

Katherine Siochi²†
Katie Ventura‡º

LIBRARIAN

Elena Lence Talley†
Fabrice Curtis‡

DAVID T. BEALS III ASSOCIATE CONDUCTOR

Jason Seber

† *Principal*

‡ *Associate Principal*

§ *Assistant Principal*

~ *Emeritus*

º *Acting*

1 *Seven Last Words*

2 *To Awaken the Sleeper*

3 *The Places We Leave*

4 *breathe/burn*

EXIGENCE VOCAL ENSEMBLE

DR. EUGENE ROGERS | CHORAL DIRECTOR

EXIGENCE Vocal Ensemble, the premier vocal group of the Sphinx Organization, is dedicated to transforming lives through powerful performances that showcase the artistry within our communities. Led by founding conductor Dr. Eugene Rogers, a visionary artist and educator, EXIGENCE provides a platform for soloists and composers of color, intending to inspire, challenge, and engage audiences worldwide through dynamic choral music. EXIGENCE's performances have resonated across a variety of prestigious stages and the group has collaborated with prominent orchestras such as the National Symphony Orchestra, Kansas City Symphony, and Sphinx Symphony Orchestra, along with the Eugene Concert Choir and Orchestra. The group has also graced major choral gatherings, including performances at the North Carolina and Southern Region American Choral Directors Association (ACDA) conferences and the National Chorus America Conference.

SOPRANO 1

Taylor Mackenzie
Adams
Jackie Cano
Rabihah Davis Dunn
Amber Merritt

ALTO 1

Rebecca Marie
Castillo
Lori Celeste Hicks
Lianna Wimberly
Williams

TENOR 1

Tyrese Byrd
David Miranda
Demetrious Sampson
Matthew Valverde†

BASS 1

Branden Hood
Stephen Lancaster
Marques Ruff
Andrew Smith

SOPRANO 2

Lenora Green-Turner
Nicole Joseph†
Kaci Timmons
Ivette Flores

ALTO 2

Melissa Connor
Betzabé Juárez
Monique
Holmes-Spells†
Taylor Russell

TENOR 2

LaVonté L. Heard
Ariel Merivil
Julio César
Morales Pineda
Lonnie Reed

BASS 2

Lucas DeJesus
Joshua Thomas
Joel Thompson†

PIANO

Ruben Reyes

† *Section Leader*

PRODUCTION CREDITS

REFERENCE RECORDINGS FR-768

Recorded: January 28, 2022 – June 6, 2024 at Helzberg Hall,
Kauffmann Center for the Performing Arts, Kansas City, Missouri

Producer: Christian Amonson

Additional / Co-Producers: Eugene Rogers (*Seven Last Words, The Caged Bird*),
Tiffany Lu (*Seven Last Words*),
Jason Seber (*To Awaken the Sleeper*)

Recording Engineers: Christian Amonson, Sammie Lee,
Parker Olsen (*To Awaken the Sleeper*),
Ben Schwartz (*To Awaken the Sleeper* narration)

Editing, Mixing: Christian Amonson

Mastering: Jett Galindo

Art Director: JoAnn Nunes

Cover Photos: Tuan H. Bui (front), Rachel Summer Cheong (back)

Technical Details: DDD Recording. Recorded at 24-bit, 96kHz.
Main channels: Grace Design pres, Prism Sound conversion;
Other channels: Digital Audio Denmark pres and conversion

SPECIAL THANKS

It took an extraordinary effort by a dedicated team of people to make this recording project a reality. The Kansas Symphony is grateful to all of the artists for their generosity and support, and to all behind the scenes for their commitment:

Christian Amonson, Danny Beckley, Kate Breyspraak, Joyce DiDonato, André Dowell, Yo-Yo Ma, Marcia Martin, Ben Motter, Dr. Eugene Rogers, John Roloff, Raymond Santos, Jason Seber, Michael Stern, Elena Lence Talley, Justin White — and of course, Joel Thompson.

TO AWAKEN THE SLEEPER

WORKS OF JOEL THOMPSON

SEVEN LAST WORDS OF THE UNARMED (2015)

- 1 I. Kenneth Chamberlain, Sr., 68
"Officers, why do you have your guns out?" 2:02
- 2 II. Trayvon Martin, 17
"What are you following me for?" 1:22
- 3 III. Amadou Diallo, 23
"Mom, I'm going to college." 3:14
- 4 IV. Michael Brown, Jr., 18
"I don't have a gun! Stop shooting!" 0:59
- 5 V. Oscar Grant III, 22
"You shot me! You shot me." 1:16
- 6 VI. John Crawford III, 22
"It's not real." 2:04
- 7 VII. Eric Garner, 43
"I can't breathe." 3:32

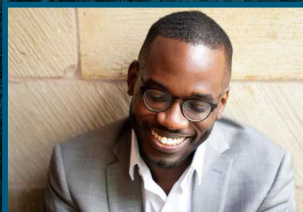
8 **TO AWAKEN THE SLEEPER** (2021) 18:56

9 **THE PLACES WE LEAVE** (2021) 11:40

10 **BREATHE/BURN: AN ELEGY** (2020) 7:47

11 **THE CAGED BIRD SINGS FOR FREEDOM** (2016) 7:18

TOTAL TIME: 60:10



JOEL THOMPSON, COMPOSER, VOICE



KANSAS CITY
SYMPHONY

MICHAEL STERN, MUSIC DIRECTOR LAUREATE

EXIGENCE VOCAL ENSEMBLE
DR. EUGENE ROGERS, DIRECTOR

JOYCE DIDONATO, MEZZO-SOPRANO
RAYMOND SANTOS, CLARINET
YO-YO MA, CELLO

fresh!
R
REFERENCE
RECORDINGS.