

resilience and jubilation

JUNETEENTH CELEBRATION

FREE AT LAST?

**THE EVOLUTION OF
THE AMERICAN SPIRITUAL**

RITZ
CHAMBER
-PLAYERS-



Presented by VyStar Credit Union

In association with Jacksonville University

JUNE 20, 2026 | 7:30 PM

Dear Friends,

Welcome to Free at Last? The Evolution of the American Spiritual.

As we gather during this Juneteenth season, we honor the African American Spiritual—the foundation of Black musical expression and one of our nation's most enduring artistic treasures. Born in bondage, these songs carried faith, resilience, hope, and the dream of freedom across generations.

We are privileged to share this journey with Dr. Johnnetta B. Cole, narrator; Artina McCain, piano; Robert Sims, baritone; and sopranos Alison Buchanan and Ann Marie McPhail.

This program embodies the spirit of our 24th Season, Resilience & Jubilation. As we look ahead to our landmark 25th Anniversary Season, your support remains essential to our mission of championing Black classical artistry, inspiring future generations, and enriching the cultural life of our community.

May these timeless songs remind us that joy and resistance have always traveled together.

With gratitude,



Terrance L. Patterson

Founder, Executive and Artistic Director
The Ritz Chamber Players



OUR MISSION

To showcase diversity by spotlighting the extraordinary artistry of African American musicians, past and present. RCP seeks to transcend cultural boundaries and amplify the rich mosaic of our society through the universal language of music. Above all, we want to share the transformative power of classical music and ensure it is accessible to everyone.

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ABOUT THE RITZ CHAMBER PLAYERS

THE RITZ CHAMBER PLAYERS (RCP), is hailed by *The Baltimore Sun* as “one of the most interesting and dynamic ensembles to emerge in recent years.” Boasting some of the world’s preeminent musicians spanning the African diaspora, it brings a fresh, new energy to the classical music genre. Its members perform with prestigious organizations such as the New York Philharmonic, Boston Symphony, Chicago Symphony, Pittsburgh Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra and the London Symphony.

Founded in 2002 by clarinetist and Artistic Director Terrance L. Patterson, RCP presents a landmark series at the Terry Concert Hall at Jacksonville University in Jacksonville, Florida, which combines exceptional artistry on stage with inspiring educational programs in schools and throughout the community. Through its concert series in Jacksonville and performances across the United States, RCP continues to build the participation of multicultural audiences that reflect our diverse society.

Called “a remarkable ensemble,” the group’s flexible make-up allows for many astonishing combinations of virtuoso players, leading to “riveting” performances of the standard classical music repertoire. RCP are also unique in their dedication to showcase the works of African-American composers with exceedingly artistic and informed interpretations.

RCP made its highly successful debut concert at New York’s Weill Recital Hall in Carnegie Hall to a standing-room-only crowd, with critics proclaiming the group’s performance “extraordinary” and “vital and fresh.” Most recently, the ensemble’s performances have been enthusiastically received in Miami, Atlanta, Baltimore, Los Angeles, Raleigh, the British Virgin Islands, Chicago, and Seattle, and in several New York venues, including Rockefeller University and Lincoln Center.

RCP, one of the country’s most significant chamber ensembles, celebrated its international radio debut on the BBC World Service and WNYC New York with a concert broadcast to more than 30 countries, and its first national television appearance on the 37th Annual NAACP Image Awards. RCP have been guests of the highly-praised National Public Radio shows *Performance Today* and the *Tavis Smiley Show* and are regular guests of the Madison and Amelia Island Chamber Music Festivals.

CONCERT PROGRAM

JUNETEENTH CELEBRATION FREE AT LAST?

THE EVOLUTION OF THE AMERICAN SPIRITUAL

OPENING PRELUDE: ANCESTRAL ROOTS

African Chant (Traditional, Mbuti People)

Alison Buchanan, Ann Marie McPhail, Robert Sims, Ryan Sinclair

Narration — Dr. Cole

I. FIELD SONGS — THE SOUND OF SURVIVAL

The raw cry of endurance. The earliest sound of a people transforming permitted voice into a language of survival.

Narration — Dr. Cole

Swing Low, Sweet Chariot (arr. Burleigh)

Robert Sims, Baritone

Po' Mourner's Got a Home at Last (arr. Burleigh)

Ann Marie McPhail, Soprano

No Ways Tired (arr. Hairston)

Alison Buchanan, Soprano

II. SORROW SONGS — LAMENT, MEMORY, AND THE CRY FOR MERCY

Grief given voice. Lament as testimony—the absolute refusal to be erased.

Narration — Dr. Cole

Lord, How Come Me Here? (Traditional Spiritual)

Robert Sims, Baritone

Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen (arr. Johnson)

Alison Buchanan, Soprano

There Is a Balm in Gilead (arr. Burleigh)

Alison Buchanan and Ann Marie McPhail, Sopranos

Guide My Feet (arr. Hairston)

Ann Marie McPhail, Soprano

INTERMISSION

III. CODED SONGS & SONGS OF RESISTANCE – RESISTANCE IN DISGUISE

The Spiritual as map, signal, and strategy—faith turned into action, liberation hidden in plain sight.

Narration — Dr. Cole

Follow the Drinking Gourd (Traditional Spiritual)

Ann Marie McPhail, Soprano

Deep River (arr. Williams)

Alison Buchanan, Soprano

Go Down, Moses / Wade in the Water (arr. Carter)

Robert Sims, Baritone and Ryan Sinclair, African Drums

Plenty Good Room (arr. Hairston)

Alison Buchanan and Robert Sims

IV. FREEDOM SONGS – JUBILEE, TRIUMPH, AND THE ONGOING JOURNEY

Deliverance and arrival. The full voice of a people—and the recognition that the work continues.

Narration — Dr. Cole

Oh, Freedom / Free at Last (Medley of Traditional Spirituals)

Alison Buchanan, Ann Marie McPhail, and Robert Sims

Ride On, King Jesus (arr. Hall Johnson)

Alison Buchanan, Soprano

Come Down, Angels (arr. Moore)

Ann Marie McPhail, Soprano

Is There Anybody Here Who Loves My Jesus (arr. Carter)

Robert Sims, Baritone

EPILOGUE – AND STILL WE SING

The arc turns toward the present: the Spiritual as living testimony, freedom as ongoing work.

Narration — Dr. Cole

He's Got the Whole World in His Hands (arr. Bonds)

Alison Buchanan, Ann Marie McPhail, Robert Sims and Artina McCain

Amen

*Alison Buchanan, Ann Marie McPhail, Robert Sims, Artina McCain
and Ryan Sinclair*

MEET THE RITZ CHAMBER PLAYERS

DR. JOHNNETTA BETSCH COLE



Dr. Johnnetta Betsch Cole is one of America's most distinguished anthropologists, educators, and cultural leaders – a scholar whose six-decade career has reshaped higher education, museum stewardship, and the national conversation on race, gender, and justice.

Born in Jacksonville, Florida, in 1936, Dr. Cole came of age in the era of Jim Crow segregation, in a family long devoted to the advancement of Black life and culture; her family was connected to the Afro-American Life Insurance Company, the pioneering Black-owned firm founded in Jacksonville. Music and art ran deep in the family: her sister was MaVynee Betsch – the celebrated soprano who studied at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music and sang opera across Europe before returning home to become the beloved environmentalist known as “The Beach Lady” of American Beach. Dr. Cole herself entered Fisk University at fifteen before following her sister to Oberlin College, where she earned her degree in sociology, and went on to earn her master's and doctorate in anthropology from Northwestern University, with a focus on African studies.

In 1987, Dr. Cole made history as the first African American woman

to serve as president of Spelman College, the nation's preeminent college for Black women, leading the institution through a decade of remarkable growth from 1987 to 1997 – including a landmark capital campaign that raised more than \$113 million. She later served as president of Bennett College for Women from 2002 to 2007, making her the only person to have led both of the nation's historically Black colleges for women. Her academic career also included faculty appointments at the University of California, Los Angeles; Washington State University, where she co-founded the Black studies program; the University of Massachusetts Amherst; Hunter College; and Emory University, where she was Presidential Distinguished Professor.

From 2009 to 2017, Dr. Cole served as Director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art, the only national museum devoted to the arts of Africa, and now holds the title of Director Emerita. From 2018 to 2022, she served as National Chair and the seventh President of the National Council of Negro Women, the historic advocacy organization founded by Mary McLeod Bethune. A prolific author whose books include *Conversations: Straight Talk with America's Sister President* and *Gender Talk*, she has been a lifelong advocate for civil and human rights, addressing racial, gender, and economic inequality across the pan-African world.

Her many honors include the 2021 National Humanities Medal, presented by President Biden at the White House, recognizing pioneering work that has deepened the nation's understanding of Black culture and the necessity of racial inclusion. The recipient of dozens of honorary degrees and a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Dr. Cole remains an inveterate teacher, writer, and champion of the belief that, in her own words, "until you've been in another's place, you don't fully know your own."



ARTINA MCCAIN - PIANO



Hailed by the *New York Times* as a “virtuoso pianist,” Artina McCain, has built a formidable career as a multi-faceted creative. As a recitalist, her credits include performances at Wigmore Hall and Barbican Centre in London, Walt Disney Concert Hall, Weill Hall at Carnegie in New York City, and more. Other highlights include guest appearances with the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, Memphis Symphony Orchestra, and others.

Dedicated to presenting works of unsung voices, she is a recording artist and publishing advocate. Recordings including collaborative projects: *I, Too* (Naxos) focused on African American Spirituals and Art Songs and multiple recordings with husband and duo partner, Martin McCain. She arranged *Twenty-Four Traditional African American Folk Songs* published by Hal Leonard for intermediate pianists. In 2026, Frances Clark Center will publish her edition of virtuosic piano works by Grammy-Award winning composer, Joseph Joubert.

A multi-faceted artist, McCain has been featured in a mirage of spaces. Most recently, she performed as part of *El Dorado Ballroom*, a multidisciplinary production curated by Solange Knowles. From mistress of ceremony at the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition to guest artist at the annual Gates Foundation Goalkeepers event at Jazz at Lincoln Center. Television appearances include the award-winning PBS documentary series *Roadtrip Nation*: 9

Degree of Impact in an episode exploring the real-world impact of professionals with doctoral degrees in and outside of academia. Other television appearances include features on C-SPAN for the MLK 50 Commemoration.

After not performing for 6 years while battling a performance injury, she enjoys a prolific concert career with more than 10 years of full injury recovery. She uses her recovery to serve as an advocate of musicians' wellness—curating articles, lectures, and forums to educate teachers and students. Most recently, the BBC featured her on the podcast *Sideways*, telling her miraculous story of injury to recovery. McCain has written and presented on wellness and other topics in publications and at multiple universities and national conferences.

McCain graduated from Southern Methodist University (BM), Cleveland Institute of Music (MM) and the University of Texas at Austin (DMA). An avid presenter of chamber music, she is Artistic Curator at PRIZM ensemble. As an educator, she is Associate Professor of Piano and Coordinator of the Keyboard Area at the University of Memphis and Co-Founder/Director of the Memphis International Piano Festival and Competition.

In her spare time, Artina enjoys boutique shopping, traveling internationally, and is an enthusiastic foodie and tea aficionado.

ALISON BUCHANAN - SOPRANO



Alison Buchanan became the only black female Artistic director of a European opera company after the death of its founder, Lloyd Newton in 2017. Her tenure has seen Pegasus attain National Portfolio status, fostering partnerships with esteemed arts organizations like Glyndebourne Opera, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, and Royal Central School of Drama. Buchanan's advocacy extends beyond organizational growth to championing compositions by black and Southern Asian artists, mentoring, and creating opportunities for diverse artists, aligning with Pegasus's mission of fostering "Harmony in Diversity." Notably, Buchanan curated the groundbreaking "MAMI WATA" program for the Royal Opera House in 2021, celebrating vocal works by black and Middle Eastern women composers through a multimedia experience featuring an all-female diverse cast and instrumentalists.

As an international soprano, Buchanan has been praised for her musical versatility, a graduate of the Guildhall School in London and the Curtis Institute in Philadelphia the critically acclaimed singer completed an 'Adler' young artist program with San Francisco Opera, making her debut as Mimi (La Boheme). Buchanan has worked with Sir. Colin Davis, Andre Previn, Sir. Simon Rattle, Marin Alsop, David Robinson, Jane Glover and Donald Runnicles to name but a few with orchestras which include the London Symphony, Baltimore Symphony, Royal Philharmonic, Sydney Symphony, Boston Symphony, BBC Symphony, the Philadelphia Orchestra and the Bayerischer Rundfunk.

Buchanan is the winner of several competitions including the Pavarotti, Maggie Teyte, Washington International and the Kathleen Ferrier competitions. Recordings include Peter Grimes with the London Symphony conducted by Sir Colin Davis and the songs of George Walker accompanied by the composer. A recent highlight found Buchanan being featured on the hit Netflix show "Queen Charlotte: A Bridgerton Story."



ANN MARIE MCPHAIL - SOPRANO



Ann Marie McPhail, a seasoned performer and Atlanta native, has established herself as a versatile lyric soprano. She received a BM in Music Education from Clark Atlanta University, a MM in Voice Performance from Georgia State University and is pursuing a DMA in Voice Performance at The University of Southern Mississippi.

Ms. McPhail made her career debut as the Countess with the Houston Ebony Opera, in Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro* and portrayed the "Diva Goddess" in the 1996 Centennial Olympic Games, Closing Ceremonies. For Tyler Perry's *For Colored Girls*, she is seen onstage singing at the opera. She has also portrayed Strawberry Woman in Gershwin's, *Porgy and Bess* while touring with the Atlanta Opera, for which she received honorable mention in *Opera News*.

In 2019, under the baton of Maestro Charles Dickerson, she was soprano soloist in the premiere of Bill Banfield's *Shine Symphony* at the NANM 100th Convention in Chicago, Illinois. In 2020 she was guest soloist for the Atlanta Ballet's premiere of "Sunrise Divine" by renowned choreographer Dwight Rhoden and composer Dr. Kevin Johnson of the Spelman College Glee Club. She is a past winner of the Madame Rose, American Traditions and the Pro-Mozart Society of Atlanta Competition where she received stipend and entry to the Mozarteum International Summer Academy in Vienna, Austria in 2022.

Ms. McPhail has served as lecturer and artist affiliate at Clark Atlanta University, Spelman College, Agnes Scott College, Talladega College and Grambling State University. She has sung with the San Francisco Opera, Paris Comique Opera, Atlanta Opera, Houston Ebony Opera, Opera Ebony, Macon Symphony Orchestra, Atlanta Chamber Players and the Savannah Philharmonic Orchestra. She is currently a staff singer at St. John's Episcopal Church in Laurel, Mississippi, and a board member of the Atlanta Chamber Players.

ROBERT SIMS - LYRIC BARITONE



Robert Sims, Gold Medal winner of the American Traditions Competition, has been hailed by critics for his rich tone, energetic performances, and convincing stage presence.

This season Robert appeared in his second telecast with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. He returned to the Oakland Symphony Orchestra singing Brahms' German Requiem, as well as solo appearances with the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra and at Symphony Center in Chicago. Robert made his debut with Chicago Opera Theater in the world premiere of Dan Shore's Freedom Ride and produced Masters of the Spiritual at New York's Lincoln Center.

He has appeared as the leading baritone in The James Baldwin Chronicles with Renee Baker and the Chicago Modern Orchestra

Project, and as Pangloss in Bernstein's *Candide* with the Oakland Symphony. Robert has toured Germany, Austria and Switzerland as the featured soloist with Roland Carter and the inSpirit Male Chorus performing spirituals of Noah Ryder, Roland Carter and Roland Hayes.

Since his solo debut at Carnegie Hall in 2005 (featuring a special appearance by the late Odetta), Sims has made several appearances at that venue performing the spirituals of Jacqueline B. Hairston, and most notably as a featured soloist in the 2009 series, *Honor! A Celebration of the African American Cultural Legacy* (at the invitation of Jessye Norman). His most recent Carnegie performance was a recital honoring the late Sylvia Olden Lee.

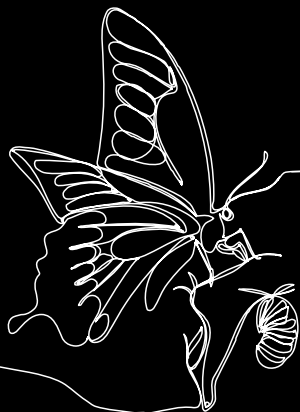
Sims has been presented in the Bay Area numerous times by Four Seasons Concerts founded by the late Dr. W. Hazaiah Williams. He sang the world premiere of Alice Walker's *Peace is Always a Good Idea* for the Afro Solo Music Festival in San Francisco and Noah Gasser's *Black Suite Blues* with the Oakland Symphony Orchestra.

He has been presented in concert by Friends of Negro Spirituals and has premiered Lena McLin's *I'm a Soldier* with the Chicago Sinfonietta among other orchestras throughout the United States. Sims founded and toured nationally with the ensemble, *Three Generations*. This trio, which specializes in American Spirituals and folk songs, has included the renowned George Shirley, Kenneth Overton, the late William Warfield and Benjamin Matthews. He has also performed with the trio *Simon, Sykes & Sims* (with Simon Estes and Jubilant Sykes) singing spirituals and American songs.



resilience and jubilation

2025 - 2026 CHAMBER MUSIC SERIES



A journey of unforgettable artistry—one that embodies resilience, radiates jubilation, and strengthens our legacy of excellence and equity, one performance at a time.

**RISING FROM
THE ROOTS**

**FREEDOM AND
LIBERATION**

**FROM ASHES
TO BEAUTY**

**JUNETEENTH
CELEBRATION**



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RCP has been a beacon of cultural excellence and diversity in Jacksonville for over two decades. Supporting RCP isn't just philanthropy—it's a gateway to enriching cultural experiences and fostering diversity in the arts.

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CONTACT

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