



CHICAGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA ASSOCIATION

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News

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**JAZZ IN THE KEY OF ELLISON WEAVES
JAZZ, R&B, SPOKEN WORD AND MULTIMEDIA TO PAY TRIBUTE
TO GREAT AFRICAN-AMERICAN NOVELIST RALPH ELLISON
ON SYMPHONY CENTER PRESENTS JAZZ SERIES**

**Featured Artists Include Will Downing, Nona Hendryx, Quiana Lynell,
Nicholas Payton, Roxane Gay and the Andy Farber Jazz Orchestra**

Friday, February 22, at 8 p.m.

CHICAGO—The Symphony Center Presents (SCP) Jazz series continues on [Friday, February 22, at 8 p.m.](#), with *Jazz in the Key of Ellison*, a multimedia performance of jazz, R&B and spoken word inspired by the life of Pulitzer Prize-winning, African-American novelist, critic and scholar Ralph Ellison and his remarkable collection of jazz recordings. The program includes music by the novelist's favorite artists including Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Mahalia Jackson, Charlie Parker and Thelonious Monk and features performances by Grammy Award-winning trumpeter Nicholas Payton, R&B and jazz vocalist Will Downing, iconic Labelle singer Nona Hendryx, 2017 Sarah Vaughan International Jazz vocal completion winner Quiana Lynell, with the Andy Farber Jazz Orchestra and hosted by Roxane Gay.

This concert production features today's pre-eminent jazz and R&B artists interpreting Ellison's themes of African-American struggle. Musical selections draw on the evolution of jazz from the Harlem Renaissance to the birth of R&B. Black American music, predominantly jazz, was a cornerstone of Ellison's life and infused his literary works, such as *Invisible Man*, *Living with Music* and *Juneteenth*. Still images and video of Ellison and the legendary performers who inspired him, as well as paintings by Ellison's close friend Romare Beardon, provide a stunning visual backdrop for this performance. This tour was produced by New Jersey Performing Arts Center in association with Danny Kapilian with generous support from Audible.

RICCARDO MUTI
Zell Music Director

HELEN ZELL
Chair, Board of Trustees

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President

YO-YO MA
Judson and Joyce Green Creative Consultant

With a career that spans more than 30 years and 21 albums, Will Downing is one of the most versatile and beloved voices of our time. Known as the Prince of Sophisticated Soul, his repertoire consists of signature interpretations of R&B classics like “I Go Crazy,” “Wishing On A Star,” and “I Try,” with original hits “A Million Ways,” “Sorry I,” and the duet with Rachelle Ferrell “Nothing Has Ever Felt Like This.” With his distinctive baritone voice along with fresh melodies and lush arrangements, Downing continues to serve his fan base through his own Sophisticated Soul record label and sold-out tour dates across the country. His latest album, “The Promise,” was released in November 2018. Downing also hosts a weekly radio show, *The Wind Down*, which is aired on more than 20 stations throughout the U.S., U.K., Japan and Spain.

Singer, songwriter and recording artist Nona Hendryx tackles social issues, love and politics with a smoky vocal tessitura. With a legendary career that now spans six decades, Hendryx was a founding member of the group Patti LaBelle & the Bluebelles, known as the “Sweethearts of the Apollo Theatre.” In the 1970s, the group morphed into the rock and funk glam group Labelle, whose hit song “Lady Marmalade” topped the charts. Hendryx emerged as the chief songwriter of the group’s songs, and in 1999, they were inducted into the R&B Hall of Fame. Hendryx also embarked on a solo career, creating eight studio albums and engaging with collaborators such as Prince, Peter Gabriel, the Talking Heads, Laurie Anderson, and Bono, resulting in top-10 hits and a Grammy nomination for “Rock This House” with the Rolling Stones’ Keith Richards. Hendryx has also created a SiriusXM Radio show, *The Nexus with Nona Hendryx*, in which she discusses her trifold passions of music, art and technology.

The 2017 Sarah Vaughan International Jazz Vocal Competition winner Quiana Lynell infuses her classical training with her gospel upbringing and approaches jazz as a storyteller. Her intense and soulful musical conviction along with perfect timing and impeccable pitch make for mesmerizing performances. A graduate of Louisiana State University’s music department, Lynell is able to harness her voice as a vibrant instrument and perform various genres of music while maintaining a unique sound. She is quickly becoming recognized as one of her generation’s most significant voices, and her debut album will be released by Concord Records later in 2019.

Multi-instrumentalist, composer and trumpet master Nicholas Payton is a significant, top-tier voice working and recording in jazz today. A virtuoso before he completed high school, his talent and skills continue to earn him praise. Spanning a multitude of musical genres, Payton has composed, arranged, performed and recorded with his own groups in many settings ranging from solo work to small ensembles, big band and his 2012 full-orchestral work, *The Black American Symphony*. Payton has toured with Ray Brown and Elvin Jones, and he has collaborated with Ray Charles, Dr. John, Elvin Jones, Roy Haynes, Joe Henderson, Jill Scott, Chucho Valdes, Dr. Michael White, Nancy Wilson and others. He is credited on more than 140 recordings as a composer, arranger, special guest or sideman. His most recent appearance on the SCP Jazz series was in May 2017, when he performed works from his album *Afro-Caribbean Mixtape*, which was released earlier that year.

Roxane Gay's writing appears in *Best American Mystery Stories 2014*, *Best American Short Stories 2012*, *Best Sex Writing 2012*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *A Public Space*, *McSweeney's*, *Tin House*, *Oxford American*, *American Short Fiction*, *Virginia Quarterly Review* and many others. She is a contributing opinion writer for *The New York Times* and is the author of the books *Ayiti*, *An Untamed State*, *Bad Feminist*, *Difficult Women* and *Hunger: A Memoir of My Body*. She is also the author of *World of Wakanda* for Marvel and the editor of *Best American Short Stories 2018*. She is currently at work on film and television projects, a book of writing advice, an essay collection about television and culture, and a young adult novel titled *The Year I Learned Everything*.

A professor at the Juilliard School of Music, award-winning jazz composer, arranger and saxophonist Andy Farber has worked extensively with legendary jazz singer Jon Hendricks and Wynton Marsalis. Farber has written arrangements for a number of diverse artists and ensembles including Shirley Horn, Bobby Short, Willie Nelson, Paul Simon, Stevie Wonder, B.B. King, Bob Dylan, Ray Charles, the Boston Pops Orchestra and several symphony orchestras throughout Europe. His 17-piece big band, the Andy Farber Jazz Orchestra, has enjoyed a two-year residency at Birdland in New York City and continues to perform and record.

Robert O'Meally, Zora Neale Hurston Professor of English at Columbia University, who has written extensively on Ralph Ellison, including *The Craft of Ralph Ellison* (Harvard, 1980), and a collection of papers for which he served as editor, *New Essays on Invisible Man* (Cambridge, 1989), will speak prior to the performance at 7 p.m. in Grainger Ballroom. Joining O'Meally will be Don Katz, President and CEO of Audible, to discuss how his mentor and teacher Ralph Ellison shaped his writing career and inspired him to found Audible. The preconcert event is open to jazz series subscribers and members of the African American Network. RSVPs requested.

Tickets for all Symphony Center Presents Jazz series concerts can be purchased by phone at **800-223-7114** or **312-294-3000**, online at cso.org or at the Symphony Center box office: 220 S. Michigan Ave., Chicago, IL 60604.

Discounted student tickets for select concerts can be purchased, subject to availability, online in advance or at the box office on the day of the concert. For group rates, please call 312-294-3040.

The SCP Jazz Series is sponsored by Exelon. This performance is generously sponsored by Patricia Hyde and the Komarek-Hyde-McQueen Foundation.

Artists, programs and prices are subject to change.

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**Symphony Center Presents
Jazz**

**Friday, February 22, 2019 at 8:00 p.m.
Jazz in the Key of Ellison**

Will Downing, vocals
Nona Hendryx, vocals
Quiana Lynell, vocals
Nicholas Payton, trumpet
Roxane Gay, narrator and host

Andy Farber Jazz Orchestra
Andy Farber, bandleader, arranger, tenor saxophone
Jay Brandford, alto saxophone
Dan Bloch, baritone saxophone, clarinet
Anthony Hervey, trumpet
Jeffrey Miller, trombone
TJ Reddick, drums
Isaiah Thompson, piano
Jennifer Vincent, bass
James Zoller, trumpet

Tickets: \$28-\$89

Featured Artist for this Performance:

[Will Downing](#)

[Nona Hendryx](#)

[Quiana Lynell](#)

[Nicholas Payton](#)

[Roxane Gay](#)

[Andy Farber Jazz Orchestra](#)

The Chicago Symphony Orchestra: www.cso.org and www.csosoundsandstories.org

Founded by Theodore Thomas in 1891, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra is consistently hailed as one of the greatest orchestras in the world. Since 2010, the pre-eminent conductor Riccardo Muti has served as its 10th music director. Yo-Yo Ma is the Judson and Joyce Green Creative Consultant, Missy Mazzoli is Mead Composer-in-Residence and Erina Yashima is the Sir Georg Solti Conducting Apprentice.

From baroque through contemporary music, the CSO commands a vast repertoire. Its renowned musicians annually perform more than 150 concerts, most at Symphony Center in Chicago and, each summer, at the suburban Ravinia Festival. They regularly tour nationally and internationally. Since 1892, the CSO has made 60 international tours, performing in 29 countries on five continents.

People around the globe listen to weekly radio broadcasts of CSO concerts and recordings on the WFMT radio network and online at cso.org/radio. Recordings by the CSO have earned 62 Grammy Awards, including two in 2011 for Muti's recording with the CSO and Chorus of Verdi's *Messa da Requiem* (Muti's first of eight releases with the CSO to date). Find details on these and many other CSO recordings at www.cso.org/resound.

The CSO is part of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Association, which also includes the Chicago Symphony Chorus (Duain Wolfe, Director and Conductor) and the Civic Orchestra of Chicago, a training ensemble for emerging professionals. Through its prestigious Symphony Center Presents series, the CSOA presents guest artists and ensembles from a variety of genres—classical, jazz, world, and contemporary.

The Negaunee Music Institute at the CSO offers community and education programs that annually engage more than 200,000 people of diverse ages and backgrounds. Through the Institute and other activities, including a free annual concert led by Muti, the CSO is committed to using the power of music to create connections and build community.

The CSO is supported by thousands of patrons, volunteers and institutional and individual donors. The CSO's music director position is endowed in perpetuity by a generous gift from the Zell Family Foundation. The Negaunee Foundation provides generous support in perpetuity for the work of the Negaunee Music Institute.