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**CURATED BY MEAD COMPOSER-IN-RESIDENCE JESSIE  
MONTGOMERY CSO MusicNOW's 2021-22 SEASON CONTINUES ON  
MARCH 14 WITH "NIGHT OF SONG"**

CHICAGO — Connecting Chicago audiences with the widest possible range of today's new music, the CSO MusicNOW series continues on March 14 with a "Night of Song" at the Harris Theater. Curated by CSO Mead Composer-in-Residence Jessie Montgomery, the program offers a celebration of art song today, with the world premiere of a new CSO MusicNOW commission from Damien Geter, a 2018 song cycle by Dale Trumbore and world premiere arrangements of works by Ayanna Woods and Shawn Okpebholo. Geter, also an acclaimed bass-baritone, joins soprano Joelle Lamarre and musicians from the [Chicago Symphony Orchestra](#) for the performance.

A winner of both the Sphinx Medal of Excellence and the ASCAP Foundation's Leonard Bernstein Award, series curator Jessie Montgomery has emerged as one of the most compelling and sought-after voices in new music today; as the *New York Times* reports, she is "pretty much changing the canon for American orchestras." Later this spring, CSO Music Director Riccardo Muti will lead the world premiere performances of *Hymn for Everyone*, her new CSO commission (April 28–May 3). She also returns to Chicago for CSO MusicNOW's "Concerto," a program of works for soloist and ensemble by contemporary composers Joan Tower, Alyssa Weinberg, James Moore and Montgomery herself (May 23).

Looking ahead to the March 14 program, Montgomery reflects: "There's a lot of enthusiasm about being a part of something new and about just sharing and being on the ground with new works that are coming into the world, so it's exciting."

Curated by Montgomery, “Night of Song” pays special attention to the art song tradition, exploring the connection between music and the written word. To develop this connection further, patrons will have the chance to order personalized poems on topics of their choosing from [Poems While You Wait](#), a collective of local poets who work on vintage typewriters. Poems ordered before the start of the concert will be ready for collection by its end.

Bringing together four noteworthy composers who are exploring the traditional art song in new ways, “Night of Song” showcases the world premiere of a CSO MusicNOW commission, *The Bronze Legacy* by Damien Geter. Geter’s other commissions include works for the Washington Chorus, On-Site Opera and the Glimmerglass Festival, where his second opera is soon to premiere. As he explains, *The Bronze Legacy* is set to a poem of the same name by Effie Lee Newsome (1885-1979):

“Newsome was a poet of the Harlem Renaissance whose primary audience was children. In fact, her poem *The Bronze Legacy* leads with the line, ‘To a brown boy,’ which suggests that it was written for a child ... with the intent to uplift and inspire. Its theme centers around the power of Black pride, and the mighty strength and beauty of Black people which she compares to some of the grandest images in nature. Although not specifically written in a jazz style, the ensemble evokes a mood that is reminiscent of the Harlem Renaissance.”

Scored for baritone, flute, piano, amplified bass and percussion, at its first performance the work will feature Geter himself, who made his Metropolitan Opera debut in the 2020 Grammy Award-winning production of *Porgy and Bess*.

Joelle Lamarre, a soprano with “a glorious lyrical bloom that allows her to explore realms of the imagination that lie beyond the everyday” (*Opera News*), joins Geter for other works on the program. These include the world premiere arrangements of two excerpts from *FORCE!* (2021), an opera in three acts, collaboratively composed by four composers to a libretto by Anna Martine Whitehead. An artist recognized with awards and fellowships from the Graham Foundation, Chicago Dancemakers Forum and Foundation for Contemporary Arts, Whitehead describes their opera as depicting “a group of Black women and femmes in the waiting room of a prison who must escape a memory-erasing mold.” Both the excerpts featured in “Night of Song” are the work of Grammy-nominated, Chicago-based composer Ayanna Woods, a recipient of Third Coast Percussion’s Emerging Composers Partnership. As Whitehead explains, “A Reckoning,” drawn from *FORCE!*’s second, central act, is “a dirge sung by the women who wait and care for their forgotten loved ones,” while “I Dream,” from the opera’s third and final act, captures the moment when “the waiting women realize they’ve shared a similar dream – one where they and their entire communities are joyful, powerful and at ease.” As Whitehead notes, “Their shared dream is a call to action.”

Also receiving world premiere performances are new arrangements of two works by 2020 American Prize in Composition-winner Shawn Okpebholo, whose music has been variously described as “searing” (*Chicago Tribune*), “powerful” (*BBC Music* magazine) and “devastatingly beautiful” (*Washington Post*). The first of these is “Ballad of Birmingham,” the opening movement from *Two Black Churches* (2020), in which the composer commemorates “two significant and tragic events perpetrated at the hands of white supremacists in two Black churches, decades apart.” Set to a poem by Dudley Randall (1914–2000), the “Ballad of Birmingham” offers “a narrative account of the [1963] 16th Street Baptist Church bombing from the perspectives of the mother of one victim and her child.” Okpebholo continues:

“Stylistically, this movement includes 1960s black gospel juxtaposed with contemporary art song. At moments, the civil rights anthem, ‘We Shall Overcome’ and the hymn ‘Amazing Grace’ are referenced subtly. While there are strophic elements consistent with the poem’s structure, the work is also rhapsodic, though serious and weighty in nature.”

The composer also revisits his take on *Oh, Glory* (2018), which he calls “a lesser-known spiritual about the hope of heaven,” in a new arrangement for soprano, violin and piano. Of his harrowing reimagining of the spiritual, he explains:

“I emphasized the image of heaven by quoting another spiritual about the afterlife, ‘Bright Mansions.’ I penned the verses of this piece to reflect the heartbreaking reality of families being separated from each other during the time of slavery. The second verse most clearly expresses the theme of family separation: it begins calmly then builds in anticipation of a mother reuniting in ‘paradise’ with her child, who was taken and sold away.”

Rounding out the program is *The Gleam* (2018), a song cycle for soprano and small ensemble by Dale Trumbore, whose honors include first prize at ACDA’s inaugural Raymond W. Brock Competition for Professional Composers, an ASCAP Morton Gould Award and a Chamber Music America Classical Commissioning Grant. *The Gleam* is set to a poem by Mexico City-based poet and translator Robin Myers (b. 1987). As Trumbore writes:

“Myers’s poem encapsulates what it means to be alive now, from the vulgarity of what we encounter every day to the beauty that threads our daily lives and, finally, to a reconciliation of the two.”

**About Mead Composer-in-Residence Jessie Montgomery**

As Mead Composer-in-Residence, Jessie Montgomery serves as curator of CSO MusicNOW through the 2023-24 season; the next program, “Concerto,” also at the Harris Theater, will take place on May 23. Montgomery will also receive commissions to write three new orchestral works for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and a number of new chamber pieces for CSO MusicNOW. Montgomery is already fast developing a presence in Chicago. CSO MusicNOW’s 2018-19 season featured both her string quartet *Break Away* and the world premiere of her string ensemble arrangement of Julius Eastman’s *Gay Guerrilla*, while CSOtv’s 2020-21 digital season saw virtual performances of her orchestral work *Starburst*, by the Civic Orchestra of Chicago, and her chamber piece *Strum*, the string orchestral version of which also received a live CSO performance in June 2021. This season, Manfred Honeck led performances of her 2017 orchestral work *Coincident Dances* in October subscription concerts, and her new CSO commission, *Hymn for Everyone*, is scheduled to receive its world premiere under the baton of Riccardo Muti in April 2022.

### **Ticket and Patron Information**

Tickets for CSO MusicNOW’s “Night of Song” concert on March 14 are \$20. Patron Services representatives are available to assist with ticket purchases by web chat at [cso.org](https://www.cso.org), by calling 312-294-3000 (Tuesday–Friday, 10am–4pm), or by emailing [patronservices@cso.org](mailto:patronservices@cso.org).

The performance takes place at Harris Theater with safety measures in place. Proof of vaccination is required for entry, and masks are required at the performance. More patron information is available at [cso.org/safeandsound](https://www.cso.org/safeandsound).

All artists and programs are subject to change.

The Mead Composer-in-Residence at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra is endowed through a generous gift from Cindy Sargent and the late Sally Mead Hands. The CSO thanks the following donors who provide major support for new music programming: the Zell Family Foundation, Cindy Sargent, the Sally Mead Hands Foundation and the Julian Family Foundation.

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**CSO MusicNOW 2**

**Monday, March 14 at 7pm**

**Harris Theater, 205 E. Randolph St, Chicago IL**

**“Night of Song”**

Joelle Lamarre, soprano  
Damien Geter, bass-baritone  
Musicians from the Chicago Symphony Orchestra  
Program curated by Jessie Montgomery, Mead Composer-in-Residence

Ayanna WOODS: "I Dream" (world premiere of new arrangement) \*

Dale TRUMBORE: *The Gleam*

Damien GETER: *The Bronze Legacy* (world premiere of CSO MusicNOW commission)

Ayanna WOODS: "A Reckoning" (world premiere of new arrangement) \*

Shawn OKPEBHULO: "Ballad of Birmingham" from *Two Black Churches* (world premiere of new arrangement)

Shawn OKPEBHULO: *Oh, Glory* (world premiere of new arrangement)

\* "A Reckoning" and "I Dream" are excerpted from *FORCE!*, an opera in three acts composed collaboratively by Ayanna Woods, Anna Martine Whitehead, Angel Bat Dawid and Philip Armstrong, to a libretto by Anna Martine Whitehead.