

FORBES CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING ARTS

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY®

School of Music

presents

Land, Freedom and Friends

the faculty recital of

Diane Phoenix-Neal, *viola*
Lauren K. Alleyne, *poet*

with

Sue Barber, *bassoon*

Special Guest

Joanne Gabbin, *founder*
Furious Flower Poetry Center

Tuesday, February 11, 2025

7 pm

Recital Hall



Program

Overcoming Nkeiru Okoye
(b. 1972)
arr. D. Phoenix

Duo for Basson and Viola (*world premiere*) Margaret Brouwer
(b. 1940)

1. Disappearing Act
2. Adagio
3. Allegro

Diane Phoenix-Neal, *viola* | Sue Barber, *bassoon*

Variations in Blue Lauren K. Alleyne

For My Brother(s)

Lauren K. Alleyne, *poet*

Keep Your Lamps Trimmed and Burning Traditional Spiritual
arr. D. Phoenix

Bilhete de um Jogral (A Minstrel's Note) César Guerra-Peixe
(1914-1993)
for solo viola

Diane Phoenix-Neal, *viola*

Rosa Parks Nikki Giovanni
(1943-2024)

In Memoriam, *read by Joanne Gabbin*

Program - *continued*

Ko'u inoa (My Name) for solo viola

Leilehua Lanzilotti
(b. 1983)

Diane Phoenix-Neal, *viola*

Red Pilgrimage

Lauren K. Alleyne

Letter to the Outside

Lauren K. Alleyne, *poet*

Kum Ba Ya

Traditional Spiritual

Fantasia X – Presto

Georg Phillip Telemann
(1681-1767)

Diane Phoenix-Neal, *viola*

Patrons are reminded to turn off all pagers, cell phones,
personal computers, and any other electronic devices.

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of this production is strictly prohibited
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Program Notes

Variations in Blue

Lauren K. Alleyne

FXW: I don't know how to swim

Me: What?!

FXW: There were no pools for Black Folk when I was coming up

In sleep's 3-D theatre: home, a green island surrounded by the blue of ocean. Zoom to the heart, see the Couva swimming pool filled with us—black children shrieking our joy in a haze of sun; our life-guard, Rodney, his skin flawless and gleaming—black as fresh oil—his strut along the pool's edge, his swoonworthy smile; Daddy a beach-ball-bellied Poseidon, droplets diamonding his afro; my brother, hollering as he jumps into his bright blue fear, his return to air gasping and triumphant. And there, the girl I was: dumpling thick and sun-brown, stripped down to the red two-piece suit my mother had made by hand, afloat in the blue bed of water, the blue sky beaming above. When I wake up, I'm in America where Dorothy Dandridge once emptied a pool with her pinkie, and in Texas a black girl's body draped in its hopeful, tasseled bikini, struck earth instead of water, a policeman's blue-clad knees pinning her back, her indigo wail a siren. I want this to be a dream, but I am awake and in this place where the only blue named home is a song and we are meant to sink, to sputter, to drown.

For My Brother(s)

Lauren K. Alleyne

My brother was a dark-skinned boy with a sweet tooth, a smart mouth, and a wicked thirst. At seventeen, when I left him for America, his voice was statted with approaching adulthood, he ate everything in the house, grew what felt like an inch a day, and wore his favorite shirt until mom disappeared it. Tonight I'm grateful he slaked his thirst in another country, far from this place where a black boy's being calls like crosshairs to conscienceless men with guns and conviction. I remember my brother's ashy knees and legs, how many errands he ran on them up and down roads belonging to no one and every one. And I'm grateful he was a boy in a country of black boys, in the time of walks to the store on Auntie Marge's corner to buy contraband *sweeties* and *sweetdrinks* with change snuck from mom's handbag or dad's wallet—how that was a black boy's biggest transgression, and so far from fatal it feels an un-American dream. Tonight, I think of my brother as a black boy's lifeless body spins me into something like prayer—a keening for the boy who went down the road, then went down fighting, then went down dead. My brother was a boy in the time of fistfights he couldn't win and that couldn't stop him slinging his weapon tongue anyway, was a boy who went down fighting, and got back up wearing his black eye like a trophy. My brother who got up, who grew up, who got to keep growing. Tonight I am mourning the black boys who are not my brother and who are my brothers. I am mourning the boys who walk the wrong roads, which is any road in America. Tonight I am mourning the death warrant hate has made of their skin—black and bursting with such ordinary hungers and thirsts, such abundant frailty, such constellations of possibility, our boys who might become men if this world spared them, if it could see them whole—boys, men, brothers—human.

Program Notes - *continued*

Rosa Parks

By Nikki Giovanni

This is for the Pullman Porters who organized when people said they couldn't. And carried the *Pittsburgh Courier* and the *Chicago Defender* to the Black Americans in the South so they would know they were not alone. This is for the Pullman Porters who helped Thurgood Marshall go south and come back north to fight the fight that resulted in *Brown v. Board of Education* because even though Kansas is west and even though Topeka is the birthplace of Gwendolyn Brooks, who wrote the powerful "The Chicago Defender Sends a Man to Little Rock," it was the Pullman Porters who whispered to the traveling men both the Blues Men and the "Race" Men so that they both would know what was going on. This is for the Pullman Porters who smiled as if they were happy and laughed like they were tickled when some folks were around and who silently rejoiced in 1954 when the Supreme Court announced its 9—0 decision that "separate is inherently unequal." This is for the Pullman Porters who smiled and welcomed a fourteen-year-old boy onto their train in 1955. They noticed his slight limp that he tried to disguise with a doo-wop walk; they noticed his stutter and probably understood why his mother wanted him out of Chicago during the summer when school was out. Fourteen-year-old Black boys with limps and stutters are apt to try to prove themselves in dangerous ways when mothers aren't around to look after them. So this is for the Pullman Porters who looked over that fourteen-year-old while the train rolled the reverse of the Blues Highway from Chicago to St. Louis to Memphis to Mississippi. This is for the men who kept him safe; and if Emmett Till had been able to stay on a train all summer he would have maybe grown a bit of a paunch, certainly

lost his hair, probably have worn bifocals and bounced his grandchildren on his knee telling them about his summer riding the rails. But he had to get off the train. And ended up in Money, Mississippi. And was horribly, brutally, inexcusably, and unacceptably murdered. This is for the Pullman Porters who, when the sheriff was trying to get the body secretly buried, got Emmett's body on the northbound train, got his body home to Chicago, where his mother said: I want the world to see what they did to my boy. And this is for all the mothers who cried. And this is for all the people who said Never Again. And this is about Rosa Parks whose feet were not so tired, it had been, after all, an ordinary day, until the bus driver gave her the opportunity to make history. This is about Mrs. Rosa Parks from Tuskegee, Alabama, who was also the field secretary of the NAACP. This is about the moment Rosa Parks shouldered her cross, put her worldly goods aside, was willing to sacrifice her life, so that that young man in Money, Mississippi, who had been so well protected by the Pullman Porters, would not have died in vain. When Mrs. Parks said "NO" a passionate movement was begun. No longer would there be a reliance on the law; there was a higher law. When Mrs. Parks brought that light of hers to expose the evil of the system, the sun came and rested on her shoulders bringing the heat and the light of truth. Others would follow Mrs. Parks. Four young men in Greensboro, North Carolina, would also say No. Great voices would be raised singing the praises of God and exhorting us "to forgive those who trespass against us." But it was the Pullman Porters who safely got Emmett to his granduncle and it was Mrs. Rosa Parks who could not stand that death. And in not being able to stand it. She sat back down.

Copyright Credit: Nikki Giovanni, "Rosa Parks" from *Quilting the Black-Eyed Pea*. Copyright © 2002 by Nikki Giovanni.

Program Notes - *continued*

Red Pilgrimage

Lauren K. Alleyne

I wanted the mountain
but found the absence of river.

I wanted stone
but it was the trees that called

and reached their branches
out to my seeking hand.

I wanted red
and the red earth parted

and bade me pass.
I walked until my feet became red

roots, slow as the trees
snarled into the riverbank.

I wanted the mountain
and saw I was at its beginning;

when I touched it,
it crumbled red into my hand.

In my palm, a compass—
red I could hold on to.

I wanted the pinnacle
but found the riverbed, dry

and brimming with so much
open, the ghosts of things showed

themselves—hovels, nests
half-buried sticks, bits of burning

white quartz, stands of snake
grass long and green, poets

in search of things that have no name
but red. I wanted wisdom,

but was given a journey:
footstep after footstep,

I made my way through
grief's stubborn endlessness

back into body and time.
My life awaited me, glittering.

I moved toward it—my red heart
pulsing its red river, red air

feeding my red lungs, my red breath
returning, returning. Red
blossoms inside me breaking open.

Letter to the Outside

Lauren K. Alleyne

Jentel, WY May 2008

It is magic here, outside the rule of clocks
and scurry. The vast baskets of mountains
overflow; the clouds clink like ice in a glass:
I drink it all in, and it is enough. What a
concept, contentment. Yesterday, where the
creek tipples at the base of the valley, I saw
a dead goat – stiff, ringed with flies, its face
like a plate of leftovers. I wept, then I did
not. I stood at the roadside until the wind
wafted up its benediction. From this place I
gift you the unoccupied air; the wobbly
prancing of new calves; a sky so close the
stars might be a chain-link fence you run
your hands along as you amble through the
night; your live and mutable body, its spark
and spell and solitude. Write back.

Biographies

Joanne Veal Gabbin is Professor Emerita of English at James Madison University and founder of the Furious Flower Poetry Center, the first academic center devoted to Black poetry. She is the author of *Sterling A. Brown: Building the Black Aesthetic Tradition*, editor of *Furious Flower: African American Poetry from the Black Arts Movement to the Present* and *The Furious Flowering of African American Poetry*, and executive producer of the Furious Flower video and DVD series. She also co-edited *Furious Flower: Seeding the Future of African American Poetry* with Lauren K. Alleyne. She is the founder and organizer of the Wintergreen Women Writers Collective and author of the children's book, *I Bet She Called Me Sugar Plum*. A dedicated teacher and scholar, Dr. Gabbin has received numerous awards for excellence in teaching and scholarship. Among them are the College Language Association Creative Scholarship Award for her book *Sterling A. Brown* (1986) and the Outstanding Faculty Award, Virginia State Council of Higher Education. Dr. Gabbin was inducted into the International Literary Hall of Fame for Writers of African Descent. In 2021 James Madison University honored her and her husband with the naming of a campus building, the Joanne V. and Alexander Gabbin Hall.

Lauren K. Alleyne serves as Executive Director of the Furious Flower Poetry Center and a Professor of English. She is author of two collections *Honeyfish* (2019), *Difficult Fruit* (2014), two chapbooks *Dawn in the Kaatskills* and *(Un)Becoming Gretel*, and co-editor of *Furious Flower: Seeding the Future of African American Poetry*. Her work has been widely published in journals and anthologies internationally, including venues such as *The Atlantic*, *The New York Times*, and *Ms.*, among several others. Alleyne, who hails from the twin island Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, has been recognized with a US Artist Award nomination (2023), an NAACP Image Award nomination for Outstanding Poetry (2020), the Green Rose Prize from New Issues Press (2017) and has been shortlisted for the BOCAS Prize for Caribbean Literature and the Library of Virginia prize for poetry (2020). In 2022, Alleyne was awarded an Outstanding Faculty Award from the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, and the JMU Agency Star Award.

Violist **Diane Phoenix-Neal** enjoys a vibrant international teaching and performing career, and her performances have taken her to concert venues and music festivals throughout the world to four continents. In France, she served as both the principal solo violist of *Orchestre de Picardie* and as violist of *Quatuor Joachim* for nearly a decade. Her sound is described as “rich and sumptuous,” and “priceless as it was memorable” (*Cultural Voice of North Carolina*). Dr. Phoenix-Neal is a longstanding principal performer and soloist with the Shenandoah Valley Bach Festival as well as a collaborative performing artist and faculty member with Eastern Music Festival. Originally from North Carolina, she received her training from the Juilliard School and the Juilliard String Quartet, is a double alumna of the University of North Carolina School of the Arts, and earned her Doctor of Musical Arts degree from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro after a ten-year career as a performer and teacher in Portugal and France. She serves as an Associate Professor of Music at JMU and was received the JMU Compass Award for Leadership in 2022.

Sue Barber, Professor of Music, is an active music educator and performer as a bassoonist. During the summer season she performs and teaches at the Brevard Music Festival. She is an active freelance bassoonist, performing as principal bassoon with CityMusic Cleveland Chamber Orchestra and the North Charleston Pops! Orchestra. She has

Biographies - *continued*

performed with many regional organizations including Opera on The James, Richmond Symphony Orchestra, Roanoke Symphony, Opera Roanoke, and the Williamsburg Sinfonia. She has also performed and presented master classes throughout the United States, Europe, Brazil, and China. She has also served as visiting professor at The Jacobs School of Music at Indiana University, teaching applied bassoon and presenting master classes. An active solo, chamber musician, orchestral musician Sue has performed with many of the leading artists of our time in noted venues such as The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Carnegie Hall, and Lincoln Center.

In memoriam: **Nikki Giovanni**

Poet **Nikki Giovanni** was born in Knoxville, Tennessee, on June 7, 1943. Although she grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio, she and her sister returned to Knoxville each summer to visit their grandparents. Nikki graduated with honors in history from her grandfather's alma mater, Fisk University.

For her poetry and activism, Giovanni received numerous awards and held 27 honorary degrees from various colleges and universities. She was also given the key to more than two dozen cities. Giovanni was honored with the NAACP Image Award seven times.

Giovanni was proud of her Appalachian roots and worked to change the way the world views Appalachians and Affrilachians.

She retired in 2022, receiving the title of Distinguished Professor Emerita after 35 years on the faculty of Virginia Tech University.

“Nikki was a wonder. So many people knew her as a phenomenal poet and teacher, but she was an even more exceptional human being—extraordinarily kind, compassionate, and loving.”