

Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Southern Oregon non-profit commissions and premieres new works by composers of color in “We Cannot Walk Alone” concert series featuring renowned performers this spring

ASHLAND, OR—After centuries of racial gatekeeping in the classical music world, Black musicians still account for less than 2% of American orchestras, and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) representation among composers remains similarly disproportionate.

Non-profit Anima Mundi Productions joins a growing movement of performing arts organizations to address this legacy of exclusion. The company, which produces an Ashland-based concert series called The Heart of Humanity series, is proud to announce “We Cannot Walk Alone,” an ambitious project to commission seven new works by BIPOC composers and premiere them across four cities in concerts featuring world-class performers this spring.

When and Where

This wide-ranging series includes concerts in Ashland on March 20 and May 1, Eugene on April 29, Portland on March 13 and April 28, and Seattle on March 10.

***Maternità*: A new recital about motherhood featuring BIPOC Star Power**

The first cycle of “We Cannot Walk Alone” concerts feature opera star Takesha Meshé Kizart-Thomas, who has been praised by *The New York Times* as “wielding impressive ease and elegant control” and called “worthy of all superlatives” by *Opera Magazine*. Ms. Kizart-Thomas has starred in leading roles with the Metropolitan Opera and Sydney Opera House, shared the stage with Yo-Yo Ma and Wynton Marsalis, collaborated with Broadway in Chicago and HBO, and developed new two works of her own, *SHONDJ* and *Opera Reconstructed*.

She is joined by Memphis-based concert pianist Artina McCain, known for her “power and finesse” (Dallas Arts Society) and “sense of color, balance and texture” (Austin Chamber Music Center). Together, Ms. Kizart-Thomas and Dr. McCain will present *Maternità*, a unique recital that explores motherhood through the famous characters in the standard operatic repertoire and by premiering four new works by female Black, First Nations Indigenous, and Latina composers Regina Harris Baiocchi, Barbara Assiginaak, Carolina Calvache, and Jasmine Barnes.

Imani Winds

The remaining three new commissions, all by Pacific Northwest composers of color, will be premiered by the Grammy-nominated quintet Imani Winds. Hailed as “dazzling” and “exhilarating” by *The Washington Post*, the Imani Winds have led both a revolution and

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evolution of the wind quintet through their dynamic playing, adventurous programming, imaginative collaborations and outreach endeavors that have inspired audiences of all ages and backgrounds over their two decades of music making.

The word "imani" means “faith” in Swahili, reflecting the group’s mission to “challenge the conventional notion of a woodwind quintet by merging musical traditions with music of our time that reflects a variety of influences.”

The Imani Winds concert will feature new works by Pacific Northwest BIPOC composers Yuan-Chen Li, Miguel del Águila, and Damien Geter, commissioned by Anima Mundi Productions in collaboration with Chamber Music Northwest and the Oregon Bach Festival.

A Coalition of Prominent Pacific Northwest Presenters

Anima Mundi Productions is proud to collaborate on this project with Seattle Opera, the N.W. African American Museum, Chamber Music Northwest, Oregon Bach Festival, Portland State University, and Opera in the Park Portland as co-presenters and co-commissioners.

How to Attend

Tickets are available at www.humanitytickets.com

These concerts mark Anima Mundi Productions’ first return to live, in-person concerts since the Covid outbreak. The company also plans to live-stream the March 20 *Maternità* concert online.

Public Performance Schedule of “We Cannot Walk Alone” events:

- March 10: Takesha Meshé Kizart-Thomas recital (TMK) with Seattle Opera
- March 13: TMK recital in Portland at PSU
- March 20: TMK recital in Ashland on the Heart of Humanity series*
- April 28: Imani Winds concert in Portland with Chamber Music Northwest
- April 29: Imani Winds concert in Eugene with Oregon Bach Festival
- May 1: Imani Winds concert in Ashland on the Heart of Humanity series*

*All Ashland concerts are held in the SOU Music Recital Hall on Mountain Avenue.

About Anima Mundi Productions:

The mission of Anima Mundi Productions is to create, present, and produce new musical works that harness the power of the arts to stir the soul, foster community, and address urgent social and environmental problems. Our events support the personal and collective healing of at-risk segments of society who have experienced trauma, discrimination, and other forms of injustice.

The mission of our **Heart of Humanity** concert series is to feature world-class musicians giving voice to marginalized people with compassion and depth, turning the concert hall into a space for renewed hope, communal healing, and mutual understanding.

For further inquiries: Please contact executive director Ethan Gans-Morse at 541-778-1211.