

UNCSA

TOWARD JUSTICE AND SHARED HUMANITY: ART SONG OF BLACK AMERICANS AS LENS, LANGUAGE, VISION AND HOPE

Aug. 29 at 7:30 p.m.

WATSON HALL

Ollie Watts Davis
SOPRANO

Casey Robards
PIANO

RECITAL AND LECTURE WITH
QUESTION & RESPONSE

PRESENTED BY
UNCSA

Brian Cole
CHANCELLOR

Saxton Rose
SCHOOL OF MUSIC, DEAN

SUPPORT FOR THE OLLIE WATTS DAVIS RESI-
DENCY AT UNCSA IS GENEROUSLY
PROVIDED BY THE THOMAS S. KENAN
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PROGRAM NOTES

Soprano Ollie Watts Davis and pianist Casey Robards will share a recital of Art Song by Black Americans. Representative works include song literature by Francis Hall Johnson, Henry Thacker Burleigh, Margaret Allison Bonds, Charles Lloyd, Jr., H. Leslie Adams and John Daniels Carter, with texts by the foremost Black writers of the early to mid-20th century. An interactive lecture, narrating the objective and development of the recital and including a time for questions and responses, will follow the performance.

As calls for diversity in concert programming and academic curricula reached a fever pitch in 2020, awareness of exclusion evidenced at institutions and in systems provided an opportunity for performing and learning from a wider, more equitable angle.

“Toward Justice and Shared Humanity: Art Song of Black Americans as Lens, Language, Vision and Hope” traces the experiences of Black Americans through their song and literature and in their voice, and advances the notion that progress is beyond statements and initial inclusion of “underrepresented” works, but demands initiatives that lead to an understanding of the social and cultural histories and contexts that informed the creative output.

The literature and songs capture the stories of Black Americans, showcasing the triumphs, strength, creativity, reality, and cultural treasure that is Black America. This repertoire reveals a lens for seeing the survival strategies and nourishing ways forward that Black Americans have used throughout their experience. Hope for lasting change is encouraged, fostering commitment to a shared human experience across ethnic and racial lines. This hope enlivens an equitable vision for life that encompasses freedom for all. The performance also provides language to express the need for collective effort in working toward this future.

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City Called Heaven Francis Hall Johnson
(1888-1970)

Deep River..... Henry Thacker Burleigh
(1866-1949)

Compensation (Paul Laurence Dunbar) Charles Lloyd, Jr.
(b. 1948)

Night Songs..... Harrison Leslie Adams
(b. 1932)

- Prayer (Langston Hughes)
- Drums of Tragedy (Langston Hughes)
- The Heart of a Woman (Georgia Douglas Johnson)
- Night Song (Clarissa Scott Delany)
- Sence you went away (James Weldon Johnson)
- Creole Girl (Leslie Morgan Collins)

Troubled Water Margaret Bonds
(1913-1972)

Casey Robards, piano

Three Dream Portraits..... Margaret Bonds

- Minstrel Man (Langston Hughes)
- Dream Variation (Langston Hughes)
- I, Too (Langston Hughes)

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For a Brown Girl Dead (Countee Cullen) Margaret Bonds

From Cantata..... John Daniels Carter
(1932-1981)

- Recitative
(Sometimes I feel like a Motherless Child)
- Toccata
(Ride on King Jesus)

BIOGRAPHIES

OLLIE WATTS DAVIS

Described as “a bubbling stream of a voice, remarkably smooth down into a resonant, rich low register” (San Francisco Chronicle), Ollie Watts Davis earns superlatives wherever she sings. Since her New York debut at Carnegie Hall, she has appeared with many of the nation’s leading orchestras, including the San Francisco, Minnesota, Houston, Milwaukee, Pittsburgh and Dallas Symphony orchestras; in opera with the San Luis Obispo Mozart Festival, the Opera Theatre of Saint Louis, Des Moines Metro Opera, Opera Theatre of Springfield and Illinois Opera Theatre; and internationally for performances and classes in North, Central and South America, Europe, Africa and Asia.

Davis is passionate about performances of historic significance and has performed in prestigious venues in Pakistan, Costa Rica, France and throughout the United States. Her presentations include “I’m a Stranger Here Myself,” as part of the exhibit “With Firmness in the Right: Lincoln and the Jews” at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum in Springfield Illinois, where she also presented “The Concert that Shook the Establishment,” a re-creation of Marian Anderson’s 1939 Easter morning concert on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial. She completed a residency at the University of Arkansas as performing artist and master class clinician and was featured in the PBS documentary “The Caged Bird: The life and music of Florence B. Price”. She has released two recordings as conductor and soprano with the Black Chorus at the University of Illinois and is featured on “Rootsongs” with the Jupiter Quartet. These come in addition to her solo recording of spiritual arrangements, “Here’s One,” which was featured on National Public Radio.

Davis’s creative activity includes presenting at the National Association of Teachers of Singing 75th Anniversary Transatlantic Pedagogy Tour to Germany. In December 2020, her work with Black Chorus was featured on the WILL-PBS documentary, “American Portrait: Central Illinois, Lift Every Voice,” which also debuted her composition, “For My Good,” and in February 2023 she directed the 16th biennial Black Sacred Music Symposium at the University of Illinois. Additional engagements include directing Black Chorus VI @ Illinois Summer Youth Music and service as artist-in-residence for Elmhurst University (Illinois) and Illinois State University. In June 2021, she served as a master teacher for the 2020 NATS Intern Program at Georgia Southern University, and in January 2022 as guest conductor for the Illinois Music Educators Association Conference All State Chorus. Her current project is a recital series titled “Toward Justice and Shared Humanity: Art Song of Black Americans as Lens, Language, Vision and Hope,” which she presented at the 2023 inaugural South Africa NATS conference at Stellenbosch University, the 57th National Conference of NATS (Chicago), Salisbury University (Maryland), Georgia Southern University, BayView Music Festival (Michigan), East Tennessee University (Johnson City) and as “The Black Rose Salon Concert” for the Generation Venetian Arts Society (GENVAS) of Fort Lauderdale (Florida) at the Florida House on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC. This

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performance was in honor of educator and activist Mary McCleod Bethune. Her performances have also been received at Working in Concert/Black Voices in Cabaret, the Peabody Institute of Music and SongFest.

In addition to her concert career, Davis uses her voice for important work as the writer of the mentoring curriculum “Talks My Mother Never Had With Me” and as a passionate mentor for young singers with StudiO: the Ollie Watts Davis Institute for Vocal Arts. As author, composer, performer and pedagogue, Davis, through her compelling performances and TALKS (Transfers A Little Knowledge Systemically). She is widely sought after as an inspirational speaker and delivered the keynote address for the televised 2020 Wisconsin Statewide Celebration honoring Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at the invitation of Governor Tony Evers from the Capitol Rotunda in Madison.

Davis is the Suzanne and William Allen Distinguished Professor in Music, professor of voice, associate dean for academic programs in the College of Fine and Applied Arts, and artistic director and conductor of the Black Chorus at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. In 2018, she was awarded the Outstanding Faculty Leadership Award; her second Campus Award for Excellence in Teaching in 2014; the Illinois Student Senate Teaching Excellence Award in 2012; and she was named a University Scholar in 2008, one of the highest honors bestowed upon a member of the faculty at the University of Illinois. Other awards include the UI College of Fine and Applied Arts Outstanding Faculty Award, a recognition award from the UI Alumni Association, and the Bronze Medallion of Honor by the UI Women’s Association, where she was recognized as a woman who through example and service has used her talents to enrich the lives of others.

Additional awards include the 2023 Lifetime Achievement Award from the National Association of Teachers of Singing Central Region, the Charles E. Walton Award presented by the Vivian G. Harsh Research Society of the Chicago Public Library for her “inestimable contributions” in 2016; the “Key to the City” for her musical contributions to the cultural life of Champaign, Illinois in 2015; the National Association for the Study and Performance of African American Music National Award in 2013; and the 40 North Lifetime ACE Award in 2012, which honors her accumulated successes for continued, outstanding support of the arts in the Champaign-Urbana community. Davis is a national honorary member of Sigma Alpha Iota and holds honorary membership in the National Society of Arts and Letters and Phi Beta Kappa.

A West Virginia native, Davis holds the Bachelor of Science (magna cum laude) from West Virginia Institute of Technology, where she was named Alumna of the Year; the Master of Arts from West Virginia University, and the Master of Music and Doctor of Musical Arts (Phi Beta Kappa) from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. She and her husband, Rev. Dr. Harold Davis, have five adult children and three wonderful grandchildren.

BIOGRAPHIES

CASEY ROBARDS

Korean American adoptee Casey Robards is a music director and pianist/vocal coach known for her sensitive musicality, expert collaborative skill and stylistic versatility. She has performed throughout the United States, Europe, Central and South America and Asia. Music directing projects include Afro-surrealist “Water Riot in Beta: A Cyberpunk Rock Opera,” “Three Decembers,” “Die Zauberflöte,” “La Boheme,” “La Traviata,” “Schicchi/Suor,” “Lucia di Lammermoor” and student premieres by Jiwon Hahn/Jolie O’Dell and Caleb Liddell. In 2023, Robards was appointed music director of Ensemble Concept 21, a chamber group that nurtures the development of young composers. Recent recitals include collaborations with Karen Slack, in her multimedia recital titled “Of Thee I Sing;” with LaToya Lain “Narrative of a Slave Woman,” a history telling program of Negro spirituals; and Ollie Watts Davis in an art song recital “Toward Justice and Shared Humanity: Art Song of Black Composer as Lens, Language, Vision and Hope.”

A committed pedagogue, Robards has special interest in piano and vocal music by Black composers, having experience in Black sacred music genres. She is the foremost expert on the life and music of renowned composer and pianist John D. Carter (1932-1981). Robards wrote a chapter on collaborative piano for “So You Want to Sing Spirituals” published by Rowman & Littlefield. Interested in the intersection of music and social justice, Robards has created benefit recitals for MUSICAMBIA, a non-profit organization that creates music conservatories in prisons.

Currently assistant professor of vocal coaching and accompanying at the University of Illinois, previous appointments include vocal coaching and collaborative piano at Indiana University, Oberlin Conservatory (postdoc) and Central Michigan University. She is main stage conductor and head of collaborative piano at the Bay View Festival, also serving as the co-director of the American Spiritual Intensive with Everett McCorvey.

Robards received the Henri Kohn Memorial Award for outstanding achievement at Tanglewood Music Festival. As a pianist/coach, Robards was a NATS professional intern, a Songfest professional development program participant and as a conductor, a participant in the Banff Opera in the 21st-Century program. Professional memberships include IKCAS (International Keyboard Collaborative Arts Society), NATS, Maestra, MUSE, Deus Ex Musica and the National Opera Association (chair of the Sacred in Opera Initiative).

UNCSA MANIFESTO

We Believe

ARTISTS enrich our culture, enlighten our society, lift our spirits, and feed our souls.

Integrative **ART EDUCATION** from an early age sparks a lifetime of creative thinking, powerful self-expression and innovative problem solving.

Rigorous **ARTISTIC TRAINING** empowers our students and graduates to engage our communities, advance local and global creative industries, and inspire the world.

ART ORGANIZATIONS improve the quality of life and place in big cities and small communities, transforming them from merely livable to truly lovable.

UNC SCHOOL OF THE ARTS nurtures the talent, hones the craft and develops the unique voices of emerging artists. We realize the full potential of exceptionally creative and passionate students to do their best work and become their best selves.



THE SCHOOL OF MUSIC

The School of Music gives talented young artists the opportunity to perfect their musical talent and prepare for life as professional musicians. Our training includes both private instruction and public performance experience, including more than 150 recitals and concerts presented each year. This performance experience, combined with career development opportunities and studies in music theory, literature and style, provides the ultimate training to help young musicians grow as both artists and professionals.

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Ten Thousand Birds

Sept. 16 at 3 p.m.

DANIEL'S PLAZA (OUTDOORS)

Come commune with nature and experience Pulitzer and Grammy award-winning American composer John Luther Adams' "Ten Thousand Birds." The work, meant to be performed outdoors, is inspired by the songs of birds that are native to, or migrate through, the area in which the piece is being performed — for this performance, Winston-Salem. Follow the cycle of a day, starting with avian songs of the morning, then afternoon, evening, night, and finally returning to morning. The performers are on the move as they play and encourage you, the audience, to move, too, and experience the music from a variety of perspectives.

UNCSA Wind Ensemble: Light Refractions

Sept. 22 at 7:30 p.m.

STEVENS CENTER

Inspired by Super Novas to Greek Methodology, the UNCSA Wind Ensemble presents the music of Katahji Copley, Kathryn Salfelder, Anthony DiLorenzo, Jennifer Jolley and John Mackey. The UNCSA faculty brass quintet, Watson Brass will be featured with the wind ensemble on Anthony DiLorenzo's fiery Chimera based on the mythical Greek creature. Members include David Dash and Mary Elizabeth Bowden, trumpets; Maria Serkin, horn; Seth Frack, trombone; and Brent Harvey, tuba. UNCSA Director of Instrumental Ensembles Mark A. Norman will conduct.