



—UNITED WE PLAY—

MARCUS ROBERTS AND THE MODERN JAZZ GENERATION COME TOGETHER WITH
AMERICAN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA FOR A VIRTUAL PREMIERE ON DECEMBER 9, 2020

All-Roberts Musical Program Features Three World Premieres

Plus, ASO Offers Free Live Chamber Music Performances for Video Streaming

New York, NY, October 28, 2020 — **Marcus Roberts and The Modern Jazz Generation** will join the **American Symphony Orchestra (ASO)** to offer *United We Play*, a short film to be available on ASO's new streaming platform [ASO Online](#), starting at 5 PM EST on **Wednesday, December 9**. The production features three world premieres of works for strings, jazz instrumentals, and piano composed by Marcus Roberts and commissioned by the ASO: *America Has the Blues*, *Seeking Peace*, and *United We Play*. The film also includes commentary by the composer and the ASO's music director Leon Botstein.

United We Play is inspired by the current turbulent times, and the belief that strength comes through adversity—where there is divide, there is also community. The project combines the talents of Marcus Roberts, The Modern Jazz Generation ensemble, and the ASO's string section in a musical, visual, and narrative digital experience that speaks to the future in a positive and hopeful way.

An all-Ellington symphonic performance scheduled for March 12, 2020 and featuring Roberts and members of The Modern Jazz Generation at Carnegie Hall was cancelled hours before the performance due to the pandemic shutdown in New York. The ASO will reschedule this concert in the 2021-22 season pending safety and public health requirements.

Marcus Roberts is a celebrated jazz pianist, recording artist, award-winning composer, and Florida State University faculty member. He was profiled on CBS News' *60 Minutes*, which traced his distinctive journey from his early roots in Jacksonville and at the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind to his remarkable career. Roberts is also a recipient of the Helen Keller Award for Personal Achievement from the American Foundation for the Blind.

For the past 25 years, Roberts has been blending the seemingly different worlds of jazz and classical music through his many compositions, arrangements, and performances. The result combines the contrasting approaches of spontaneous improvisation and written music into a collage that is uniquely and unmistakably American. Roberts' Grammy-nominated recording *Portraits in Blue* (Sony Classical, 1996) was one of the first recorded collaborations between jazz and classical music. Since then he has been commissioned by numerous organizations such as Chamber Music America, Jazz at Lincoln Center, ASCAP, the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, the Savannah Music Festival, and Seiji Ozawa and the Saito Kinen Festival Orchestra. Roberts' renowned jazz trio has been touring for more than 25 years and served as the foundation for the multi-generational The Modern Jazz Generation ensemble.

“We are a diverse group of people and we love playing together,” says Roberts of *United We Play*. “As musicians, we have learned to depend on and trust one another in order to create something greater than any one of us could create alone. I believe that every time we listen to someone else’s voice we become stronger and better people. Given the current state of the world, I hope that the great musical collaboration we built with the ASO for *United We Play* will be used as a vehicle to encourage and demonstrate that strength.”

“The American Symphony Orchestra has a longstanding history of presenting works by Black American composers,” said Music Director Leon Botstein. “To continue its mission, the ASO recently expanded its outreach by featuring works and composers unfairly neglected on our new streaming initiative *ASO Online*. It is my sincerest wish that *United We Play*, our second collaboration with Marcus Roberts, clearly shows how the performing arts can lead the way in presenting a vision of a more democratic and equitable society.”

The ASO’s string chamber orchestra will be filmed at the Fisher Center at Bard College while Marcus Roberts and members of the Modern Jazz Generation will record separately from their home locations. The film is produced and presented by the ASO in collaboration with Marcus Roberts.

United We Play

All music composed and arranged by Marcus Roberts

America Has the Blues (World Premiere)

Seeking Peace (World Premiere)

United We Play (World Premiere)

Leon Botstein, conductor, music director (American Symphony Orchestra)

Marcus Roberts, composer, music director (The Modern Jazz Generation)

The Modern Jazz Generation

Marcus Roberts, piano

Rodney Jordan, bass

Jason Marsalis, drums

Joe Goldberg, alto saxophone, clarinet

Ricardo Pascal, soprano & tenor saxophones

Stephen Riley, tenor saxophone

Tissa Khosla, baritone saxophone

Alphonso Horne, trumpet

Tim Blackmon, trumpet

Ron Westray, trombone

American Symphony Orchestra

Funding for this project is being raised through the Musician Support Initiative, a campaign to provide opportunities for ASO’s musicians while live performances with full orchestra are not possible. Support for the production of *United We Play* can be made through online donations [here](#).

ASO’s Digital Initiatives

Free Live Chamber Music Performances and Streams

In August, the American Symphony Orchestra launched a series of [free outdoor chamber performances](#). The events are presented as socially-distanced, live chamber music and pop-up concerts that are curated and performed by ASO musicians and reflect the Orchestra’s vital mission of providing music within the reach

of everyone. One of the programs, presented at the Washington Lake Park Amphitheater in New Jersey and at Bryant Park, showcased works by **Nino Rota**, **Samuel Barber**, and **George Walker**—the first Black winner of the Pulitzer Prize in music—all of whom studied composition with Rosario Scalerò at the Curtis Institute. The concert was performed by ASO's concertmaster Cyrus Beroukhim, principal violin Richard Rood, principal viola William Frampton (curator for the program), and cellist Alberto Parrini.

A second program [featured six Black composers](#) and explored works by **Florence Price**, the first Black woman to have a composition performed by a major orchestra, along with works by **William Grant Still**, **Adolphus Hailstork**, **Jessie Montgomery**, **Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson**, and **Trevor Weston**. The concert was performed by ASO's concertmaster Cyrus Beroukhim, violinist Philip Payton (curator for the program), principal viola William Frampton, and cellist Alberto Parrini. It was repeated at the [Morris Museum in New Jersey on Oct. 17](#). A third program was offered on [Oct. 14](#) at the Opus 40 Sculpture Park and Museum in Saugerties, NY featuring ASO's oboist Julia DeRosa and clarinetist Liam Burke in arrangements of works by Bach, Britten, Messiaen, Mozart, and Puccini.

Works performed at those concerts will be **offered for free video streaming on ASO Online** during the 2020-21 season.

ASO Online

ASO recently launched [ASO Online](#), a digital initiative in collaboration with Bard's Fisher Center that offers recordings of outstanding and often rarely-heard past performances for streaming. So far, the content has featured 8 operas and 15 symphonic works alternating between live video recordings of operas from Bard's SummerScape with ASO as the orchestra-in-residence, and iconic orchestral audio recordings from the Orchestra's past seasons. The fall 2020 content will include video recordings of live chamber music concerts and other digital projects presented by ASO as part of its [current season](#) and uploaded regularly.

American Symphony Orchestra

Now in its 59th season, the American Symphony Orchestra was founded in 1962 by Leopold Stokowski, with a mission of providing music within the means of everyone. Music Director Leon Botstein expanded that mission when he joined the ASO in 1992, creating thematic concerts that explore music from the perspective of the visual arts, literature, religion, and history, and reviving rarely-performed works that audiences would otherwise never have a chance to hear performed live.

The ASO's signature programming includes its Vanguard Series, which presents concerts of rare orchestral repertoire at Carnegie Hall and Lincoln Center; an adult educational series at Symphony Space that offers interactive investigations into popular classical works; and various other events dedicated to enriching and reflecting the diverse perspectives of American culture. During the summer months, the ASO is the orchestra-in-residence at Bard's SummerScape and performs at the Bard Music Festival.

As part of its commitment to expanding the standard orchestral repertoire, the ASO has released recordings on the Telarc, New World, Bridge, Koch, and Vanguard labels, and live performances are also available for [digital download](#). In many cases, these are the only existing recordings of some of the forgotten works that have been restored through ASO performances.

For more information, please visit americansymphony.org.

Leon Botstein

Leon Botstein has been music director and principal conductor of the American Symphony Orchestra since 1992. He is also music director of The Orchestra Now, an innovative training orchestra composed of top musicians from around the world. He is co-artistic director of Bard SummerScape and the Bard Music Festival, which take place at the Richard B. Fisher Center for the Performing Arts at Bard College, where he has been president since 1975. He is also conductor laureate of the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, where he served as music director from 2003–11. In 2018, he assumed artistic directorship of Campus Grafenegg and Grafenegg Academy in Austria. Mr. Botstein also has an active career as a guest conductor with orchestras around the globe, and has made numerous recordings, as well as being a prolific author and music historian. He is the recipient of numerous honors for his contributions to the music industry. In 2019, *The New York Times* named Leon Botstein a “champion of overlooked works...who has tirelessly worked to bring to light worthy scores by neglected composers.” More info online at LeonBotstein.com.

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