Marcus Roberts: I’ve been thinking a lot lately about the current state of the world and the current state of our country. This is a very difficult time in our history. We seem to be surrounded by pain and conflict and mistrust, but we are here today to show you in our own way how music can help us overcome. As musicians, we have had to learn to depend on and trust one another in order to create something greater together than any of us could have created alone. Through music, we can learn to work together, because every time we truly listen to someone else’s voice, we become stronger—better musicians and better people.

MUSIC BY:
Marcus Roberts

United We Play

Marcus: United We Play is about bringing jazz and classical music together as a symbol of the need to bring our entire country together.

A PRODUCTION OF:
The American Symphony Orchestra
and
Marcus Roberts, J-Master Music

MARCUS ROBERTS & THE MODERN JAZZ GENERATION

Marcus Roberts Piano
Rodney Jordan Bass
Jason Marsalis Drums
Joe Goldberg Alto Saxophone & Clarinet
Ricardo Pascal Tenor & Soprano Saxophones
Stephen Riley Tenor Saxophone
Tissa Khosla Baritone Saxophone
Alphonso Horne Trumpet
Tim Blackmon Trumpet
Ron Westray Trombone
Leon Botstein: Music is a meaningful means of human expression and action without being easily pinned down. I don’t think we can live without music any more than we can live without language. For music really to survive it can’t be through any box—not the computer, the audio device, not the smartphone—it has to be human-to-human and in real time, real space. Nothing has brought that home more vividly than this enforced isolation from doing that.

Marcus: The American Symphony is a great orchestra. We were rehearsing to do a concert together at Carnegie Hall right at the beginning of the pandemic. Unfortunately, just a few hours before the show, Carnegie Hall was closed and the show was canceled. So we hated to lose the chance to perform together, so we came up with the idea to do this remote performance for all of you.

Leon: Music, it demands our being together in a common space. This project, which is a stopgap between the times when we were actually able to perform in front of the public and with the public, and the time when we will be able to do so again.

Marcus: This pandemic is certainly an enormous problem. To overcome it, we’re going to have to get to it by working together and looking out for one another. Each of the 10 jazz musicians, we rehearsed over Zoom, connected remotely.

Marlan Barry: Are you guys there?
Marcus: The classical players and the maestro recorded the string parts separately, and I was logged in from 1,500 miles away. Contrabass was late at measure 21. This pandemic has forced us, as people, into isolation. It’s not natural. But, perhaps it’s an opportunity for us to find innovative ways to collaborate remotely and to get together and work better together.

When I was writing America Has the Blues I was thinking about the many complex issues that our country is struggling with at this time in our history. In jazz music, we play the blues to defeat the blues in life. Our music sends a clear message that we never succumb or give up. This piece is a statement that together, we will overcome the blues in this very difficult time.

*America Has the Blues* [Musical Feature]

Marcus: *Seeking Peace* is a song that I wrote for piano and strings. Sometimes in the midst of chaos and turmoil, we just need to find a quiet place to reflect. I’ve been doing more of that than usual this year myself. The sound of the strings, it’s a beautiful sound—my hope is that it will bring you a feeling of tranquility and a feeling of being settled.

*Seeking Peace* [Musical Feature]

Leon: The real demands of our life—whether it is about the water in our community or the schools in our community, whatever community you may be in, you’re going to have neighbors who are not like yourself. They’re of different religion, they’re different belief, they come from different places, they’re different color skin. You can’t choose them the way you can on the Internet, and that’s the demand of democracy: to listen, to compromise—and musical communication is connected to democracy. The role of the listener, the player, the performer, the spaces we have for music. What happens in a musical ensemble, what happens when we dance to music, we sing together at church. We use music as a kind of medium, a form of life by which we connect with other people, and we can express kindness to strangers.

Marcus: When we have 20 or 30 great musicians on the stage, especially at the same time, we have to find a balance between freedom and individual achievement and collaboration. If everybody is just concerned with being the star of the show, we likely would end up with chaos. So we have to listen to each other and make room for each musician’s part to be heard. This is a very politically charged time in our history. It’s so important that we do everything we can to listen to one another and work together. If we do, if we do the same in our families, our workplaces, and in our communities, I think we would have a much more peaceful society and a lot more satisfaction in our lives.

*United We Play* [Musical Feature]
Credits

UNITED WE PLAY

America Has the Blues
Seeking Peace
United We Play

Composed and arranged by Marcus Roberts
Commissioned by the American Symphony Orchestra
Published by Marcus Roberts, J-Master Music

Marcus Roberts, Executive Producer
Leon Botstein, Music Director

Featuring

Marcus Roberts & The Modern Jazz Generation

Marcus Roberts  Piano
Rodney Jordan  Bass
Jason Marsalis  Drums
Joe Goldberg  Clarinet & Alto Saxophone
Ricardo Pascal  Tenor & Soprano Saxophones
Stephen Riley  Tenor Saxophone
Tissa Khosla  Baritone Saxophone
Alphonso Horne  Trumpet
Tim Blackmon  Trumpet
Ron Westray  Trombone

Lynn Moore  Artist Manager

American Symphony Orchestra

Leon Botstein  Conductor
Cyrus Beroukhim  Concertmaster
Pauline Kim Harris  Violin I
Philip Payton  Violin I
Robert Zubrycki  Violin I
Richard Rood  Principal Violin II
Wende Namkung  Violin II
Ragga Petursdottir  Violin II
Dana Kelley  Principal Viola
Shelley Holland-Moritz  Viola
Debra Shufelt-Dine  Viola
Eugene Moye  Principal Cello
Maureen Hynes  Cello
Alberto Parrini  Cello
Jordan Frazier  Principal Bass
Oliver Inteeworn  Executive Director
Ally Chapel  Marketing Manager
Katherine Peck  Director of Development
Catherine Williams  Operations & Audience Development Coordinator
Zachary Schwartzman  Assistant Conductor
Matt Dine  Personnel Manager
Sebastian Danila  Library Manager
Marc Cerri  Orchestra Librarian
Marielle Metivier  Production Consultant

Film Production

Lynn Moore  Co-Director
Oliver Inteeworn  Co-Director
AJ Wilhelm  Director of Photography & Editor
Alexander Ariff  Senior Producer
Chelsea Solitrin  Senior Producer
Ally Chapel  Creative Director
Marcus Roberts  Audio Producer
Les Stephenson  Audio Engineer
Joe Goldberg  Assistant Engineer
Tissa Khosla  Assistant Engineer
Marlan Barry  Audio Producer & Engineer (ASO string section)
Damon Whittemore  Co-Engineer (ASO string section)
Kostadin Kamcev  Assistant Engineer, Studio Mozart (drums)
Danny Carr  Robo Cam
John Gasper  Robo Cam Operator
Denise Sinelov  Additional Camera
Alexander Ariff  Additional Camera

SPECIAL THANKS

Sam Gellerstein  -  Jeff Bradshaw  -  Tre Lambert  -  Khayyl CE  -  Ben Gullett
Julian Weller, Musicians United NYC  -  Marc Basch  -  Matt Dine  -  Gillian Maranga

Stock licensed from Pexels, Storyblocks, Pond5, Shutterstock, and iStock

United We Play was recorded at the Sosnoff Theater at and with the support of the Fisher Center at Bard.
fishercenter.bard.edu