



# **JUNETEENTH**

## ***“SONGS OF BLACK FOLK 2023”***

### ***Music of Resistance & Hope***

Paramount Theatre  
911 Pine St, Seattle, WA 98101

**Sunday, June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023, 7:00 pm**

[www.songsofblackfolk.org](http://www.songsofblackfolk.org)

#### **The Music**

The **SONGS OF BLACK FOLK** returns for a second year after a truly magical debut one year ago before a mesmerized audience of more than 1,800. **SONGS OF BLACK FOLK 2023** will take to the stage of Seattle’s iconic Paramount Theatre on Sunday evening June 18<sup>th</sup>, at 7:00 pm.

**SONGS OF BLACK FOLK 2023** will once again present a music tradition that began on the African continent and was transported to the Americas, via slave ships, and took root in the daily sufferings of an enslaved Black people who chose to survive and who fought to be free. This Concert will feature the rise of the Negro Spirituals and demonstrate how they have evolved into other Black musical genres including, blues, jazz, Gospel, R&B, Hip-Hop, and even spoken word.

Importantly, the audience will be shown how Black musical culture has functioned as both a tool of resistance and as a powerful source of hope for a Black people who have endured four centuries of white supremacy and its relentless assault on Black lives. Ultimately, the intent of **SBF** is to use music to connect the African American struggle for freedom, justice, dignity, and happiness with the struggles of other Americans who have had to fight their way from the margins of American society into the mainstream.

#### **The Mission**

The mission of **SONGS OF BLACK FOLK** is to utilize the Juneteenth holiday weekend as a compelling backdrop for a worldclass “fine arts” production that features elite African American artists, both local and national. This provides the Northwest audience with a Black Cultural Arts experience that rivals the most elite productions presented anywhere in the U.S. In essence, **SBF** is the Northwest audience’s opportunity to annually experience the *best of Black folk*



### **The Artistic Director, Orchestra Conductor, and Choir Director**

Maestro Ramón Bryant Braxton returns for a second year as the Artistic Director and Conductor for ***SONGS OF BLACK FOLK 2023***. A native of Tacoma, Braxton is a product of the Black Church and the Historically Black College and University (HBCU) experience. He is a graduate of the iconic Morehouse College in Atlanta (BA), where he studied under Dr. Uzee Brown, renowned educator, composer, singer, Choir Director, and musical mentor. Bryant received his graduate musical education (MM) at the Morgan State University in Baltimore where he studied under the late Dr. Nathan M. Carter, an internationally renowned teacher of vocal music who built the Morgan State University Choir into one of the premier vocal groups in the nation. Braxton is a composer, orchestra conductor, choir director, vocalist, pianist, and organist. He has led and served with the musical staffs of some of the most historic and premier African American churches in the nation including, the Abyssinia Baptist Church of Harlem, the Metropolitan Baptist Church of Washington DC, the New Psalmist Baptist Church of Baltimore, the Ebenezer Baptist Church of Atlanta, and the First Shiloh Baptist Church of Buffalo. Braxton has performed with Baltimore's internationally acclaimed *"Soulful Symphony"*: a full symphony orchestra and vocalists of only elite African American and Latin X musicians. Braxton was formerly the vocal instructor at the Duke Ellington School of the Arts in Washington DC and the Assistant Director of the Howard University Choir.



### **Special Guest**

Darin Atwater is a critically acclaimed composer, conductor, pianist, record producer, arranger, film composer, vocalist, and arts advocate. Though classically trained, his music incorporates gospel and jazz. He has recorded and conducted for Yolanda Adams, Donnie McClurkin, Shirley Caesar, Richard Smallwood, Wynton Marsalis, Jennifer Hudson, and Ruben Studdard to name a few. In 2000, Atwater founded Soulful Symphony, an orchestra with vocals made up of primarily African American and Latino musicians. The 2009 Emmy Award-winning *"Soulful Symphony with Darin Atwater"* was one of the longest running pledge specials for MPT/PBS. In 2018, Atwater was commissioned by the Mann Center and the Philadelphia Orchestra to compose *"South Side, Symphonic Dances"* - an adaptation of *"West Side Story"* for the Leonard Bernstein Centennial.

## ***Featured Soloists***



### **Solomon Howard**

Solomon is one of the most acclaimed opera singers in the world. His voice is described as “*sonorous*” by the New York Times, “*Superhuman*” by the Denver Post, and “*a triumph*” by the Guardian. He is the winner of the 2021 Washington Performing Arts Ambassador of the Arts Award, and the Kennedy Center’s 2019 Marion Anderson Vocal Award. He is a graduate of Washington National Opera’s Domingo-Cafritz Young Artist Program. Solomon is a graduate of Howard University (BA) and Morgan State University (MM). In addition to his vocal brilliance, Solomon has gained acclaim as one of the nation’s premier percussionists.



### **Jacqueline Echols**

Lyric soprano Jacqueline Echols has been praised for her “dynamic range and vocal acrobatics” (*Classical Voice*) in theaters across the United States. In the summer of 2022, Echols reprised her acclaimed portrayal of Clara in *Porgy and Bess* in her debut with Des Moines Metro Opera. In the 2022/23 season, Echols has returned to the LA Opera as Julie in Rhiannon Giddens and Michael Abels’ *Omar*. She also debuts the role of Juliette in *Romeo et Juliette* with Opera San Antonio and makes her long-awaited return to the Kennedy Center reprising the role of Musetta in *La Boheme* with Washington National Opera.



### **James Conner**

James has been a performer at the Universal Studios since 2009. He is a Gospel and R&B recording artist, composer, conductor, pianist, dancer, and actor. James is a graduate of the Berklee College of Music in Boston where he studied Music Education. He has served as Minister of Music, Worship Leader, and Choir Director for Churches in Massachusetts, California, and Washington. A native of Seattle, He sang with the Total Experience Gospel Choir under the musical mentorship of Rev. Pat Wright in his youth.



### **Crystal Aikin**

Crystal Renee Aikin is an American gospel singer-songwriter from Tacoma, Washington, and the winner of the first season of Sunday Best. Her eponymous debut album was released on January 13, 2009, through Verity Records. In 2010

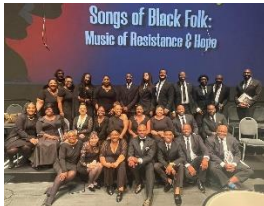
Aikin was nominated for a GMA Dove Award for New Artist of the Year at the 41<sup>st</sup> GMA Dove Awards. In 2012 she released, *Silent Night*, through Verity Records. In 2015 she released, *All I Need*, through RCA Records.



### **Josephine Howell**

Josephine Howell is arguably the Pacific Northwest's most popular and beloved African American vocalist on the scene today. She flows seamlessly between Rhythm & Blues, jazz, and Gospel music, thrilling crowds and congregations in clubs, concert halls, and houses of worship. Her distinctive contralto/mezzo voice and captivating personality make her performances a truly transformative experience for her audiences.

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### **Choral Singers**

An intergenerational Choral group of 40 gifted African American singers from the Puget Sound Community will perform under Braxton's direction. The Choral group will combine the talents of well-known local vocalists and emerging young local vocalists. Together they form a musically versatile Choir with an extraordinarily rich and dynamic sound.



### **The Musicians**

A 50-piece Orchestra (Conducted by Ramon Braxton) will accompany the Choir and the featured soloists. The orchestra will be comprised of musicians from the Puget Sound community. Additionally, the music will be supported by a 7-piece rhythm section that will combine the talents of local and national musicians.



### **The Emcees**

The emcees for ***SONGS OF BLACK FOLK 2023***, will be the Honorable T'wina Nobles, Washington State Senator from the 28th District and KING 5 News Reporter Lionel Donovan.



### **VIP Reception**

There will be a pre-event VIP Reception beginning at 6:00 pm. The list of invitees will include event sponsors, public officials, and community leaders. The Conductors will make a brief appearance at the reception to thank the event sponsors and to explain the music and the program that they are about to present.

**Don't miss this journey through music – Sunday June 18, 2023 @ 7:00 pm**