

joy

ft. kebra-seyoun charles



march 15 - 18, 2023

portland, me | cambridge, ma | brooklyn, ny



palaver
STRINGS

program

Tonight's program celebrates the joy and catharsis that music can give us, featuring bassist Kebra-Seyoun Charles, winner of the 2022 Sphinx Competition. In a mashup of musical styles and eras, we combine string orchestra classics by Grieg and Bartok with fiddle tunes and Feeling Good, made famous by Nina Simone. At the heart of this program is John B. Hedges' Raise Hymn, Praise Shout, a concerto for bass and strings originally commissioned by the Sphinx Organization in 2014. This piece is rooted in African American church music traditions, with the soloist "lining out" hymns and leading the "congregation" (string orchestra) in song. To connect more spontaneously with the audience and each other, Palaver will play much of the program from memory.

Sonata on a Theme from Feeling Good - Anthony Newley, Leslie Bricusse, arr. Kebra-Seyoun Charles

Romanian Folk Dances - Bela Bartok, arr. Alexander Goodin

Raise Hymn Praise Shout - John B. Hedges

Holberg Suite - Edvard Grieg

Praeludium

Sarabande

Gavotte

Air

Rigaudon

Tree House | Jig for John #2 | Forestreet - Elizabeth Moore, Liz Knowles

program notes

Art in all its forms, but perhaps especially music, has the power to make us feel good, and **Feeling Good** is the ultimate feelgood song. Written by British songwriters **Anthony Newley** and **Leslie Bricusse** for their stage musical, *The Roar of the Greasepaint, the Smell of the Crowd*, *Feeling Good* was seized upon by singers and arrangers even before the musical hit the stage, in thanks to the promotional recording released to drum up attention for the show. While not the first to cover the song, **Nina Simone's** recording of *Feeling Good* from 1965 became the definitive rendition, with her arranger Hal Mooney bringing in a big band, and emphasizing beats one and three, giving the song the feel we think of today. **Kebra-Seyoun Charles** goes a step further in their arrangement of the piece, setting the melody in $\frac{3}{4}$ time, and giving it the royal treatment with an introduction in the french overture style, full of drama and sweeping runs. Written to express the particular joy that comes with freedom from oppression, the release of *Feeling Good* at the height of the civil rights movement struck a chord with listeners, and embodied the hopes of all those protesting for equality. The poignancy of the song still holds today, and it remains an enduring classic, with countless renditions from across the years.

Bela Bartok's Romanian Folk Dances has been a favorite of Palaver's over the years, ever since our former bassist Alexander Goodin put together an arrangement for us that moved the solo line throughout the members of the ensemble. With the solo passing from musician to musician, it allows us to express ourselves as individuals and to interact with each other in a way that brings us joy as an ensemble. Bartok was a documentarian, and collected field recordings of Hungarian melodies which inspired much of his music. Composed in 1915, the suite of 6 short dances draws on the folk music of Hungary, and in our latest rendition of the piece, we have gone back to the original folk tunes for inspiration, listening to both Bartok's field recordings made with Edison's phonograph, and contemporary Hungarian folk musicians playing these same tunes. The movements are as follows: Stick Dance, Sash Dance, In One Spot, Dance from Bucsum, Romanian Polka, Fast Dance.

Raise Hymn, Praise Shout was commissioned by The Sphinx Organization to be performed by the Sphinx Virtuosi and Sphinx 2014 1st place laureate Xavier Foley as soloist. . . This newly composed work goes further into that original idea of bass soloist as preacher and is conceived in three sections played without pause, all of which explore music forms from the African American church music tradition. The first section, *Raising the Hymn*, is a more direct reimagining of a classic long meter hymn being lined out (Specifically in this case, the hymn 'What a Friend We Have in Jesus'.) The solo bass metaphorically 'lines out' the opening hymn text and then proceeds to raise the hymn by leading the 'congregation' (string orchestra) in song. They in turn, freely follow his lead, improvising around the line as the spirit moves them. The second section, *Prayer*, is the material taken from the original concerto; the bass soloist leading their congregation in a more tender, expression of a hymn tune building to a prayer spoken over the supportive, improvisatory humming of the ensemble. As the soloists energy of the room increases the music builds into an explosive *Praise Break* of shouting music, all musicians exclaiming their joy through rhythm, dance and song. - *John B. Hedges*

Edward Grieg's Holberg Suite, a beloved musical landscape in five sections, is simultaneously playful and spirited while also evoking mourning and repose. Although the piece adheres to a traditional "baroque" structure with dance movements like "Gavotte" and "Sarabande," Grieg was a lush romantic and does not shy away from sweeping melodies, poignant harmonies, and folksong. The piece was originally written for piano in 1884 and arranged for string orchestra a year later.

Treehouse/Jig For John #2/Fore Street is a set of tunes written and arranged by two Portland-based fiddlers, **Liz Knowles** and Palaver violist **Elizabeth Moore**. Moore's nostalgic waltz *Treehouse*, was originally written as a birthday gift for her father, who was a contra dance caller and always saved the last waltz of the night to dance with her. Liz's *Jig for John #2* is a lilting jig in the traditional Irish style. We are very grateful to Liz for coaching us on Irish style and groove. The set ends with the raucous *Fore Street*, a reel written by Elizabeth's when she lived above a rowdy bar in Portland's Old Port. The arrangement was first put together for Palaver's album *Ready or Not*.

musicians + artists

violin: Che Buford, Josie Davis, Kiyoshi Hayashi, Teagan Faran, Maya French

viola: Brianna Fischler, Lysander Jaffe, Elizabeth Moore

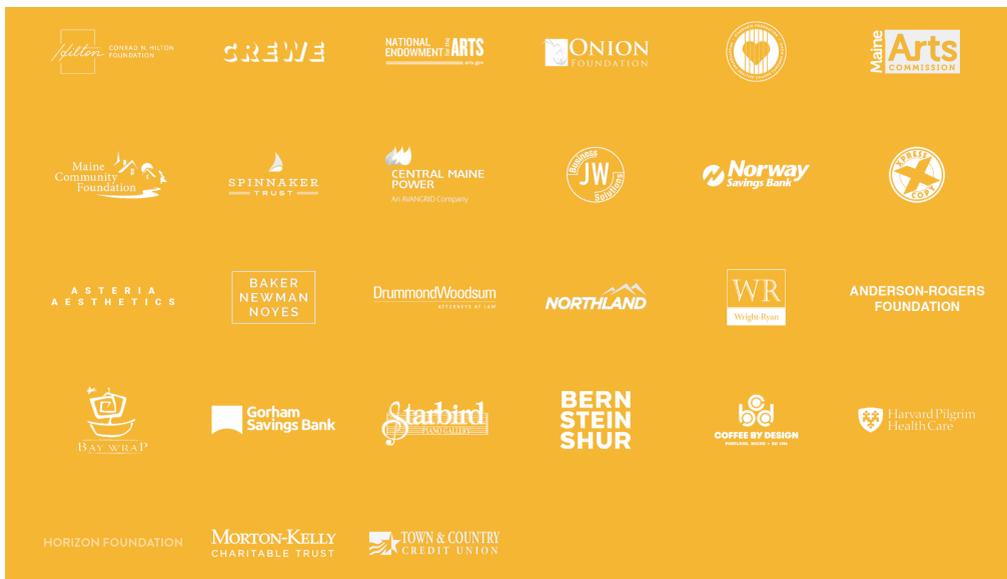
cello: Matthew Smith, Nathaniel Taylor, Kamyron Williams **bass:** Nate Martin

guest collaborator: Kebra-Seyoun Charles

With inherent virtuosity and the singular ability to communicate their ideas effortlessly to audiences, **Kebra-Seyoun Charles** is poised to be a leader of their generation. After winning first prize in the 2022 Sphinx Competition, Kebra-Seyoun has quickly made a name for herself by soloing in front of orchestras such as the New World Symphony, Indianapolis Symphony and Palaver Strings. Growing up the child of an African drummer and dancer, Kebra-Seyoun was exposed to music at a very early age. Having been steeped in jazz, gospel, and traditional African music, they developed an interest in a multiplicity of genres. In line with their upbringing, Kebra-Seyoun is able to give prominence to the dance qualities in all forms of music. Exhibiting their versatility, Kebra-Seyoun has collaborated with esteemed improvisers and composers such as Jon Batiste, at Carnegie Hall, and Tyshawn Sorey, at the New England Conservatory. In addition to their solo career, Kebra-Seyoun is a passionate chamber musician. Playing with groups like East Coast Chamber Orchestra, A Far Cry, Palaver Strings and the Sphinx Virtuosi afford Kebra the opportunity to showcase their musicianship while still playing within an ensemble. A prime example of this is their tenure on the 2019 Emmy award winning Broadway production "Hadestown". As if this weren't enough, they also have 32 piercings.

Palaver Strings is a musician-led string ensemble and nonprofit organization based in Portland, ME. Founded in 2014, Palaver has established itself as a forward-thinking ensemble whose mission is to strengthen and inspire community through music. In our musician-led model, Palaver's musicians share artistic and administrative leadership, guided by a passion for engaging new audiences, addressing social justice issues, and amplifying underrepresented voices. Each year, Palaver presents a full series of live performances featuring diverse musical programming, cross-genre projects, and community collaborations. **To support our work with a tax-deductible donation, visit www.palaverstrings.org/donate**

Palaver Strings affirms that Black lives matter and acknowledges that systemic racism continues to affect our community. Our mission is to strengthen and inspire community through music, and we believe that true community is not possible without sustained work to dismantle these oppressive structures that can separate us and impair the development of the community we seek. As performers, educators, and collaborators, we strive to create a culture of equity, inclusion, and accountability. One necessary part of this work is examining classical music's legacy of exclusion and white supremacy, and the ways in which this legacy shapes our playing, decision-making, and ways of being together. We will coordinate that effort with a continuing awareness of the effects that exclusion and white supremacy have on our day-to-day lives. Our work cannot end here; it must continue with concrete action to disrupt these systems and practices.



*Our sincere gratitude goes out to the movers and shakers at **Longy School of Music, Mechanics Hall,** and **National Sawdust,** for presenting live music and supporting the arts; the dozens of **hosts** and **audience members** who welcome musicians into their homes during Palaver's performance weeks; **Merry Peckham** and **Liz Knowles** for their incredible coaching this cycle; **Roland Robitaille** for his logistical and audio support; **Tuere Lawton** for the poster artwork; **Haley Maiden** for her marketing expertise; **Fiona Hilton** for her beautiful graphic design; and our **Board of Directors** and all of the generous supporters who continue to make our work possible.*