

Gateways Music Festival Coming To Carnegie Hall April 27



Fri, Apr 19, 2024 –
Chicago Symphony Orchestra
Symphony Center Presents
Gateway Music Festival Final concert
featuring Take 6

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The Gateways Music Festival is heading to New York City April 24-27 to celebrate Black musicians in classical music. The festival launched April 21st in Rochester, New York, with a series of concerts and panel discussions. The spring event will host lectures, concerts, and master classes in Manhattan. The Gateways Festival Orchestra is the heart of the event,

with members from national orchestras and music faculties. The orchestra is returning to Carnegie Hall, where it debuted with a sold-out show in 2022. Anthony Parnter will lead again as the conductor to direct the orchestra through symphonies by Antonín Dvořák and William Levi Dawson. Damien Sneed will present the New York premiere of a Gateway-commissioned piece featuring Grammy-winning mezzo-soprano J’Nai Bridges. There will be solo recitals from pianist Rochelle Sennet and Grammy-nominated violinist Curtis Stewart. The Gateways Brass Collective will perform; there will be discussion and educational initiatives. Spring Festival 2025 is presented in association with the University of Rochester’s Eastman School of Music. Gateways is dedicated to supporting Black classical musicianship and bringing together multiracial and multigenerational audiences.

“Gateways isn’t just a festival—it’s a home. A place where Black classical musicians bring their full selves to the stage and where audiences can come together to listen, connect, and celebrate,” said Gateways Music Festival President & Artistic Director Alex Laing. “This April, we invite everyone to come out, see world-class artists, and be part of a cultural moment. Whether it’s your first festival or you never miss one, if classical music has been part of your life for decades or you’re experiencing it for the first time, Gateways Spring Festival promises to challenge, inspire, and uplift.”

Fresh off a landmark 30th anniversary season in 2023-2024, which included major debuts in Chicago and Washington, D.C.’s Kennedy Center as well as a \$1 million Mellon Foundation award, the Gateways Festival Orchestra heads to New York with a thoughtfully curated program that honors **the** enduring power of folk traditions, with special focus on Negro spirituals. The finale concert on April 27, at 2 p.m. at Carnegie Hall, opens with Antonín Dvořák’s Eighth Symphony, a work inspired

by the dances and folk tunes of the composer's Bohemian homeland. Dvořák believed that "Negro melodies ... must be the real foundation of any serious and original school of composition to be developed in the United States." The program concludes with William Levi Dawson's *Negro Folk Symphony*, a towering landmark in American composition, first heard at Carnegie Hall just days after its 1934 world premiere. Rooted in the spiritual tradition and shaped by Dawson's travels in West Africa, his work represents a resounding declaration of Black cultural pride.

The two symphonies bookend the New York City premiere of *Reflections of Resilience: Five Spirituals*, a new Gateways Music Festival commission from NAACP Image Award- and Sphinx Medal of Excellence-winning musical polymath Damien Sneed, featuring the Grammy-winning mezzo-soprano J'Nai Bridges. Sneed describes the new work as "five spirituals carefully woven together in a musical tapestry highlighting the tradition of the African American spiritual."

The Carnegie Hall concert will stream live to home audiences worldwide as part of WQXR's *Live from Carnegie Hall* series.

Spring Festival 2025 shines a light on the work of two important Black artists. "Combining omnivory and brilliance" (*The New York Times*), six-time Grammy nominee Curtis Stewart is a violinist and composer who serves as Artistic Director of the American Composers Orchestra and professor at the Juilliard School. He will be presented in recital at Merkin Hall on Friday, April 25, at 8 p.m., where he is a 2024-25 Artist-in-Residence. Showcased will be *Seasons of Change*, his re-composition of *The Four Seasons* as an Afrofuturist meditation on climate change, memory, and resilience. This interlayers Vivaldi's music with Stewart's digital soundscapes and recordings of the unhoused in Phoenix, whose voices and personal stories form the emotional backbone of his work. Also featured will be his world premiere performance of selections from his ambitious new project, *American Caprices*, which

explores the intersection between classical violin techniques and the diverse musical traditions that shape the American soundscape.

Rochelle Sennet is the inaugural Associate Dean of DEI at the College of Fine and Applied Arts at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, where she is Professor of Piano in the School of Music. Albany Records recently released the third volume in her series *Bach to Black, Suites for Piano*, which juxtaposes the keyboard suites of J.S. Bach with those of Black composers including Margaret Bonds, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, William Grant Still, Adolphus Hailstork, James Lee III, Florence Price, and George Walker. Gateways presents Dr. Sennet in a solo piano recital at Harlem School of the Arts on Saturday, April 26, at 7:30 p.m.

The nation's only all-Black professional brass quintet, Gateways Brass Collective – comprised of trumpeters Herbert Smith and Courtney Jones, horn player Larry Williams, trombonist Isrea Butler, and tuba player Jerome Stover – will offer an inspiring afternoon of masterclasses, sectionals and performance at Harlem School of the Arts for the educational institution's young brass players on Thursday, April 24, at 4 p.m.

Members of Gateways Festival Orchestra will also offer an immersive afternoon of master classes and mentorship to aspiring young performers at Gateways' Spring 2025 Young Musicians Institute, hosted by Carnegie Hall's Weill Music Institute on Saturday, April 26, at 3 p.m.

Rounding out the Spring Festival will be the William Levi Dawson Symposium: A Paul J. Burgett Lecture and Community Conversation at the Resnick Education Wing of Carnegie Hall on Saturday, April 26, from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Presented in collaboration with the William Levi Dawson Institute for Classical and Folk Music at Tuskegee University, the event will mark the legacy of Dawson, a pioneering composer,

arranger, musicologist, and choral director. Lectures by Tuskegee University professors Dr. Wayne Barr and Dr. Yi Cheng will complement a presentation by University of Michigan's Dr. Louise Toppin and a recital by soprano Amber Rogers, winner of the 2024 National Association of Negro Musicians (NANM) Competition. The event is free with RSVP.

For complete Spring Festival information, please visit www.gatewaymusicfestival.org.



GATEWAYS MUSIC FESTIVAL

IN ASSOCIATION WITH EASTMAN SCHOOL OF MUSIC

SPRING FESTIVAL

APRIL 24-27

2025

NEW YORK, NY

