FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SPHINX
Aaron P. Dworkin • Founder

Contact:
Katlyn Morahan
Morahan Arts and Media
katlyn@morahanartsandmedia.com
(610) 914-3152

SPHINX ORGANIZATION DIGITALLY PRESENTS
TWO OF ITS FLAGSHIP PROGRAMS FROM JANUARY 28 TO 30
SPHINXCONNECT: UNITY AND
WORLD RENOWNED SPHINX COMPETITION

Largest and Longest Running Convening Dedicated to Diversity, Equity and
Inclusion in the Performing Arts Sector Features Over 70 Speakers
Exploring Social Change Initiatives and New Programming Paradigms
in Classical Music
Sphinx Competition Junior and Senior Division Finals Honoring Talented Young Black and Latinx Classical String Players Streamed on January 30 at 7pm ET

December 15, 2020, Detroit, MI — The Sphinx Organization, dedicated to transforming lives through the power of diversity in the arts, is presenting its fifth annual and first ever digital SphinxConnect convening, SphinxConnect 2021: UNITY!, from January 28 to 30, 2021. SphinxConnect is the annual epicenter where artists and leaders in diversity meet, and this year’s convening features over 70 speakers exploring topics related to diversity, equity and inclusion in the arts.

Conference highlights include an opening session with Elizabeth Alexander, Andrew W. Mellon Foundation President, interviewed by American public radio host and journalist Jenn White, and a closing session with pianist and 2014 Sphinx Medalist Damien Sneed. Other panels include: Artful Resilience: How Musicians Innovate in Crisis, Socially Vocal: a Discussion on Race and Identity in the Arts, This is Everyone’s Fight: How Philanthropic Institutions Stepped Forth to Support Artists and BIPOC Institutions, and The ABCs of DEI (Diversity, Equity & Inclusion) and EDIB (Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging): Best Practices in Implicit Bias and Anti-Racist Training with speakers including Jenny Bilfield, Clive Gillinson, and Deborah Rutter. The digital sessions are interactive and participants will have opportunities for one on one networking with panelists during the course of the three day conference.

Tickets for the conference are priced at $150 for the full series of events, as well as a “Pay What You Are Able” option to minimize attendance barriers. SphinxConnect Virtual Fellowships provide free access to the conference and $75 towards internet costs. An application for a SphinxConnect Fellowship is available here. A list of session and panelist information is below: the full schedule is available here.

In conjunction with the convening, the Sphinx Organization also hosts its prestigious competition recognizing the outstanding achievements of young Black and Latinx classical string players, offering them the opportunity to compete under the guidance of an internationally renowned panel of judges, and receive mentorship from established professional musicians. The organization’s founding program, now in its 24th year, includes both a Senior Division (ages 18 to 30) and a Junior Division (ages 17 and under).

The Sphinx Competition Junior and Senior Division Finals will feature the three Finalists from both the Senior and Junior Divisions. Presented by DTE Energy Foundation, the concert will be available to watch on Sphinx’s website, YouTube Channel, and Facebook on Saturday, January 30 at 7pm ET.

Senior Division (Ages 18 to 30) Semi-Finalists include: Paul Aguilar (violin - Houston, Texas), Quenton Xavier Blache (cello - Wake Forest, North Carolina), Kebra-Seyoun Charles (bass - Miami, Florida), Maithéna Girault (violin - Montreal, Quebec), Christian Gray (bass - Winston-Salem, North Carolina), Luiz Fernando Venturelli (cello - Praia Grande, São Paulo, Brazil), Mikel Rollet (viola - Boca Raton, Florida), Samuel Abraham Vargas Teixeira (violin - Araure, Portuguesa, Venezuela), and Andres Vela (bass - Edinburg, Texas). Three of these Semifinalists will perform at the Finals Concert on January 30.
The First Place Senior Division winner receives a $50,000 Robert Frederick Smith Prize, and solo appearances with major orchestras; Second Place receives a $20,000 cash prize; and Third Place receives a $10,000 cash prize. An Audience Choice Award, sponsored by Mercedes-Benz Financial Services, with a $5,000 cash prize, will be determined by audience members texting in their votes.


The First Place Junior Division winner receives a $10,000 cash prize, solo appearances with major orchestras, and a nationally-broadcast radio appearance on From the Top; Second Place receives a $5,000 cash prize; and Third Place receives a $3,000 cash prize.

The Competition Semifinals for both Junior and Senior Divisions will take place on January 15 at 10am ET and will be streamed on the website and Facebook. For more information, please visit https://www.sphinxmusic.org/sphinx-competition-concerts/. The Finalists in both the Junior and Senior Division will be announced at 7pm ET.

"SphinxConnect is a place for gathering, sharing, and celebration. We look forward to learning with and from one another, through meaningful dialogue at the intersection of social justice and the arts” said President and Artistic Director Afa S. Dworkin. “This year has shown us that we can only move forward if we all work together. We hope to welcome a larger group of participants from all around the world to SphinxConnect: UNITY!”

Event Information

**SphinxConnect**  
**Tickets:** [www.SphinxConnect.org](http://www.SphinxConnect.org)  
**General Admission:** $150  
**Student Pass:** $35

**Thursday, January 28, 2021 at 5:00pm ET**

Opening Plenary Session with Elizabeth Alexander (Andrew W. Mellon Foundation) interviewed by Jenn White, Host Of 1A, NPR/WAMU

**Friday, January 29, 2021 at 1:00pm ET**

*Artful Resilience: how musicians innovate in crisis*

Speakers: Jennifer Bowman, Leslie DeShazor, Thomas Mesa, Elena Urioste  
Amidst the season of postponed performances and canceled premieres, artists turned to their imagination to create new modes of expression and avenues for connecting with audiences. This conversation examines unique examples of such innovation that may lay the pathway for a reimagined normal.

*No Time Like the Present*
Speakers: Jenny Bilfield, Camille Delaney-McNeil, Kendra Ingram, Abhijit Sengupta
Arts presenters discuss risks and rewards of innovative programming.

**Where Do I Begin?**
Speakers: Lucinda Ali-Landing, Armando Castellano, Quanice Floyd, Ashe Gordon
This session explores the core elements of getting started when contemplating new programs, initiatives, and partnerships in the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion sphere.

**Friday, January 29, 2021 at 2:20pm ET**

**Presenting Progress: American Classical Heritage**
Panelists: Clive Gillinson, Marc Bamuthi Joseph, Paola Prestini, Deborah Rutter, Lisa Richards Toney
Since last spring, the Sphinx Organization has called for examples of more decisive work in the DEI space. Presenting organizations have been challenged to contemplate committing 15% of their dollars and programming to Black and Latinx art. This session explores the ways in which presenters have pioneered change and what will they commit to moving forward.

**Socially Vocal: a Discussion on Race and Identity in the Arts**
Speakers: Chris Anderson, Tehvon Fowler-Chapman, Krystal Glass
In today’s world, social media has been the source for trending news, opinions and judgements. Join the conversation on more and less effective and impactful ways to use platforms to effect change.

**Sphinx Venture Fund 2021**
Speakers: Derrell Acon, Lara Downes, Afa Dworkin, Hilary Herndon, Ciyadh Wells
Over five years, Sphinx will invest $1.5 million to transform the future of cultural diversity, equity, and inclusion in the arts with the Sphinx Venture Fund (SVF). Through competitive grants, SVF will catalyze initiatives designed to solve a challenge or an issue related to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the sphere of the performing arts, with an emphasis on classical music. This session will discuss this initiative, introduce the SVF 2021 funded projects, and provide information for those interested in applying for funding in 2022.

**Friday, January 29, 2021 at 3:40pm ET**

**Higher Learning: Institutionalizing Social Change**
Speakers: Aaron Dworkin, James Gandre, David Stull, Sel Kardan
Institutions of higher learning have had to respond in profound ways to the global pandemic and the catalyzing events of last spring and summer. Concepts of innovation, collaboration, and social responsibility had to be challenged like never before. How do we as a field hold our conservatories accountable and empower them to lead the way?

**National Alliance for Audition Support (NAAS) Roundtable**
Since its launch in 2018, The National Alliance for Audition Support (NAAS) has empowered more than 200 Black and Latinx musicians pursuing careers as orchestral musicians. NAAS has worked with over 100 Orchestra Partners over the years to ensure musicians are met with fair and equitable practices in the field. Hear artists and administrators describe how NAAS is changing the field.

**The ABCs of DEI (Diversity, Equity & Inclusion) and EDIB (Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging): Best Practices in Implicit Bias and Anti-Racist Training**
Speakers: Jazmin Morales, Kristal Pacific, Christina Salgado, Vester Waters
Hear from leaders of institutions who are modeling this work for the performing arts sector.

Friday, January 29, 2021 at 5:00pm ET

Plenary Session with Will Liverman

Saturday, January 30, 2021 at 1:00pm ET

**Opus 2021: Orchestrating Change**
Speakers: Jen Arnold, Deborah Borda, Michelle Miller Burns, Matías Tarnopolisky
Orchestras as institutions have been deeply affected by the pandemic. Arguably, as profound has been their reckoning with the heavy past of racism and weight of the lack of progress on a systemic level. This session challenges orchestras to act as champions for change, committed to citizenship, and promotion of a more evolved definition of excellence.

**Taking the Reins**
Speakers: LaSaundra Booth, Angie Durrell, Yvette Loynaz, Rod Vester
Rising arts administrators discuss challenges and successes of diversifying the administration. Learn about ways in which the performing arts field can improve its readiness and competency while leading and sustaining change in more effective ways.

Saturday, January 30, 2021 at 2:20pm ET

**Audiences Over the Airwaves**
Speakers: Lara Downes, Terorrance McKnight, Gretchen Nielsen, Garrett McQueen
Forwarding diversity via podcasts and radio is a timely topic. This session explores how to get started, keep growing, and learn more about the possibilities of encouraging positive and constructive change through this impactful medium.

**This is Everyone’s Fight: How Philanthropic Institutions Stepped Forth to Support Artists and BIPOC Institutions**
Speakers: Naimah Bilal, Susan Feder, Margaret Morton, Doug Stewart
This year ushered in some profound changes into the artist community. The philanthropic community has responded in an unprecedented fashion, signaling commitment to address many societal wrongs. This session discusses how to push for change, balance commitment to DEI/artists, and continue to think about the entirety of the performing arts ecosystem.

**Young and Bold**
Speakers: Clifton Boyd, Ian Saunders, Samantha Williams, Ed Yim
This session presents examples of youth activism and early successes in student-led initiatives.

Saturday, January 30, 2021 at 3:40pm ET

**Casting Change**
Speakers: Alejandra Boyer, Julia Bullock, Raquel Gonzalez, Will Liverman
Artists and leaders share their vision of equity in the opera world.

**Conducting Change 2.0**
Speakers: Kalena Bovell, Lina Gonzalez-Granados, Paula Nava Madrigal, Titus Underwood
This session explores the role that conductors play in leading change through programming and will discuss the issue from various perspectives, addressing the challenges and creative solutions surrounding relevant programming.

Saturday, January 30, 2021 at 5:00pm ET

Closing Plenary Session with Damien Sneed

Sphinx Competition Junior and Senior Division Finals
Friday, January 30, 2021 at 7pm ET

Free; available to stream at https://www.sphinxmusic.org/sphinx-competition/ or on Facebook or YouTube

About Sphinx Organization
The Sphinx Organization is the social justice organization dedicated to transforming lives through the power of diversity in the arts. Sphinx's four program areas—Education & Access, Artist Development, Performing Artists, and Arts Leadership—form a pipeline that develops and supports diversity and inclusion in classical music at every level: music education, artists performing on stage, the repertoire and programming being performed, the communities represented in audiences, and the artistic and administrative leadership within the field.

Sphinx was founded in 1997 by Aaron P. Dworkin with the goal of addressing the underrepresentation of people of color in classical music. The name Sphinx, inspired by the mythical creature and legendary statue, reflects the power, wisdom and persistence that characterize Sphinx's participants, as well as the enigmatic and interpretive nature of music and art.

Now led by President and Artistic Director Afa S. Dworkin, Sphinx programs reach more than 100,000 students and artists as well as live and broadcast audiences of more than two million annually. Read more about Sphinx's programs at www.SphinxMusic.org.

# # #

Photo at top of release by Kevin Kennedy / Sphinx Organization