SPHINX ORGANIZATION CELEBRATES
20 YEARS OF POSITIVE IMPACT
*Sphinx marks milestone anniversary with 20th Sphinx Competition, new convening SphinxConnect, and Sphinx Virtuosi tour*

Detroit – Throughout 2017, the Sphinx Organization is celebrating 20 years of transforming lives through diversity in the arts. In February, Sphinx launched a new artist network and global convening, SphinxConnect, in conjunction with the nonprofit’s flagship Sphinx Competition. In September, the organization will launch a 20th anniversary edition of the annual Sphinx Virtuosi tour.

Kicking off the milestone year, Sphinx brought hundreds of musicians, industry leaders, students, and diversity advocates to Detroit for the inaugural SphinxConnect – a global convening dedicated to career development for musicians of color – and the 20th annual Sphinx Competition for young Black and Latino string players, presented by DTE Energy Foundation. Taking place at the Westin Book Cadillac and Max M. and Marjorie S. Fisher Music Center, the two events occurred in conjunction allowing attendees of the convening to view the finals of the competition’s Junior Division (ages 17 and under) and Senior Division (ages 18-30), and allowing the competition participants to attend several sessions of the convening.

Highlights of the February weekend of events included an opening plenary with Melissa Harris-Perry; an interview of soprano Martina Arroyo by Sphinx Founder Aaron Dworkin; a Sphinx Artist Showcase with a $3,000 juried prize; and over 30 sessions featuring more than 60 speakers – composers, symphony musicians, and representatives from Carnegie Hall, New World Symphony, the Association of British Orchestras, and many more. The culmination of the weekend was the Competition Finals Concert featuring the three Senior Division finalists, the all-Black and Latino Sphinx Symphony Orchestra (SSO), and special guest the University of Michigan Men’s Glee Club. Violinist Anelle Gregory, 21, was named First Place Laureate and winner of the $50,000 Robert Frederick Smith prize and a custom made gold bow by Berg Bows International. The SSO and Glee Club premiered a newly commissioned version of “The Seven Last Words of the Unarmed” by composer Joel Thompson, a multi-movement work honoring the lives of Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, Oscar Grant, Eric Garner, Kenneth Chamberlain, Amadou Diallo, and John Crawford.

Sphinx’s anniversary celebration will continue throughout the year; the organization is preparing to launch their annual Sphinx Virtuosi tour this fall, with a 20th spin on the program’s theme: *Concerti per Venti*. The 18-piece self-conducted ensemble, comprised entirely of Sphinx Competition alumni, will perform a collection of concerti through the ages, showcasing a variety of styles from baroque to contemporary. The program will feature the newly commissioned *Guardian of the Horizon: Concerto Grosso for Violin, Cello, and Strings* by award-winning composer Jimmy Lopez, made possible in part with the support of Linda and Stuart Nelson, along with *Delights and Dances* by Michael
Abels (commissioned by Sphinx in 2012), *Concerto Grosso* by Vaughan Williams, and Beethoven’s *Grosse Fugue*. The tour will bring the Sphinx Virtuosi to Carnegie Hall for a performance and formal gala, taking place on Friday, Oct. 13th.

Since its founding in 1998, Sphinx has grown to include education programs reaching more than 100,000 students, many in underserved communities including Detroit and Flint, MI; scholarship and grant programs that have distributed more than $4 million in instruments, college tuition, and other education and career development opportunities; touring orchestras and quartets that have reached 70 cities in 13 countries; and more. Sphinx Competition alum Joseph Conyers now holds the position of Assistant Principal Bass with the Philadelphia Orchestra and has founded his own arts nonprofit, Project 440. Conyers says, “As a 16-year-old kid, Sphinx meant to me that I wasn’t alone. I will never forget meeting for the first time young musicians of color who were as passionate about classical music as I was…Now, as a professional musician, I can look on the Sphinx Organization and see the profound impact that it is having in the world.”

Sphinx is now lead by President and Artistic Director Afa S. Dworkin, who has served in various leadership roles since Sphinx’s inception and has been recognized as one of 30 classical music influencers in the country by Musical America as well as one of Crain’s 40 Under 40 leaders. “Our work began as a grassroots effort to encourage access, inclusion and exposure within classical music. Through the advocacy and hard work of countless passionate individuals, and a proven track record of artistic excellence and positive change, it has evolved into a global social justice movement,” Dworkin says.


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