



PRESS RELEASE

FOR RELEASE:

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Docuseries Prologue and Episodes 1–3, click [here](#)

Kennedy Center Launches *The Cartography Project*: Multi-Season National Symphony Orchestra & Washington National Opera Commissioning Initiative to Map Black Dignity as a Cultural Response to Extrajudicial Violence

**Live World Premieres of First Eight Chamber & Vocal Commissions (March 15 & 16),
Plus Ten-Part Online Docuseries (Launches Today, February 3)**



“It’s about our blind determination to push for something better for ourselves, our communities, and our shared place on this miraculous planet. This is an anthem for that brilliant fire that lives in us all.”

– Jessica Mays, composer commissioned for The Cartography Project

(WASHINGTON)—Launching today as a cornerstone of the [Kennedy Center](#)’s 50th anniversary season, ***The Cartography Project*** is a major multi-year **National Symphony**

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Orchestra (NSO) and **Washington National Opera (WNO)** commissioning initiative, conceived by the Center’s Artistic Director & VP of Social Impact **Marc Bamuthi Joseph** to foreground the phenomenon of race-based violence in the United States by commissioning **new chamber and vocal works by creators of color from grieving communities across the nation**. Moreover, by considering the broader context of this violence, the project aims to position Black dignity as the prevailing narrative of the African American experience, rather than Black trauma.

For its first installment, *The Cartography Project* includes **eight new commissions**. These will receive live **world premiere performances** from WNO singers and members of the NSO and WNO Orchestra in an evening-length program at **Studio K** in the Kennedy Center’s new REACH expansion on **March 15 and 16**. As part of this multimedia event, excerpts from a complementary **ten-part docuseries** will screen between performances to contextualize each new work. Meanwhile the series’ first four episodes **premiere online today (February 3)** on the Center’s website and social channels.

An inaugural recipient of the Guggenheim Social Practice initiative, Bamuthi Joseph explains:

“We use maps as connective tissue to mark pathways to freedom and delineate ourselves in space. With *The Cartography Project*, empathy becomes pedagogy and the sheet music becomes the textbook. We are mapping, figuratively, these incidents of violence but we are also mapping the possibility of who we can be. We are drawing dots – and those dots not only show how to go between but also how to move beyond. Cartography is inspired by the idea that somebody has to chart the beyond – to chart the course forward. Equally important, we knew we couldn’t do this work without engaging some of the families of individuals who have been murdered in the last several years. It was critical that we let them know that we care about them and think of them, not only in connection with this moment in time but also as the true pillars of dignity that these pieces represent.”

As an introduction to the concept of Black dignity and the vital part it plays in this project, *Cartography*’s first installment features ***The Road Ahead*** by the Kennedy Center’s new Composer-in-Residence, 2021 Sphinx Medal of Excellence winner **Carlos Simon**, written for a text by Bamuthi Joseph, who will perform its spoken word component himself. The NSO has commissioned short chamber works from three up-and-coming composers: Colorado’s **Jessica Mays**, Cleveland’s **Nathaniel Heyder**, and Louisville’s **Derek Douglas Carter**, who honor lives taken in these areas. To complete the project’s first edition, the WNO has commissioned short vocal works from four composer-librettist teams: Baltimore’s **Jasmine Barnes** and **Joshua Banbury**; Minneapolis’ **Liz Gre** and **Junauda Petrus-Nasah**; the Bay Area’s **Jens and**

Yasmina Ibsen; and Atlanta’s **B.E. Boykin** and **Brittney Ray Crowell**, who pay tribute to lives taken in these cities.

Each of these eight new works forms the basis of one episode of the dedicated new **docuseries** commissioned for *The Cartography Project* from filmmaker **T.L. Benton**, whose documentary *We Have the Numbers: Gun Violence in America* debuted at the 2019 DC Black Film Festival. Bookended by a prologue and epilogue, the ten-part series will premiere on the Kennedy Center’s **website and social channels** in the weeks preceding the live events, with the first four episodes premiering today, February 3. Narrative excerpts from the series will also screen between performances at the concerts themselves. A complete online release schedule of the videos is [here](#).

Four more *Cartography* commissions are set to premiere in future seasons, each deepening the musical and geographical exploration of Black dignity in the face of systemic violence. As an evolving, ongoing initiative that gives contemporary creators the chance to engage with issues of critical social importance, the project is intended as a model for other classical organizations to follow.

WNO General Director **Timothy O’Leary** says:

“After Bamuthi came to us with this idea, it was clear that *The Cartography Project* could be an extraordinary chance to serve our community, in this case our national community, to meet a need—probably the most urgent need in our culture today. The arts have always played a part in the quest for justice and emotional connection across our differences. Opera is the combination of words and music to tell a story. In these times, we’re rightly asking ourselves, which story, and who is telling it?”

Gary Ginstling, Executive Director of the NSO, observes:

“Seeing what happened—the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement and the subsequent public response—we at the NSO and the Kennedy Center asked ourselves what role we could play in this watershed moment for the country. The NSO and WNO also saw this project as an opportunity to address a long struggle with diversity on- and off-stage in our field. Additionally, we see this as a springboard for other organizations in the field to think about contemporary art-makers who are consciously engaging social pathology and creating work in that area.”

ABOUT THE WORKS:

**The Kennedy Center presents *The Cartography Project*
March 15 & 16, 2022, 7:30 p.m.**

The REACH, Studio K

Live world premieres of first eight commissions, performed by members of NSO, WNO Orchestra, and WNO Singers

The Road Ahead

Carlos SIMON, composer; Marc BAMUTHI JOSEPH, libretto and spoken word
(WNO commission)

With Katerina Burton, soprano; Karen Lowry-Tucker, violin; Amy Frost Baumgarten, cello;
Robert Ainsley, piano

Biography and Artist Statement linked above on page 1.

Anthem for GO

Jessica MAYS, composer
(NSO commission; Aurora, CO)

With Heather LeDoux Green and Jane Bowyer Stewart, violins; Eric deWaardt, viola; David Teie,
cello; Jeffrey Weisner, double bass; Scott Christian, percussion

Biography and Artist Statement linked above on page 1.

Ahead of Time

Nathaniel HEYDER, composer
(NSO commission; Cleveland, OH)

With Paul Cigan, clarinet; Robert Rearden, horn; Jennifer Mondie, viola; Britton Riley, cello; Scott
Christian, percussion

Biography and Artist Statement linked above on page 1.

Breonma's Lullaby

Derek Douglas CARTER, composer
(NSO commission; Louisville, KY)

With Paul Cigan, clarinet; Ruth Wicker, viola; Paul DeNola, bass; Jiyoung Oh, piano

Biography and Artist Statement linked above on page 1.

Mo(u)rning

B.E. BOYKIN, composer; Brittney Ray CROWELL, libretto
(WNO commission; Atlanta, GA)

With Martin Bakari, tenor; Amy Frost Baumgarten, cello; Dana Scott, piano

Biography and Artist Statement linked above on page 1.

The Burning Bush

Jasmine BARNES, composer; Joshua BANBURY, libretto
(WNO commission; Baltimore, MD)

With Suzannah Waddington, soprano; Daniel J. Smith, baritone; Roderick Demmings, Jr.;
Raymond O. Caldwell, director

Biography and Artist Statement linked above on page 1.

Progeny of Perpetual Independence

Liz GRE, composer; Junauda PETRUS-NASAH, libretto
(WNO commission; Minneapolis, MN)

With Amber R. Monroe, soprano; Karen Lowry-Tucker, violin; Amy Frost Baumgarten,
violoncello; Christian Gray, double bass; Dana Scott, piano
Biography and Artist Statement linked above on page 1.

Pretty Girl

Jens IBSEN, composer; Yasmina IBSEN, libretto
(WNO commission; Oakland, CA)

With Katerina Burton, soprano; Amber R. Monroe, soprano; Robert Ainsley, piano
Biography and Artist Statement linked above on page 1.

Screened excerpts from ten-part docuseries:

T.L. BENTON: *The Cartography Project*
(Kennedy Center commission)

TICKET INFORMATION:

Tickets for the two performances range from \$15 to \$45 and go on sale to members at 12 noon today (Thursday, February 3), and to the public on Monday, February 7. Tickets may be purchased online at [kennedy-center.org](https://www.kennedy-center.org) in-person at the Kennedy Center Box Office, or by calling (202) 467-4600.

FUNDING CREDITS:

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Follow the initiative on social media at **#CartographyProject** and click [here](#) to download the docuseries' complete online release schedule.

Discover the Kennedy Center on social media:



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