

CARLOS **SIMON**

TALES: A FOLKLORE SYMPHONY



**National
Symphony
Orchestra**
The
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National Symphony Orchestra

GIANANDREA NOSEDA CONDUCTOR

CARLOS SIMON

Tales—A Folklore Symphony (2021)

1. Motherboxx Connection..... 4:53
2. Flying Africans..... 4:56
3. Go Down Moses (Let My People Go)..... 8:17
4. John Henry..... 4:48

Tales—A Folklore Symphony was recorded live on March 3, 4, and 5, 2022, in the Concert Hall of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, D.C.

Recording producer Blanton Alspaugh, *Soundmirror*.

Recording engineer Dirk Sobotka, *Soundmirror*. **Mixing and Mastering engineer** Mark Donahue, *Soundmirror*.

Executive Producers Nigel Boon and Genevieve Twomey, *National Symphony Orchestra*.

Cover design Dana Cohen, *The Kennedy Center*.

Cover photo and Carlos Simon photos Yassine El Mansouri. **Carlos Simon headshot** Kendall Bessent. **National Symphony Orchestra photos** Scott Suchman.

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Carlos Simon: *Tales—A Folklore Symphony*

I am beyond thrilled with the release of my symphonic works with the National Symphony Orchestra—my orchestra, my family. To have my music performed, recorded and released by such a world class ensemble is truly a dream come true. *Tales* is an exploration of African American folklore and Afrofuturist stories, and I am so proud and confident to know that the best musicianship and artistry has been brought to this recording. Thank you to the Sphinx Organisation and the University of Michigan Symphony Orchestra for commissioning this work, and to Maestro Nosedá, the NSO staff, and each and every musician for how you have brought it to life here.

Composer's Notes about *Tales—A Folklore Symphony*:

1. Motherboxx Connection

“Where are all the black people in comics?” This is a question posed by the creative duo, Black Kirby (John Jennings and Stacey Robinson). Based heavily in Afrofuturism, Black Kirby's characters show black people as heroes using ancient customs and futurist motifs from the African and African American diaspora. This piece is inspired by the many heroic characters found in the work of Black Kirby, but mainly Motherboxx Connection.

According to scholar Regina N. Bradley, Motherboxx Connection is “a pun on Jack Kirby's motherbox, a living computer connected to the world. The Motherboxx, too, is a living computer with a heightened awareness of racial and sexual discourses surrounding the black body. The Motherboxx is the technological equivalent of the ‘mother land’ in the black diaspora imagination. She is where black identities merge and depart.”

To represent the power and intelligence of the Motherboxx, I have composed a short, fast-moving musical idea that constantly weaves in and throughout the orchestra. A majestic, fanfare-like motif also provides the overall mood of strength and heroism. I imagine the motherboxx as an all-knowing entity that is aware of the multi-faceted aspects of blackness.

2. Flying Africans

Once, all Africans could fly, but lost their ability after they crossed the Atlantic Ocean as enslaved humans. This story tells how one African maintained the ability and secretly passed the gift to others. The Negro Spiritual “Steal Away” is referenced in the woodwinds, as well as the cello section, while the upper strings hover effortlessly in the higher register.

*Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus
Steal away, steal away home
I ain't got long to stay here*

3. Go Down Moses (Let My People Go)

The Hebrew biblical story of the Plagues of Egypt resonated with the enslaved, and they created songs that related to this story of bondage. While the horrific plagues that swept across Egypt are compelling in and of themselves, the focus of this piece is recounted from the perspective of the stubborn Pharaoh, who unwillingly loosens his grip on the enslaved people. The Pharaoh's hardened heart is conveyed through two sharp, accented chords. The spirit of God, represented by light, heavenly, metallic sounds from the percussion, signal the beginning of each new plague. Frogs, pestilence, and sickness are not enough to break the Pharaoh's will. It is only with the "Angel of Death," which takes the life of the Pharaoh's first-born child, represented by dark, brooding harmonies, that he relents in despair. The orchestral texture grows thinner and thinner as the Pharaoh wallows in emotional anguish. The once prideful Pharaoh is now broken down to a powerless whimper. I use the Negro Spiritual, "Let My People Go (Go Down Moses)" as a musical framework throughout this movement.

*Go down Moses
Way down in Egypt land
Tell ol' Pharaoh to
Let my people go!
When Israel was in Egypt land
Let my people go!
Oppressed so hard they could not stand
Let my people go!*

4. John Henry

The story of John Henry is traditionally told through work songs, each with wide-ranging and varying lyrics. The well-known narrative ballad of "John Henry" is essentially the battle between man versus machine. Enslaved prisoners would often sing the story more slowly and deliberately, often with a pulsating beat suggestive of swinging a hammer. These songs usually contain the lines, "This old hammer killed John Henry / but it won't kill me."

Writer Scott Nelson explains that "workers managed their labor by setting a 'stint,' or pace, for it. Men who violated the stint were shunned... Here was a song that told you what happened to men who worked too fast: they died ugly deaths; their entrails fell on the ground. You sang the song slowly, you worked slowly, you guarded your life, or you died."

Carlos Simon

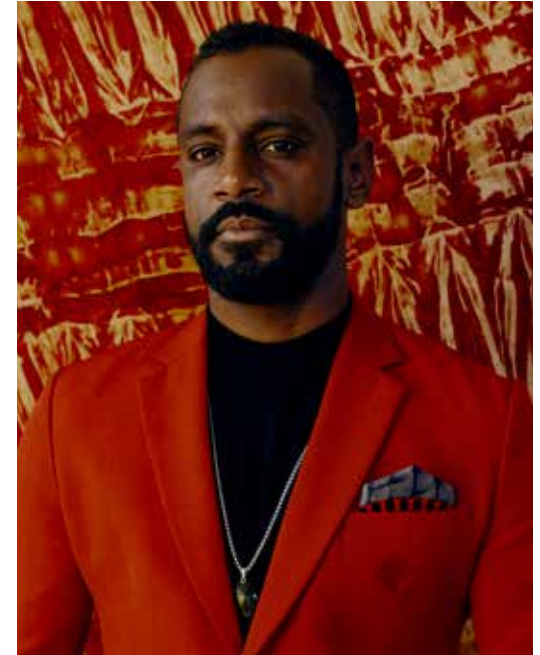
Composer

“My dad, he always gets on me. He wants me to be a preacher, but I always tell him, ‘Music is my pulpit. That’s where I preach,’” Carlos Simon reflected for *The Washington Post*’s ‘Composers and Performers to Watch in 2022’ list.

Having grown up in Atlanta, with a long lineage of preachers and connections to gospel music to inspire him, Grammy[®]-nominated Simon proves that a well-composed song can indeed be a sermon. His music ranges from concert music for large and small ensembles to film scores with influences of jazz, gospel, and neo-romanticism.

Simon is the current Composer-in-Residence for the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and frequently writes for the National Symphony Orchestra and Washington National Opera. The 2023–24 season sees premiere performances with San Diego Symphony Orchestra, National Symphony Orchestra, The Washington Chorus, and LA Master Chorale. These follow recent other commissions from Minnesota Orchestra, Boston Symphony Orchestra, Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Washington National Opera (in collaboration with Mo Willems), Brooklyn Art Song Society, New York Philharmonic and Bravo! Vail, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Glimmerglass Festival, Sphinx Organization, Music Academy of the West, and San Francisco Chamber Orchestra.

Simon’s work spans genres, taking great inspiration from liturgical texts and writers such as Terrance Hayes, Colson Whitehead, Lynn Nottage, Emma Lazarus, Isabel Wilkerson, Ruby Aiyo Gerber, and Courtney Lett, as well as the art of Romare Bearden.



In September 2023, Simon released two albums on Decca. *Together* is a compilation of solo and chamber compositions and arrangements featuring Simon and guests such as J’Nai Bridges, Randall Goosby, Seth Parker Woods and Will Liverman. The work draws on Carlos’ personal experience as an artist to highlight the importance of heritage and identity, and the power of collaborative music-making. Simon also released the live premiere recording of *brea(d)th*, a landmark work commissioned by Minnesota Orchestra and written in collaboration with Marc Bamuthi Joseph, conducted by Jonathan Taylor Rush. “Arguably the most important commission of Simon’s career so far” (*New York Times*), *brea(d)th* was written following George Floyd’s murder as a direct response to America’s unfulfilled promises and history of systemic oppression against Black Americans.

Simon was nominated for a 2023 Grammy® Award for Best Contemporary Classical Composition for his previous album, *Requiem for the Enslaved*. The requiem is a multi-genre musical tribute to commemorate the stories of the 272 enslaved men, women, and children sold in 1838 by Georgetown University, released by Decca in June 2022. This work sees Simon infuse his original compositions with African American spirituals and familiar Catholic liturgical melodies, performed by Hub New Music Ensemble, Marco Pavé, and MK Zulu.

Acting as music director and keyboardist for Grammy® Award winner Jennifer Holliday, Simon has performed with Boston Pops Symphony, Jackson Symphony, and St. Louis Symphony. He has also toured internationally with soul Grammy®-nominated artist Angie Stone and performed throughout Europe, Africa, and Asia.

Simon earned his doctorate degree at the University of Michigan, where he studied with Michael Daugherty and Evan Chambers. He has also received degrees from Georgia State University and Morehouse College. He is an honorary member of Phi Mu Alpha Music Sinfonia Fraternity and a member of the National Association of Negro Musicians, Society of Composers International, and Pi Kappa Lambda Music Honor Society. He has served as a member of the music faculty at Spelman College and Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia and now serves as Assistant Professor at Georgetown University. Simon was also a recipient of the 2021 Sphinx Medal of Excellence, the highest honor bestowed by the Sphinx Organization to recognize extraordinary classical Black and Latinx musicians, and was named a Sundance/Time Warner Composer Fellow for his work for film and moving image.



Gianandrea Noseda

Conductor

Gianandrea Noseda is one of the world's most sought-after conductors, equally recognized for his artistry in both the concert hall and opera house. The 2023–2024 season marks his seventh as Music Director of the National Symphony Orchestra.

Noseda's leadership has inspired and reinvigorated the National Symphony Orchestra which makes its home at the Kennedy Center. The renewed artistic recognition and critical acclaim has led to invitations to Carnegie Hall, international concert halls, as well as digital streaming and a record label distributed by LSO Live for which Noseda also records as Principal Guest Conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra. The label's most recent and upcoming releases are dedicated to the complete *Sinfonias* by Pulitzer Prize-winning Washington, D.C. native George Walker and a Beethoven Cycle. The label launched in 2020 with Dvořák's Symphony No. 9 and Copland's *Billy the Kid*. Noseda has made over 70 recordings for various labels, including Deutsche Grammophon and Chandos on which he recorded many works including those by neglected Italian composers through his *Musica Italiana* series.

Noseda became General Music Director of the Zurich Opera House in September 2021. In 2022, his initial four-year contract was extended through the 2027–2028 season. An important milestone will be two complete *Ring* Cycles in May 2024 in a new production by Andreas Homoki. Since April 2022, his performances of the *Ring* operas have been praised by critics and in February 2023 he was recognized as “Best Conductor” by the jury of the German OPER! AWARDS, specifically for his Wagner interpretations.

From 2007–2018, Noseda served as Music Director of the Teatro Regio Torino, where his leadership marked the opera house’s golden era.

Noseda has conducted the most important international orchestras, opera houses and festivals and had significant roles at the BBC Philharmonic (Chief Conductor), Israel Philharmonic Orchestra (Principal Guest Conductor), Mariinsky Theatre (Principal Guest Conductor), Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale della RAI (Principal Guest Conductor), Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra (Victor de Sabata Chair), Rotterdam Philharmonic (Principal Guest Conductor), and Stresa Festival (Artistic Director).

Noseda has a strong commitment to working with the next generation of musicians and in 2019 was appointed the founding Music Director of the Tsinandali Festival and Pan-Caucasian Youth Orchestra in the village of Tsinandali, Georgia.

A native of Milan, Noseda is Commendatore al Merito della Repubblica Italiana, marking his contribution to the artistic life of Italy. He has been honored as Musical America’s Conductor of the Year (2015) and International Opera Awards Conductor of the Year (2016). In 2023, he received the Puccini Award whose past recipients include legendary opera stars Maria Callas, Birgit Nilsson, and Luciano Pavarotti.

The NSO Music Director Chair is generously endowed by The Sant Family.
Funding for NSO recordings is provided by generous Noseda Era Fund supporters.

National Symphony Orchestra

The 2023–2024 season is the National Symphony Orchestra’s 93rd season. Gianandrea Noseda serves as the Orchestra’s seventh Music Director, joining the NSO’s legacy of distinguished leaders: Christoph Eschenbach, Leonard Slatkin, Mstislav Rostropovich, Antal Doráti, Howard Mitchell, and Hans Kindler. Its artistic leadership also includes Principal Pops Conductor Steven Reineke and Artistic Advisor Ben Folds.

Since its founding in 1931, the NSO has been committed to performances that enrich the lives of its audience and community members. In 1986, the National Symphony became an artistic affiliate of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, where it has performed since the Center opened in 1971. The 96-member NSO participates in events of national and international importance, including the annual nationally televised concerts on the lawn of the U.S. Capitol, live-streamed performances from the Kennedy Center Concert Hall on medici.tv, and local radio broadcasts on Classical WETA 90.9 FM.

The NSO builds on its recording legacy with its eponymous label that launched in 2020. Since launching, the National Symphony Orchestra has garnered praise for its ambitious recording projects including the orchestra’s first complete Beethoven Symphony cycle and the release of the first-ever cycle of George Walker’s *Sinfonias*, both led by Music Director Gianandrea Noseda.

Additionally, the NSO’s community engagement and education projects are nationally recognized, including NSO *In Your Neighborhood*, an annual week of performances in schools, churches, community centers, and other unexpected venues; *Notes of Honor*, which offers free performances for active, veteran, prior service, and retired members of the military and their families; and *Sound Health*, a collaboration with the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and other medical partner, that works to raise awareness of the impact music, and particularly live music, can have on health outcomes. Career development opportunities for young musicians include the NSO Youth Fellowship Program and its acclaimed, tuition-free Summer Music Institute.

For more information, visit nationalsymphony.org



National Symphony Orchestra

Violins

Nurit Bar-Josef, *Concertmaster*
Ying Fu, *Associate Concertmaster*
Ricardo Cyncynates,
Assistant Concertmaster

Jane Bowyer Stewart
Teri Hopkins Lee
Pavel Pekarsky
Heather LeDoux Green
Joel Fuller
Lisa-Beth Lambert
Jing Qiao
Angelia Cho

Marissa Regni, *Principal*
Dayna Hepler, *Assistant Principal*
Desimont Alston
Cynthia R. Finks
Deanna Lee Bien
Glenn Donnellan
Natasha Bogachek
Carole Tafoya Evans
Jae-Yeon Kim
Wanzhen Li
Hanna Lee
Benjamin Scott
Malorie Blake Shin

Marina Aikawa
Peiming Lin
Derek Powell
Meredith Riley **

Violas

Daniel Foster, *Principal*
Abigail Evans Kreuzer,
Assistant Principal
Lynne Edelson Levine
Denise Wilkinson
James Francis Deighan
Nancy Thomas
Jennifer Mondie
Tsunaka Sakamoto
Ruth Wicker
Mahoko Eguchi
Rebecca Epperson

Cellos

David Hardy, *Principal*
Glenn Garlick, *Assistant Principal*
Steven Honigberg
David Teie
James Lee
Rachel Young
Mark Evans

Eugena Chang Riley
Loewi Lin
Britton Riley

Basses

Robert Oppelt, *Principal*
Richard Barber, *Assistant Principal*
Jeffrey Weisner
Ira Gold
Paul DeNola
Charles Nilles
Alexander Jacobsen
Michael Marks

Harp

Adriana Horne

Flutes

Aaron Goldman *Principal*
Leah Arsenault Barrick,
Assistant Principal
Alice Kogan Weintreb
Carole Bean, *Piccolo*

Oboes

Nicholas Stovall, *Principal*
Jamie Roberts, *Assistant Principal*
Harrison Linsey
Kathryn Meany Wilson,
English Horn

Clarinets

Lin Ma, *Principal*
Eugene Mondie, *Assistant Principal*
Paul Cigan
Peter Cain, *Bass Clarinet*

Bassoons

Sue Heineman, *Principal*
David Young, *Assistant Principal*
Steven Wilson
Samuel Blair, *Contrabassoon* **

Horns

Abel Pereira, *Principal*
Laurel Bennert Ohlson,
Associate Principal
Markus Osterlund
James Nickel
Robert Rearden
Scott Fearing

Trumpets

William Gerlach, *Principal*
Thomas Cupples
Keith Jones

Trombones

Craig Mulcahy, *Principal*
Evelyn Carlson, *Assistant Principal*
David Murray
Matthew Guilford, *Bass Trombone*

Tuba

Stephen Dumaine, *Principal*

Timpani

Jauvon Gilliam, *Principal*
Scott Christian, *Assistant Principal*

Percussion

Eric Shin, *Principal*
Scott Christian
Joseph Connell *

Keyboards

Lambert Orkis, *Principal*
Lisa Emenheiser *

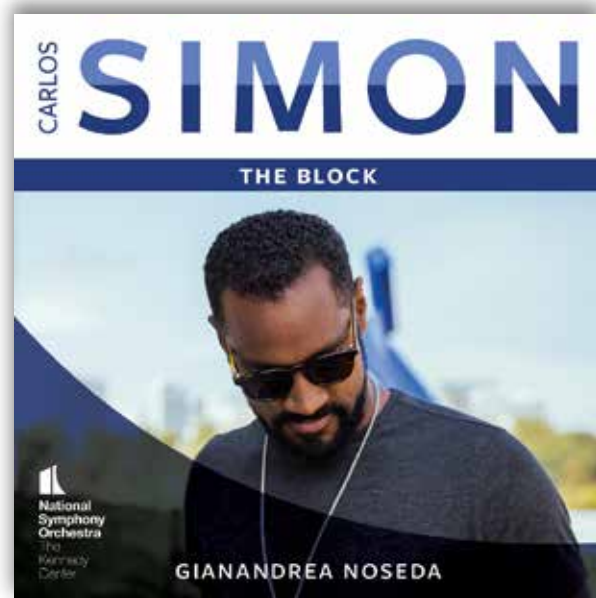
Librarians

Elizabeth Cusato Schnobrick,
Principal
Zen Stokdyk, *Associate*
Karen Lee, *Assistant*

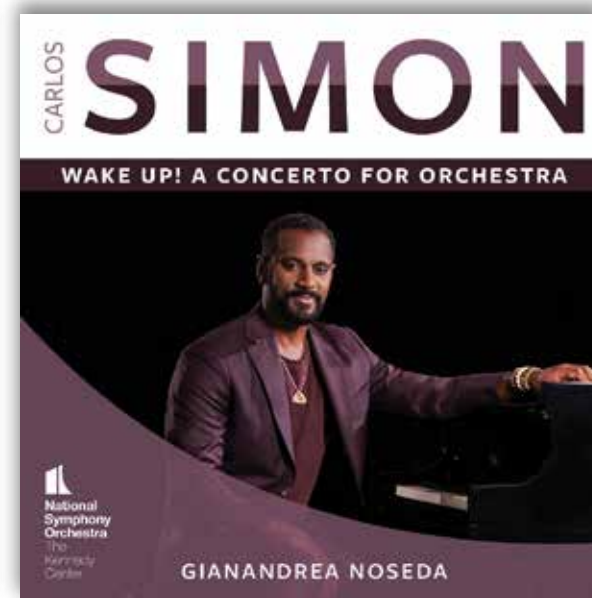
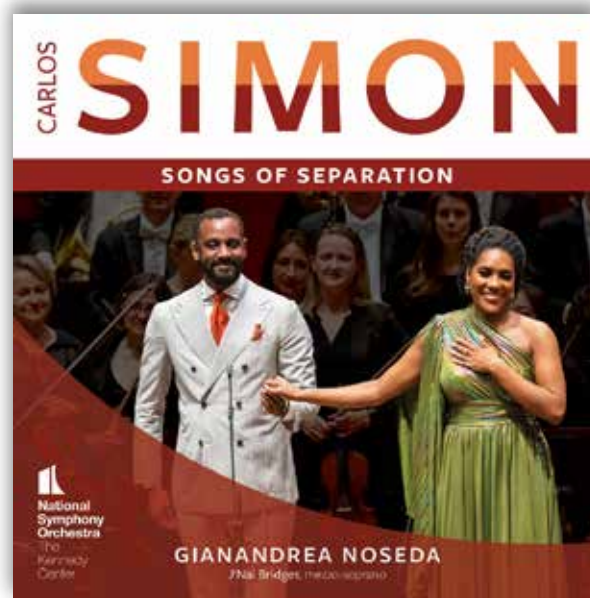
* Regularly engaged extra

** Temporary position

CARLOS SIMON



Coming Spring 2024



Coming September 2024