

news

For Immediate Release



SPHINX ORGANIZATION ANNOUNCES RECIPIENTS OF THE 2022 SPHINX MEDALS OF EXCELLENCE, WHICH CELEBRATE MUSICIANS OF COLOR

Pianist Michelle Cann, violinist Randall Goosby, and soprano Karen Slack each receive the Sphinx Medal of Excellence and a \$50,000 career grant



L-r: Michelle Cann, Randall Goosby, and Karen Slack.

DETROIT, MICHIGAN (JULY 26, 2021) — The Sphinx Organization has announced the three recipients of the 2022 Sphinx Medals of Excellence: pianist Michelle Cann, violinist Randall Goosby, and soprano Karen Slack.

The Sphinx Medal of Excellence is the highest honor bestowed by the Sphinx Organization, the social justice organization dedicated to transforming lives through the power of diversity in the arts, and comes with a \$50,000 career grant. The medal recognizes extraordinary classical musicians of color. Recipients are artists who early in their career demonstrate artistic excellence, outstanding work ethic, a spirit of determination, and an ongoing commitment to leadership and their communities.

Sphinx President and Artistic Director, Afa S. Dworkin, said that, in addition to their performance excellence, all three medalists bring an exceptional level of ambassadorship and advocacy to their work.

"With our 11th annual Sphinx Medals of Excellence, we invite the world to celebrate the artistry and visionary leadership of Karen Slack and her #KikiKonversations as she sheds light upon historically excluded artists; we are thrilled to amplify Randall Goosby's Roots album as a project of musical and personal discovery; and applaud Michelle Cann's vision and ongoing excellence in uncovering and championing the voice of Florence Price, evolving the classical music canon for our sector. These leaders set extraordinary examples and Sphinx is proud to celebrate and support their talent."

Since the inaugural presentation of the Sphinx Medal of Excellence in 2012 and including the 2022 recipients, the organization has awarded \$1.38 million in career grants to 33 Black and Latinx artists including pianist Lara Downes, sopranos Raquel González and Ailyn Pérez, pianist/conductor/composer Damian Sneed, and bass-baritone Davóne Tines among others. View the full list of recipients [here](#).

The 2022 recipients will receive their medals on March 17, 2022 at a luncheon hosted by The Kennedy Center and a private back-tie dinner in Washington, D.C.

MICHELLE CANN:

"I'm extremely honored to receive the Sphinx Medal of Excellence, and to become part of this esteemed family of change-makers. I've always admired Sphinx's efforts to change the face of classical music, and I'm committed to furthering this mission especially for young pianists of color. With this award, I hope to inspire and motivate new generations of musicians by celebrating and advancing works by great Black composers."

Pianist **Michelle Cann** made her orchestral debut at age 14 and has since performed as a soloist with numerous ensembles including The Philadelphia Orchestra, The Cleveland Orchestra, the North Carolina Symphony, and the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra.

A champion of the music of Florence Price, Ms. Cann performed the New York City premiere of the composer's Concerto in One Movement with The Dream Unfinished orchestra in July 2016 and the Philadelphia premiere with The Philadelphia Orchestra in February 2021, which *The Philadelphia Inquirer* called "exquisite." She has also performed Price's works for solo piano and chamber ensembles in concerts presented by the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, Chamber Music Society of Detroit, and the New World Symphony, among others.

Ms. Cann regularly appears in solo and chamber recitals throughout the U.S., China, and South Korea. Notable engagements include performances at the National Centre for the Performing Arts (Beijing), the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts (Washington, D.C.), Walt Disney Concert Hall (Los Angeles), and the Barbican (London).

An award winner at top international competitions, in 2019 she served as the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra's MAC (Multicultural Awareness Council) Music Innovator, a music residency that highlights leading African American classical musicians.

Ms. Cann studied at the Cleveland Institute of Music and the Curtis Institute of Music, where she holds the inaugural Eleanor Sokoloff Chair in Piano Studies.

RANDALL GOOSBY:

"I am truly grateful for this award and opportunity from the Sphinx Organization, whose indelible influence on my musicianship has brought me to this point in my career. Participating in the Sphinx Competition over a decade ago opened my eyes to the potential for myself and other musicians of color to make our mark on the world of classical music. I hope to continue making classical music ever more accessible to young musicians, especially those of color, and amplifying the work of marginalized creators within this field."

American violinist **Randall Goosby** is acclaimed for the sensitivity and intensity of his musicianship, as well as for his determination to make classical music more inclusive and accessible, including by bringing the music of under-represented composers to light.

Mr. Goosby made his debut with the Jacksonville Symphony at age nine. At age 13, he performed with the New York Philharmonic in a Young People's Concert at Lincoln Center's Avery Fisher Hall and the same year was one of the youngest-ever winners of the Sphinx Competition. He is a recipient of Sphinx's Isaac Stern Award and a career advancement grant from the Bagby Foundation. He has performed with orchestras across the U.S., including the New York Philharmonic, The Cleveland Orchestra, Nashville Symphony, and New World Symphony. Recital appearances have included the Kennedy Center, Kravis Center, and Wigmore Hall.

Mr. Goosby is deeply passionate about inspiring and serving others through education, social engagement, and outreach activities. He has worked with non-profit organizations such as the Opportunity Music Project and Concerts in Motion in New York City, as well as participating in community engagement programs for schools, hospitals, and assisted living facilities across the U.S. In 2020 he became an Ambassador for Music Masters, a role that sees him mentoring students in schools around the U.K.

In 2020, at the age of 24, Mr. Goosby signed exclusively with Decca Classics, and his debut album, *Roots*—a celebration of African American music which explores its evolution from the spiritual through to present-day compositions—was released in June 2021. A graduate of The Juilliard School, he continues his studies there, pursuing an Artist Diploma under Itzhak Perlman and Catherine Cho.

KAREN SLACK:

"What an honor to receive the illustrious medal of excellence. To have my work acknowledged by this amazing organization and now to be a part of the Sphinx family is tremendous. In an industry where it can be incredibly difficult to build and then sustain a career, to be recognized by an organization whose mission it is to foster, support and empower Black and Latinx artists and arts administrators is humbling. I am extremely proud to now have my name aligned with artists, leaders and advocates that I greatly admire and respect. Thank you to Afa and Aaron Dworkin for your tireless advocacy and commitment to our art form."

Soprano **Karen Slack** is hailed for possessing a voice of extraordinary beauty and a seamless legato, garnering critical acclaim for her artistic versatility and dynamic performances in leading operatic roles and on the concert stage.

In recent seasons Ms. Slack has performed in the Verdi operas *Falstaff*, *Il Trovatore*, *La Traviata*, and *Aida*; Puccini's *Tosca* and *Le Villi*; Terence Blanchard's *Champion*; and as Serena in The Metropolitan Opera's *Porgy and Bess*. In 2019 she made her Opera Theatre of Saint Louis debut in the world premiere of Terence Blanchard and Kasi Lemmons' *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* and performed in the world premiere of Hannibal Lokumbe's *Healing Tones* with The Philadelphia Orchestra.

During the 2020-21 COVID-19-impacted season, Ms. Slack took part in digital performances for Houston Grand Opera, Opera Philadelphia, and Minnesota Opera. She co-created and performed in *#SayTheirNames – Women of the Movement*, a film production in partnership with Philadelphia's Lyric Fest. Additional virtual projects included starring in the film adaptation of the opera *dwb (driving while black)* with Virginia-based UrbanArias and performing alongside actor Liev Schreiber in Orpheus Chamber Orchestra's "Speaking Truth to Power" program. She also launched her popular digital talk show, *#KikiKonversations*, which has garnered critical acclaim from *Opera News* and *The New York Times*. Upcoming highlights include her debut with Houston Grand Opera in the world premiere of Joel Thompson and Andrea Davis Pinkney's *A Snowy Day*, Verdi's *Aida* with Opera Carolina, soloist with organist Alan Morrison at Atlanta's Spivey Hall, and the premiere of a new work by James Lee III at Carnegie Hall with the Pacifica Quartet.

In 2020 she was appointed Artistic Advisor for Portland Opera and Co-Director of the Banff Centre for the Performing Arts in Alberta, Canada, focusing on diversity, equality, and inclusion initiatives in both roles. A graduate of the Adler Fellowship program at the San Francisco Opera, she is also a graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music in her hometown of Philadelphia.

ABOUT THE 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 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.

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Photo of Michelle Cann by Steven Mareazi Willis
Photo of Randall Goosby by Kaupo Kikkas
Photo of Karen Slack by Kia Caldwell