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Cantate Chamber Singers presents
**A Concert Meditation on
Civil Rights in America**

Sunday, April 19, 5:00 p.m.

Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church in
Washington, D.C.



Rise artwork by Rafaela Dreisin

Cantate to share historic venue with jazz a cappella virtuosos Afro Blue of Howard University in a concert that reaches across musical styles and generations

Featuring spirituals, jazz, and songs of courage and consolation from "Precious Lord" to Mary Lou Williams's *Mass for Peace*, U2's "MLK"

And the timely world premiere of *Rise* by Judah Adashi with text by Tameka Cage Conley

Special appearance by Gwen Ifill

WASHINGTON, D.C.: On Sunday, April 19 at 5:00 p.m., [Cantate Chamber Singers](http://www.cantate.org)—hailed for 20 years of innovative programming under **Music Director Gisèle Becker**—will finish an adventurous 30th Anniversary Season at the historic Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1518 M Street, N.W., in Washington, D.C.

Cantate is thrilled to team with jazz a cappella guest artists [Afro Blue](http://www.afroblue.org) of Howard University in **A Concert Meditation on Civil Rights in America**. In individual sets, Cantate and Afro Blue will perform classic spirituals such as "Precious Lord," dazzling and reflective jazz (including an excerpt from *Mass for Peace* by jazz great Mary Lou Williams), arrangements of Bill Withers's "Lean on Me" and U2's "MLK," and other works that evoke the astonishingly rich musical heritage of the Civil Rights movement. Then the two groups will join in unveiling *Rise*, a newly commissioned work for double chorus and chamber ensemble by Baltimore-based composer **Judah Adashi** setting poems by **Tameka Cage Conley**.

The concert began with a plan by Gisèle Becker for Cantate's 30th Anniversary: to continue Cantate's recent focus on collaborating across audience boundaries and artistic genres by commissioning a new work that put the group's classically oriented singers in dialogue with a nimble, modern a cappella vocal ensemble. "My thought was an interest in cross-generational and cross-cultural sharing of a commonality: music," said Becker.

Becker brought the double-choir idea to Dr. Judah Adashi of the Peabody Institute of the John Hopkins University, an advocate of new music and past winner of Cantate's biennial Young Composers' Contest. Adashi agreed to a commission and suggested that Becker consider collaborating with Afro Blue, the "vocal big band" from Howard University that in little more than a decade since its founding by **Connaitre Miller** has won acclaim and an avid fan following at jazz festivals and as a finalist on NBC's primetime contest *The Sing-Off*.

For his commission, Adashi proposed a piece inspired by his longstanding interest in the Civil Rights Movement. Soon he came to the conclusion that the piece he envisioned would require new words by a young American poet, and he approached Dr. Tameka Cage Conley, whom he'd met when both were in residence at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, about writing the text. "I got to hear Tameka read her extraordinary poetry in summer 2013, and we had many late-night conversations about race and politics in America. Her words are the beating heart of *Rise*," he said. "I have put my soul into these poems," Cage Conley said, "and hope that I have captured hope and struggle with the same level of grace

and dignity that the courageous men, women, and children in the Civil Rights movement exhibited each day they arose and decided to fight for justice." *Rise* has taken shape, Adashi added, as a "a reflection on the journey from Selma to Ferguson and beyond—a celebration of and reckoning with the Civil Rights movement of the 20 century, refracted through the unimaginable triumphs and horrors of the 21st."

Another concert highlight will be a special appearance by renowned journalist **Gwen Ifill**.

Cantate Chamber Singers is proud to be joined by Afro Blue and, with *Rise*, to welcome another work to the major commissions the group has already helped add to the choral repertoire. These include Andrew Earle Simpson's visionary wedding oratorio ***A Crown of Stars*** and Maurice Saylor's brilliant setting of Lewis Carroll, ***The Hunting of the Snark*** (available on Albany Records and Naxos, respectively).

"The release of the movie *Selma* honoring the 50th anniversary of the Voting Rights Act," Becker said, "makes our commission all the more important as a musical acknowledgement of a benchmark in American history."

Tickets for the April 19 concert (\$35 general admission, \$45 premium seats in the first few rows, \$15 students with ID) are available at www.cantate.org, 301-986-1799, or at the door. Under a new admissions policy, children ages 18 and under are invited to attend free of charge.

WHEN: Sunday, April 19, 5:00 p.m

WHAT: Cantate Chamber Singers presents **A Concert Meditation on Civil Rights in America** featuring Afro Blue

WHERE: Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1518 M Street, N.W., Washington, D.C.

TICKETS: \$35-45, students w/ ID \$15, 18 and under free. Available at cantate.org, 301-986-1799, or at the door.

About the Artists

Founded in 1984 by Phyllis Isaacson and under the artistic direction of Gisèle Becker since 1994, **CANTATE CHAMBER SINGERS** attracts many of the Washington, D.C. area's finest choral musicians, selected annually by audition. The group performs a broad range of great Western choral literature spanning the past five centuries and is recognized for championing neglected masterpieces and premiering newly commissioned works. The group's biennial Young Composers' Contest seeks to encourage emerging composing talent from around the nation. Its virtuoso performances, often featuring acclaimed guest artists, are offered in smaller venues to create the greatest possible intimacy between performers and audience.



Photo by Wayne Guenther

An hour-long broadcast on Classical WETA's *Front Row Washington* was devoted to Cantate performances, and the group won the 2011 Ovation award for creative programming. Cantate launched ***A Britten Holiday*** (Raven), its third nationally released CD, in fall 2013. Other CDs with major Cantate commissions include Andrew Earle Simpson's visionary wedding oratorio ***A Crown of Stars*** on Albany Records and Maurice Saylor's brilliantly playful setting of Lewis Carroll's ***The Hunting of the Snark*** on the Naxos label.



Howard University's premier vocal jazz ensemble, **AFRO BLUE** was formed by Professor Connaitre Miller in the spring of 2002. Singing music similar to the styles of Lambert, Hendricks, and Ross, The Manhattan Transfer and Take 6, while adding their own unique sound, this dynamic "vocal big band" has performed to wide critical acclaim. *Afro Blue* has been featured

on NPR's *All Things Considered*; reached the top four on *The Sing-Off*, NBC-TV's a cappella group competition; and joined the legendary Bobby McFerrin in selections from his Grammy-nominated *VOCABularies* album during the 2011 D.C. Jazz Festival in what has been called "the finest concert in D.C. Jazz Festival history." They have established a continuing relationship with The John F. Kennedy Center for The Performing Arts, having performed with The National Symphony Orchestra (NSO) Pops, as part of The TedMed Conferences, and participated in multiple jazz concerts. Last December, Afro Blue appeared at a White House Christmas party and was honored to perform for the president and Mrs. Obama.

Since its existence, Afro Blue has received ten Student Music Awards (SMA) from *DownBeat Magazine* and members of the ensemble have been recognized for their stellar solo work. In June, 2013, Connaitre Miller received *DownBeat Magazine's* "Jazz Education Achievement Award" celebrating her work with Afro Blue and her contributions to the field of jazz education. In addition, Afro Blue was featured in Jazz Times 2014-2015 Jazz Education Guide with the article "How Afro Blue Happened." Afro Blue has been voted Best A Cappella Group for the past three years by The Washington Area Music Association (WAMA), and their CD *The Best Is Yet To Come* was named Best Choral Album, as well as Album of the Year for 2013. Afro Blue has released four additional CD's: *Freedom in Song* (2008), *It's a Matter of Pride* (2010), *Jubilee* (2014), and *An Afro Blue Christmas* (2014) which features HU jazz piano faculty member Cyrus Chestnut. All CD's are available at www.cdbaby.com

The music of composer **JUDAH ADASHI** has been described as "beguiling" (Alex Ross, *New Yorker*) and "elegant" (Steve Smith, *Boston Globe*). Dr. Adashi has been honored with awards, grants and commissions from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the ASCAP and BMI Foundations, the American Composers Forum, New Music USA and the Aspen Music Festival, as well as residencies at Yaddo and the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts. A committed musical organizer, advocate and educator, Dr. Adashi is the founder and artistic director of the Evolution Contemporary Music Series, noted for having "elevated and enriched Baltimore's new music scene enormously" (*Baltimore Sun*). He is also on the composition and music theory faculty at the Peabody Institute of the Johns Hopkins University. Dr. Adashi holds master's and doctoral degrees from Peabody and a bachelor's degree from Yale University. For more information, please visit judahadashi.com.

TAMEKA CAGE CONLEY, PhD, is a literary artist who writes poetry, fiction, and plays. In 2010, she received the August Wilson Center Fellowship in literary arts. Her first play, *Testimony*, was produced at the Center in May 2011. An excerpt of the play is published in the anthology *24 Gun Control Plays* and has been performed in Los Angeles and the Darlinghurst Theatre Company in Sydney, Australia. Her poems are published in *Callaloo*, *The Portable Boog Reader*, *African American Review*, *Huizache: The Magazine of Latino Literature*, and a special online feature of the *Southeast Review* in response to the Ferguson protests that spread across the nation. An excerpt of her novel-in-progress, *This Far, By Grace*, is also published in *Huizache*. She has received writing fellowships from Cave Canem, the Vermont Studio Center, the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts, and the Squaw Valley Writers Conference and Workshops. Last month, her poem "Losing" was chosen by the Pennsylvania Center for the Book as one of four featured poems for the Public Poetry Project in 2015.

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