



**10 MOSS
ARTS
CENTER**
10TH ANNIVERSARY SEASON

**VT VIRGINIA
TECH.**

**JAVON JACKSON WITH NIKKI GIOVANNI
AND NNENNA FREELON**
The Gospel According to Nikki Giovanni

Friday, November 3, 2023, 7:30 PM

Street and Davis Performance Hall, Anne and Ellen Fife Theatre

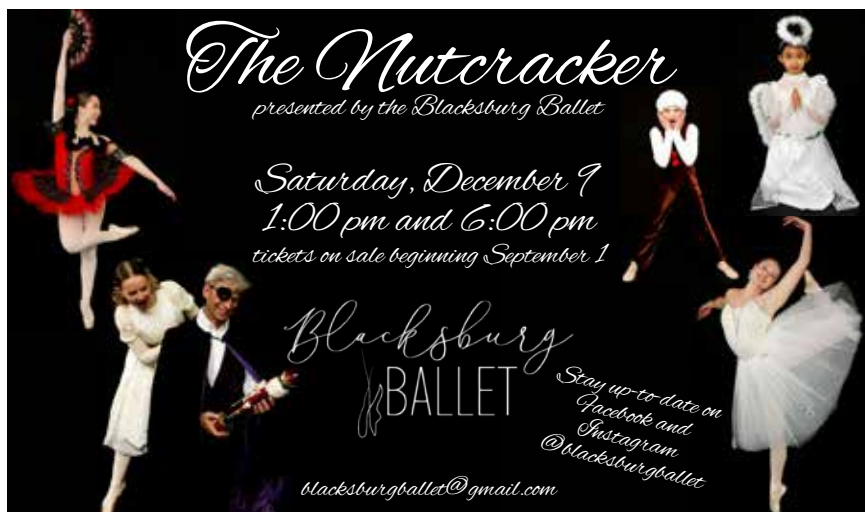
Friday, March 15, 7:30 PM
Meshell Ndegeocello

VT VIRGINIA
TECH.

**10 MOSS
ARTS
CENTER**

10TH ANNIVERSARY SEASON

Traversing soul, R&B,
jazz, hip-hop, and
rock, Grammy winner
Meshell Ndegeocello's
work is bound by
the search for love,
justice, respect,
and resolution.



The Nutcracker
presented by the Blacksburg Ballet

Saturday, December 7
1:00 pm and 6:00 pm
tickets on sale beginning September 1

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JAVON JACKSON WITH NIKKI GIOVANNI AND NNENNA FREELON

The Gospel According to Nikki Giovanni

JEREMY MANASIA, PIANO

DAVID WILLIAMS, BASS

MCCLINTY HUNTER, DRUMS

Program to be announced from the stage.

This performance is supported in part by gifts from Ms. Kelli Whitfield
and Dr. James M. Shuler and Ms. Margaret F. Shuler.

Co-sponsored by the Black Cultural Center

PROGRAM NOTES

The Gospel According to Nikki Giovanni connects with the ancestral stream while putting a jazzy new perspective on timeless hymns and spirituals.

Why would one of poetry's most revered voices want to curate a jazz saxophonist's album of gospel hymns and spirituals? "These songs are so important," says Nikki Giovanni, one of Oprah Winfrey's 25 "Living Legends" and a Maya Angelou Lifetime Achievement Award winner for 2017. "They comforted people through times of slavery, and during recent years we needed them to comfort us again. But a lot of the students today do not know about the history of these songs, and they should. So I'm out here putting water on the flowers, because they need a drink."

Giovanni's historic collaboration with saxophonist-composer and former Jazz Messenger Javon Jackson has yielded *The Gospel According to Nikki Giovanni*, released on his Solid Jackson label.

"The spirituals have been around so long," says the renowned poet, activist, and educator, who came to prominence in the 1960s and '70s as a foundational member of the Black Arts movement, following the publication of such early works as 1968's book of poetry, *Black Feeling, Black Talk/Black Judgment*, and 1970's *Re:Creation*.

"Some spirituals have been updated and stayed around and some have been lost over time," Giovanni notes. "So for me, it's just helping to keep something going. And I do it because there's a need."

Jackson brings his bold-toned, Trane-inspired tenor lines to bear on a series of hymns, spirituals, and gospel numbers hand-picked

by Giovanni, who was also the first person to receive the Rosa L. Parks Women of Courage Award.

And the 80-year-old poet makes a rare vocal appearance on the tender ballad *Night Song*, singing a song identified with her close friend, the late Civil Rights activist and High Priestess of Soul, Nina Simone. “Nina was a friend of mine, and I knew that one of her favorite songs was *Night Song*,” she explains. “And even though I’m not a singer, I told Javon I wanted to sing it because I just wanted Nina to be remembered.”

Jackson, who flew to Nikki’s home to record her vocal track on the existing instrumental tracks, says, “I sat beside her when she sang it and by the time she finished that chorus, I was deeply moved. I just love the fragile nature of the way she treated it. It was very emotional.”

Joined by an outstanding crew comprised of pianist Jeremy Manasia, bassist David Williams, and drummer McClenty Hunter — the same lineup that appeared on Jackson’s 2018 album, *For You*, and his 2020 follow-up, *Deja Vu* — Jackson interprets gospel staples like *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot*, *Wade in the Water*, *Didn’t My Lord Deliver Daniel*, and *Leaning on the Everlasting Arms* with authoritative tenor tones, deep walking bass lines, and an organic sense of group swing.

“It’s the first time I worked in a collaborative manner,” Jackson says. “The project is personal for me. I come from a lineage of devout Christians, and that has afforded me the chance to connect with that ancestral stream.”



BIOGRAPHIES



JAVON JACKSON

A former member of Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers who also put in time with such jazz giants, Javon Jackson keeps the fires burning for straight-ahead jazz on his 21st release as a leader. "I was raised in that experience of swinging, and that's what I really have an appreciation for," says the 55-year-old saxophonist, composer, and educator. And as director of the Jackie McLean Institute of Jazz at the Hartt School, part of the University of Hartford, since 2013, Jackson is also mindful of his position and the importance of educating the next generation of players. As he told *Downbeat* magazine, "Today's students won't get to know Art Blakey. They won't get to know Freddie Hubbard. They won't get to know Elvin Jones or Cedar Walton or Charlie Haden or Betty Carter. But they can know them through me."

As saxophonist and leader or co-leader, Jackson has participated in 20 recording projects that have included such renowned artists as Dianne Reeves, Cassandra Wilson, Ron Carter, Kenny Garrett, Christian McBride, Lenny White, and Les McCann. During his career as tenor saxophonist, Jackson has toured and recorded with artists including Art Blakey, Elvin Jones, Charlie Haden, Freddie Hubbard, Donald Byrd, Cedar Walton, Curtis Fuller, Ben E. King, Dr. Lonnie Smith, and Joanne Brackeen. As composer, Jackson was commissioned by the Syracuse International Film Festival to compose a full-length score for the Alfred Hitchcock film *The Lodger*. An early outing by the master of suspense, *The Lodger* is a silent film based on the story of the hunt for Jack the Ripper. He debuted his original score at the festival, performing it live at the film's screening on October 15, 2010. Jackson is highly sought after in jazz education as a clinician and lecturer, conducting master classes at music schools, colleges, and universities throughout the U.S. and abroad. Currently, he serves as jazz panelist and as chair for the National Young Arts Foundation. Jackson's latest album on his Solid Jackson label is *With Peter Bradley*, a soundtrack to the illuminating documentary of the groundbreaking abstract artist Peter Bradley.



NIKKI GIOVANNI

Poet Nikki Giovanni was born in Knoxville, Tennessee, on June 7, 1943, and grew up in Cincinnati, Ohio. Giovanni graduated with a degree in history from Fisk University. A world-renowned poet and one of the foremost authors of the Black Arts movement, her notable books of poetry are *Black Judgment* (1968) and *Those Who Ride the Night Winds* (1983), which were influenced by her participation

BIOGRAPHIES, cont.

in the Black Arts movement and Black Power movement in the 1960s. Giovanni has published numerous collections of poetry — from her first self-published volume, *Black Feeling Black Talk* (1968), to *New York Times* bestseller *Bicycles: Love Poems* (2009). She has written several works of nonfiction and children's literature and made multiple recordings, including the Emmy Award-nominated *The Nikki Giovanni Poetry Collection* (2004). Her most recent publications include *Make Me Rain: Poems & Prose* (2020); *Chasing Utopia: A Hybrid* (2013); and, as editor, *The 100 Best African American Poems* (2010). She has published more than two dozen volumes of poetry, essays, and edited anthologies and 11 illustrated children's books, including *Rosa*, an award-winning biography of Rosa Parks.

Giovanni has received numerous awards, including the 2022 Ruth Lilly Poetry Prize, the inaugural Rosa L. Parks Woman of Courage Award, the American Book Award, the Langston Hughes Award, the Virginia Governor's Award for the Arts, the Emily Couric Leadership Award, and a Literary Excellence Award. She is a seven-time recipient of the NAACP Image Award. Her autobiography, *Gemini*, was a finalist for the 1973 National Book Award. In 2004 Giovanni's album, *The Nikki Giovanni Poetry Collection*, was a Grammy finalist for Best Spoken Word Album.



NNENNA FREELON

Multi-Grammy Award nominee Nnenna Freelon is known worldwide as a compelling and captivating live performer. Recently, Freelon starred in the critically acclaimed show *Georgia on My Mind: Celebrating the Music of Ray Charles* — and she's no stranger

to the music of the master singer; she toured with Ray Charles, as well as many other great jazz artists, including Ellis Marsalis, Al Jarreau, George Benson, Earl Klugh, Take 6, and others.

Accolades and awards have abounded, including performances at the White House; headlining the Asia Pacific Economic Summit for 300 presidents, premiers, and heads of state; receiving the YWCA of North Carolina's inaugural Legend Award for her outstanding artistry and her dedication to education; and so much more. From Freelon's turn in *What Women Want* (featuring her hit, *If I Had You*) starring Mel Gibson and Helen Hunt, to her own production (as writer/composer, singer/actress, and producer) of the theatrical musical play *The Clothesline Muse*, to her triumphant role in composer Laura Karpman's undertaking of Langston Hughes' *Ask Your Mama* at the Apollo Theater and the Hollywood Bowl with opera superstar Jessye Norman and the indie phenom band The Roots, she continues to wow audiences at SRO shows — even as she embarks on new avenues.

This is the first performance of The Gospel According to Nikki Giovanni at the Moss Arts Center and the first appearance by Jackson and Freelon.

ENGAGEMENT EVENTS

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 2

LUNCH AND DISCUSSION WITH NIKKI GIOVANNI AND JAVON JACKSON

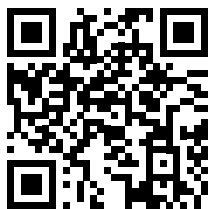
The artists engaged in an informal conversation about the development of *The Gospel According to Nikki Giovanni* with students, faculty, and staff at the Black Cultural Center.

*Special thanks to the Black Cultural Center
and Kimberly Clark-Shaw*

GO DEEPER

How would you describe the jazz quartet's reimagination of the traditional hymns, spirituals, and gospel pieces in this program? How does the adaptation of these pieces through contemporary jazz change their historical and spiritual meaning?

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK!



We'd love your feedback on this performance. If you complete the short survey, you can enter for a chance to win two tickets to Blacksburg Master Chorale on Sunday, December 17, 2023. bit.ly/gospel-giovanni-feedback



10TH ANNIVERSARY SEASON

artscenter.vt.edu

A black and white photograph of a large orchestra performing on a stage in a grand hall. The musicians are seated with their instruments, and a conductor stands in the center. The stage is illuminated by overhead lights, and the audience seating is visible in the foreground.

10 YEARS

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IN THE GALLERIES

THROUGH SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17



william cordova

can't stop, won't stop: tenets of southern alchemy

Ruth C. Horton Gallery

william cordova examines the visual aspects of transition and displacement, studying the evolution and adaptation of objects and perception across time and space. Constructing artworks composed of reclaimed elements, paint, gold leaf, and collage, cordova presents encoded representations of social systems and the material histories of objects and images.

THROUGH SUNDAY, DECEMBER 17



Laurie Steelink

Spirit Is Alive, Magic Is Afoot

Miles C. Horton Jr. Gallery and Sherwood Payne Quillen '71
Reception Gallery

Multidisciplinary artist Laurie Steelink is a citizen of the Akimel O'otham Nation and a member of the Gila River Indian Community. Exploring connections to her Native American roots, Steelink creates assemblages of found objects and reassembled paintings to question authenticity and consider spirituality. Using her creativity to reconnect with and to reference her ancestors, culture, and community, Steelink defines her work as an expression of her personal identities.

K-12 PROGRAMS AT THE MOSS ARTS CENTER

Experiences with the arts cultivate the next generation of creative thinkers, engage learners of diverse backgrounds, and foster community dialogue. The Moss Arts Center has been dedicated to providing K-12 students in the region with free, high-quality, and exciting arts programming since opening our doors in 2013. Through school-day matinee programs, gallery tours, in-school performances, and workshops with artists, we are passionate about serving our youngest community members and schools.

Learn more at bit.ly/moss-K12.

DID YOU KNOW?

On Friday, November 1, 2013, the Philip Glass Ensemble christened the stage of the Anne and Ellen Fife Theatre with the sold-out performance *Powaqqatsi: Life in Transformation*, which featured an appearance by the Blacksburg Children's Chorale. The performance was chosen to launch the inaugural season for its extraordinary sensory power of music and imagery and the timely and compelling international themes and questions it raises.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Virginia Tech acknowledges that we live and work on the Tutelo / Monacan People's homeland, and we recognize their continued relationships with their lands and waterways. We further acknowledge that the Morrill Land-Grant College Act (1862) enabled the commonwealth of Virginia to finance and found Virginia Tech through the forced removal of Native Nations from their lands in California and other areas in the West.

LABOR RECOGNITION

Virginia Tech acknowledges that its Blacksburg campus sits partly on land that was previously the site of the Smithfield and Solitude Plantations, owned by members of the Preston family. Between the 1770s and the 1860s, the Prestons and other local White families that owned parcels of what became Virginia Tech also owned hundreds of enslaved people. Enslaved Black people generated resources that financed Virginia Tech's predecessor institution, the Preston and Olin Institute, and they also worked on the construction of its building.

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We are grateful for the generosity of our patrons and donors who sustain the Moss Arts Center with their annual gifts. The impact of all contributions, no matter the amount, is significant in helping us transform lives through exploration and engagement with the arts and the creative process. We are honored to have received cash donations during the period of July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2023, from the following:

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VETERANS EVENT

The YMCA at Virginia Tech invites local veterans to attend this special celebration.

NOVEMBER 6th, 11am til 2pm
At The Y Center, 1000 N. Main St.
Blacksburg

www.vtymca.org

Meals
4 Vets

with November Company
VT Corps of Cadets

Resources
4 Vets

Visit the 54th annual YMCA Craft Fair

Nov 10- Nov 11, 2023

at Christiansburg Recreation Center
1600 N. Franklin St, Christiansburg



Nov 10 - 10am-7pm
Nov 11-9am-5pm



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day of generosity that
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