



MIDDLEBURY  
PERFORMING ARTS SERIES  
P R E S E N T S

# *Abdullah Ibrahim, Piano and Ekaya*

SATURDAY, APRIL 29, 2023  
MAHANEY ARTS CENTER, ROBISON HALL



**Abdullah Ibrahim, Piano  
and Ekaya**

Program to be announced from the stage

*90 minutes with no intermission*

Tonight's performance is made possible thanks to support  
from the Paul Nelson Performance Endowment  
and Rothrock Family Residency Fund.

Additional thanks to Deborah Felmeth, Norbert Eierding,  
and The Kurland Agency.

*Artist Biographies*

**Abdullah Ibrahim,  
Piano/Composition**

Abdullah Ibrahim, South Africa's most distinguished pianist and a world-respected master musician, was born in 1934 in Cape Town and was baptized Adolph Johannes Brand. His early



musical memories were of traditional African Khoi-san songs and the Christian hymns, gospel tunes, and spirituals that he heard from his grandmother, who was a pianist for the local African Methodist Episcopalian church, and his mother, who led the choir. The Cape Town of his childhood was a melting-pot of cultural influences, and the young Dollar Brand, as he became known, was exposed to American jazz, township jive, Cape Malay music, and classical music. Out of this blend of the secular and the religious, the traditional and the modern, developed the distinctive style, harmonies, and musical vocabulary that are inimitably his own.

He began piano lessons at the age of seven and made his professional debut at 15, playing and later recording with such local groups as the Tuxedo Slickers. He was at the forefront of playing bebop with a Cape Town flavor and 1958 saw the formation of the Dollar Brand Trio. His groundbreaking septet the Jazz Epistles, formed in 1959 (with saxophonist Kippie Moeketsi, trumpeter Hugh Masekela, trombonist Jonas Gwanga, bassist Johnny Gertze, and drummer Makaya Ntshoko), recorded the first jazz album by South African musicians. That same year, he met and first performed with vocalist Sathima Bea Benjamin. They were to marry six years later.

After the notorious Sharpeville massacre of 1960, mixed-race bands and audiences defied the increasingly strict apartheid laws. Jazz symbolized resistance, so the government closed a number of clubs and harassed the musicians. Some members of the Jazz Epistles went to England with the musical *King Kong* and stayed in exile. These were difficult times to sustain musical development in South Africa. In 1962, with Nelson Mandela imprisoned and the African National Congress (ANC) banned, Dollar Brand and Sathima Bea Benjamin left the country, joined later by the other trio members Gertze and Ntshoko, and took up a three-year contract at the Club Africana in Zürich. There, in 1963, Sathima persuaded Duke Ellington to listen to them play, leading to a recording session in Paris – Duke Ellington presents the Dollar Brand Trio – and invitations to perform at key European festivals and on television and radio during the next two years.

In 1965, the now-married couple moved to New York. After appearing that year at the Newport Jazz Festival and Carnegie Hall, Dollar Brand was called upon in 1966 to substitute as leader of the Ellington Orchestra in five concerts. Then followed a six-month tour with the Elvin Jones Quartet. In 1967 he received a Rockefeller Foundation grant to attend the Juilliard School of Music. Being in the USA also afforded him the opportunity to interact with many progressive

musicians, including Don Cherry, Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, Pharaoh Sanders, Cecil Taylor, and Archie Shepp.

The year 1968 was a turning point. Searching for spiritual harmony in an increasingly fractured life, Dollar Brand went back to Cape Town, where he converted to Islam, taking the name Abdullah Ibrahim, and in 1970 he made a pilgrimage to Mecca. Music and martial arts further reinforced the spiritual discipline he found. After a couple of years based in Swaziland, where he founded a music school, Mr. Ibrahim and his young family returned in 1973 to Cape Town, though he still toured internationally with his own large and small groups. In 1974 he recorded *Mannenberg – Is Where It's Happening*, which soon became an unofficial national anthem for black South Africans. After the Soweto student uprising in 1976, he organized an illegal ANC benefit concert. Before long, he and his family left for America to settle once again in New York.

Determined to manage his own affairs in America, he founded the record company Ekapa with Sathima in 1981. The 1980s saw him involved with a range of artistic projects that depended on his music: Garth Fagan's ballet *Prelude* (first performed 1981), the *Kalahari Liberation Opera* (Vienna, 1982), and the musical *Cape Town, South Africa*

(1983) featuring Ekaya, the septet he formed that year. In 1987, he played a memorial concert for Marcus Garvey in London's Westminster Cathedral, and the following year he played at the concert in Central Park, New York to commemorate the 70th birthday of Nelson Mandela.

Mandela, freed from prison in 1990, invited him to come home to South Africa. The fraught emotions of reacclimatizing there are reflected in *Mantra Modes* (1991), the first recording with South African musicians since 1976, and in *Knysna Blue* (1993). He memorably performed at Mandela's inauguration in 1994.

Abdullah Ibrahim has been the subject of several documentaries: Chris Austin's 1986 BBC film *A Brother with Perfect Timing; A Struggle for Love* by Ciro Cappellari (2004); and the forthcoming *Water from an Ancient Well*, to be released in spring 2024. He has also composed scores for film, including the award-winning soundtrack for Claire Denis's *Chocolat* (1988), as well as for *No Fear, No Die* (1990), and Idrissa Ouedraogo's *Tilai* (1990). He was also featured in the 2002 production *Amandla: A Revolution in Four-Part Harmony*.

For more than a quarter-century he has toured the world extensively, appearing at major concert halls, clubs and festivals, giving sell-out performances, as a solo artist or with other renowned artists (notably Max Roach, Carlos Ward, and Randy Weston). His collaborations with classical orchestras have resulted in acclaimed recordings, such as *African Suite* (1999, with members of the European Union Youth Orchestra) and the Munich Radio Philharmonic orchestra symphonic version of *African Symphony* (2001), which also featured the NDR Jazz Big Band.

Abdullah Ibrahim celebrated his seventieth birthday in October 2004, which occasion was marked by the release of two CDs by Enja Records (the Munich-based label with whom he has recorded for three decades): the compilation *A Celebration*, and *Re:Brahim*, his music remixed. His discography runs to well over a hundred album credits.

When not touring, he now divides his time between Cape Town and New York. In addition to composing and performing, he has started a South African production company, Masingita (Miracle), and established a music academy, M7, offering courses in seven disciplines to educate young minds and bodies. Most recently, in 2006, he spearheaded the historic creation of the Cape Town Jazz Orchestra

(backed by the South African Ministry of Arts and Culture), an 18-piece big band, which is set to further strengthen the standing of South African music on the global stage.

A martial arts Black Belt with a lifelong interest in zen philosophy, he takes every opportunity to visit his master in private trips to Japan. In 2003 he performed charity concerts at temples in Kyoto and Shizuoka, with proceeds going to his M7 academy.

Abdullah Ibrahim remains at his zenith as a musician and a tireless initiator of new projects. In his own words: “Some do it because they have to do it. We do it because we want to....so we do not require much sleep... so we have to do it.”

The recipient of many awards and honorary doctorates – including being named a 2019 NEA Jazz Master, and honored with Japan’s Order of the Rising Sun, conferred by His Majesty, the Emperor of Japan – and spiritually strong as both teacher and disciple, Professor Abdullah Ibrahim is a true inheritor of the ancestral name SENZO.



### **Cleave Guyton, Alto Saxophone/Flute/Piccolo/Clarinet**

Cleave Guyton is a professional musician who plays the saxophones, flutes, and clarinet. He has been fortunate to have worked with artists such as Aretha Franklin, Abdullah Ibrahim, Joe Henderson, Stanley Turrentine, Nat Adderley, Abby Lincoln, The Duke Ellington Orchestra, Jon Hendricks, The Ray Charles Orchestra, Lionel Hampton, The Count Basie Orchestra, The Cab Calloway Orchestra, Little Jimmy Scott, Spike Lee, Joe Williams, *Late Night with Conan O'Brien*, Dizzy Gillespie, Tito Puente, Ronny Jordan, The Mingus Big Band, Cleo Laine, and Chaka Khan. Mr. Guyton also has a Master's degree in music from The Aaron Copland School of Music in New York City.

### **Lance Bryant, Tenor Saxophone**

Saxophonist and vocalist Lance Bryant comes out of Markham, Illinois, a small town near Chicago. He received his formal music education at Berklee College of Music in Boston, MA, where he studied saxophone, composition, and arranging. After moving to New York City in the mid-1980s, Mr. Bryant continued his education, studying saxophone and arranging privately with Frank Foster, the former director of the Count Basie Orchestra. He also studied composition with Bruce Adolphe of Lincoln Center's Chamber Music Society. In 1990 Lance

began his decade-long relationship with the Lionel Hampton Orchestra and in 1993 became the orchestra's musical director and principal arranger. Mr. Bryant has performed, recorded, and traveled extensively with major artists such as Phyllis Hyman, Jon Hendricks, Pete "LaRocca" Sims, Wallace Roney, Abdullah Ibrahim, James Williams, and others. His connection with spirituality and music has endured. In 2002 he released *Psalm*, the first of four CDs featuring original songs and jazz arrangements of hymns and spirituals. Mr. Bryant's teaching experience has included woodwind instructor for Covenant Christian Academy in Peabody, MA, director of the Phillips Academy Gospel Choir in Andover MA, Berklee's Saxophone Weekend for the Berklee College of Music summer program, and Jazz at Lincoln Center's Middle School Jazz Academy program. Recent Broadway experience includes the musical *After Midnight*, featuring the music of Duke Ellington; *Shuffle Along*, featuring Tony Award winner Audra MacDonal; and *A Celebration of Cole Porter*, performing with Harry Connick Jr. Currently, Mr. Bryant is touring with the newly re-formed Lionel Hampton Big Band featuring Jason Marsalis, and with venerated pianist/composer Abdullah Ibrahim and Ekaya.

**Joshua Lee, Baritone Saxophone**

Grammy-nominated saxophonist, composer, arranger, and Managing/Co-Artistic Director of Jazz Lives Philadelphia Joshua Lee is fully dedicated to the advancement of the Philadelphia jazz community. Mr. Lee graduated from Temple University in 2016 and 2019 with both Bachelor's and Master's degrees in jazz performance. He has had the fortune of mentorship from musicians like Dick Oatts, Terrell Stafford, Tim Warfield, and Gary Smulyan on both the Philadelphia and New York scenes. As a result, Mr. Lee joined the Legendary Count Basie Orchestra in June of 2018 and performs with them around the world while also serving as a regular substitute with groups like the Vanguard Jazz Orchestra, the Sun Ra Arkestra, and Terrell Stafford's Jazz Orchestra of Philadelphia. Mr. Lee joined the Jazz Faculty at Temple University in the fall of 2019 and was named one of Temple University's *30 Under 30* in 2020. He joined the WRTI team in early 2021 and officially became an on-air host in November of 2021.

### **Noah Jackson, Cello/Bass**

Noah Jackson is a Grammy-nominated bassist, cellist, composer, and curator from Detroit, Michigan. As a member of NEA Jazz Master Abdullah Ibrahim's ensemble Ekaya since 2010, Mr. Jackson has performed internationally to critical acclaim and recorded the latest album, *The Balance*, released in 2019. Mr. Jackson is also a member of

the Recording Academy. A recipient of the Creative Engagement and UMEZ grants from the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council and the State of New York, he produced a work based on the music of Duke Ellington – *On A Turquoise Cloud* – at the Schomburg Center in September 2019 and performed at the Detroit Symphony Orchestra @ The Cube in February 2020. His group also recorded an album, *Contemplations: A Suite* in 2011, which has garnered critical praise. As a leader, Mr. Jackson was commissioned to compose and direct his string quartet Asé Quartet in a multidisciplinary collaborative art project, *Practicing: Silence at Grace Farms*, under the direction of Kenyon Adams as part of their Practicing series alongside featured dancers from the American Ballet Theater. He has also led his Detroit-based Tangent String Quartet in a rare performance of Quartet No.2 by black composer Florence B. Price as part of a video series presented by the Detroit Institute of the Arts in February 2021. A graduate of Michigan State University (B.M.) under the direction of Rodney Whitaker, and Manhattan School of Music (M.M.) with Dr. Larry Ridley, Mr. Jackson currently resides in Detroit.

### **Will Terrill, Drums**

Drummer Will Terrill's career took flight after catching the attention of singer Betty Carter during a jam session at the International

Association of Jazz Educators Conference. Mr. Terrill was invited to participate in Carter's Jazz Ahead program and later went on to tour as a member of her band from 1993 to 1995. He has also performed with Benny Golson, Ron Carter, Jimmy Heath, the Count Basie Orchestra, Wynton Marsalis, Cyrus Chestnut, Nnenna Freelon, and Abdullah Ibrahim. Mr. Terrill earned a Bachelor's degree with honors from The City College of New York and a Master's degree in jazz and contemporary music from New York University.

### **Michael Pallas, Trombone**

Michael Pallas is a New York City-based trombonist who has been performing professionally for over 15 years. He works frequently with Antibalas, Tito Rodriguez Jr, Soul Science Lab, and The Steven Oquendo Latin Jazz Orchestra. Born in California and raised in Phoenix, Arizona, Mr. Pallas has toured throughout the U.S. and the E.U. and has appeared in many noteworthy venues including Carnegie Hall and Opéra de Lyon. He graduated from the Jackie McLean Institute where he studied with Steve Davis, Nat Reeves, and Rene McLean. He has since become well known for his clear tone and melodic improvisation. As a musician of Dominican heritage, Mr. Pallas emerged on the NYC Salsa scene as a sideman appearing alongside notable artists such as Eddie Palmieri, Tito Rodriguez Jr.,

Victor Wail, Luisito and Roberto Quintero, and Victor Wail, Luisito and Roberto Quintero, and Gilberto Pulpo Colon. While the Latin music scene embraces his talents enthusiastically, Mr. Pallas has been honored to share the stage with premier jazz musicians as well, including Al Foster, Rene McLean, Steve Davis, and The Cotton Club Orchestra. He is working towards releasing his debut album *Gateway* in 2023, featuring his own compositions and productions.

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