

CARLOS **SIMON**

SONGS OF SEPARATION



National
Symphony
Orchestra

The
Kennedy
Center

GIANANDREA
NOSEDA
J’Nai Bridges





National Symphony Orchestra

GIANANDREA NOSEDA, CONDUCTOR

J’Nai Bridges, Mezzo-soprano

CARLOS SIMON

Songs of Separation (2021)

1. The Garden..... 4:41
2. Burning Hell..... 4:19
3. Dance..... 3:17
4. We Are All the Same..... 5:18

Songs of Separation was recorded live on April 21, 22, and 23, 2023, in the Concert Hall of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Washington, D.C.

Recording producer Blanton Alspaugh, *Soundmirror*.

Recording engineer John Newton, *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 National Symphony Orchestra photos Scott Suchman. **Carlos Simon headshot** Kendall Bessent. **J’Nai Bridges headshot** Dario Acosta.

Photo of Carlos Simon’s hands Yassine El Mansouri.

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Carlos Simon: *Songs of Separation*

Thomas May

Even before Carlos Simon began his tenure as Kennedy Center Composer-in-Residence in the fall of 2021, local audiences could get a sense of his versatility from performances here of his brief but powerful string quartet, *Elegy: A Cry from the Grave*, and his one-act chamber opera, *Night Trip*. Both works also underscore Simon's commitment to addressing issues of social justice and racial inequity in America. The young composer, who was born in Washington, D.C., believes in music's power to give voice to the marginalized and to shape aspirations for a better world.

Simon grew up in Atlanta, Georgia, in a family that encouraged his love of music as a way to participate in singing and playing for the services at the African-American Pentecostal church his father founded. He likes to compare his role as a composer to what his father, part of a multi-generational line of preachers, does from the pulpit. Simon has again become a D.C. resident: in 2019 he joined the performing arts faculty at Georgetown University, where his work on the Slavery, Memory, and Reconciliation Project inspired him to write *Requiem for the Enslaved*. A work featuring spoken word with lyrics by hip hop artist Marco Pavé, *Requiem*, was released as Simon's debut album for the Decca label; it was nominated for the Best Contemporary Classical Composition category in the 2023 Grammy Awards®.

Songs of Separation for mezzo-soprano and orchestra was commissioned by the National Symphony Orchestra in connection with Simon's residency. The ordeal of the COVID-19 pandemic concentrated his attention on experiences of separation and loss. Searching for texts for this orchestral song cycle, which he wrote for J'Nai Bridges, he found himself drawn backward in time to the work of the 13th-century Persian poet and Sufi mystic Jalāl al-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī.

"We all, as humans, experience separation in a variety of forms," Simon writes in his note to the score. "Whether it be through the death of a loved one, a break-up, a divorce, or a permanent relocation from family and friends, a parting of ways is a part of life for us all." He explains that the timeless eloquence of Rūmī appealed to him in particular because he realized it could serve as a vehicle to grapple with "negative things that we tend to shy away from." Summing up the personal message he finds in these poems—"What hurts you, also blesses you"—Simon describes how the pain of loss can lead to gaining something as well, which he says is "the real inspiration and hope of the piece."

Using the translations of Rūmī's texts by Coleman Barks, Simon selected four poems that "depict moments of grief and sorrow as well as hope and encouragement":

“The Garden,” “Burning Hell,” “Dance,” and “We Are All the Same.” He wrote the four songs specifically to highlight the unique beauty and power of Bridges’ wide range. Simon prefers not to pre-program audiences with guideposts about what to listen for but encourages them to bring their own background to the experience: “Everybody’s dealt with loss in a certain way. So everyone will bring something different.”

I. The Garden

Your Grief can be the garden of compassion.
If you keep your heart open through everything,
your pain can become your ally in your life’s search for
love and wisdom.
But listen to me:
for one moment, quit being sad.
Hear blessings dropping their blossoms around you.
What hurts you, blesses you.
Darkness is your candle.

II. Burning Hell

I plant some flowers without you —
They become thorns.
I see a peacock — it
turns into a snake.
I play the harp — nothing but noise.
I go to the highest heaven — it’s a
burning hell.

III. Dance

Dance, when you’re broken.
Dance, if you’re torn.
Dance in the middle of the fighting.
Dance in your blood.
Dance, when you’re perfectly free.
Life is ending? God gives another.
Admit the finite. Praise the Infinite!
Love is a spring — submerged!
Every separate drop, a whole new life.

IV. We Are All the Same

Listen to the reeds as they sway apart;
Hear them speak of lost friends.
At birth, you were cut from your bed,
Crying and grasping in separation.
Everyone listens, knowing your song.
You yearn for others who know your name,
And the words to your lament.
We are all the same, all the same,
Longing to find our way back;
Back to the one, back to the only one.

By Jalāl al-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī
Translation by Coleman Barks

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. Simon also holds the position of inaugural Composer Chair of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the first in the institution’s 143-year history. The 2023–2024 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 Simon’s 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 associate 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.
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J’Nai Bridges

Mezzo-soprano

Two time Grammy Award®-winning American mezzo-soprano **J’Nai Bridges**, known for her “plush-voiced mezzo-soprano” (*The New York Times*), and “calmly commanding stage presence” (*The New Yorker*) has been heralded as “a rising star” (*Los Angeles Times*), gracing the world’s top opera and concert stages.

The 2023–2024 season spotlights Bridges in the world premiere of *Intelligence* by Jake Heggie, where she takes on the role of Lucinda at the Houston Grand Opera. Bridges will make her subscription debut with the New York Philharmonic and Boston Symphony Orchestra, performing Julia Perry’s *Stabat Mater* and Berlioz’s *Romeo et Juliette*, respectively. She will be returning to the Metropolitan Opera in John Adams’ *El Niño* conducted by Marin Alsop, as well as taking one of her signature roles of *Carmen* to the Hamburg State Opera. Bridges’ recital engagements for the season begin with a performance alongside Latonia Moore at the San Diego Opera, continuing with Modlin Center of the Arts and The Metropolitan Museum of Art, with more to be announced throughout the season.

Bridges’ 2022–2023 season highlights included Bridges as *Carmen* with debut engagements at the Arena di Verona, Canadian Opera Company, and a return to Dutch National Opera and Lyric Opera of Chicago. As a native of Tacoma, Washington, she made her Seattle Opera debut in a concert performance of *Samson and Delilah* as Delilah in January 2023. Additional concert engagements included Mahler’s “Resurrection” Symphony with the Detroit Symphony in November, and a world premiere by Carlos Simon in April 2023 with the National Symphony Orchestra. Bridges’ recital engagements for the season included a world premiere by Jimmy Lopez at 92NY, as well as performances at Washington University, Thomasville Center for the Arts, The Cliburn, Wallis Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts, San Francisco Performances, and the Mondavi Center.



In the midst of the worldwide pandemic, she emerged as a leading figure in classical music's shift toward conversations of inclusion and racial justice in the performing arts. In 2022, she was announced as one of the Kennedy Center's NEXT50 cultural leaders, and appeared with The National Philharmonic in the world premiere of Adolphus Hailstork's *A Knee on the Neck* that same year. Bridges led a highly successful panel on race and inequality in opera with the Los Angeles Opera that drew international acclaim for being a "conversation of striking scope and candor" (*The New York Times*). In early 2021, Bridges was featured in the Converse shoe brand's All Stars Campaign for its Breaking Down Barriers collection. Bridges also performed with the Los Angeles Philharmonic under the baton of Gustavo Dudamel for two episodes of the digital SOUND/STAGE series, and as part of the Global Citizen movement's Global Goal campaign, a program which also included Coldplay, Shakira, Usher, and more. Bridges returned to the LA Phil and Dudamel in June 2022 for a performance of Lieberon's *Neruda Songs* as part of the *Power to the People!* festival.

The pandemic also forced the cancellation of Bridges' numerous debuts during the 2020–2021 season including the title role of *Carmen* at The Metropolitan Opera. Bridges' 2019–2020 season included her highly acclaimed debut at The Metropolitan Opera as Nefertiti in a sold-out run of Philip Glass' opera *Akhmaten*, as well as a house and role debut with Washington National Opera as Dalila in *Samson and Delilah*.



Other recent highlights include the 2022 Grammy Award®-winning Metropolitan Opera production of *Akhnaten* and the 2021 Grammy Award®-winning recording of Richard Danielpour's oratorio *The Passion of Yeshua* with the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra, performing at the Library of Congress to honor legendary fashion designer Diane von Furstenberg as she received the 2022 Ruth Bader Ginsburg Woman of Leadership Award, her sold-out Carnegie Hall recital debut, her role debut of Kasturbai in *Satyagraha* at LA Opera, and her debuts at Dutch National Opera and the Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona. Bridges also created the role of Josefa Segovia in the world premiere of John Adams' *Girls of the Golden West* at San Francisco Opera, and performed in the world premiere of *Bel Canto* at the Lyric Opera of Chicago, an opera by Jimmy Lopez based on the novel by Ann Patchett.

Bridges is a recipient of the prestigious 2018 Sphinx Medal of Excellence Award, a 2016 Richard Tucker Career Grant, first prize winner at the 2016 Francisco Viñas International Competition, first prize winner at the 2015 Gerda Lissner Competition, a recipient of the 2013 Sullivan Foundation Award, a 2012 Marian Anderson award winner, the recipient of the 2011 Sara Tucker Study Grant, the recipient of the 2009 Richard F. Gold Grant from The Shoshana Foundation, and the winner of the 2008 Leontyne Price Foundation Competition. Bridges completed a three-year residency with the Patrick G. and Shirley W. Ryan Opera Center at Lyric Opera of Chicago, and represented the United States at the prestigious BBC Cardiff Singer of the World Competition.

Bridges earned her master of music degree from Curtis Institute of Music, and her bachelor of music degree in vocal performance from Manhattan School of Music.

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 partners, 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, *Principal*

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

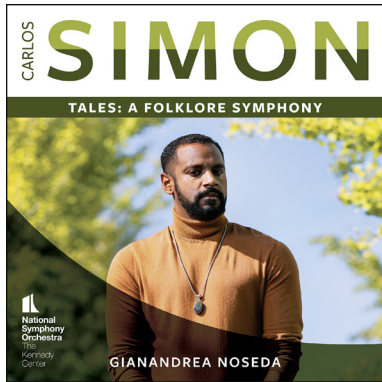
Lambert Orkis, *Principal*
Lisa Emenheiser *

Librarians

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

* Regularly engaged extra

** Temporary position



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