

WELCOME

Good evening,

Welcome to this special co-presentation of *I Am a Man: Reclaiming Brilliance in the Midst of Brokenness*. Conceived and curated by artistic director, Theodore Thorpe III, this production employs music and imagery to explore issues of identity, injustice, and hope as experienced by African American communities. *I Am a Man* borrows its title from the rallying cry of striking Memphis sanitation workers in 1968 who carried signs with these very words declaring their humanity. More than 50 years later, African Americans and people of color continue to echo this refrain—I am a (hu)man—as they address social, cultural, and systemic injustices. This production represents just one voice in this great chorus calling for true “liberty and justice for all.”

Opening with “Lift Every Voice and Sing” (often called the Black National Anthem), the first half of *I Am a Man* is a reverential tribute to African Americans’ fight for social and legal equality. The centerpiece of this section is Joel Thompson’s multi-movement choral work, *Seven Last Words of the Unarmed*, which honors the lives of seven unarmed African American men who were violently killed. Using their final words as text, Thompson strives to humanize these men while encouraging us to grapple with our own identities and experiences. Shifting focus, the second half of the concert celebrates the virtuosic achievements of African American performing artists. Renowned special guests, composer and conductor Darin Atwater, hip hop artist Konshens The MC, pianist Joseph Joubert, and tenor Issachah Savage each use their medium to articulate the enduring power of hope and courage in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

Washington Performing Arts believes in the power of music to heal, provoke, and inspire. To this end, we embraced the opportunity to share the powerful performances and poignant messages of *I Am a Man* with you. We owe a debt of gratitude to our co-presenter Alfred Street Baptist Church, whose legacy of leadership and service in the DMV area is unparalleled. We are also grateful to the wonderful sponsors who supported this performance—Rudy Burwell and Mona Mohib on behalf of Encompass Supply; Pepco, An Exelon Company; Trista and Theodore Colbert; and the friends and family of Jenny Bilfield—and to the many generous individuals and organizations who support our gospel music programs on an ongoing basis.

We are so grateful you have joined us, and we hope your experience tonight is engaging and meaningful.

Sincerely,



Raynetta Wiggins-Jackson
Manager of Choir Curriculum & Performance,
Washington Performing Arts