Put on your fanciest concert attire (or your comfiest PJs), fire up your favorite screen, and get ready for Home Delivery Plus’s inaugural presentation: The String Queens. An innovative force on the D.C. chamber music scene—as well as Washington Performing Arts’s Mars Arts D.C. Ensemble-in-Residence—“TSQ” have collaborated with Washington Performing Arts over the past two years on a range of live performances and in-person and online educational programs. Good friends of WPA with deep roots in the D.C. community, they are the perfect artists to launch our new all-online series with this wide-ranging program of holiday songs, spirituals, pop, and jazz filmed at one of our favorite venues, Sixth & I.

The program includes songs spanning several genres. Rodgers and Hammerstein’s classic “My Favorite Things” debuted on Broadway in The Sound of Music in 1959 en route to finding new generations of fans via the 1965 film. Jazz saxophone legend John Coltrane recorded the song in 1961—an interpretation that is widely considered one of the greatest jazz performances of all time. In subsequent years, the song has appeared on numerous Christmas albums and has found yet another generation of fans in a cover version by pop diva Ariana Grande. This one song, spanning so many genres and and eras, is a perfect representation of The String Queens’s own eclectic approach—and it’s also the almost title track of their new holiday CD, Our Favorite Things.

Also on the program, reaching into the European hymnal history, is “O Come, O Come Emmanuel.” Hymns like this trace their roots back to Gregorian chant and Latin texts. Over the centuries, these chants have had a variety of texts and translations attached to them, appearing in a number of hymnals. Today, they are performed in a variety of settings, from choral arrangements to chamber-ensemble arrangements like this one.

The spirituals on the setlist have a similarly long history, with a variety of origins. Some have lyrics alluding to Biblical struggles paralleling the Underground Railroad, while others were staples of the Civil Rights Movement. As performed by The String Queens, even without their lyrics, these works convey a powerful common thread of both protest and triumph.

Continuing the program’s multi-generational theme, The String Queens also draw from pop music of many decades, including works by legends like Stevie Wonder and the Jackson 5 to more recent recordings by Pentatonix and Justin Bieber. While this may be unusual fare for most classically trained musicians, it’s the kind of inspired eclecticism The String Queens’s fans have come to expect—as well as a festive treat for our Home Delivery Plus audience.

—Rose Martus

Rose Martus is Washington Performing Arts’s Fall 2020 Communications and Creative Media intern. They are currently pursuing a Masters of Music degree, with a concentration on Flute Performance, at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.
THE STRING QUEENS
Praised for their “authentic, soulful, and orchestral sound,” The String Queens (TSQ) are a dynamic trio that create stimulating musical experiences that inspire diverse audiences to love, hope, feel, and imagine! With an array of repertoire spanning from the Baroque era to the Jazz Age to today’s Billboard “Hot 100” chart, TSQ perform versatile programs that transport audiences through time and a multitude of musical genres. Based in Washington, D.C., TSQ members have been featured in famed performance venues across four continents, including: D.C.’s John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and The Howard Theatre; London’s Royal Festival Hall; New York’s Radio City Music Hall; the Shanghai Grand Theatre; and The Moscow Conservatory, to name a few. TSQ members have collaborated with artists throughout the music industry, including Ledisi, Solange, Leslie Odom Jr., Janelle Monáe, Ariana Grande, and the late Aretha Franklin, among others. As chamber and orchestral musicians, TSQ members have performed under the batons of musical directors Ray Chew, Adam Blackstone, and many more. Recognized by D.C. CBS affiliate WUSA9 as “school teachers by day and concert performers by night,” they have been honored as the 2020 Aspire Awardees by the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra.

ÉLISE SHARP
Élise Sharp, a native Washingtonian, began playing the cello in the D.C. Youth Orchestra Program (DCYOP) when she was eight years old. As a student at DCYOP, she was afforded the distinct honor of performing under the baton of the cellist and conductor Mstislav Rostropovich and was selected to tour with the orchestra to China and Taiwan. Inspired by the rigorous training and diverse experiences that she received as a student at DCYOP, Élise continued her musical studies at Howard University, where she pursued a Bachelor’s degree in Music Education. She has graced some of the world’s most renowned stages in performances alongside musical legends Whitney Houston, Tye Tribbett, Donnie McClurkin, Aretha Franklin, and Dionne Warwick, to name a few. In addition, Élise has performed for three former Presidents of the United States of America, including George H.W. Bush, William J. Clinton, and Barack Obama. Currently, she performs as principal/assistant principal cellist of Soulful Symphony and many other community-based orchestras in the Washington, D.C. area. She is also a conductor for one of DCYOP’s student ensembles.

KENDALL ISADORE
Born in Houston, Texas, Kendall Nicole Isadore is a vocalist, violinist, pianist, songwriter, and educator. She is a graduate of Howard University and George Washington University, and has been playing the violin, piano, and singing since she was eight years old. Though classically trained in all three disciplines, Kendall’s niche is performing a wide range of musical genres on violin including, R&B, jazz, “Top 40,” gospel, contemporary, and hip-hop. She has performed at a variety of legendary venues all over the country with artists including Roberta Flack, Josh Groban, Fantasia, Sheryl Lee Ralph, Kurt Carr, and Kim Jordan, to name a few. Most recently, she was featured as the first violinist for the “March for Our Lives” concert, where she led a string quartet under the direction of Adam Blackstone in collaborative performances with Ariana Grande, Andra Day, Common, Jennifer Hudson, Miley Cyrus, and many more leading artists of our generation.

DAWN JOHNSON
Named as the recipient of the 31st Annual Mayor’s Award for Excellence in Performing Arts Teaching in Washington, D.C., Dawn Michelle Johnson is a graduate (BM, MM) of The Juilliard School in New York City and has been recognized by her alma mater for her “Outstanding Achievement and Leadership in Music” as a recipient of the Jerome L. Greene Fellowship, the Irene Diamond Scholarship, and the Peter Mennin Award in Music. A native of Miami, FL, Dawn is a violist and music educator who has been featured as soloist with the Moscow State Symphony Orchestra, the New World Symphony, the Santa Fe Virtuosi, and the Ars Flores Chamber Orchestra. In addition, her contributions to the field of music education have earned her recognition as a quarter-finalist for the 1st Annual GRAMMY Music Educator Award, a recipient of KIPP DC’s Executive Director’s Award, and the title of one of Glamour Magazine’s “Top 10 College Women.” She has previously served as a member of the viola faculty for The Killington Music Festival in Vermont and the D.C. Youth Orchestra Program in Washington, D.C.
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