

Anthony McGill begins #TakeTwoKnees movement

by Jarrett Hoffman



In response to the killing of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis, and the killing of so many other black people in this country, clarinetist Anthony McGill has begun a call to action to #TakeTwoKnees “in the struggle for justice and decency.”

On Wednesday, May 27, the principal clarinet of the New York Philharmonic [posted](#) to his Facebook page a powerful written message and a short video: his performance of a deeply sad arrangement of *America the Beautiful*. Since then, 70,000 people have watched that original video, and a countless number of musicians and other artists have responded by adding their voices in solidarity.

Hymns, spirituals, jazz, classical, folk songs, pop, new compositions, dance performances, visual art, or no art at all — the responses have been highly varied, though nearly all of them include the gesture of getting down on two knees in a moment of silence. The emotional experience of taking in these forms of expression cannot be put into words.

Those who have joined McGill include some of the most famous names in their fields as well as lesser-known ones, those with connections to Northeast Ohio and those without. All are important and beautiful.

Go to Anthony McGill’s professional [page](#) on Facebook to hear more from him and others. The following is the message he included in his original post:

This “normal” isn’t new. It’s just easier to see what’s going on now that some of the horrific hate crimes that happen every day make the national news. Complacency is rampant, and hiding behind privilege is obviously just as bad. If there were hashtag movements in the last century during America’s ‘good old days’ one could have easily been [#BlackLivesDefinitelyDontMatter](#). Few would have batted an eye.

Earlier this year, before the pandemic, I performed in Birmingham, Alabama and Tulsa, Oklahoma. The challenging history of those places speaks for itself, but in those two trips, I met some of the nicest people that you’ll ever meet in this country. I also pondered how far we’ve come and how far we still have to go in terms of treating everyone with respect and decency. We live alongside that reality all across America. What the news this week and most weeks of my life demonstrates, however, is that Black lives didn’t matter in our glorified past, and still don’t matter that much today.

Flashback then with me to when a football player attempted a protest, bringing to our attention the murder of black people. People said: ‘Let’s not politicize sports,’ and ‘all lives matter.’ Now add to that list Ahmaud Arbery and George Floyd, two men who clearly didn’t deserve their fates.

Now we don’t have sports to distract us, and we’re mostly at home. Now’s the time to protest. Can we say [#ALMBLM2](#) (All lives matter and black lives matter as well)? Or [#HowAboutNow](#)? Or maybe the best thing to share is [#ICareAboutBlackLives](#). [#ICareAboutBlackLives](#) is a pretty innocent statement, so if that’s considered radical we’ll have really shined a light on the problem.

So join me. Pick one of these potent hashtags, or all of them. And this time let’s try and [#TakeTwoKnees](#) in the struggle for justice and decency. No guidelines. Your message, your voice, your mission, your focus. Just [#TakeTwoKnees](#) for what you believe in. Pass it along. Let’s try this again and put a spotlight on this evil. [#TakeTwoKnees](#)

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