

## Capathia Jenkins returns to Blossom with the Great American Songbook

by Cait Winston



“They are iconic,” Capathia Jenkins says of the pop and jazz standards that make up the Great American Songbook. “These songs will never go away. They are just so beautiful, they’re so well crafted, and as an artist you want to wrap your brain and your artistry around these songs and what they represent. I think that they will always be regarded as the Great American Songbook. Whether we are in 2021, or 2055 — they will *remain.*”

Joining conductor Lucas Waldin and the Cleveland Orchestra, Jenkins will bring Songbook classics by the Gershwins, Oscar Hammerstein, and more to the Blossom stage on Sunday, July 18 at 7:00 pm.

To Jenkins, the music of the Great American Songbook has stood the test of time not only because it evokes universal emotions and tells timeless stories, but because the songs themselves are so well-crafted. “You have a melody that may be unexpected, or you have a harmony that may be unexpected,” she said during a recent telephone conversation.

She praised the efforts of the songwriters of that era, saying “It’s like they took their time. They came up with clever, double-entendre lyrics, they made you think a little bit, or there was a sweet chord that just made your heart melt.”

But today, these songs are not just heard in their original context — rather, they are often adapted to more contemporary musical stylings. Jenkins said that this adaptability is just another testament to the genius of this music, and that the music’s essence will remain through all modernizations. “That, to me, is the power of a great song. You can add a

drum beat and strings, or you can strip it all the way down, and the song will still hold up.” And while Jenkins acknowledges that “there will always be purists,” she believes that, no matter what, “there will always be an audience for this music.”

Jenkins’ performance of these iconic songs is inspired by an equally iconic jazz artist, Ella Fitzgerald. “She was a singular talent,” Jenkins said. “There will never be another Ella. She was like one of the guys in the band, the way that she could scat and improvise — but then she could also sing beautiful, crystal-clear tones.”

While she assures listeners that she is in no way trying to imitate Fitzgerald (“Never, ever would I dare!”), Jenkins said “I try to bring Capathia’s pure joy to a performance of [Fitzgerald’s] iconic charts on stage. I think that’s the most reverent thing I can do.”

Jenkins also admires Fitzgerald for her dedication to the composers’ original intentions. “Whenever I had to learn something from the Great American Songbook, I could listen to Ella’s recording, because I knew she would sing the melody correctly. She was really true to what the composers wrote, and I just love that about her.”

In her performances, Jenkins too celebrates the essence of these classic songs by staying true to the original melodies and singing them “precisely off the page,” while also making sure to highlight the in-depth storytelling that the original verse-refrain structure of many of these songs allows.

A frequent guest of the Cleveland Orchestra, Jenkins reports that she always looks forward to collaborating with those world-class musicians. “They really are at the top of their game.” But her appreciation for the Orchestra goes beyond pure talent.

“What I really love about them, not only are they great — and I mean *great* — musicians, they are also great human beings, and as a guest soloist, that’s one of the things I look for.” Jenkins said that the Orchestra’s energy is consistently warm, inclusive, and encouraging. “I really feel like I’m a part of their family, a part of their brotherhood and sisterhood. I always feel like I’m coming home when I’m there.”

After a year and a half of isolation, Jenkins said that her reunion with the Cleveland Orchestra will feel like “a warm hug for the soul.” She encourages music lovers to “sit back, relax, and enjoy the Great American Songbook!”

Click [here](#) for ticket information.

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