

Kent Blossom faculty concerts continue with the Imani Winds: a chat with clarinetist Mark Dover

by Daniel Hathaway



Photo credit: Shervin Lanez

The 2024 GRAMMY® winner in the Classical Compendium category for Jeff Scott's *Passion for Bach and Coltrane*, Imani Winds have led both a revolution and evolution of the wind quintet for over a quarter of a century.

Their adventurous programming, imaginative collaborations and outreach endeavors have inspired audiences of all ages and backgrounds.

Tonight at 7:30 pm in Ludwig Recital Hall, the Kent/Blossom Music Festival will present the Imani Winds. Tickets available [online](#)

I caught up with Imani clarinetist Mark Dover yesterday by phone to ask about the ensemble's residency and this evening's repertoire..

Daniel Hathaway: What have you been up to with the students?

Mark Dover: We flew in this morning and I'm seeing them for the first time tonight at 6 pm. I'm giving a clarinet masterclass. The other Imanis already gave their classes a little earlier.

DH: Do you enjoy doing that?

MD: Absolutely. Particularly because I am an alumnus of Kent Blossom, so I'm looking forward to it. It's kind of surreal to come back, let's see, thirteen years later. I was here in

2011. It was an incredible experience to be part of the festival and learn from the principals of the Cleveland Orchestra. And not just the principals, but a bunch of people from the Orchestra. It was such a formative time for me, so, it feels extra special to come back and pass on whatever knowledge I have.

DH: Tell me about tomorrow night's program.

MD: We're playing a program called "Black and Brown 2.0." We had a similar theme last year called Black and Brown, so we decided to continue with it.

It's a program made up of composers of color. The most exciting thing is this piece called *BeLoud, BeLoved, BeLonging*. We just released a recording of it about two weeks ago. We've been touring it all season, but it feels really special because now we're playing it live right after the album came out.

It was written by Andy Akiho, who's one of the great composers living today. He's an amazing steel pan virtuoso. He comes from a classical percussion background but also a Trinidadian steel pan tradition. He wrote two versions of it, one that's just the wind quintet and one for him and us playing together.

It's a beautiful piece that's inspired by the theme of incarceration. We actually went to Rikers Island in New York City and did percussion workshops with the incarcerated men. We had them playing drum sticks on tables and desks, and Andy transcribed some of their rhythms and those rhythms became the source material for the piece. It's amazing and we're really excited to play it.

We're also playing Paquito D'rivera's *Aires Tropicales* and a couple pieces that are newish commissions, one by Damian Geter, and one by Carlos Simon.

Then a piece that we just premiered at the Kennedy Center a couple months ago, called *Rise* by Shawn E. Okpebholo. We're also playing my arrangement of Billy Taylor's *I Wish I Knew How It Would Feel to Be Free*, which was made famous by the great Nina Simone.

DH: That's a beautiful program. What's on the Quintet's calendar for the rest of the summer?

MD: We're playing at the Norfolk Chamber Music Festival, which is in Connecticut, in a week or two. And then the big thing is our Chamber Music Festival, which is entering its 14th season. It's a ten-day-long intensive for students from all over the country who

come to play chamber music, and it's a blast. And that's happening at the end of the month into the first week of August.

Our schedule is a little bit light this summer, which is really nice, because we had a really crazy year, so I'm planning to catch up on personal projects.

DH: Back to the new release, what is the talk circuit like for a classical musician promoting a CD?

MD: It's a lot of social media but we have a great PR person. And there's a lot of grassroots stuff — email blasts, spreading the word that way, and selling the album at concerts.

The record recording industry has really changed a lot, so you have to be very self-enterprising. And Imani Winds just formed a media company, called Imani Winds Media. Our album that came out last fall, *Passion for Bach and Coltrane*, was the first album on the label.

DH: Do you still have to lug around boxes of CDs?

MD: We still lug the suitcase around with CDs and sell them at the end of concerts. It's not like anyone is making serious money doing that, but we feel it's almost like a business card. So we still find that it's useful. And a lot of our audience still listens to CDs, so having that option for them is really helpful.

So, yeah, we still do the old school CD thing. Kevin, our horn player, that's his job. So we're always reminding him to bring the suitcase with the CDs.

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