

Cleveland Chamber Music Society continues its 75th anniversary season with Imani Winds and pianist Michelle Cann

by Mike Telin



For pianist Michelle Cann, returning to Cleveland always feels like coming home. “It was such a significant part of my life, having done my bachelor’s and master’s degrees at the Cleveland Institute of Music,”

she said. “I just love the city and I have so many memories, both musically and personally, that it always feels so great to be back.”

On Tuesday, October 15 at 7:30 pm at The Cultural Arts Center at Disciples Church, Cann will join the Imani Winds for a Cleveland Chamber Music Society concert that will include works by Paquito D’Rivera, Lalo Schifrin, Valerie Coleman, and Francis Poulenc. Tickets are available [online](#).

During a recent telephone conversation, Cann said that she was looking forward to working with Imani Winds for the first time. “I remember when they were founded — I was a student at CIM — so it’s exciting for me to collaborate with them because they’re a group I’ve admired for a long time.”

In addition to her very busy concert career, Cann also serves on the faculty of the Curtis Institute of Music. “Imani is also on the faculty, so this collaboration is a great coming-together of the Curtis community.”

Regarding the program, Cann said: “If you have a pianist and a wind quintet, you almost have to play the Poulenc. The *Sextet* is a real gem in the chamber music repertoire and one of the few major pieces written for that combination of instruments.”

The pianist noted that Poulenc knew how to use the unique colors and sound of each instrument, giving each player a moment in the spotlight. “Poulenc also writes some really great rhythmic lines as well. So, I think it’s a mix of great colors and melodies, and a perpetual motion that makes the piece so much fun.” She added that these same qualities are present in the composer’s *Trio* for oboe, bassoon, and piano.

In Valerie Coleman’s *Portraits of Langston* for flute, clarinet, piano, and narrator, the composer presents an homage to the American poet and leading figure of the Harlem Renaissance.

“Valerie did such a phenomenal job with this piece,” Cann said. “The way she brings each portrait into the foreground is like when you go to an art museum — you see a painting and are immediately transported into that moment in time. That’s what her music does. And Langston Hughes’ poetry is so amazing. It makes you feel like you’re in Harlem — you can literally feel the humidity on a summer night in the park.”

While in Cleveland, Cann — and her Imani colleagues — will return to her alma mater to present a master class on Monday, October 14 at 7:00 pm. “One of the most significant parts of schooling is that first degree,” the pianist said. “It’s your first step away from living at home, you’re becoming an adult and trying to figure yourself out. And I feel very grateful and honored to be asked to connect with students at CIM. To return to the school that I went to and gave me so much — to be able to give back is so meaningful.”

Published on ClevelandClassical.com October 10, 2024

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