

SAN
FRANCISCO
PERFORMANCES



presents

REGINA CARTER, violin

with

Yacouba Sissoko, kora

Will Holshouser, accordion

Chris Lightcap, bass

Alvester Garnett, drums & percussion

Saturday, February 18, 2012, 8pm

Herbst Theatre

Reverse Thread



Photo: Rahav Segov

ARTIST PROFILES

Regina Carter was San Francisco Performances' first jazz Artist-in-Residence, from 1997-2001, and has performed for SF Performances ten times previously: in 1996, 1997, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, twice in 2005, 2007 and with the Oakland East Bay Symphony in 2011.

Regina Carter's career has been a veritable crescendo of success that shows no sign of letting up. She is on a mission: to make a meaningful musical contribution and do it on her own terms. Indeed, she tours with relentless purpose and a seemingly endless supply of energy. Over the past seven years, Ms. Carter and her group have brought audiences to their feet with exhilarating performances worldwide. In 2006, Ms. Carter won the highly esteemed MacArthur Fellowship, which is given to individuals who have shown extraordinary originality and dedication in their creative pursuits.

During the 2007-08 season, Ms. Carter continues to lead her group through an extensive, national and international tour. Along the way, she will perform music from her critically acclaimed release, *Paganini: After A Dream*, with music from her latest release, *I'll Be Seeing You: A Sentimental Journey*, both on the Verve record label.

In December 2001, Regina Carter traveled to Genoa, Italy and made history: She became the first jazz musician and first African American to play the legendary Guarneri del Gesù violin owned by classical music virtuoso and composer Nicolo Paganini. Less than a year later, Carter returned to Genoa to accomplish another milestone—using the treasured violin to record her classical-infused album.

Regina Carter's recent triumphs by no means came without paying her dues as a

Regina Carter is represented by Unlimited Myles, Aberdeen, New Jersey;
Reverse Thread was recorded by eOne Entertainment.

side person, a student and her early musical experiences, in her hometown, Detroit, Michigan. Carter's master classes with violin giants, Itzak Perlman and Yehudi Menuhin, as well as her association as a member of the Detroit Civic Symphony Orchestra and with the pop-funk group, Brainstorm, provided the needed experience to play with a range of artists. Ms. Carter has had the opportunity to perform with such jazz luminaries as, Ray Brown, Dr. Billy Taylor, Marian McPartland, Kenny Barron, Wynton Marsalis, Randy Weston and Cassandra Wilson. She has also performed with pop icons Dolly Parton and Billy Joel. During the 2002–2003 season, Ms. Carter and her touring band began performing with numerous orchestras, including the Atlanta Symphony, the Milwaukee Symphony and the Minnesota Orchestra. Ms. Carter and her band also performed a special engagement with the Boston Pops, featuring classical virtuoso Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg and celtic star, Eileen Ivers. Together, the three violinists debuted a song written especially for them by Chris Brubeck (Dave Brubeck's son), entitled, *Interplay*.

Just as prolific as her accomplishments on stage are Carter's performances on record. Included in her discography—along with recordings with Patti Labelle, Aretha Franklin, Mary J. Blige and Lauryn Hill—are recordings with vocalists, Cassandra Wilson and Carmen Lundy, trombonist Steve Turre, pianists Kenny Barron and Danilo Perez, guitarist Rodney Jones, saxophonist James Carter, Quartet Indigo (led by cellist, Akua Dixon) and the String Trio of New York.

Her influences have ranged from R&B to East Indian, to classical music. As a college student, Carter took on a double major in classical music and African American music at both the prestigious New England Conservatory and Oakland University in Rochester, Michigan, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Performance.

Regina currently has five discs under her own name, two on Atlantic Records, *Regina Carter* (1995) and *Something for Grace* (1997). In 1998 Regina changed record labels and in the spring of 1999 *Rhythms of the Heart* made its debut under the auspices of Verve Records (Universal). Her fourth CD, *Motor City Moments*, was released in September 2000 and is a tribute to the musical legacy of her hometown of Detroit. *Freefall*, a collaboration with pianist Kenny Barron was released in the spring of 2001 and was nominated for a Grammy Award in February 2002. The aforementioned *Paganini: After A Dream*, was released in April 2003 and her latest CD, *I'll Be Seeing You: A Sentimental Journey*, made its

debut, in June of 2006. On this disc, Regina pays homage to her late mother by performing music from the 20's, 30's and 40's.

Regina Carter, one of the most popular contemporary violinists in modern music, further revealed her diverse musical personality with the recent release *Reverse Thread*—a celebration of traditional African music with a modern perspective.

Program Notes

The most heralded jazz violinist of our time, San Francisco Performances' first jazz artist-in-residence, Grammy Award-winner and MacArthur Fellow, Regina Carter presents the San Francisco debut of the project that has consumed her for the last two years: *Reverse Thread*. This program is dedicated to music from the recording of the same name, featuring the band for which the project was assembled, which includes the accordion and kora (the twenty-one-string African harp). The songs in *Reverse Thread* range from rare field recordings to tunes by current African pop stars—many of them unfamiliar to American music listeners. It is a very different experience from her most recent local appearance, at the Paramount Theatre one year ago in the West Coast premiere of pianist Billy Childs' Violin Concerto where she was soloist with the Oakland East Bay Symphony, an OEBS-SFP collaboration.

"There is something magical about this music," Carter says of *Reverse Thread*. "The melodies, and the instrumentation with kora and accordion—it's not just a project that you do and then move on to the next one. I'm not moving on, not changing direction like I usually do. I'm staying with the thread, just going farther."

Reverse Thread is a product of Carter receiving the 2006 MacArthur Foundation "genius" grant. As she explains, the project is not a "back to the African roots of jazz", but that award gave her the financial freedom to explore music without concern about commercial considerations. Carter's roots are in her Detroit birthplace. The Motor City, her family and fellow Detroit musicians have figured prominently in past recordings—and that's where she began her *Reverse Thread* journey.

"I started with the music of the Chaldeans, the Christian Arabs in Detroit. I grew up hearing their music; it's a non-Western sound, but very beautiful. So I began with them, but then got off the path, so even though that music is not represented on the CD of *Reverse Thread*, I want to explore it more in the future. That may be the next record. I

had wanted to do a world music record from growing up in Detroit and hearing so many styles and cultures in one place. Starting with the Chaldean music, I next went to the World Music Institute (in New York City) to explore further. Someone there handed me a recording by Ugandan Jews and I loved it. It was so bare bones and yet captivating. As I researched that music, it was like a branch on a tree where I just kept going and found so much more."

Carter's *Reverse Thread* CD opens with "Hiwumbe Awumba," a traditional Abayudaya (Ugandan Jewish) tune. The society is a community in eastern Uganda who, although not genetically or historically Jewish, practice the Jewish religion. In concert she introduces the music by, "...playing the original field recordings for the audience so they can hear where we started. It's not like you can turn on a radio and hear Ugandan Jewish music." Other songs come from contemporary greats of Mali: Mariam Doumbia of popular singing duo Amadou & Mariam, singer-guitarists Habibe Koite and Boubacar Traore; plus traditional sources including "Zerapiky" from Madagascar, where the accordion is the national instrument.

Accordion and kora are not what one immediately thinks of in jazz, and while they define the sound of Carter's current group, she surprisingly did not pick them to fit these African tunes. "I went about this in reverse order," Carter admits, "I actually put the band together before I had the idea for *Reverse Thread*. I had for some time wanted to be able to play onstage without using stage monitor speakers to hear the rest of the band. So I looked for quieter instrumentation. My last project (*I'll Be Seeing You*) used clarinet and piano. After this quieter sound, I took away the piano and replaced it with accordion, and we played as a quartet—accordion, bass and drums—and then I wanted another string instrument. I tried guitar with these tunes, but that wasn't what I wanted. Then John Blake (violinist and producer of *Reverse Thread*) suggested the kora. His sister is a kora player, and suggested **Yacouba Sissoko.**" Born in Mali and raised in the griot tradition (the griot is the tribe's historian, learning and singing its story, accompanying himself on kora), Sissoko now lives in New York City. "He came over and started to play. Most kora players do music in one key or mode. But Yacouba is so amazing; he knows Western music and can retune to different keys. When he came over and played, it was magical and I knew that was it! We'd go out and try things on gigs, and sometimes they worked and sometimes not."

The accordion is no stranger to Carter. She has used it on past recordings. "... and with this project, the more I got into it, the more I found that the accordion is used throughout Africa in different ways. I knew **Will Holshouser** already because he played on *I'll Be Seeing You*." Holshouser is known for his collaborations with an array of jazz and world artists including klezmer clarinetist David Krakauer, and in his touring trio with European avant gardists Han Bennink and Michael Moore, as well as for doing pop work with such artists as Anthony and the Johnsons and Martha Wainwright.

Carter also wanted an upright (acoustic) bassist for this project. **Chris Lightcap** had played in her band previously and on two of her Verve recordings. "Then I got him back for this project. He has a great knowledge and feel for this music; he's played with a lot of African bands." Drummer **Alvester Garnett** has been with her since Carter's first band, and his rhythmic approach was a key to her musical direction and development long before they married in 2004. They now live in Maywood, New Jersey.

Chosen in 1997 as the first SF Performances jazz artist-in-residence (others since have been Stefon Harris, Luciana Souza and now Vijay Iyer, who makes his SF Performances recital debut on April 7), Carter's residency involved outreach a week at a time to students in Bay Area public schools through 2001. As a thank you to SF Performances founder and president Ruth Felt, Carter composed a waltz, "How Ruth Felt," performed it in concert and recorded it. "Ruth has just been such a powerful force in my life," Carter says. "I'm really fortunate to have been able, and to be able to

work with San Francisco Performances, to go out into the community and try out things, to create a family where young kids I visited in their classrooms at the start are now entering college. To meet teachers and troubled teens, to see a teacher doing an after school strings program and not getting paid for it, but to see students get so much out of it. To see that there's so much need out there, and young people who find a passion for music. There's so much more I got from that time, like working with Oakland's Allen Temple Baptist Church and Choir. I love being on stage in concert halls—but that was a special experience, very special. I never had the opportunity before to do anything like that, and it may not happen again."

Born in 1966, Carter began playing music when she was two years old and just tall enough to reach the family piano's keys in their Detroit home. A couple of years later her mother chose the violin for her. She learned by ear in the Suzuki method before she could read music. "Originally I thought I'd grow up to be a teacher like my mother, but around the time I was nine or ten I began to think of myself as a musician. I envisioned myself playing with orchestras." In high school she heard pop-jazz records by Seventies violinists Jean-Luc Ponty and Noel Pointer, and a world of possibilities opened up. "Then a friend took me to a concert by Stephane Grappelli (the French violinist who, with guitarist partner Django Reinhardt, defined Thirties string swing jazz). "What I got from Stephane was his freedom of improvising and no feeling of uptightness that I'd felt in classical music. How happy he was, and how happy his music sounded. That started a new

journey, and new battles because that's not music we heard in the home."

Early performances ranged from the Detroit Civic Symphony Orchestra to pop, funk and fusion bands. Her membership in Detroit's all-woman jazz band Straight Ahead led to her first recordings. After attending the New England Conservatory of Music, Carter moved to New York City in 1991. Her reputation for her virtuosity and ability to elevate seemingly any musical context brought her calls to record and perform with, among others, Lauryn Hill and Mary J. Blige, Aretha Franklin, Billy Joel, Dolly Parton, Max Roach, and saxophonist cousin James Carter. She was a featured soloist on Latin jazz master Eddie Palmieri's Grammy Award-winning 2005 CD, *Listen Here*.

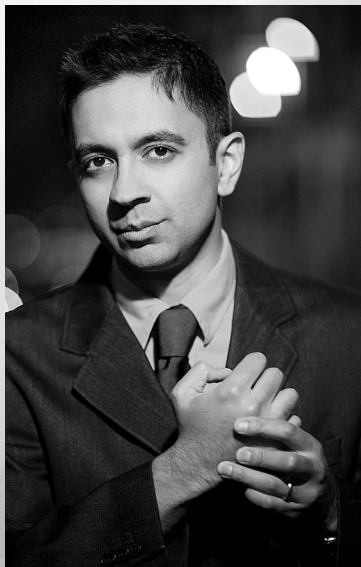
In 1996 Carter made her first San Francisco Performances appearance in the String Trio of New York. The next year her solo role in Wynton Marsalis' Pulitzer Prize-winning *Blood on the Fields* led to her appointment as an SFP artist-in-residence. During that time she returned in trombonist Steve Turre's Bone, Shells & Strings sextet (January 22, 1999) before making her local debut as a bandleader on March 18, 2000. Since then she has appeared several times with her band and in a double-bill with vibist Stefon Harris for SF Performances.

Her inclusion as the youngest member of the 1998 Four Generations of Jazz Violin tour that came to the San Francisco Jazz Festival demonstrated that she could play the entire history of jazz, and jam enthusiastically and equally with its elder statesmen. "Hanging out with two giants of the jazz violin, Johnny Frigo (then eighty-one years old) and Joe Kennedy, Jr. (seventy-five years old), who stuck with what they did their whole lives, they're my green light to keep going."

Recordings under her name have ranged from her best-selling 2003 jazz-classical album, *Paganini: After a Dream*, to a collection of 1920s-1940s pop tunes her late mother, Grace, loved, *I'll Be Seeing You*, and the Grammy Award-winning duo album with pianist Kenny Barron, *Freefall*. For the *Paganini* project Carter became the first non-classical musician and first African-American chosen to perform on Nicolo Paganini's violin, built in 1743 and housed in his and the violin's hometown, Genoa, Italy.

"My life is all over the map," Carter explains, "going from place to place and culture to culture. The thing that pulls me is the drum, Brazilian, Afro-Cuban, any culture where the drum is important. That and any music with strings, from Irish to Arabic music."

—Program notes by Larry Kelp



Vijay Iyer Trio

Vijay Iyer, piano
Stephan Crump, bass
Marcus Gilmore, drums

Saturday, April 7, 8pm
Herbst Theatre

Named 2010 Musician of the Year in the Jazz Journalists Association Awards, Vijay Iyer continues to rack up top honors and a devoted following for his super-smart, physical jazz. He brings a neo-Monkian "assertive style, filled with quirky dissonances, craggy rhythms, and oddly tangible moments of silence" to his music (*Wall Street Journal*).

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