

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**NJSO Accent event features reading by American poet Kurtis Lamkin  
with tap accompaniment by Newark native Maurice Chestnut**  
*Presented in partnership with Dodge Poetry Festival*  
**Sun, Sep 25, at NJPAC in Newark**



**Event inspired by NJSO opening-weekend program featuring  
Bernstein's *On the Town* and Copland's *Rodeo***

**Reading follows matinee concert with Sarah Chang and Teddy Abrams**  
***Prudential Foundation sponsors NJSO Accent events in Newark***

NEWARK, NJ (September 8, 2016)—The New Jersey Symphony Orchestra presents a live reading by American poet Kurtis Lamkin, a Dodge Poetry Festival favorite, with tap accompaniment by Newark native Maurice Chestnut following the Orchestra's opening-weekend performance on Sunday, September 25, at 3 pm at the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark. The NJSO Accent event is inspired by American musical icons Bernstein and Copland, whose works the Orchestra performs on the matinee program. Free to concert ticketholders, the event is presented in partnership with the Dodge Poetry Festival.

Lamkin and Chestnut have collaborated on performances featuring poetry, dance and music at the Dodge Poetry Festival on multiple occasions. Lamkin is a contemporary American embodiment of the ancient West African griot tradition, which blurs the boundaries between poet, singer and storyteller. Chestnut began his professional career at age 9 as an original member of the New Jersey Tap Ensemble; when the dancer was 14, *The Star-Ledger* named him "one of the twenty New Jersey faces to watch for in the new millennium."

The NJSO concert program features Bernstein's *On the Town: Three Dance Episodes* and Copland's *Rodeo: Four Dance Episodes*. Virtuoso violinist Sarah Chang solos in a pair of showpieces—Piazzolla's *The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires* and

Ravel's *Tzigane*. Teddy Abrams, who has garnered critical attention as a conductor, composer and instrumentalist, makes his NJSO debut at the podium.

*The Star-Ledger* has praised Chang's "stunning," "thoroughly impressive and entertaining" performances with the NJSO and hailed the violinist's "characteristic athleticism and firepower" in her most recent New Jersey concerts. NPR writes that Abrams, the music director of the Louisville Symphony, is "brimming with ideas."

Inspired by the concerts and designed to inspire audiences, NJSO Accents are pre- or post-concert events that complement the concert experience and provide audience members with more opportunities to personally connect with the music and music makers. NJSO Accents in Newark are generously sponsored by the Prudential Foundation. Additional information, as well as a schedule of 2016–17 season NJSO Accents, is available at [www.njsymphony.org/accents](http://www.njsymphony.org/accents).

The 30th anniversary Dodge Poetry Festival takes place October 20–23 at NJPAC and other locations throughout Newark's Downtown Arts District. Additional information is available at [www.dodgepoetry.org](http://www.dodgepoetry.org).

## **TICKETS**

Concert tickets start at \$20 and are available for purchase online at [www.njsymphony.org](http://www.njsymphony.org) or by phone at 1.800.ALLEGRO (255.3476). The NJSO Accent event is free to all ticketholders.

## **THE PROGRAM**

### **Opening Weekend with Sarah Chang**

Sunday, September 25 at 3 pm | NJPAC in Newark

Teddy Abrams, conductor

Sarah Chang, violin

New Jersey Symphony Orchestra

BERNSTEIN	<i>On the Town: Three Dance Episodes</i>
PIAZZOLLA	<i>The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires</i>
RAVEL	<i>Tzigane</i>
COPLAND	<i>Rodeo: Four Dance Episodes</i>

The NJSO also performs this program on Friday, September 23, at 8 pm at NJPAC in Newark and Saturday, September 24, at 8 pm at the State Theatre in New Brunswick. Full information is available at [www.njsymphony.org/events/detail/opening-weekend-with-sarah-chang](http://www.njsymphony.org/events/detail/opening-weekend-with-sarah-chang).

## **THE ARTISTS**

### **Kurtis Lamkin**

Kurtis Lamkin is a contemporary American embodiment of the ancient West African griot tradition, which blurs the boundaries between poet, singer and storyteller. When he performs, Lamkin often accompanies himself on the kora, a 21-stringed West African harp-lute. He not only composes on and plays the kora, but he also makes koras by hand. This sense of the intimate bond between performer and instrument is also part of the griot tradition. The griot, bard or troubadour has been a fixture in all cultures since before the advent of written language. The poet is seen as someone directly involved in the life of the community, and commentary on events that impact the community is not only accepted, but expected. We assume our troubadours will sing us love songs (and Lamkin certainly celebrates love) but they are also the chief chroniclers of the times. In Elizabethan England, the news stories of the day were passed on through popular ballads. Like Lamkin, the griots and bards of the past always performed this function with satire and wit. Lamkin has released a number of albums of his work, including *My Juju* (1995), *El Shabazz* (1998) and *Queen of Carolina* (2001). His newest CD is *Kora Songs*.

### **Maurice Chestnut**

Newark, New Jersey, native Maurice Chestnut began dancing at the age of 5. He became a professional dancer at the age of 9 as an original member of the New Jersey Tap Ensemble under the direction of Deborah Mitchell. He was a gold medalist in the NAACP Act-So competition and was crowned “Top Dog Performer” at The Apollo Theater. When Chestnut was 14, *The Star-Ledger’s* arts reviewers named him “one of the twenty New Jersey faces to watch for in the new millennium.” In 2003, Chestnut was recruited by tap master Savion Glover to join the national touring company of the Tony Award winning *Bring in ‘da Noise, Bring in ‘da Funk*. He has continued to work with Glover as a member of his *Improvography* and *Bare Soundz* tours, as well as performing in productions such as *Classical Savion*, *Tapping into Monk*, *Invitation to a Dancer* and on ABC’s “Dancing with the Stars.” Theater credits also include *Shades of Harlem*, *The Wiz* and *Bubbling Brown Sugar*. He was one of the performers in the film *Happy Feet Two*.

*Photo: Kurtis Lamkin and Maurice Chestnut perform at the 2012 Dodge Poetry Festival. Credit T. Charles Erickson.*

### **NEW JERSEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**

Named “a vital, artistically significant musical organization” by *The Wall Street Journal*, the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra embodies that vitality through its statewide presence and critically acclaimed performances, education partnerships and unparalleled access to music and the Orchestra’s superb musicians.

The NJSO welcomes new Music Director Xian Zhang in the 2016–17 season. The Orchestra presents classical, pops and family programs, as well as outdoor summer concerts and special events. Embracing its legacy as a statewide orchestra, the NJSO is the resident orchestra of the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark and regularly performs at the State Theatre in New Brunswick, Count Basie Theatre in Red Bank, Richardson Auditorium in Princeton, Mayo Performing Arts Center in Morristown and bergenPAC in Englewood. Partnerships with New Jersey arts organizations, universities and civic organizations remain a key element of the Orchestra’s statewide identity.

In addition to its lauded artistic programming, the NJSO presents a suite of education and community engagement programs that promote meaningful, lifelong engagement with live music. Programs include school-time Concerts for Young People performances, NJSO Youth Orchestras family of student ensembles and El Sistema-inspired NJSO CHAMPS (Character, Achievement and Music Project). The NJSO’s REACH (Resources for Education and Community Harmony) chamber music program annually brings original programs—designed and performed by NJSO musicians—to a variety of settings. In the 2015–16 season, Orchestra musicians performed at nearly 200 events, reaching more than 34,000 people in nearly all of New Jersey’s 21 counties.

For more information about the NJSO, visit [www.njsymphony.org](http://www.njsymphony.org) or email [information@njsymphony.org](mailto:information@njsymphony.org). Tickets are available for purchase by phone at 1.800.ALLEGRO (255.3476) or on the Orchestra’s website.

*The New Jersey Symphony Orchestra’s programs are made possible in part by the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, along with many other foundations, corporations and individual donors.*

### **THE GERALDINE R. DODGE POETRY FESTIVAL**

The Geraldine R. Dodge Poetry Festival, the largest poetry event in North America with audiences of more than 16,000 for four days of readings, performances and conversations, returns to Newark for a fourth time. Called “Wordstock” by *The New York Times*, the Festival’s audiences at NJPAC and throughout Newark’s Downtown Arts District will hear performances from and interact with dozens of the world’s foremost poets with an extraordinarily wide range of backgrounds and styles, from Poets Laureate to slam champions. During the Festival, multiple poetry events occur simultaneously throughout each day and feature more than five dozen poets, musicians and storytellers, including four U.S. Poets Laureate: the current Poet Laureate, Juan Felipe Herrera, as well as past laureates Billy Collins, Robert Hass and Kay Ryan. For more information, visit [www.dodgepoetry.org](http://www.dodgepoetry.org).

### **PRESS CONTACT**

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