



ATLANTA FREEDOM BANDS

PRESENT



Georgia on Our Minds

Home Grown Music from Peach State Composers

SATURDAY, MARCH 21, 2026 @ 7PM

Ray Charles Performing Arts Center • Morehouse College
900 West End Ave SW, Atlanta 30310



Jon Sims Endowment Fund
for the Performing Arts
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“Georgia, Georgia, a Song of You”

Welcome to the second concert of Atlanta Freedom Bands’ 33rd performance season. Our season’s theme is “No Places Like Home”, and tonight we celebrate our home state of Georgia. Our Artistic Staff has assembled an intriguing selection of works by Georgia composers and with Georgia connections. Much of the music has been written in the 2020s, so you are sure to hear something new. We also hope you are as impressed as we are by the depth and diversity of talent from composers here in the Peach State, including our student composer Brady Chandler from the University of West Georgia.

Along the way tonight, we hope to share stories about places and people in our state. We climb to the top of Stone Mountain, plumb the murky depths of the Okefenokee, and battle our way through Atlanta traffic. We receive inspiration from poetry, family history, and the natural beauty of water and sky. Our featured work “John and Jim” celebrates the historic Supreme Court decision that guaranteed marriage equality. Of course, any Georgia show should include music from some movies filmed here, and you will “Marvel” at our selection. And, we couldn’t perform in his house without honoring Albany-native Ray Charles.

We are thrilled to present this music in a new venue for us, the Ray Charles Performing Arts Center on the historic campus of Morehouse College. AFB has had a “growing” problem — more and more people coming to concerts and more and more musicians joining the band. We hope this beautiful location might give us room to reach even more people with our music of hope and our mission of acceptance. We are grateful you have joined us in this space tonight.

The season continues with “Americans We” on June 20th, also here at the RayPAC. To celebrate the Semiquincentennial, we will present a selection of works that tries to represent the diversity of voices that make up our country. We will present the premiere of a work commissioned just for the occasion. “We the People” by Christopher Kyle Green is inspired by the rights and freedoms guaranteed by The Constitution. Tickets are available now for that concert, which you will not want to miss.

Special Thanks for Tonight's Concert

🎵 **Ray Charles Performing Arts Center** for our concert venue and providing several percussion instruments. We are grateful for the assistance of Stephanie Whittaker, Senior Administrative Specialist, and Dr. Chad Hughes, Director of Bands.

🎵 **Central Congregational United Church of Christ** in North Druid Hills for providing our rehearsal home, Rev. Elizabeth Mitchell Clement, Senior Minister.

🎵 This program is supported in part by the **Atlanta Mayor's Office of Cultural Affairs**. Thank you to the Mayor's Office, the Atlanta City Council, and City of Atlanta residents in the audience.

🎵 Funding for this program is also provided by the Fulton County Board of Commissioners under the guidance of the **Fulton County Arts Council**. Thank you to the Fulton County Commissioners and Fulton County residents in the audience.

🎵 This program is supported in part by the **Georgia Council for the Arts** through the appropriations of the Georgia General Assembly. Georgia Council for the Arts also receives support from its partner agency - the **National Endowment for the Arts**.

🎵 **Peak Printing** of Woodstock for our concert programs.

🎵 **Dan Lax Media** for concert photography.



Proud member of the
ASSOCIATION OF CONCERT BANDS:
The International Voice of Community Bands



About Atlanta Freedom Bands

Atlanta musician Buz Carr attended the 1993 Pride Parade and noticed there was no marching band. “We can’t have a parade with floats and not have a marching band,” he remarked as he set about recruiting musicians to form the Atlanta Freedom Marching Band. The marching band appeared not only in the Atlanta Pride Parade, but also in neighborhood festivals and events across the city and in Pride events across the Southeast.

Over the years, the organization grew to become Atlanta Freedom Bands. Now thirty-three years later, AFB still represents our city’s lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community through music. AFB includes the original Marching Band as well as the MetroGnomes Stage Band (2001), the Color Guard (2010) and, of course, the Atlanta Freedom Concert Band (2004) appearing in tonight’s concert. We have also offered a variety of smaller ensembles to meet the musical interests of our members over time, including a brass quintet, a wind quintet, a saxophone ensemble and more.

AFB is a member of Pride Bands Alliance, a network of bands in cities across the United States, Canada, and Australia. Our members joined others for annual conferences as well as historic events such as Inaugurations of Presidents Bill Clinton and Barack Obama, Gay Games events in Amsterdam, Sydney, Paris and Chicago, and the Millennium March for Equality. Atlanta Freedom Bands hosted the Alliance’s annual convention in October 2013 with over 250 musicians from 33 different bands in attendance.

AFB has commissioned three works for band across its history, and will present the premiere of a fourth commissioned work at its June 2026 concert. AFB’s Student Composer Residency Program invites local collegiate composers to submit works to present to our audiences.

We welcome musicians at all levels and all orientations and identities to join in our activities and become part of our band family. All of our ensembles welcome the opportunity to partner with groups in the community to help raise awareness, raise funds or just raise the roof with good music. Atlanta Freedom Bands is a 501(c)3 non-profit charitable corporation.



O'Shae D. Best **Artistic Director**

O'Shae D. Best is the Director of Bands at Fayette County High School, in Fayetteville, Georgia where he oversees all aspects of the band program. He also serves as the Fine Arts Chair at Fayette County High School. He was recently elected as the Georgia Music Educators Association (GMEA) District VI Treasurer. Prior

to his roles in Georgia, he was the Band Director at Crestdale Middle School in Matthews, NC. Previously he was elected to be the Band Section Delegate for the North Carolina Music Education Association (NCMEA) for 2022-2024. He also served as the Assistant Artistic Director of the Charlotte Pride Band for five years.

Best served as a Graduate Teaching Assistant at the Mead Witter School of Music, located at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where he led non-major University Band, guest conducted the UW Wind Ensemble and Concert Band, and assisted with the UW Marching Band. He received his BM in Music Education from East Carolina University and his MM in Wind Conducting from the University of Wisconsin - Madison, where he studied under Scott Teeple, with studies completed with Mark Hetzler (trombone), Tom Curry (tuba/euphonium), and Chad Hutchinson (orchestral conducting). O'Shae is a member of Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia, National Association for Music Education, and the National Band Association.



Kurt Wackerly

Associate Director

Currently serving in the role of Interim Artistic Director, Kurt Wackerly has been the Associate Director of the Atlanta Freedom Concert Band since 2011. He graduated from Bowling Green State University in Ohio in 1994 with a Bachelors in Music Education, and became a member of the Ohio Music Education Association, the Hancock County Music Teachers Association, and the Findlay Community Band. During his time in Ohio, he was the band director and choral instructor for grades 5 through 12 in the McComb Local School District near Lima, Ohio.



Mr. Wackerly moved to Atlanta in 2001 to pursue professional opportunities, and that was where he discovered the Atlanta Concert Band. He joined that band as a French horn player and was later appointed as an assistant conductor for his merits from 2007 to 2011. He later discovered the AFB through networking and joined it in 2011, where he played French horn and soon took up the position of Associate Director for the Concert Band that he has held to this day.

During his time in Atlanta, he joined the Atlanta Wind Symphony and the Callanwolde Concert Band. He served as associate conductor of both ensembles when he was a member. As for his business career, he is a licensed manager at FirstService Residential, a professional property management company.





O'Shae D. Best, Artistic Director
Kurt Wackerly, Associate Director
Hosted by Zenas Dyer

Stone Mountain Fanfare (2007)^{OB} Dr. Joseph Benjamin Earp (b. 1984)
Sponsored by the AFB Percussion Section – Good luck!

Okefenokee: Land of Trembling Earth (2020)^{OB} R. Alan Carter (b. 1964)

Big City Lights (2020)^{OB} Dr. Marie A. Douglas (b. 1987)
Sponsored by Taylor Carstens – My weekend trips to the city thanks to this band have been the highlight of every week. Thanks AFB for allowing me to feel at home here.

reflections (2021)^{OB} Dr. Carlos Simon (b. 1986)

Savannah River Rhapsody (2012)^{KW} Robert Sheldon (b. 1954)
Sponsored by the AFB French Horn Section – With love from the French horns, those on and off the podium!

John and Jim (2024)^{OB} Viet Cuong (b. 1990)
Sponsored by Jeff LaRock – Married 15 years and partners for 33. Our thanks to John and Jim and many before them for helping to make same-sex marriage legal throughout our country.

Sponsored by Robert Hults – Way to go trumpets! You sound great!

Sponsored by Charity Johansson – Love to Lux and all their friends!

Sponsored by Emily Harris – Happy One Year, my love. You are the best thing that has ever happened to me, and I thank the universe every day that our paths crossed. I'm so grateful for your heart, your laughter, and the life we're building together. I can't wait to spend forever with you.

— Intermission —

Bamboo Warrior (2022)^{OB} Christina Huss (b. 1962)

All the Earth and Air (2024)^{OB} Tyler S. Grant (b. 1995)

Sponsored by Daniel Barker — I always look forward to new works from this extremely talented composer. Hats off to you, Mr. Grant!

"Ay Ziggy Zoomba!" — BGSU Alumni Toni and Kurt

Etowah (2008)^{OB} Brian Balmages (b. 1975)

Everglow (2024)^{OB} Katahj Copley (b. 1998)

Sponsored by the AFB Saxophamily — "Bask in the glow of friends and community"

Solstice (2025)^{OB} Brady Chandler (b. 2005)

Tonight is the premiere performance.

Heroes of the Marvel Universe (2024)^{OB} arr. Michael Brown

The Avengers (2012) Alan Silvestri

Captain America March (2011) Alan Silvestri

Theme from Ant-Man (2015) Christophe Beck

Thor: The Dark World (2013) Brian Theodore Tyler

Iron Man 3 (2013) Brian Theodore Tyler

Black Panther (2018) Ludwig Emil Thomas Goransson and Massamba Diop

Portals from Avengers *Endgame* (2019) Alan Silvestri

Tribute to Ray Charles (2005)^{OB} Ray Charles (1930-2004)

arr. Johnnie Vinson

Hallelujah, I Love Her So (1956) words and music by Ray Charles

Georgia on My Mind (1930) words by Stuart Gorrell

music by Hoagy Carmichael

What'd I Say (1959) words and music by Ray Charles

Sponsored by Grace Aspenwall — To my parents, Kathy & Bob, who traveled 17+ hours to be here. I know my mom will be dancing along to this one!

Love you both to the moon and back!

^{OB} Conducted by O'Shae D. Best

^{KW} Conducted by Kurt Wackerly

We kindly ask you to silence your mobile devices for the recording. You can relive the concert at Atlanta Freedom Bands' YouTube channel. Please tag your concert photos with #AFB33.

Tonight's Concert Performers

Flute

‡ Brandon Gray (13)
Alexandria Jones (17)
Anthony Neal (24)
Peter Prefontaine (13)
Luke Rogers (23)
Beth Savoy (19)
Sara Tonks (25)

Piccolo

Peter Prefontaine (13)

Oboe

‡ Robert Simon (17)

Bassoon

Darius Gourdine (25)
Anna Mitchell (25)

Clarinet

‡ Annette Piepenhagen (13)
‡ Aaron Smith (23)
Grace Aspenwall (25)
Jason Baker (25)
Daniel Barker (11)
Bruce Bythwood (21)
Taylor Carstens (24)
Ann Cooley (24)
Teak Hadman (25)
Emily Victoria Harris (24)
Zora Joyner (23)
Austin Latimer (25)
Emma Smith (24)
Toni Raines (24)

Bass Clarinet

Cecil Land (17)
Diane Quilter (23)

Alto Saxophone

‡ Beth Fordyce (09)
Bradley Bee (25)
Travis Bishop (25)
Audrey Brasuell (23)
Drew Johnson (23)
Jason Morley (19)
Demarius Newsome (25)
Cristian Perez (23)
Toni Ralston (23)

Tenor Saxophone

Matt Akins (15)
Jeff LaRock (17)
Sierra Wyble (24)

Baritone Saxophone

Benjamin Bebe (25)
Katie Mitchell (23)

Trumpet

‡ Fitz Dement (23)
‡ Ethan Messere (22)
Torsten Behrens (24)
João M. Cleaver (15)
Tyler Hodge (24)
Bob Hults (23)
Jonathan Law (12)
Andre Leon (25)
Sean Max (25)
Lillian Piepenhagen (22)
Andrew Redmon (25)
William Rohrbach (25)

French Horn

‡ Kurt Wackerly (11)
Landon Bubb (24)
Michael McFarlin (12)
John McNamara (21)
Chase Rogers (26)
Rachel Scarboro (23)
Amy Toale (17)
Anna Wodny (25)

Trombone

‡ Hannah Dunn (19)
‡ Henry Gallagher (24)
Alex Drake (25)
Kurt Haas (95)
Larry Henderlight-Gómez (14)
Lux Johansson (25)
Daniel Lucas (25)
Terry McGrath (25)
Brittney Pham (25)

Euphonium

‡ Edward Ehlers (23)
Kazuki Koide (24)
Zakariya Thiam (24)

Tuba

‡ Cliff Norris (96)
♯ Bernard Flythe
Will Segó (16)
Darren Williams (22)

String Bass

Destiny Hayes (25)

Percussion

‡ Abby Gaskins (06)
‡ Mitch Cave (13)
Jazz DeFreitas (23)
Jenna Galligan (24)
John Haunson (25)
Suzanne McHann (23)
S. Nester (23)
George Oh (22)
Mel Raines (24)
Chris Segó (16)
Erin Seligsohn (24)

Year of joining the band
in parentheses

‡ Section Leader
♯ Special Guest

Atlanta Freedom Bands Leadership

Board of Directors

Officers

| | |
|-----------------------|----------------|
| <i>President</i> | Oliver Spirito |
| <i>Vice President</i> | Emma Smith |
| <i>Secretary</i> | Alex Drake |
| <i>Treasurer</i> | Brian Gross |

Representatives

| | |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| <i>Concert Band</i> | Suzanne Kamm McHann |
| <i>Marching Band</i> | Candace Miller |
| <i>Color Guard</i> | Christopher Brooks |
| <i>MetroGnomes</i> | Nanette King |

Artistic Leaders

| | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Artistic Director</i> | O'Shae Best |
| <i>Associate Director</i> | Kurt Wackerly |
| <i>MetroGnomes Director</i> | Nic Chambers |
| <i>Marching Band Director</i> | Fitz Dement |
| <i>Color Guard Director</i> | Michel Brandon Boddie |

Ensemble Coordinators

| | |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| <i>Concert Band</i> | Aaron Smith |
| <i>Marching Band</i> | Abby Gaskins |
| <i>Color Guard</i> | Michel Brandon Boddie |
| <i>MetroGnomes</i> | Beth Herndon |

Organizational Leaders

| | |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| <i>Development & Marketing</i> | Cliff Norris |
| <i>Marching Band Drum Major</i> | Edward Ehlers |
| <i>Librarian</i> | Brandon Gray |
| <i>Founder and Guiding Spirit</i> | Walter L. "Buz" Carr, Jr. |



“Georgia on Our Minds” Program Notes

A large-print version is available from your ushers.



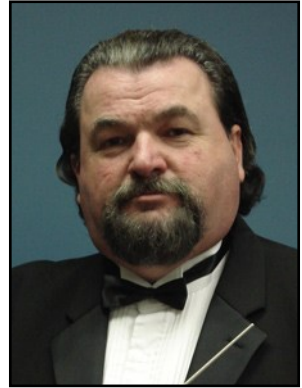
Dr. Joseph Earp is currently the Performing Arts Chair and Director of Bands at Hinds Community College in Raymond, Mississippi. Ensembles include the Eagle Marching Band, Wind Ensemble, Concert Band, Jazz Band, Percussion Ensemble, and various other small ensembles. He earned his undergraduate degree in Music Education from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. He earned his Master of Music in Music Education from Anderson University (Anderson, SC), and his Doctor of Music Education degree from Liberty University (Lynchburg, VA). He also taught and led high school bands, was Director of Bands at Limestone University (Gaffney, SC), was Director of Instrumental Music at Pfeiffer University (Misenheimer, NC).

As an active composer, Dr. Earp has been commissioned on several occasions, including band works for middle and high school ensembles, honor bands and brass choir. Some of his commissions have come from Chris White (Hickory Ridge Holiday), Blair Smith (Coastal Fanfare, Mustangs Rebel the Knight of Wolves, and Stone Mountain Fanfare), Dave Silden (The Nobles of Queen City), Kevin Townsend (WE ARE BRAVE! – Concert March), and Steve Petrucci (Among the Vikings and the Cast Iron Sixth). Hickory Ridge Holiday was the first composition of Dr. Earp to be performed internationally as part of the Hickory Ridge Wind Ensemble’s Performance Tour in China (2018). In addition to composition, Dr. Earp has arranged many works for concert band, marching band, and small ensembles. Recently, several of his compositions have been selected in the BANDWORLD Top 100 and the J. W. Pepper Editor’s Choice catalogs.

“**Stone Mountain Fanfare**” is a high-energy piece written to start off any concert with a bang! Commissioned in 2007 by the Georgia Music Educators Association, the work was written for district and All State Honors Band performances.

R. Alan Carter (b. 1964) is a composer, clinician, retired educator, and music consultant whose music is played throughout the United States. He received his Bachelor of Music in Music Education from Valdosta State University. As a teacher, Alan has taught both middle school and high school levels. As a middle school teacher, his bands consistently received superior ratings at contests and festivals. He received “Teacher of the Year” at Brooks Middle School in 2007 and Ware Middle School in 2014. Most of his experience at the high school level was as an arranger and visual coordinator. As a composer, Mr. Carter recognized a need for quality music at the middle school level that focused on teaching fundamentals while engaging the students. His music is currently published through Carl Fischer Music

and Excelsia Music Publishing, LLC. His march “Azalea City” was featured by Band World Magazine’s Top 100. He serves as music consultant for several schools and is the staff arranger and composer for the Azalea Winds. He is the Director of Music at Faith Baptist Church in Valdosta.



“Okefenokee: Land of Trembling Waters” —

The Okefenokee Swamp is slated as one of the seven natural wonders of Georgia. The name has two different meanings: first being bubbling waters, and the second meaning land of trembling earth, so named because the peat bog (land closed parentheses moves when you walk on it, because it is actually floating on water. Although the Oconi are the earliest known inhabitants, this piece is written to honor the Chehaw Native Americans who gave the swamp its name. The beginning of the piece depicts the grandeur of the over 438,000 acre swamp (one of the five largest swamps in the world). The middle section has a flute solo that depicts the primitive life of the early inhabitants. The piece ends with a spirited dance, beginning with the thunderous role of the timpani and base rounds.

Grammy-nominated composer **Dr. Marie A Douglas** has been noted for the arrangement and orchestration choices within her works. Her arrangements focus on affording quality voice leading, memorable rhythms and unique and interesting textures for musicians at all levels of music performance. She enjoys arranging and transcribing pieces in addition to her own compositions.



She often infuses aspects of her favorite genres of music into her wind band and orchestral creations, and aspects of wind band and orchestral literature in her electronic music productions. Most recently, her compositions have included negro spirituals, African drumming idioms, spoken word, sound design, samples, and tons of other elements of Hip-Hop, specifically the sub-genre “Trap Music.”

Dr. Douglas is an active conductor, composer, and arranger. Marie serves as an adjunct professor within the Master of Music Technology Program at Southern Utah University where she was awarded the 2022, 2024 Influencer Award by the Division of Student Affairs and Professional Development Center. She earned her Doctor of Musical Arts in composition and conducting from the University of Memphis.

“Big City Lights” is a piece for wind band, inspired by the Hip-Hop sub-genre “Trap Music”, which finds its roots in the composer’s hometown,

Atlanta, Georgia. The atonal piece has elements that are meant to imitate techniques which are commonly used in Trap Music production. For example, in general the timpani perform what our intended to be “808’s”, while the tuba is often performing lines that would be reserved for synthesized base. The combination creates an often-utilized distortion technique.

Other production tactics travel through the ensemble as well. Certain aspects of the orchestration imitate automation, which places the sound exclusively in different spots of the ensemble (specifically on the left or right of the conductor). Sudden and gradual ensemble crescendos and dovetailing of melodies imitate low and high pass filters and volume knobs.

The piece begins with the high-paced “It’s Lit!!” section which includes *fortissimo* exclamations demonstrating the hustle and bustle of the famed Atlanta traffic. The traffic sounds perform a trio with the clarinets and marimba, who depict a sense of “hurry and wait”, as they endure the Atlanta traffic scene. The “Issa Vibe” section is much slower and intends to depict a night out on the town with friends, enjoying the city lights and the slightly slower paced environment. The “Chopped and Screwed” section is a half time recapitulation of the main themes. “Chopped and Screwed” is a famous DJ style where a song is slowed down tremendously. The piece closes out with one final return of the original marking “It’s Lit!!”. Enjoy that a day in the life of an ATLien with “Big City Lights”.



“Music is my pulpit. That’s where I preach,” **Dr. Carlos Simon** reflected for *The Washington Post*. Having grown up in Atlanta, with a long lineage of preachers and connections to gospel music to inspire him, GRAMMY-nominated Simon proves that a well-composed song can indeed be a sermon. His music ranges from concert music for large and small ensembles to film scores with influences of jazz, gospel, and neo-romanticism.

Simon is the current Composer-in-Residence for the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and frequently writes for the National Symphony Orchestra and Washington National Opera. Simon also

holds the position of inaugural Composer Chair of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the first in the institution’s 143-year history.

Simon was nominated for a 2023 Grammy Award for Best Contemporary Classical Composition for his album, *Requiem for the Enslaved*. The requiem is a multi-genre musical tribute to commemorate the stories of the 272 enslaved men, women, and children sold in 1838 by Georgetown University.

Dr. Simon earned his doctorate degree at the University of Michigan, where he studied with Michael Daugherty and Evan Chambers. He has also received degrees from Georgia State University and Morehouse College. He is an honorary member of Phi Mu Alpha Music Sinfonia Fraternity and a

member of the National Association of Negro Musicians, Society of Composers International, and Pi Kappa Lambda Music Honor Society. He has served as a member of the music faculty at Spelman College and Morehouse College in Atlanta and now serves as Associate Professor at Georgetown University. Simon was also a recipient of the 2021 Sphinx Medal of Excellence, the highest honor bestowed by the Sphinx Organization to recognize extraordinary classical Black and Latinx musicians, and was named a Sundance/Time Warner Composer Fellow for his work for film image.

“**reflections**” was commissioned in 2020 by current and former members of the Georgia State University Graduate Wind Conducting Studio and Symphonic Wind Ensemble for Dr. Robert J. Ambrose in celebration of his 20 years as Director of Bands at Georgia State University. The piece is inspired by the following words from a poem by Courtney D. Ware, which the host will read.

Robert Sheldon has taught instrumental music in the Florida and Illinois public schools and has served on the faculty at Florida State University where he taught instrumental music education classes, conducting, and directed the university bands. Following seventeen years as Director of Concert Band Publications for Alfred Music, he now maintains an active composition and conducting schedule. Sheldon received the Bachelor of Music in Music Education from the University of Miami and the Master of Fine Arts in Instrumental Conducting from the University of Florida. In 2020, VanderCook College of Music presented him with an honorary Doctorate in Music Education.



An internationally recognized clinician, his music is performed around the world and frequently appears on many international concert and contest lists. Sheldon has conducted Regional and All-State Honor Bands throughout the United States and abroad. He often appears as a Music Education clinician and has presented sessions and seminars at numerous colleges and universities as well as state and provincial Music Education Association conferences. His teaching career included 28 years in the public schools as well as at the University of Florida, Florida State University, Illinois Central College and Bradley University.

His compositions embody a level of expression that resonates with ensembles and audiences alike, and he produces numerous publications for concert band each year. The American School Band Directors Association has honored him with the Volkwein Award for composition and the Stanbury Award for teaching, the International Assembly of Phi Beta Mu honored him with the International Outstanding Bandmaster Award, and he has been awarded membership in the American Bandmasters Association. With over four million copies of his compositions and books sold, he is one of the most performed composers of wind band music today.

Commissioned by and written for the Georgia Music Educators District Ten Band Directors Association, “**Savannah River Rhapsody**” was premiered by the District’s outstanding high school honor band in Augusta, Georgia, with the composer conduction. The Savannah River plays an enormous part in the lives, history, and commercial vitality of the region. The pieces begins at the source of the river, in the southern Appalachians, with an introductions representing the grandeur of this ancient mountain range. As the music continues, it follows the river downstream, changing tonality and style with every river bend.



Described as “alluring” and “stirring” by *The New York Times*, the “arresting” (*Gramophone*), “irresistible” (*San Francisco Chronicle*), and “exhilarating” (*Chicago Tribune*) music of Vietnamese-American composer **Viet Cuong** has been commissioned and performed on six continents by musicians and ensembles such as the New York Philharmonic, Los Angeles Philharmonic, Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Eighth Blackbird, Kronos Quartet, and Dallas Winds, among many others. Cuong’s music has been heard at Carnegie Hall, Kennedy Center, and Lincoln Center, as well as on NPR Music’s Tiny Desk and PBS News-

Hour. His works for wind ensemble have had over a thousand performances worldwide, including at Midwest, WASBE, and CBDNA conferences.

Cuong was born in California and grew up in Marietta, where he attended Lassiter High School and was a member of the LHS marching and concert bands. Growing up, he played piano, percussion, and clarinet. He is a member of BMI, the American Composers Forum, and Blue Dot Collective, a group of composers who focus on writing adventurous music for band.

A composer known for his imagination and colorful voice, Cuong strives to blend the whimsical and profound by finding new expressive possibilities through unexpected instrumental pairings and textures. His works thus include concerti for tuba and dueling oboes, percussion quartets utilizing wine glasses and sandpaper, and pieces for double reed sextet, cello octet, and solo snare drum.

Cuong serves as Assistant Professor of Music Composition and Theory the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, where he teaches composition, orchestration, and music theory. He has also served on the faculties of the Eighth Blackbird Creative Lab, Juilliard Summer Composition, and Newfound Chamber Winds Tidewater Composition Workshop. He holds degrees in music composition from Princeton University (MFA/PhD), the Curtis Institute of Music (Artist Diploma), and the Peabody Conservatory (BM/MM).

“**John and Jim**” was commissioned by The Columbus Pride Bands and the Queen City Freedom Band of Cincinnati for the 2024 Pride Bands Alliance

Annual Conference, where it was premiered on July 20, 2024 by Dr. Jon Noworyta and the combined Concert Bands. He writes about the piece:

John Arthur and Jim Obergefell were married in July of 2013. They had been together in a loving relationship for 22 years, and Jim was caring for John as he faced the end stages of ALS. In the last year of John's life, they traveled on a medical plane to Maryland—one of just a handful of states where same-sex marriage was legal at the time—to be married. The marriage ceremony was conducted on board the plane before they returned home to Ohio for their last months together. John passed away that October, and, because Ohio did not recognize their marriage as legal, Jim had to challenge the state in court to be listed as John's surviving spouse on his death certificate. The state appealed, and the court battle worked its way through the legal system until 2015, when Jim and his team were victorious before the Supreme Court. Their efforts ensured that the relationships of same sex couples, including my marriage to my husband, would be seen as equal under the law. For that I am deeply and personally grateful.

“John and Jim” is my effort to pay tribute to the men whose love and devotion gave rise to great change, and I do so by interpolating source material from an iconic piece of traditional wedding music: Pachelbel's *Canon in D*. In my youth I adored Pachelbel's *Canon*, and I learned a piano arrangement of it when I was 11 years old. For months I would play the piece every morning before school, endlessly repeating its bass line while improvising melodies when the treble clef's music ran out. It was through the Pachelbel that I began composing in earnest. However, this was also around the time that I first learned of its use in weddings, and it saddened me that music I found so beautiful was emblematic of something that, according to the law, I could never have. It feels fitting then, that in the year of my own wedding to my partner of 11 years, reframing (and perhaps reclaiming) the Pachelbel should provide the inspiration for a celebration of marriage equality.

Ultimately, I believe “John and Jim” sounds like both a departure and nod to the piece that first inspired me to compose. It takes place in a reverberant



Jim Obergefell and John Arthur during their marriage ceremony.

atmosphere, where notes linger and continually echo around one another, symbolic of both the persistence and impact of people like John and Jim.



With a career spanning 38 years in music education, **Christina M. Huss** has taught and conducted bands at both the middle school and high school level, most recently as Director of Bands at Valdosta Middle School, where she retired in 2016.

Throughout her career, Ms. Huss' bands have performed in multiple venues throughout the Southeastern United States and have consistently received superior ratings in various state and regional events.

Ms. Huss has served in a variety of roles in state music affiliations, and has enjoyed various honors and awards, including Teacher of the Year and STAR

Teacher, during her 28-year tenure at Brooks County High School in Quitman, GA. Since retiring, Christina enjoys composing music for bands and orchestra, and continues to mentor and teach middle school band part-time for the Lowndes County, GA band program. Prior to coming to Lowndes County, she served as Director of Bands at both Valdosta Middle School in Valdosta, GA and Berrien Middle School in Nashville, GA.

Ms. Huss is an alum of Valdosta State University, where she earned both her bachelor's and master's degrees in music education. She is a founding co-director and conductor of the Azalea Winds Community Band based in Valdosta, GA, where she continues to perform and serve as an adjudicator, guest conductor, and clinician. Most recently, Ms. Huss is a 2021 Recipient of the Citation of Merit from the Women Band Directors International.

“Bamboo Warrior” is an original work for band written shortly after I began researching my Southeast Asian roots. In “Bamboo Warrior”, our hero is called from the peace and safety of their beautiful bamboo garden home to the battle of battles. The opening of the tone poem begins among the sounds of trickling waterfalls of a bamboo garden, introduced with a solo flute and Asian drone oriental garden backdrop, culminating in a climactic moment where we hear the first presentation of the main melodic theme. The safety of the bamboo garden then moves to a more threatening, ominous sentiment in a short transition presented subtly by the percussion and low winds. Suddenly, the music shifts to a sense of urgency, as driving tribal rhythms and a new melodic line in the horns and low brass lead us straightaway to our hero's fate. After an exciting chase presented by combining both old and new melodic motifs, our warrior's destiny is found to be victorious.

Tyler S. Grant is an internationally recognized composer, arranger, conductor, and clinician of music for concert bands, orchestras, and chamber ensembles of all levels. His music is featured regularly in performances by both region and all state honor ensembles and is also featured annually on

Editor's or Publisher's Choice Repertoire Lists around the world. Since 2010, Tyler has regularly accepted commissions for new works and produced new publications for bands and orchestras each year. Notable performance venues of his works include The Midwest Clinic, Carnegie Hall, Music for All's National Concert Band Festival, the Meyerson Symphony Center, the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, Bands of America Grand Nationals, and numerous state-wide, national, and international music conferences and conventions.



Tyler enjoys conducting and clinic engagements with ensembles throughout the United States. He has served as a clinician with over 150 school instrumental music programs and honor groups across more than 25 states. Notable conducting venues include The Midwest Clinic and all-state bands in Nebraska, Oregon, Alabama, Louisiana, South Dakota, and North Dakota. Before becoming a full-time composer and arranger, Tyler served as the Director of Bands at Holy Innocents' Episcopal School from 2019-2023. He currently resides in Atlanta, Georgia, and maintains an active composing and conducting schedule.

Commissioned by the Bowling Green State University Band Alumni Association, "**All the Earth and Air**" was written in honor of Dr. Bruce Moss and his 30th anniversary as Director of Bands at BGSU. The composer writes:

In writing a work that celebrates Dr. Moss's significant and lasting contributions to music education, I chose to delve into his early years, rooted in the picturesque landscapes of Kingsport, Tennessee. While traditionally structured in ABA form, my goal was to provide a dynamic exploration of the vivacious spirit and introspective depth he is known form.

An intriguing aspect of the work is the thematic connection to ZIP codes, deriving inspiration from Kingsport, TN, and Bowling Green, OH. These motives are interwoven throughout the piece, service as the foundations for the majority of melodic material and reflecting Dr. Moss's clever and memorable fascination with numbers and places.

The title "All the Earth and Air" draws inspiration from the Percy Bysshe Shelly poem, "To a Skylark." Much like the skylark's music encompassing the vast expanse of the sky, the resonant echo of Dr. Moss's boundless influence continues to permeate the lives of his colleagues and former students.

Brian Balmages is known worldwide as a composer and conductor who equally spans the worlds of orchestral, band, and chamber music. His music has been performed by groups ranging from professional symphony orchestras to elementary schools in venues such as Carnegie Hall, the Kennedy Center, Sydney Opera House, Toronto Centre for the Arts, and many more. He is a recipient of the A. Austin Harding Award from the American School Band Directors Association, won the 2020 NBA William D. Revelli

Composition Contest with his work *Love and Light*, and was awarded the inaugural James Madison University Distinguished Alumni Award from the School of Visual and Performing Arts. In the same year, he was commissioned by his other alma mater, the University of Miami, to compose music for the inauguration of the institution's 6th president, Dr. Julio Frenk. His music was also performed as part of the 2013 Presidential Inaugural Prayer Service, which was attended by both President Obama and Vice President Biden.



As a conductor, Mr. Balmages enjoys regular engagements with all-state and regional ensembles as well as university and professional groups throughout the world. Notable guest conducting appearances have included the Midwest Clinic, Western International Band Clinic, Maryborough Music Conference (Australia), College Band Directors Conference, American School Band Directors Association National Conference, numerous state ASTA conferences, Teatro dell'Aquila (Italy), and others. He is an elected member of the American Bandmasters Association and has taught instrumental conducting at Towson University where he also served as Assistant Director of Bands and Orchestras. Currently, he is Director of MakeMusic Publications and Digital Education for Alfred and MakeMusic

“Etowah” was commissioned by the Hightower Trail Middle School Band in Marietta, Georgia, by Andrew Cole, Director. It commemorates the opening of their new band room while tying in some of the strong historical significance of the area.

The Hightower (Etowah) trail, located in Georgia, was used by Native Americans as a trading route for hundreds of years. In addition to marking a former boundary between Cherokee and Creek lands, it was one of three major footpaths used in the area. The name “Etowah” is believed to be an anglicized corruption of the Cherokee word “Itawa” or “Italwa”, referring to the name of the trail and the large permanent settlements and towns by the same name.

Time has had many devastating effects on the trail. Its geography has changed a great deal due to events in recent history. Shortly after World War II, the Army Corps of Engineers built Lake Allatoona to serve several purposes including flood control, water supply, and hydropower generation. The original bed of the Etowah River runs through the middle of the lake, which covers portions of the old Hightower trail and the original city of Etowah.

This work seeks to pay homage to the great Cherokee and Creek nations that once thrived in this area. It takes the audience on a journey beneath the waters of Lake Allatoona to the location of Etowah. The opening sounds of

the work echo the spirit of the city, seemingly coming out of the very waters that now cover it and its history. As the music builds, the audience begins its descent into the lake to find the original bed of the Etowah river and the city itself. Ultimately, past meets present, signifying present-day efforts to acknowledge and preserve the important trails and history that remain.

Georgia native **Katahj Copley** (b. 1998) has a Bachelor's degree in Music Education and Composition at the University of West Georgia, a Master's in Music Composition from the University of Texas, and is working on his DMA at Michigan State University. Copley's first work, "Spectra", premiered in 2017 by the University of West Georgia's Saxophone Ensemble. Since then, Copley has written over 100 pieces, including over twenty-five for Wind Band, which have been performed and commissioned by colleges, organizations, universities and professional ensembles, including the 1st Infantry Brass Choir, Rhode Island Recording Ensemble, Axos Saxophone Quartet, the Admiral Launch Duo and the Nu Alpha chapter of Kappa Kappa Psi at Georgia State University.



In February of 2020, Copley's "Sunshine" was featured at the Georgia Music Educators Association's District XIII's performance and NOVA was premiered by the University of West Georgia's Wind Ensemble at the College Band Directors National Association Southeast Division Conference. In March, "The President's Own" United States Marine Band premiered his new work "Dope". Copley was an AFB Resident Student Composer in 2021 during his senior year at the University of West Georgia. AFB premiered his work "Unspoken" in a virtual concert in March 2021. Aside from composing, Copley is an excited educator who teaches young musicians the joy of discovering music and why music is a phenomenal language.

The composer writes: When I first wrote "Halcyon Hearts," I wrote it in a week when I was a student teacher in Georgia. I wrote the piece as an exercise of thematic material and warmth in sound. The theme was passion—passion in those you love and the things you love no matter what anyone says. Years later, this small piece has become a fan favorite and a piece I am thankful that gets played so much. While I was thankful, I had become restless with the constant asking for the piece or that being the only thing people would know my music for — I lost my passion for the work. I had started to grow feelings for the piece similar to that of Radiohead and "Creep". However one day I looked at the comments left on my social media platforms, read the posts so many made about this piece and I saw the stories and all the lives this work has changed. I found what I lost — the everlasting feeling of love and appreciation. When asked to write for the 2024 Midwest Band and Orchestra Conference, I knew what I wanted to write... **EVERGLOW**.

“Everglow” is a continuation of the feeling from “Halcyon Hearts”. The meaning of “Everglow” is the warm feeling of love that lingers after its initial discovery. While “Halcyon Hearts” was about an overture about the discovery of passion, “Everglow” to me currently is the finale of that feeling — what remained, what was lost and what grew from the proclamation of passion and love.

I am forever grateful to every director, every musician, every composer, every student and every kind soul that has embraced my music, that has embraced “Halcyon Hearts”, and that has embraced my own heart. Without you, all this wouldn’t have happened — and thanks to you all — the passion remains. The everglow lives on...

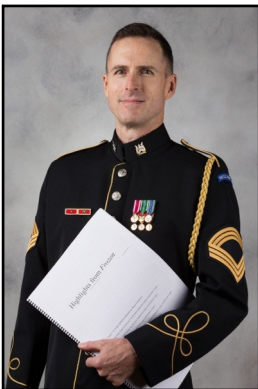


Our resident student composer for tonight’s concert is **Brady Chandler**. He is a twenty year old student working on his bachelor’s of music composition at the University of West Georgia, under the studio of Katahj Copley. He started composing music in 2019 by learning different composition software to assist fellow marching band members with hearing their individualized parts. From there he blossomed into writing compositions of his own that he hopes to share with many audiences.

AFB will present the premiere of his new work **“Solstice”**. The composer writes about the piece: “I wrote ‘Solstice’ out of my passion and interest in

space; how wild and different colors and planetary systems interact, whether they are in harmony or discord. In fact, this piece premieres after the spring (vernal) equinox, which seems incredibly fitting for this piece.

Overall, space is such a mysterious place, and I hope that you all see the same vision as I did while writing this piece.”



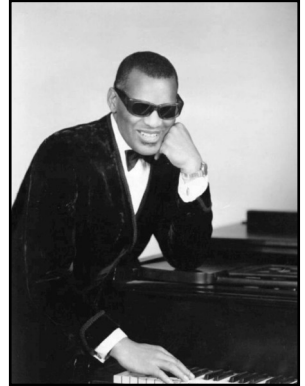
Michael Brown is an American composer and arranger. Brown earned his M.M. in music theory from the University of Texas at Austin and his B.M. in music theory from Furman University in Greenville, S.C. Michael is currently staff arranger for the United States Army Band (“Pershing’s Own”) in Washington, D.C., having served previously as chief arranger for the United States Military Academy Band at West Point, N.Y.

His arranging credits include: the *Tonight Show* with Jay Leno, the opening ceremonies of the 2002 Olympic Winter Games in Salt Lake City, Utah, the National Symphony Orchestra, and the Kennedy Center Honors in Washington, D.C. Michael draws upon his experience

as a college and high school band director, church orchestra director, and freelance trumpeter.

Some of the most impressive movie themes in recent years have come from the blockbuster Marvel films and their superheroes. Many of the Marvel films were produced right here in Atlanta. **“Heroes of the Marvel Universe”** offers a dynamic and well-paced medley featuring memorable hero themes including: *Captain America*, *Ant-Man*, *Thor*, *Iron Man*, *Black Panther*, and of course *The Avengers*.

Ray Charles Robinson was a singer, songwriter, and pianist, born in Albany, Georgia. He is regarded as one of the most iconic and influential musicians of the 20th century and was often referred to by contemporaries as “The Genius”. Among friends and fellow musicians, Charles preferred being called “Brother Ray”.



Charles pioneered the soul music genre during the 1950s by combining elements of blues, jazz, rhythm and blues, and gospel into his music during his time with Atlantic Records. He contributed to the integration of country music, rhythm and blues, and pop music during the 1960s with his crossover success on ABC Records, notably with his two *Modern Sounds* albums. With ABC, Charles became one of the first Black musicians to be granted artistic control by a mainstream record company.

Charles’s 1960s hit “Georgia on My Mind” was the first of his three career No. 1 hits on the *Billboard* Hot 100. His 1962 album *Modern Sounds in Country and Western Music* became his first album to top the *Billboard* 200. Charles had multiple singles reach the Top 40 on various *Billboard* charts: 61 on the US R&B singles chart, 33 on the Hot 100 singles chart, and eight on the Hot Country singles charts.

For his musical contributions, Charles received the Kennedy Center Honors, the National Medal of Arts, and the Polar Music Prize. He was one of the inaugural inductees at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1986. Charles has won 17 Grammy Awards (five posthumously), the Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award in 1987, and 10 of his recordings have been inducted into the Grammy Hall of Fame. *Rolling Stone* ranked Charles No. 10 on their list of the “100 Greatest Artists of All Time”. In 2022, he was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame, as well as the Black Music & Entertainment Walk of Fame.

Tonight’s **“Tribute to Ray Charles”** is a medley of three of his biggest hits: the 1956 “Hallelujah, I Love Her So”, his #1 hit 1960 rendition of “Georgia on My Mind” (which was proclaimed the state song of Georgia in 1980), and the 1959 “What’d I Say”. Fittingly for us, “What’d I Say” is the song he used to close every concert, and we are proud to continue the tradition here at Morehouse in the arts center that bears his name.



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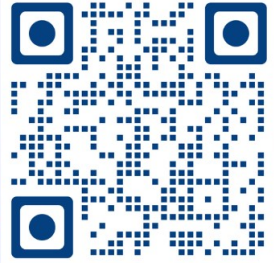
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Clarkston Community Center
Every 1st Thursday | 4pm - 6pm
FELIX'S HAPPY HOUR

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Every 3rd Wednesday | 7pm

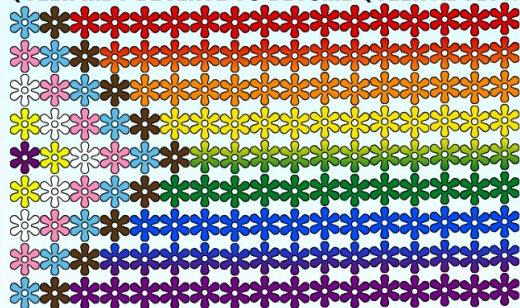
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TRANS DAY OF VISIBILITY

The Church at Ponce and Highland
March 28th 2026 | 10am - noon
AFB and colorguard will be there!

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