

Celebrating Gateways

By Joel Seligman

On August 8–13, Rochester will be the host city to the Gateways Music Festival, with a spectacular lineup of classical music events and concerts that are all free and open to the public. More than 125 of the most talented professional classical musicians of African descent—players from major American symphony orchestras, faculty members from college and university music schools, and renowned freelance artists—will participate in the six-day festival that takes place at the Eastman School of Music and throughout the Rochester community.

The Gateways Festival celebrates the historic participation and achievements of classical musicians of African descent through more than 50 solo, chamber, and orchestra performances at Eastman Theatre, Hatch Recital Hall, Rochester City Hall, houses of worship, libraries, retirement communities, private homes, and other locations throughout the city and suburbs of Rochester. The festival also will feature a panel discussion among the musicians themselves and a lecture demonstration about some of the composers and the music. A “Young Musicians Institute” will offer opportunities that pair young instrumentalists with seasoned professionals and establish relationships between the musicians and Rochester-area music programs.

Founded by Juilliard-trained pianist and retired Eastman School of Music faculty member, Armenta Hummings Dumisani, the festival began in North Carolina in 1993, with a mission to increase the visibility and viability of classical musicians of African descent; provide an opportunity for musicians of African descent to revitalize their musical energies; and establish role models for young musicians of all ethnic origins. Since 1995, the festival has been held biennially in Rochester in collaboration with the Eastman School of Music. Performances have been broadcast on National Public Radio and have been met with wide critical acclaim.

In 2016, Eastman and the Gateways Music Festival started a new alliance that has strengthened the organizations’ efforts to promote and increase diversity in the field of classical music. The six-day summer festival is now “Gateways Music Festival in



SOUND DIRECTION: University Vice President Paul Burgett '68E, '76E (PhD), the chair of Gateway's board, says the effort “will have implications for American music for generations to come.”

association with Eastman School of Music.” Eastman graduate Lee Koonce '96E (MM), who has served on the festival's board since 1997 and chaired the festival's artistic programs committee since the founder's retirement in 2009, now serves as the inaugural president and artistic director of Gateways.

Before his appointment, Lee served in several arts leadership positions, including executive director of Ballet Hispanico, Third Street Music School Settlement, and Opus 118 Harlem School of Music in New York City and director of community relations for the Chicago Symphony Orchestra.

Lee holds a bachelor of music in piano performance from the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, a bachelor of arts in Spanish literature from Oberlin College, and a master of music in piano performance and literature from Eastman. In his role as president and artistic director, Lee oversees the artistic and program operations of the festival and is heavily involved in the critical fundraising efforts to support and sustain the festival's current and future efforts.

Until Lee's appointment, the festival had relied exclusively on volunteer support and leadership. A reinvigorated board of directors, chaired by Paul Burgett '68E, '76E (PhD), is attracting increased national attention and has recently added Jamal Rossi, the Joan and Martin Messinger Dean of the Eastman School of Music, Toni-Marie Montgomery, dean of the Bienen School of Music at Northwestern University, among others, to the board. The president and CEO of the

American Symphony Orchestra League, Jesse Rosen, was so moved by the 2015 festival orchestra performance that a photo of the Festival Orchestra in Kodak Hall was featured on the cover of the league's winter 2016 issue of *Symphony* magazine.

This year's festival is a cornucopia of musical delights, ranging from extraordinary composers of African descent such as the 18th-century's Le Chevalier de Saint-Georges's *Symphony No. 1 in G minor* to the 21st-century's Jesse Montgomery's “Records from a Vanishing City,” reflecting on her life growing up as a young girl on New York City's Lower East Side. The final concert in Kodak Hall will feature Rochester native Adolphus Hailstork's “American Port of Call,” Johannes Brahms's *Second Symphony* and Sergei Rachmaninoff's *Second Piano Concerto* with phenomenal Canadian pianist Stewart Goodyear.

Michael Morgan, conductor of the Oakland East Bay Symphony Orchestra, the Sacramento Philharmonic Orchestra, and the festival opera in Walnut Creek, California, is the Gateways Festival's conductor and music director. Once again he leads the orchestra in what promises to be the festival's most exciting concluding concert ever.

As a University, we strive to enrich the civic and social culture of our communities through our commitment to world-class programs in music and the arts. The Gateways Festival and all who work toward its success exemplify that spirit, demonstrating the artistic excellence and leadership that imbue our motto of *Meliora*. 