



Rising Stars

The JNSA 20th Anniversary Benefit Concert

*October 8th, 2023
4pm*



**ADVANCING THE ARTS.
ENRICHING LIVES.**



Community FOUNDATION for the Central Savannah River Area



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Maxwell Performing Arts Theatre - 2500 Walton Way

The school began operating in the fall of 2003 as a response to budget cuts in the arts leaving the school district with only two, full-time art teachers serving nearly 35,000 students. Offering programs in Drama, Dance, Music, and Visual Art, the Jessye Norman School of The Arts may have been the only avenue to art enrichment for many students.



Founding Board Chair Dr. Linda Scales saw the need and acted along with Ellis Johnson and others to reach out to Jessye Norman asking for her support and to bring her values and name to the organization. She enthusiastically agreed and helped to raise the first \$50,000 to start the school.



Since 2003, JNSA has moved in to its own 18,000 sq.ft. building donated by Peter Knox IV, renovated 9,000 square feet of the building, and grown programming to serve more than 400 students in free programming every year and more than 2000 in all programs combined. JNSA has developed programs serving students and adults in Aiken, Edgefield, Richmond, Columbia, and Burke Counties.




Beyond providing free arts education, the Jessye Norman School also offers services impacting the entire community. The school offers ASL learning classes, home school enrichment, private music tutoring, and classes for local seniors. The school also hosts services for students in the foster care system and students of military families. The benefit concert helps support all of these services.



"JNSA HAS GIVEN MY CHILDREN A LARGER LOVE AND APPRECIATION FOR THE ARTS. THEY HAVE SO MUCH MORE CONFIDENCE IN THEMSELVES AND THEIR TALENTS AND ABILITIES."

-JNSA PARENT

A black and white portrait of Jessye Norman, a Black woman with long, dark, curly hair, wearing a light-colored headband and a dark, high-collared garment. She is looking slightly to the left of the camera with a gentle expression. The background is a textured green wall. The text 'JESSYE NORMAN' is overlaid on the left side of the image in large, white, bold, sans-serif capital letters.

JESSYE NORMAN

(September 15, 1945 – September 30, 2019)

Jessye Norman, one of the world's most celebrated performing artists, was acclaimed for her performances in wide range of leading roles with the world's premier opera companies, in solo recitals and in concerts of her cherished classical repertoire with preeminent orchestras all over the globe, as well as her latest artistic expansion with her jazz ensemble and the extensive programming of music from the American musical theater, which she entitled: AMERICAN MASTERS. She was the recipient of many awards and accolades, including forty honorary doctorate degrees from colleges, universities, and conservatories around the world, five Grammy awards including the 'Lifetime Achievement Award', the National Medal of the Arts received at the White House from President Obama in 2010, and was a Kennedy Center Honors recipient. In France, an orchid was named for her by the National Museum of Natural History. She was a Commandeur de L'Orde des Arts et des Lettres and was an Officier of the Legion Francaise. Her community service included trustee board memberships at The New York Public Library, Carnegie Hall, The Dance Theatre of Harlem, the Lupus Foundation, Paine College, and the New York Botanical Garden. She was called upon often to speak to her passionate involvement and advocacy of arts education. The school for the arts in her hometown of Augusta, Georgia which bears her name, enabled her to support and see first-hand the extraordinary work of an equally dedicated staff of teachers and auxiliary personnel. Students who would otherwise not be able to avail themselves of private tutelage in the arts grew into the fullness of their talents and gifts as they developed their own sense of community and citizenship. She absolutely glowed at any mention of The Jessye Norman School for the Arts and was grateful indeed for this tangible, living opportunity to address the need for education in the arts in the town where her own studies and training began. Her memoir, STAND UP STRAIGHT AND SING!, released in May of 2014 and in France in the summer of 2015, chronicles her childhood in Augusta, Georgia and man experiences of her professional life as it unfolded all over the world over a period of four decades!

“WHY BE MEDIOCRE? EXCELLENCE HAS TO ALWAYS BE THE GOAL. THERE’S NO POINT IN BOTHERING IF YOU’RE NOT GOING TO GIVE IT YOUR ALL.”

- JESSYE NORMAN, 2014, (INTERVIEW FOR THE AFUWI BOB MARLEY AWARD)

PERFORMERS

Asleif Willmer– Soprano



Hailed as “a most incredible voice” (Arizona Daily Star) with “glowing color and exceptional artistry” (Schmopera), soprano Asleif Willmer delights audiences with her captivating stage presence, nuanced artistry, and polished lyric-coloratura soprano voice. Asleif has sung leading roles in several opera houses including Florida Grand Opera, Opera Saratoga, International Vocal Arts Institute, Brevard Music Festival, and City Lyric Opera. Highlights include Pamina in *Die Zauberflöte*, Adina in *L’elisir d’amore*, Baby Doe in *The Ballad of Baby Doe*, Juliette in *Romeo et Juliette*, Tytania in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and Zerlina in *Don Giovanni* of which she garnered the praise, “Willmer won the affections of the audience... freely reaching her high notes, sweetly seductive, physically and vocally” (Miamiartzine). Equally at home in the concert hall, Asleif is an artist with the GRAMMY-nominated True Concord Voices and Orchestra and has been a featured soloist internationally and nationally. Solo highlights include Handel’s *Messiah*, Brahms *Requiem*, Poulenc *Gloria*, and Haydn’s *The Creation*. She has also received top awards from many organizations, including the Metropolitan Opera Laffont Auditions, Classical Singer Competition, and MTNA Competition. Asleif received her Doctor of Musical Arts from Arizona State University.

Veronica Williams–Mezzo Soprano

Veronica Williams is an emerging mezzo-soprano known for her thrilling instrument and “overwhelming authority” on stage. Most recently, Ms. Williams sang with Opera Theatre of the Rockies in Scott Davenport Richards’ *Blind Injustice*. In the fall season of 2022, she served as a recitalist for the Shivers Fund in Colorado Springs and *Castle Of Our Skins* in Boston. She also appeared as a background vocalist on Michael Bubl e’s *Higher* tour, and performed the role of The Witch in Chicago Summer Opera’s production of Humperdinck’s *Hansel und Gretel*. In February 2022, Ms. Williams made her concert debut with Fort Worth Opera as a soloist in their prestigious *Night of Black Excellence* series. In 2019, she was personally invited by Maestro Sebastian Lang Lessing to join the San Antonio Symphony as their first ever *Singer-In-Residence*. As a result, she was the featured soloist in Leonard Bernstein’s *Symphony 1*, Manuel De Falla’s *El Amor Brujo*, Beethoven’s *9th Symphony*, and Sergei Prokofiev’s *Alexander Nevsky*. Ms. Williams received her Master of Music Degree from Boston’s New England Conservatory of Music, and her Bachelor of Music Degree from the University of Texas at Austin. Upcoming engagements include: *The Messiah* with the Austin Symphony Orchestra.



Dominic Armstrong – Tenor

Dominic Armstrong has established himself internationally as an artist of superb and distinguished musicality and characterization. The tenor holds degrees from Truman State University, The Juilliard School, and The Curtis Institute. This season Dominic Armstrong appears at Carnegie Hall with the American Symphony Orchestra for Schoenberg's *Gurre-Lieder*, singing *Waldemar* under the baton of Leon Botstein. He also continues his close collaboration with the Brooklyn Art Song Society, joining them in recital. In the 2022–2023 season, Mr. Armstrong debuted the role of the *Steuermann* in *Der Fliegende Holländer* with Utah Opera, continued his relationship with Opera Carolina, returning to the role of *Alfredo* in *La traviata*, and joined the Bangor Symphony for a pandemic-rescheduled Beethoven's 9th. An in-demand interpreter of modern and contemporary operas, Mr. Armstrong's notable performances include *Peter Quint* in *Turn of the Screw* (NYCO, Castleton, OnSite Opera), *Arthur Dimmesdale* in *The Scarlet Letter* (Opera Colorado, world premiere), *Orville Wright* in *Finding Wright* (Dayton Opera, world premiere), *Jump Master* in *The Falling and the Rising* (Opera Carolina), *Dr. Richardson* in *Breaking the Waves* (Beth Morrison Projects), *Steve* in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (Lyric Opera of Chicago, Carnegie Hall), *Count Almaviva* in *The Ghosts of Versailles* (Wexford Festival), *Haydn* and *the Bartender* in the world premiere performances of *The Classical Style* (Ojai Festival, Cal Performances, and Carnegie Hall), and the title role in *Candide* (Wolf Trap). The tenor is equally at home in traditional opera repertoire, having essayed such roles as *Don José* in *Carmen* (Kentucky Opera, Dayton Opera), *Cavaradossi* in *Tosca* (on tour in France under the baton of Emmanuel Plasson, Northwest Indiana Symphony), *Alfredo* in *La traviata* (Chautauqua Opera), *Macduff* in *Macbeth* (Syracuse Opera), *Tamino* in *Die Zauberflöte* (Dayton Opera, Piedmont Opera) and the title role in *La Clemenza di Tito* (Chicago Opera Theatre). Mr. Armstrong made his New York Philharmonic debut in acclaimed performances of Britten's *Spring Symphony*, conducted by Music Director Alan Gilbert. He has appeared as the *First Jew* in *Salome* with the Philadelphia Orchestra and Opera Philadelphia, conducted by Yannick Nézet-Séguin, as well as the *Third Jew* in performances of the same opera with the Boston Symphony, and *Second Jew* with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. In the 2016–2017 season, he traveled to Russia to perform Britten's *War Requiem* with the Russian National Orchestra and subsequently performed in a series of concerts, collaborating with Craig Rutenberg. He is closely tied to the works of Benjamin Britten, having also performed his *Serenade* with Symphony in C and the Princeton Symphony. He regularly performs standard symphonic repertoire, such as Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* (Indianapolis Symphony, North Carolina Symphony, Baton Rouge Symphony), *Handel's Messiah* (Aiken Symphony), *Mozart's Requiem* (Lansing Symphony, Amarillo Symphony), *Bach's Magnificat* (Milwaukee Symphony), and *Rachmaninoff's The Bells* (Portland Symphony). Other notable recent performances include: *Deutsche Oper Berlin* as *Parpignol* in *La bohème*; *Opera Regio Torino* as the *Gran Sacerdote* in *Idomeneo*, *Reverend Adams* in *Peter Grimes*, and *Heinrich der Schreiber* in *Tannhäuser*; *Opera Omaha* for their inaugural ONE Festival as *Lurcanio* in *Ariodante*, *Los Angeles Opera* and the *Center for Contemporary Opera* in a double bill of two Gordon Getty one-act operas, *Usher House* and *The Canterville Ghost*, as *Edgar Allen Poe* and *Duke Cecil of Yorkshire*; and in spring 2020 he was slated to make his debut with *Lincoln Center Theater* in the ensemble for *Intimate Apparel*, with the run of preview performances interrupted due to COVID-19. Mr. Armstrong's numerous prizes and awards include being one of the Grand Finalists in the 2008 National Council Auditions with the Metropolitan Opera, a 2013 George London Foundation Winner, the SAI Vocal Competition, Gold Medal Aria Competition (Truman State University), The Sullivan Awards, *Lucrezia Bori Grant*, *Opera Index*, *Gerda Lissner Award*, The *William Boldyga* and *Betty Myers Incentive Award* from Annapolis Opera, *NATS State and Regional* winner, and he was the 2009 winner of the *Liederkrantz Art Song Competition*. Dominic has been on faculty at The University of South Carolina since 2020. He has also served on faculty at The Chautauqua Opera Conservatory, and helped to develop the Castleton Festival/USC Immersion Program.



Ramelle Brooks – Baritone

Ramelle Brooks' noble bass voice has been described as powerful yet full of color and nuance. Ramelle is a young artist who is on the rise in the operatic community. He has been afforded the opportunity to sing roles in operas such as *Sarastro* in *Die Zauberflöte*, *Doctor 6* in *The Falling and Rising*, *Norton* in *La Cambiale di Matrimonio*, *Nardo* in *La Finta Giardiniera*, *Dr. Dulcamara* in *L'elisir d' amore*, and *Dick Deadeye* in *H.M.S. Pinafore*. His musical credits include *Smokey Joe's Cafe* and *The Carousel*. Ramelle is also a vibrant soloist with regional choruses and symphonies. He holds a Doctor of Musical Arts and Master of Music in Performance from the University of South Carolina and a Music Education (Voice K-12) Bachelor's degree from Fayetteville State University. Ramelle supplements his academic experience serving as Director of Music at Second Calvary Baptist Church in Columbia, South Carolina. He also holds membership in the National Association of Teachers of Singing and Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. Ramelle currently serves on the music faculty of SC State University as an Assistant Professor of Voice.



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Rising Stars

20th Anniversary Gala Benefit Concert

Asleif Willmer, Soprano Veronica Williams, Mezzo-Soprano Dominic Armstrong, Tenor Ramelle Brooks, Baritone
Mr. David Brown and Mr. Justin Hornsby, Collaborative Pianists

Introduction.....Gary Dennis and William Mills

The JNSA Creed Song..... JNSA Singers
Written by Russell Joel Brown, Arr. Edwin G Hamilton, ASCAP

Rise Up.....JNSA Dancers
By Andra Day

O luce di quest'anima.....Asleif Willmer
From *Linda di Chamounix* by Gaetano Donizetti

Cruda sorte!.....Veronica Williams
From *L'italiana in Algeri* by Gioachino Rossini

Dein ist mein ganzes Herz.....Dominic Armstrong
From *Das Land des Lächelns* by Franz Lehar

Hexenlied.....Veronica Williams
From *Hänsel and Gretel* by Engelbert Humperdink

Chacun le sait.....Asleif Willmer
From *Fille du Regiment* by Gaetano Donizetti

La fleur que tu m'avais jetée.....Dominic Armstrong
From *Carmen* by Georges Bizet

Belle Nuit.....Asleif Willmer and Veronica Williams
From *Les contes de Hoffmann* by Jacques Offenbach

Intermission

La Vendetta.....Ramelle Brooks

From *Le Nozze di Figaro* by W.A. Mozart

Là ci darem da mano.....Asleif Willmer and Ramelle Brooks

From *Don Giovanni* by W.A. Mozart

Original Compositions.....Veronica Williams

Half Empty, Poison

Sit down, you're rockin the boat!.....Dominic Armstrong

From *Guys and Dolls* by Frank Loesser

She Smiles.....Veronica Williams

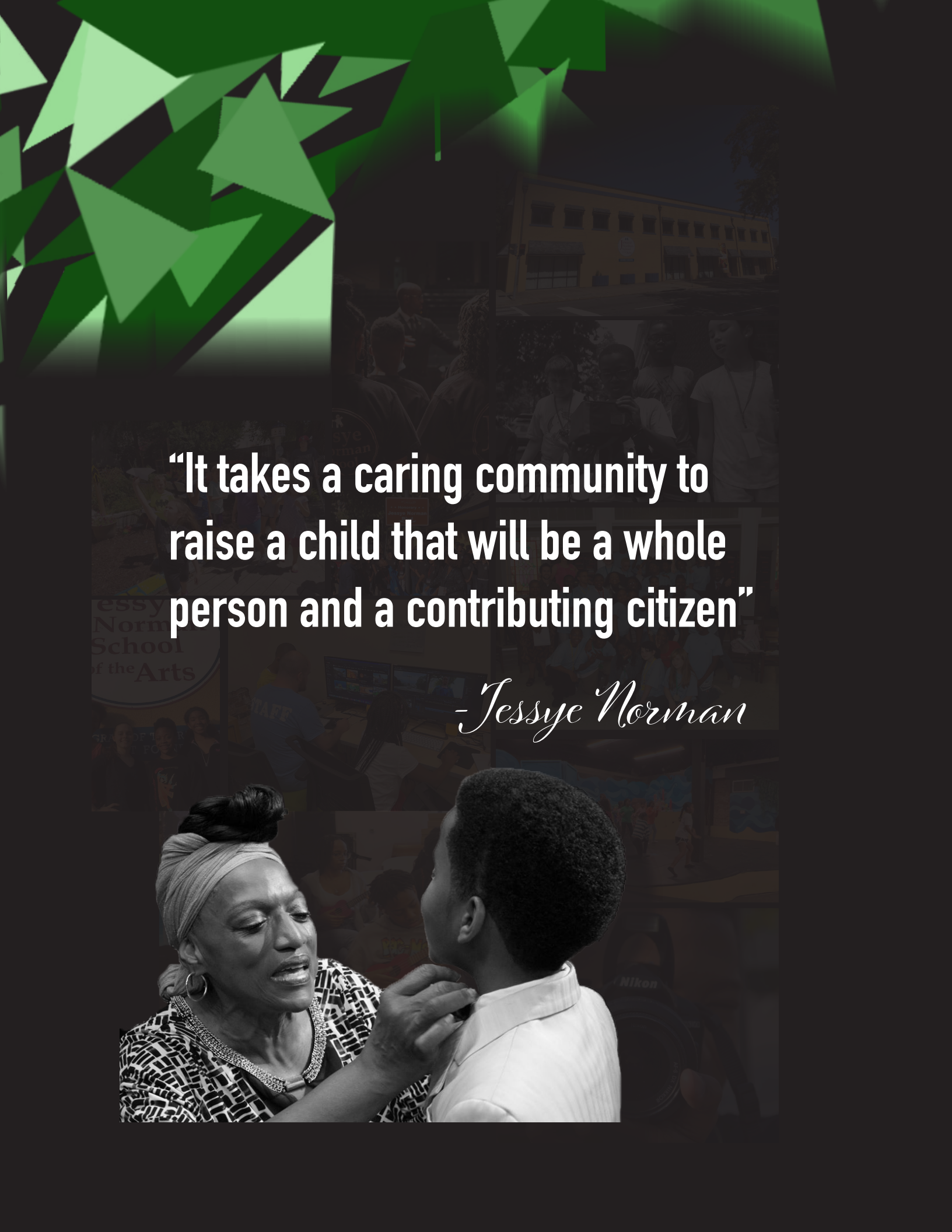
An original composition

I could've danced all night.....Asleif Willmer

From *My Fair Lady* by Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe

"Brindisi".....Armstrong, Willmer, Williams, and Brooks

From *La Traviata* by Giuseppe Verdi



**“It takes a caring community to
raise a child that will be a whole
person and a contributing citizen”**

-Jessye Norman



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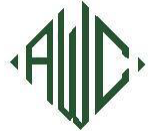
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Special thanks to the following organizations and individuals for supporting arts and culture in the CSRA!

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To all who have donated at any level, volunteered their time, or have contributed to the growth of our school; It is because of you that we are able to serve our community through the transformative power of the arts. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts!

How can You Help?

Visit thejnsa.org to make monetary donations, volunteer, and see our calendar of events

-Donate materials, instruments, supplies, or vehicles

Mail a check to 739 Greene Street, Augusta Ga, 30901- Payable to JNSA

Say something nice about us on social media:

IG: @thejnsa

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“My son thoroughly enjoys going to JNSA and has made lasting friends there. He feels comfortable being himself and enjoying the arts knowing that his friends there not only support his interest, but also share in his enthusiasm. JNSA is truly the highlight of his days!”

-Kimberly Norville, JNSA Parent

“The Jessye Norman School of the Arts created so many friendships, memories, and bonds throughout my time there. The school broke me out of a shell and allowed for me to grow as a person. To create, learn, and be my best. Most importantly, the life lessons I’ve learned from all the teachers and staff during my time as a student and as a teacher will forever remain true in my heart. I carry their words with me and strive to reflect them daily. JNSA has taught me integrity, discipline, and respect. Three key traits that I use to this day in my art, work, and life.”

-Sam Cunningham, Alumni and Teacher

“The generosity, expertise of the staff and artistic collaboration has been an important part of the survival of our organization.”

-Scott Seidl, Augusta Players

“Not only has JNSA been an instrumental part of my artistic growth, but my personal as well. I have been loved on and cared for in so many ways. The constant grace for learning and uplifting makes me feel welcomed. I have had many opportunities to develop my craft as well. I’m beyond grateful for the school, staff, and community.”

-Kiara Iman, Actress/Director, Intern

“It changed me and my siblings’ life! My first class was great and was absolutely worth the excitement! There were many classes to choose from and my favorite was visual arts. My sister and brother also enjoy being students here.”

-Delilah Curry, Current Student

The JNSA Creed

*I represent something larger than
myself
In everything I do
and In Everything I say.*

*I represent myself,
My family
My school
And the Jessye Norman School of
the Arts.*

*I Will strive to bring honor to all
that I represent
By doing only my best
Saying only my best
and being only my best.*

*I am a student of the Jessye Norman
School of the Arts!*

-Written by Russell Joel Brown

www.thejnsa.org