

# UMS ANNOUNCES DIGITAL RESIDENCIES, COHORT OF ARTIST PARTNERS

## Six Artist-Driven Digital Projects Will Take Place Over Next Year

### Artists to Participate in Two Digital Residency Kickoff Events

Tuesday, September 29 at 5:30 pm ET

Wednesday, September 30 at 12 noon ET

*Available on demand after the live event*

ANN ARBOR, MI (September 28, 2020) — The **University Musical Society** announces its full cohort of Digital Artist Residency artists, each of whom will explore timely themes through an array of new creative projects being developed specifically for the digital frame. The six artist-led projects will connect artists to audiences in brand new ways, from rarely visible behind-the-scenes creative development all the way to presentations of finished works, some of which will be experienced digitally and some, eventually, to in-person audiences. The projects will be presented in various stages of creative development over the course of the next year. Participating artists will also connect to audiences, including students, faculty, and the broader community, through informal conversations, participatory experiences, discussions about the creative process, and other activities. Information about all of the projects will continue to be updated at [ums.org/digitalresidencies](https://ums.org/digitalresidencies).

The UMS Digital Artist Residencies launch with two events that feature the artists in conversation, on **Tuesday, September 29 at 5:30 pm** and **Wednesday, September 30 at 12 noon**, both available at [ums.org](https://ums.org). These events will allow viewers to meet each artist and learn more about their residencies, how they are responding to current events, and how that translates into creating art that can be experienced in both the digital and live performance spaces. Conversations will be available on demand after the initial live events at [ums.org/digitalresidencies](https://ums.org/digitalresidencies). Full details about each event are listed at the end of this release.

The six participants in the Digital Artist Residency cohort include:

- Actor **WENDELL PIERCE**, whose residency will explore social justice, anti-racism, and the Black canon of performance work. Among the most ambitious of Pierce's projects will be the

production, filming, and release of a digital presentation of the recent American play, *Some Old Black Man* by James Anthony Tyler, which explores race in America through the lens of interpersonal and intergenerational relationships.

- Lebanese composer and pianist **TAREK YAMANI** and the Chicago-based **SPEKTRAL QUARTET**, who will join forces to explore the junctures between Western Classical, jazz, and traditional Arab music, resulting in a new, evening-length commission. The residency brings these innovative artists together for the first time, allowing audiences to join on a journey of discovery, improvisation, and collaboration encompassing both traditional and contemporary performing arts from both Western traditions and the Arab diaspora.
- Flint-based musician and activist **TUNDE OLANIRAN**, who will activate a dynamic residency that features art-making across disciplines, community collaboration and co-creation, emergent technologies, and video animation. Through the introduction of four singles from Olaniran's forthcoming full-length album, audiences will be invited to participate in the creative process using building blocks developed by Olaniran and a cohort of creatives, remixing them to create new artistic outputs.
- Choreographer **CLEO PARKER ROBINSON**, who is celebrating the 50th anniversary of her Denver-based company Cleo Parker Robinson Dance. Robinson, will document, in collaboration with award-winning filmmaker Alan Domínguez, the creative process behind *The Four Journeys*, a new work that examines the confluence of culture in Mexico from its diverse indigenous heritage to more recent influences from Europe, Africa, and Asia. Audiences will get to know Robinson and her legacy as a Black artmaker, choreographer, and social activist, and as an active creator and collaborator whose current work leans into multiculturalism and intersectionality.
- Performance artist **BRIAN LOBEL**, who, along with artists **GWENETH-ANN RAND**, **ALLYSON DEVENISH**, and **NAOMI FELIX**, will playfully interrogate the idea of failure in art, in life, in public, and in private through an extension of his 2015 performance piece, *24 Italian Songs and Arias*. Audiences will be invited to upload recordings of themselves singing from the collection of well-known songs after which Lobel's work was named, ultimately curating a uniquely crowd-sourced digital performance archive. The residency will also examine bodily experience, illness, marginalization, and vulnerability.
- Mezzo-soprano **JOYCE DIDONATO**, who will use song as a lens through which to process and navigate the human experience in relation to current events and global concerns in real time. A

series of videos featuring DiDonato singing and in dialogue with people from a variety of different backgrounds will be the primary focus of a residency that casts a spotlight on the healing power of calling on great art from the past centuries to pass through challenging events of the present day. Expected themes such as grief, community, unity, patriotism, and nature will surely factor in as topics unveiling themselves in our current headlines. DiDonato's digital project is being developed in collaboration with Princeton University Concerts.

"As we face unprecedented challenges in presenting live, in-person work by artists, I'm absolutely thrilled that we will be investing in and working with this select group of artists over the course of the next year, to develop new work and to invite audiences into the process," said **UMS President Matthew VanBesien**. "Since our venues closed in March, we have been fully committed to exploring ways that we can continue to connect with our audiences and continue to support artists in their creative development. With this program, which is funded in part by a group of generous UMS board and board emeritus supporters, we are able to continue that work on both fronts."

**Wendell Pierce** noted, "I first got to know the staff at UMS about a year ago, and I'm so impressed by how they are thinking about their role in the community. It's truly an honor to be able to participate in this first Digital Artist Residency pilot, and also to connect with students and community members in Southeast Michigan. For me, the role of Art is to ignite public discourse. Art is where we come together as a community to confront who we are as a society, to decide what our values are, and then to act on them. I look forward to exploring these issues through the play that we'll be rehearsing in quarantine in Michigan this fall, and then to presenting it to what I hope will be a much broader audience."

"Ever since I started the journey of reimagining Arabic musical idioms within the framework of jazz harmony, it's been a wish of mine to conceptualize these sounds into the world of chamber music," said **Tarek Yamani**. "It's such a thrill that this will now be possible through the UMS Digital Artist Residency, and with none other than the genre-bending Spektral Quartet."

**Tunde Olaniran** added, "Artists are experiencing a continuum of challenges and opportunities to their process. Inside and through incredible social upheavals, reawakenings, and uncoverings, the emotional lives and needs of an audience (as well as the artist) still exist. During the digital residency, I'm trying to explore how artists can show up right now, without assuming we are the representative or surrogate for

any movement, but still reflecting the emotions that have the potential to exist inside of any particular moment.”

## **Digital Artist Residency Kickoff Events**

Part 1: Tuesday, September 29 at 5:30 pm (with Wendell Pierce, Cleo Parker Robinson, and Tunde Olaniran)

Part 2: Wednesday, September 30 at 12 noon (with Joyce DiDonato, Brian Lobel & Gweneth-Ann Rand, and Tarek Yamani & members of the Spektral Quartet)

Connect via [ums.org/digitalresidencies](https://ums.org/digitalresidencies).

*Both events will be streamed live on YouTube and Facebook and will be available on demand at [ums.org/digitalresidencies](https://ums.org/digitalresidencies) immediately after the live conversation.*

UMS's Digital Artist Residencies are made possible with support from:

Lead Presenting Sponsors **Michigan Engineering** and **Tim and Sally Petersen**

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## **ABOUT THE PARTICIPATING ARTISTS**

Actor **WENDELL PIERCE** is a television and film actor who grew up in New Orleans before attending The Juilliard School for drama. He has appeared in over 30 films and 50 television shows, as well as dozens of stage productions. As a television actor, he became known for his roles as Bunk Moreland in *The Wire* and trombonist Antoine Batiste in *Treme*, as well as portraying James Greer in *Tom Clancy's Jack Ryan*. He had roles in the films *Malcolm X*, *Selma*, and *Ray*. In 2019, he performed the lead role of Willy Loman in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* on London's West End, a role for which he received a nomination

for the Olivier Award for Best Actor. Pierce will make his UMS debut with this residency, where he will explore themes of social justice, anti-racism, the Black canon of performance work, New Orleans heritage, and jazz.

Lebanese pianist and composer **TAREK YAMANI** was scheduled to make his UMS debut in March 2020, just two days after the University of Michigan canceled all performances and gatherings due to the coronavirus pandemic. Yamani teams up with the Chicago-based **SPEKTRAL QUARTET**, a string quartet that actively looks for connections between traditional repertoire and contemporary works. Since its inception in 2010, the Grammy-nominated Spektral has become known for creating seamless connections across the centuries. UMS was pleased to bring these two curious artists together to explore collaboration across disciplines, with a particular focus on Arab instrumental and vocal music and improvisation, as well as mentorship and apprenticeship in the performing arts.

Born in Nigeria, Flint-based performer and activist **TUNDE OLANIRAN** is a beloved fixture of the Detroit music scene and first got to know UMS in February 2019, when they hosted a performance by local musicians and performing artists as part of Yo-Yo Ma's Day of Action focused on the Flint community. They spent part of the 2019/20 season as UMS's research residency artist, where they focused on creating an experimental film series that would blend performance, music, and installation art. From that project, they began to develop ideas for a new, experimental approach to a traditional LP release: a series of modular, participatory, and experimental performance works that will be released over the course of the next season. Olaniran will explore art-making across disciplines and technologies, community collaboration and co-creation, emergent technologies, and social justice through this residency.

Choreographer **CLEO PARKER ROBINSON** is a cultural ambassador and the founder, artistic director, and choreographer of the 50-year-old Denver-based company Cleo Parker Robinson Dance. As a Black artmaker, social activist, and community leader, she has been recognized with the Colorado Governor's Award for Excellence, the Kennedy Center Medal of Honor, and countless other awards and citations for her contributions to the dance community. Robinson will explore themes of multiculturalism, Mexican indigenous culture, immigration, and the legacy of Black dance through this residency, and her process will be documented in a short film directed by award-winning filmmaker Alan Domínguez.

Theater and performance artist **BRIAN LOBEL** is an artist and scholar who attended the University of Michigan and is now based in the UK. He came to prominence as a performance artist in 2003 with his monologue piece *BALL*, which reflected on his cancer diagnosis when he was in his 20s. Since that time, he has performed at the Sydney Opera House, the National Theatre, and Harvard Medical School, exploring the intersections of health, illness, disability, and medical research. His most recent work includes *BINGE*, a one-on-one performance that takes the solitary experience of binge-watching television shows and transforms it into an opportunity to figure out where we are and how to connect; *24 Italian Songs and Arias*, which explores personal and professional failure; and *Fun with Cancer Patients*, which provides participants an opportunity to reflect on their experiences and wisdom. Lobel's unique biography and life experiences will lead to a further exploration of marginalization and vulnerability, the impact of intimate stories mixed with grander public narratives, and failure. For his UMS residency, Brian's collaborators are the British soprano **GWENETH-ANN RAND**, the Canadian musical director and recitalist **ALLYSON DEVENISH**, and the British contralto **NAOMI FELIX**. Collectively, they will create a digital archive featuring video recordings of each of the *24 Italian Songs and Arias* sung by a diverse array of singers who also share their own experiences of failure.

A multiple Grammy-winner, mezzo-soprano **JOYCE DIDONATO** is a transformative presence in the arts whose healing approach to music has taken her beyond the world's great opera stages to educational institutions, refugee camps, and maximum-security prisons. She has appeared on UMS concerts three times in the past several years, including in the lead role in Handel's *Ariodante*, with pianist Yannick Nézet-Séguin in Schubert's *Winterreise*, and, again with Nézet-Séguin and his Orchestre Métropolitain de Montréal in November 2019. Through this residency, she will explore the relevance of classical music and song, as well as artists' responses to current events past and present. She is an exclusive recording artist with Erato-Warner Classics, which is proud to be associated with this innovative project.

## **ABOUT UMS**

A recipient of the 2014 National Medal of Arts, UMS (also known as the University Musical Society) contributes to a vibrant cultural community by connecting audiences with performing artists from around the world in uncommon and engaging experiences. One of the oldest performing arts presenters in the country, UMS is an independent non-profit organization affiliated with the University of Michigan, presenting over 70 music, theater, and dance performances by professional touring artists each season,

along with over 100 free educational activities. UMS is committed to bold artistic leadership, engaged learning through the arts, and access and inclusiveness. Since 1990, the organization has co-commissioned and supported the production of over 80 new or reimagined works. Matthew VanBesien became the organization's seventh president in July 2017.

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