



# James Carter Joins Symphony Tacoma for Saxophone Fusion

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Symphony Tacoma welcomes jazz saxophone virtuoso **James Carter** to the Pantages Theater on Saturday, April 20 as the guest soloist for Saxophone Fusion. The program presents compositions derived from diverse cultures that feature the luscious sounds of the saxophone with the rich harmonies of the orchestra.

Opening the program is Fanny Mendelssohn's Overture in C Major (1834). Although she wrote nearly 500 pieces of music, this work is her only-known full orchestral work. The sister of renowned composer Felix Mendelssohn, Fanny's ambitions were limited by the societal views of the time that deemed musical careers for women of wealth and status as inappropriate. Instead, she performed her original works to small gatherings in her salon, Sonntagskonzerte, which was well-known and highly-regarded for the originality and quality of the performances. A few of her compositions appeared in Felix's Op. 8 and Op. 9 collection of songs for voice and piano, but they were listed under his name.

Musicologists are still uncovering and attributing Fanny's music today. Because minimal effort was invested in preserving or studying her work, little is known about Overture in C Major. Its peaceful opening paves the way for very virtuosic runs in the strings. The piece never becomes brash, and for every majestic, showy passage, there is a light and restrained balance to counter it.

Francis Poulenc's satirical *Sinfonietta* (1947) represents works by Les Six, a group of young composers who sought to free French music from foreign domination and called for new music that would be fully French and anti-Romantic in its clarity, accessibility and emotional restraint in post-World War II Europe. Poulenc fulfilled these tenets in his composing, with many of his pieces drawing from Parisian cabarets and revues, making them accessible to the general public.

Poulenc's music is unique in that it often includes satirical mimicry and fluent melody. His *Sinfonietta* is no exception. Its first movement opens with a gruff musical idea that is not necessarily symphonic in construction but begins a succession of lyrical themes. The second movement, a scherzo, is the most light-hearted, echoing a style and mood reminiscent of Tchaikovsky and Mozart, whose happy music is a staple of classical literature. The final movement takes a turn, beginning with the gruff tone that Poulenc adopts when appropriating neoclassicism, but soon turns to light again in the true style of Poulenc.

The remainder of the program features James Carter on saxophone accompanying the orchestra on classical works with jazz influences. Darius Milhaud's *La création du monde* (1922-23) was inspired by authentic jazz he heard on the streets of Harlem during a concert tour in the early 1920s. The piece was originally

written for a ballet that portrayed the creation of the world based on African folk mythology. It uses saxophone to replace violas, and the soloistic treatment of the instruments evokes the sound of jazz bands. The incorporation of blues notes and melodies, syncopations, riffs and ensemble textures are stylized with neoclassical and other modernist traits. Milhaud's openness to foreign influences truly speaks to his unique style of composing. A multimedia film with art visuals-from African tribal sculptures to works by Picasso and Gauguin-accompany the piece.

Closing the concert is Puerto Rico native Roberto Sierra's Caribbean Rhapsody (2010). The result of a decade-long collaboration between Carter and Sierra, Caribbean Rhapsody marries classical and Latin jazz influences and showcases Carter's virtuosity. It draws on Sierra's memories of growing up in Puerto Rico and the music he heard on jukeboxes-from the sensuous opening boléro, to the Latin riffs reminiscent of son montuno with alternating reflective and spirited music. Sierra wrote the piece as a musical reunion for Carter and his cousin, violinist Regina Carter. Sierra was "curious to see the combination of James and Regina improvising together and also on two different instruments-the sax, basically from the jazz tradition, and the violin, the quintessential orchestral instrument." The resulting juxtaposition of saxophone and violin, viola, cello and bass is a refreshingly new hybrid of musical elements.

"When I first heard James Carter perform, a whole new set of possibilities opened up in my creative mind," says Sierra. "I realized that his extraordinary gifts as musician and improviser would be fertile ground for the collaboration that culminated in the writing of Caribbean Rhapsody. I think that what I write is expression that comes from my soul, and a reflection of my own life experiences...This rhapsody not only recalls memories of

tropical colors and sounds, but also exposes the pulse of life-the life that I knew growing up in Puerto Rico.”

Tickets range from \$24 to \$85 and are on sale through the Tacoma Arts Live box office. To order tickets, call 253-591-5894 or visit [symphonytacoma.org](http://symphonytacoma.org). Saxophone Fusion is sponsored by KeyBank, Marine Floats, South Sound Physical & Hand Therapy, Kareem Kandi World Orchestra, Northwest Public Broadcasting and KNKX.