

## ABOUT FALLEN PETALS & NAMELESS FLOWERS

*“In a shadowed corner of the American judicial system, the application of mandatory sentences of life without the possibility of parole has fallen upon very young offenders, disproportionately so upon young men of color. Against a backdrop of legal systems in Michigan and elsewhere still taking halting steps toward righting this wrong, *Fallen Petals of Nameless Flowers* combines personal accounts of formerly incarcerated individuals, original poetry by Robert Laidler, and an original music score by Jeff Scott to shine a brighter light on the human side of this issue.*

*The metaphors of flowers as men and petals as arms are used dramatically in the poetry, as well as the personal stories. This and the colorful instrumentation of the ensemble made for rich source material and composition tools for the score. It is the composer’s hope that this work will help to create a safe space for further discussion, action, and empathy.”*

- Jeff Scott, composer

Fallen Petals of Nameless Flowers is the outcome of a two-year collaborative effort at Chamber Music Detroit to highlight an important societal issue that began touching our organization directly two years before that. It was in the summer of 2018 that Bryan Jones joined the CM Detroit staff, a few weeks following his release after serving more than three decades of a life sentence that was imposed in his youth. Bryan's uncommon optimism and positive attitude affected us all deeply, and his generosity of spirit exhibited in the sharing of his personal story created in us a growing awareness of the human side of his experience. Bryan's story became for us an inspiring testament to the power of the human spirit, and his active involvement in supporting others similarly released helped us understand the importance of this work. The prospect of dramatizing and humanizing his efforts through a major new work of art became a high priority.

After many months of gestation and refinement, in early 2020 Chamber Music Detroit submitted an application to the National Endowment for the Arts. We proposed a series of facilitated interviews with persons in Bryan's orbit with similar experiences of youthful life incarceration. Bryan partnered with a creative writer whose role would be the creation of a libretto for the composition of a major work for a mixed chamber ensemble and spoken word. The project application was approved by the NEA,

and composer Jeff Scott and poet Robert Laidler were recruited as creative collaborators. Imani Winds, cellist Seth Parker Woods, pianist Cory Smythe, and Robert Laidler himself as poet/narrator were engaged for the world premiere. Bryan Jones has served as project director since the inception.

The narrative path of *Fallen Petals of Nameless Flowers* is based upon material from four interviews with recently released “juvenile lifers.” While its five movements follow actual experiences generically, the text includes direct quotations shared with Bryan and Robert by the interviewees. In this way, the work takes listeners into the courtroom, the crime scene, the prison yard; and more importantly, onto the emotional landscape of shock, pain, fear, grief, and remorse that characterizes lives so deeply wounded by the hopelessness of youthful life incarceration. The possibility of ultimate redemption – experienced so movingly by Bryan and others – is expressed in the final movement, “To Bloom Again.”



### **Jeff Scott, COMPOSER**

Jeff Scott is a French hornist, composer and educator. As a composer, he says, “I create works that I call ‘Urban Classical Music.’ It’s rooted in European traditions and informed by my African American culture. It is also unapologetically influenced by the cultural experiences of my diverse, urban environment upbringing. My mission is to broaden the scope of American music theory and composition, with the intention of introducing performers, teachers, students and audiences to the richness and value of our very own, American music.” <https://www.musicbyjeffreyscott.com/>



### **Robert Laidler, POET**

Robert Laidler is an assistant professor at Wayne State University, a graduate of the University of Michigan's Helen Zell Writing Program, and the author of a poetic libretto, *The Fallen Petals of Nameless Flowers*, which premiered at Chamber Music Detroit in 2022. Most recently he was a finalist for The 2023 National Poetry Series, and The Adrift Chapbook Contest. His poems can be found in *Missouri Review*, *Ilanot*, *Driftwood*, *Poet Lore*, *Oxford* and elsewhere.



## **Bryan Jones, PROJECT DIRECTOR**

Bryan Jones is familiar to Chamber Music Detroit patrons as our Box Office Manager. In addition to serving in an administrative capacity, Bryan played a crucial role in the genesis of “Fallen Petals of Nameless Flowers,” as he was able to offer his unique perspective and knowledge of the criminal justice system because of his personal life experiences. Bryan’s story is filled with tragedy, loss, and suffering the devastating consequences of breaking the law as a child and young man. His mother died when he was three; later he was to lose two siblings and his father. As a teenager he became a ward of the state, and by age twenty he was sent to prison for armed robbery and served 31 years. But instead of becoming embittered, Bryan worked hard, taking college courses, learning keyboard and music theory and improving his administrative skills. He eventually became the Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent of Michigan State Industries, which runs three large factories serving the State, and held that and other positions of responsibility until his release from prison in 2018.

Through his knowledge of the prison system and his contacts with several inmates he came to know well, Bryan helped identify and work with the individuals whose

stories are the basis for the text of Jeff Scott's new work. Today, Bryan continues to work for Chamber Music Detroit, is an apprentice electrician, takes long-distance bicycle trips in his spare time, and is serving as a teaching assistant for a sociology course at University of Michigan Dearborn this semester.

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS



### **Imani Winds**

Brandon Patrick George, FLUTE

Mekhi Gladden, OBOE

Kevin Newton, FRENCH HORN

Mark Dover, CLARINET

Monica Ellis, BASSOON

Celebrating over two decades of music making, the Grammy-

nominated Imani Winds has led both a revolution and evolution of the wind quintet through its dynamic playing, adventurous programming, imaginative collaborations and outreach endeavors that have inspired audiences of all ages and backgrounds.

The ensemble's playlist embraces traditional chamber music repertoire, and as a 21st century group, Imani Winds is devoutly committed to expanding the wind quintet repertoire by commissioning music from new voices that reflect historical events and the times in which we currently live.

Imani Winds regularly performs in prominent international concert venues, including Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, the Kennedy Center, Walt Disney Hall and the Kimmel Center. Their touring schedule has taken them throughout the Asian continent, Brazil, Australia, England, New Zealand and across Europe. <https://imaniwinds.com/>



### **Michael Braugher, NARRATOR**

A recent graduate of the Juilliard School, where he received the John Houseman Award for Excellence in Classical Theater. TV: *The Gilded Age*. Broadway: *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Off-Broadway: *Romeo y Julieta*. Guthrie Theater: *Hamlet*. Williamstown Theatre Festival: *Artney Jackson*, *Son Come Home*.



### **Seth Parker Woods, CELLO**

Hailed by *The Guardian* as “a cellist of power and grace” who possesses “mature artistry and willingness to go to the brink,” has established a reputation as a versatile artist straddling several genres.

<https://sethparkerwoods.com/>



### **Cory Smythe, PIANO**

Pianist Cory Smythe has worked closely with pioneering artists in new, improvisatory, and classical music, including saxophonist-composer Ingrid Laubrock, violinist Hilary Hahn, and multidisciplinary composers from Anthony Braxton to Zosha Di Castri. His own music “dissolves the lines between composition and improvisation with rigor” <https://corysmythe.com/>



## PANELISTS



### **Deborah LaBelle, ATTORNEY**

An attorney and writer whose advocacy focuses on the human rights of people in detention, the intersection of race and gender, and the rights of children in the criminal justice and education systems in the United States. In addition to her private practice, Ms. LaBelle is the Director of the Juvenile Life Without Parole Initiative for the ACLU of Michigan and Coordinator of Michigan's Juvenile Mitigation Access Committee. She has been lead counsel in over a dozen class actions that have successfully challenged policies affecting the treatment and sentencing of incarcerated men, women and children, utilizing a human rights framework. She has represented clients before the United States Supreme Court and in international forums with an integrated model for reform utilizing concurrent litigation, documentation and advocacy strategies.



**Jose Burgos** joined Campaign for the Fair Sentencing of Youth (CFSY) in October 2023. Before joining CFSY, Jose was a Reentry specialist assisting those coming home after decades of incarceration with Project Reentry at Michigan's State Appellate Defenders Office (SADO). As a former life-sentenced child and long-standing member of the Incarcerated Children's Advocacy Network (ICAN), Jose has been an avid champion of youth justice reform in the State of Michigan.



State Rep. **Amos O'Neal** is serving his second term representing the 94th House District. Rep. O'Neal continues to work for criminal justice reform. As chair of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Corrections, he continues to advocate for adequate funding for improved prison systems, well-trained corrections officers and beneficial prisoner support resources.



**Tina Olson** is the Juvenile Lifer Unit manager at the Michigan State Appellate Defender Office. Tina has litigated death penalty cases at trial and on appeal, and currently represents people sentenced as children to life without parole.



**Terrell Topps** is Program Coordinator for Wayne State University Educational Transition Coordination Program and an alumni with an M.S.W. He lectures for first-year students and works with adult learners navigating their way back into college. Terrell has personally navigated higher education pathways from community college to graduate school for 13 years. He is expertly positioned to identify and assess community and collegiate challenges that confront justice-impacted individuals post-incarceration. “Higher education was my means for never returning to prison, yet ironically it’s the reason I’ve returned.”