

NJYS HONORS BLACK HISTORY MONTH FEATURING MATTHEW WHITAKER AND GERSHWIN'S "RHAPSODY IN BLUE"

BY MABEL PAIS

The New Jersey Youth Symphony (NJYS) will present "Sound Beyond Sight," an inspiring Black History Month concert celebrating resilience, artistry, and inclusion on Sunday, February 15, 2026 at 2:30 p.m. at the Sieminski Theater, located on the campus of Fellowship Village, Basking Ridge, NJ.

Led by Helen H. Cha-Pyo, the NJYS Youth Symphony will welcome internationally acclaimed pianist Matthew Whitaker as guest artist. The program features George Gershwin's "Rhapsody in Blue" alongside the New Jersey premiere of "Electric Beauty" by Quinn Mason, one of today's most compelling young American composers.

Helen Cha-Pyo, Artistic Director & Principal Conductor said, "This concert represents everything we believe music can be — collaborative, inclusive, and deeply human. Our partnership with the Sieminski Theater allows us to co-present a concert that brings an extraordinary artist like Matthew Whitaker to our community, while also amplifying the powerful voice of a brilliant young composer, Quinn Mason. To unite these artists alongside organizations that support individuals who are visually impaired is truly meaningful. It is my hope that this concert goes far beyond an exciting performance and shows how music can connect people across lived experiences,

creating space for empathy, inspiration, and shared understanding."

"Sound Beyond Sight" is co-presented by Wharton Arts and the Sieminski Theater at Fellowship Village and reflects Wharton Arts' ongoing commitment to artistic excellence, community engagement, and inclusive programming.

CONCERT DETAILS

Date: Sunday, February 15, 2026
Time: 2:30 p.m.
Location: Sieminski Theater at Fellowship Village
8000 Fellowship Rd, Basking Ridge, NJ 07920. Phone: (908) 580-3800

TICKETS

Tickets can be purchased at WhartonArts.org. Adult tickets are at the regular price. Students & Seniors get a discount with valid ID.

MATTHEW WHITAKER

Blind since birth, GRAMMY-nominated Whitaker is a powerful advocate for accessibility in the arts. His appearance underscores the concert's broader mission of highlighting organizations that support individuals with visual impairments, including "The Seeing Eye" and "Bella Music Foundation for the Blind."

Jazz pianist, composer, and music advocate Matthew Whitaker will be

honored with Wharton Arts' Trailblazer Award at the upcoming "Arise to the Occasion Gala" on Friday, April 17, 2026, at the Hyatt Regency Morristown, 3 Speedwell Avenue in Morristown, New Jersey.

Whitaker has captivated audiences worldwide with his virtuosic keyboard and organ performances, appearing on major platforms including "Showtime at the Apollo," "The Today Show," "Ellen," and "60 Minutes." A versatile artist, he has scored the Emmy-nominated documentary "About Tomorrow," composed music for films such as "Starkeisha," and created works for the Alvin Ailey Dance Company's 2024-2025 season.

A true musical trailblazer, Matthew has collaborated with renowned artists including Jon Batiste, Christian McBride, Derrick Hodge, Regina Carter, and Anderson .Paak. He has performed with symphonies worldwide, including the Aspen Chamber Symphony and the National Arts Centre Orchestra in Canada, and has composed for the 82-piece Bulgarian Symphony Orchestra. His fourth album, "On Their Shoulders: An Organ Tribute" (2024), received an NAACP Image Award nomination for Outstanding Jazz Album in 2025, honoring the Hammond B-3 pioneers who shaped his sound.

NEW JERSEY YOUTH SYMPHONY



Matthew Whitaker

Credit: whartonarts.org

The New Jersey Youth Symphony (NJYS), a program of Wharton Arts, is one of the region's premier youth orchestral programs, providing advanced musical training and performance opportunities for talented young musicians from across New Jersey.

Through rigorous rehearsal, exceptional repertoire, and collaborations with distinguished guest artists, NJYS fosters artistic excellence, leadership, and a lifelong appreciation for music. The Symphony regularly presents innovative and meaningful programs that connect classical music to community, culture, and social impact.

NJYS INVITES YOUNG MUSICIANS AND THEIR FAMILIES TO EXPERIENCE THE EXCITEMENT OF MUSIC-MAKING

BY MABEL PAIS

The New Jersey Youth Symphony (NJYS), a program of Wharton Arts, invites young musicians and their families to experience the excitement of ensemble music-making during the "NJYS Open Rehearsals Week," taking place March 1-5, 2026.

Throughout the week, visitors are welcome to observe live rehearsals of any of NJYS's 15 ensembles, offering a rare behind-the-scenes look at how young musicians collaborate, learn, and grow under the guidance of NJYS's accomplished artistic staff. Open Rehearsals Week is designed for students in grades 2-11 who are curious about joining a youth orchestra or expanding their musical journey.

Attendees will have the opportunity to meet NJYS conductors, experience the rehearsal process firsthand, and explore how NJYS nurtures musical excellence, teamwork, and confidence in young performers.

Helen Cha-Pyo, Artistic Director and Principal Conductor said, "At the New Jersey Youth Symphony, we hold our students to the highest standards of musical excellence and artistry because they are capable of extraordinary things. At the same time, our core mission goes beyond performance. We want our students to experience the profound connection between music and life, and to understand the power of music as a force for service, empathy, and community building. Open Rehearsals Week is an open invitation to parents, educators, and students to step inside our rehearsal rooms, feel the joy of our community, and witness the 'serious fun' that happens when young people make music together with purpose, passion, and heart."

NJYS is one of New Jersey's premier youth orchestra programs, serving talented young musicians from across the region through a comprehensive range of ensembles and educational experiences. Open Rehearsals Week reflects NJYS's commitment to access,



Open Rehearsals week.

Credit: whartonarts.org

education, and artistic excellence.

REGISTRATION

Attendance is free, but advance registration is encouraged. Registration and additional information available at NJYS.org.

WHARTON ARTS & NEW JERSEY YOUTH SYMPHONY

Wharton Arts' mission is to offer accessible, high quality performing arts education that sparks personal growth and builds inclusive communities. Wharton Arts' vision is for a transformative performing arts education in an inclusive community to be accessible for everyone.

Wharton Arts is New Jersey's largest independent non-profit community performing arts education center serving over 2,000 students through a range of classes and ensembles.

With the belief in the positive and unifying influence of music and that performing arts education should be accessible to all people regardless of their ability to pay, Wharton Arts offers need-based scholarships.

Wharton Arts is located in Berkeley Heights, New Providence, and Paterson, NJ and reaches students from 12 counties. All of Wharton Arts' extraordinary teaching artists, faculty members, and conductors hold degrees in their teaching specialty and have been vetted and trained to enable our students to achieve their personal best.

The New Jersey Youth Symphony (NJYS), a program of Wharton Arts, provides exceptional orchestral and ensemble training to young musicians in grades 2-12. Through a wide range of ensembles, performances, and educational opportunities, NJYS fosters musical excellence, collaboration, and a lifelong appreciation for the arts.

The 15 ensembles of the New Jersey Youth Symphony, which serve nearly 600 students in grades 3-12 by audition, inspire young people to achieve musical excellence through high-level ensemble training and performance opportunities.

Mabel Pais writes on The Arts and Entertainment, Social Issues, Education, Business, Spirituality, Health and Wellness, and Cuisine.