



## ***Legendary Soprano Kathleen Battle to Make Debut at The Soraya with an LA Premiere!***

### ***Kathleen Battle: Underground Railroad – A Spiritual Journey***

**With Joel Martin, piano  
And LA's Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers**

**Thursday, March 29 at 8:00pm**

(Los Angeles, CA | January xx, 2017) American soprano Kathleen Battle's luminous voice has been called by *The Washington Post* "...without qualification, one of the very few most beautiful in the world." Yet beyond the glory of her singing, in a career filled with countless accolades, honors and major milestones, what has perhaps distinguished her most is her almost magical ability to create an unwavering emotional bond between herself, her music and her audience. On Thursday, March 29 at 8pm, that special bond will be on full display when Ms. Battle makes her debut at The Soraya with ***Kathleen Battle: Underground Railroad—A Spiritual Journey*** accompanied by pianist Joel Martin and the LA-based choir, The Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers.

"Kathleen Battle is an American treasure and we are delighted to present the Los Angeles premiere of her extraordinary piece honoring the legacy of the Underground Railroad," said Thor Steingraber, The Soraya's Executive Director. "The plight of people escaping slavery in this country is an indelible part of our history. This chapter of human migration—the journey of determined individuals seeking new opportunity or the plight of those tragically displaced—is as relevant a matter today as any time in history."

Tickets for ***Kathleen Battle: Underground Railroad—A Spiritual Journey*** priced from \$43-\$103, are now available at [ValleyPerformingArtsCenter.org](http://ValleyPerformingArtsCenter.org) or by calling (818) 677-3000. The Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts (The Soraya) is located on the campus of California State University, Northridge (CSUN), 18111 Nordhoff Street Northridge, CA 91330-8448, at the corner of Nordhoff and Lindley.

#### **About *Kathleen Battle: Underground Railroad – A Spiritual Journey***

*Kathleen Battle: Underground Railroad—A Spiritual Journey* is a program of music inspired by the journey to freedom along the Underground Railroad, the 19th-century network of safe houses that

allowed African-Americans to escape from slavery. Ms. Battle said. "Spirituals have the power to uplift and to heal, and we certainly need that in today's world. This is a program, which brings together my musical background and my cultural heritage.

The concert program will feature numerous well-known Spirituals, gospel and traditional pieces, including "Lord, How Come Me Here?," "Go Down, Moses," "Wade in the Water," "Roll, Jordan, Roll," "City Called Heaven," "Over My Head," "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot," "I Don't Feel No-Ways Tired," "Farther Along," "Fix Me, Jesus," "Balm in Gilead," "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn You Me Roun'," "Let Us Break Bread Together," "He's Got the Whole World in His Hand," "Gospel Train," "Every Time I Feel the Spirit," and the anthem "Lift Every Voice and Sing."

In writing about Ms. Battle's performance at the Metropolitan Opera in 2016, *The New York Times'* Anthony Tommasini said, "Ms. Battle sang with remarkable freshness and beauty...she sent high phrases soaring and sang with ethereal elegance. These spirituals clearly touch her deeply. The focus of the program was the Underground Railroad, the secret network of "conductors" and "pilots" who, at enormous risk, helped thousands of slaves in the South find safe havens and nighttime routes to freedom in the North. The final standing ovation was tumultuous."

In the program notes, Janet E. Bedell writes, "the Underground Railroad was a secret organization. To this day, no one knows exactly how it was organized and how many people worked for it. This was intentional, for using this road to freedom was highly dangerous for both slaves and the people who assisted them. The Fugitive Slave Law of 1793 made it a crime for slaves to leave their masters, and a yet tougher revision of the law passed in 1850 required that courts and police return escaped slaves—even if they had been free for years—to their owners. Since escaping to the North therefore no longer remained a safe option, ex-slaves were only fully protected if they continued to Canada. Slave catchers operated throughout the country, often accompanied by specially trained bloodhounds; they were ruthless and well paid for their work. Those who were caught aiding the fugitives could be financially ruined and, if they were African Americans, sold into slavery themselves.

It is estimated that more than 3,000 individuals were active in helping the fugitives, among them such remarkable African-American leaders as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman, both born into slavery in Dorchester County, Maryland.

A few lucky fugitives were placed by sympathetic transport officials and captains on stagecoaches or ships, but most made the arduous journey entirely on foot. Usually moving at night, they were taught to follow the North Star to keep traveling in the right direction; thus, Frederick Douglass named his pioneering African-American newspaper *The North Star*.

Many spirituals contained coded language that alerted slaves to leave the plantation, to find their way to a safe station, and to watch out for slave catchers in the neighborhood.

In her book "The Music of Black Americans," Eileen Southern eloquently sums up the role of music in the lives of African-American slaves: "Music was a primary form of communication for the slaves, just as it had been for their African forebears. Through the medium of song, the slave could comment on his problems and savor the few pleasures allowed him; he could voice his despair and his hopes, and assert his humanity in an environment that constantly denied his humanness. As in the African tradition, the songs of the slaves could tell his history and reveal his everyday concerns." Today, the religiously inspired songs of the slaves are known as "spirituals."

As African-American solo vocalists such as Marian Anderson and Roland Hayes finally made their way into concert halls in the early 1900s, they usually ended their programs with a group of

spirituals. Often these used concert arrangements created by Harry T. Burleigh, also known as the man who inspired the slow movement of Dvořák's "New World" Symphony, with its plaintive melody in spiritual style. These haunting songs have endured, both as treasures of American music and as an important piece of the country's history.

### **About Kathleen Battle**

Soprano Kathleen Battle's luminous voice has been called "...without qualification, one of the very few most beautiful in the world" (*The Washington Post*). Yet beyond the glory of her singing, in a career filled with countless accolades, honors and major milestones, what has perhaps distinguished her most is her almost magical ability to create an unwavering emotional bond between herself, her music and her audience.

In her youth, this native of Portsmouth, Ohio, the youngest of seven children, sang in church and school, and envisioned a future as a music teacher. Fortunately for audiences around the world, she found other ways to share her love of music—and through her natural gifts, innate intelligence, and hard work, her soaring voice has carried her to the heights of the classical music world. Indeed, throughout a remarkable career that has brought her to the stages of the world's leading opera houses and major concert halls, critics have never tired of rhapsodizing over her limpid, unmistakable sound. In quite poetic terms, they have compared it to "the ethereal beauty of winter moonlight" (*The Washington Post*), "a paradoxical meeting of earth and sky" (*Philadelphia Inquirer*), and "cream from a miraculous, bottomless pitcher" (*The New York Times*).

The range of Ms. Battle's repertoire spans three centuries from the Baroque era to contemporary works. She has enjoyed some of her greatest successes in the opera house in repertoire ranging from Handel (Cleopatra in the Metropolitan Opera's premiere staging of *Giulio Cesare*) to Richard Strauss (Sophie, Zdenka, Zerbinetta). For her Covent Garden debut as Zerbinetta in *Ariadne auf Naxos*, Ms. Battle became the first American to be honored with a Laurence Olivier Award for Best Performance in a New Opera Production. She has similarly distinguished herself as one of our generation's finest interpreters of Mozart (Susanna, Despina, Pamina, and Zerlina), as well as the bel canto operas of Rossini (*Il Barbiere di Siviglia*) and Donizetti (*L'Elisir d'Amore*, *Don Pasquale*, *La Fille du Regiment*). In the words of critic Tim Page, "Miss Battle's natural territory is music of sweetness, serenity, and girlish ecstasy. Within this repertoire she is all but unequaled."

In recital, Kathleen Battle, the winner of five Grammy awards, has mesmerized audiences around the globe with her unique artistry and vocal beauty. Of her Carnegie Hall recital debut, *New York Newsday* declared, "In an age when the vocal recital has practically gone the way of the dinosaur, this was a thrilling case for its return." For the CD of this recital, released on DG, Ms. Battle received one of three Grammy Awards for Best Classical Vocal Soloist; Ms. Battle has won a total of five Grammy Awards.

Kathleen Battle's gifts as a singer extend beyond the realm of classical music. Her work as a great interpreter of spirituals is documented on a joint recital with Jessye Norman, *Spirituals in Concert* (DG). Her pure emotional power in this music of joy and sorrow cuts through all cultural boundaries. As the *Vienna Kurier* put it, "Kathleen Battle sang so beautifully in the spiritual 'Heaven is one beautiful place,' she came pretty close to heaven."

Ms. Battle drew considerable attention with the world premiere of *Honey and Rue*, a song cycle with music by Oscar and Grammy-winner composer André Previn and lyrics by Nobel and Pulitzer Prize-winning author Toni Morrison, commissioned for Ms. Battle by Carnegie Hall on the event of their 100th anniversary. Since then, she has performed the work with leading orchestras and in recital throughout the world. The *Los Angeles Times* called her performance of this work

"spellbinding," while the Cincinnati Herald remarked, "her voice was like the ebb and flow of the seas as an almost sacred silence enclosed the auditorium." The recording of this cycle was released by DG, on a disc which also includes Barber's *Knoxville: Summer of 1915* and arias from Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*.

Always seeking to expand her artistic horizons, Ms. Battle was joined by leading jazz musicians for her first crossover album, *So Many Stars* (Sony Classical), a collection of lullabies, spirituals, and folksongs. Commenting on her extraordinary gifts as a jazz artist, The Detroit News noted, "When Battle and her core jazz trio held the stage, the musical splendor was almost more than the ear could take in." Since her student years, Kathleen Battle has collaborated with colleagues who rank among the world's most talented musicians. She has been a favorite soloist with the world's leading orchestras and esteemed conductors such as Herbert von Karajan, Sir Georg Solti, Riccardo Muti, James Levine, Claudio Abbado, Lorin Mazell, Seiji Ozawa, Leonard Slatkin, and Sir Neville Marriner. Her partnerships with soprano Jessye Norman, tenors Luciano Pavarotti and Plácido Domingo, violinist Itzhak Perlman, trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, guitarist Christopher Parkening, flautists Jean-Pierre Rampal and Hubert Laws, and the late saxophonist Grover Washington, Jr., to name but a few, are documented on numerous recordings and video discs.

Kathleen Battle has established herself as a distinguished recording artist through a wide range of releases encompassing complete opera, concert, choral and solo albums on all major labels. Memorable concerts recorded live and now available on CD and home video include Mozart's Coronation Mass from the Vatican and the 1987 New Year's Concert, both with Herbert von Karajan conducting; the CDs are on the DG label with the video versions on Sony.

Her performance of the title role in the DG recording of Handel's *Semele*, with Marilyn Horne, Samuel Ramey, and John Nelson conducting, earned Ms. Battle a fifth Grammy Award. This recording commemorates a now legendary concert performance of Handel's masterpiece, starring Ms. Battle and virtually the same cast as the recording, which created such a sensation that Carnegie Hall recognized it as one of its one hundred milestones during its centennial year.

Kathleen Battle has made immeasurable contributions as an ambassador for classical music, performing for Presidents and dignitaries, and attracting diverse new audiences through television broadcasts of her operas and concerts, as well as through appearances on popular network talk shows. Her performance on the PBS broadcast of the Metropolitan Opera's 1991 season opening gala won her an Emmy for Outstanding Individual Achievement in a Classical Program on Television.

A documentary film on the recording of Sony's Baroque Duet album with Wynton Marsalis and John Nelson conducting the Orchestra of St. Luke's was nominated for an Emmy. Ms. Battle's critically acclaimed "Metropolitan Opera Presents" performances of Mozart's *Die Zauberflöte*, Donizetti's *L'Elisir d'Amore*, and Rossini's *Il Barbiere di Siviglia* are available on DG VHS and DVD, while Sony has captured her Zerlina in Karajan's production of *Don Giovanni* at the Salzburg Festival as well.

Praised for the keen intelligence, which informs her musical sensitivity, Ms. Battle earned both her Bachelor and Master degrees from the College Conservatory of Music, University of Cincinnati. She has been awarded eight honorary doctoral degrees—from her Alma Mater, the University of Cincinnati; Westminster Choir College in Princeton, New Jersey; Ohio University; Xavier University in Cincinnati; Amherst College; Seton Hall University; Wilberforce University, Ohio; Manhattanville College; and the Shawnee State University.

In honor of her outstanding artistic achievements, Ms. Battle was inducted into the "NAACP Image Award Hall of Fame", and in 2002 into the "Hollywood Bowl Hall of Fame". She is the first recipient of the "Ray Charles Award" bestowed upon her by Wilberforce University. Heady accomplishments indeed for an artist whose earliest connection to music was simply feeling "blessed to have a voice that somebody else wanted to hear."

### **About The Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers**

The Albert McNeil Jubilee Singers, a traveling company of 12 to 18 and a resident group of 29, have garnered international acclaim and focused worldwide attention on the vast body of folk music termed "African-American." In 1968 the Singers undertook their first European tour. Today, after 18 sold-out European tours, 12 tours of the United States and Canada, tours of the Middle and Far East, Africa and South America, they are among the most honored singing ensembles in the world. They were selected three times to serve the U.S. State Department and USIS Cultural Exchange Program in areas of the world, known in those days as "behind the Iron Curtain," including East Germany, Hungary, Romania, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Iran, India, North and West Africa, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates.

Founder-Director Albert McNeil is well-known to the national choral community, having been honored on four occasions with "Command Performances" before the prestigious American Choral Directors Association in 1981 in New Orleans, in 1985 at their Salt Lake City convention at their convention and their 1997 convention in San Diego, California at Los Angles during the ACDA Western Division Convention held on the campus of Loyola-Marymount University campus.

The Jubilee Singers were invited to sing for Pope John Paul II during his 1987 visit to the singers' home-base, Los Angeles. The Singers were headliners at the First Choral Festival in Jaffa, Israel in 1988. On Martin Luther King, Jr. Sunday the following year, they performed with the world-famous Mormon Tabernacle Choir on the program aired by CBS-TV. They have had collaborative concerts with the Los Angeles Master Chorale, the Dale Warland Singers, Chanticleer, the Vancouver Chamber Choir, and Pro Musica of El Paso. The Singers made their first Far East Tour of Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan. That season they went on to Spain to complete concerts at the XXIII Semana de Musica de Camara in Segovia, in the Real Coliseo Carlos III in El Escorial, performing not only their regular fare of Spirituals, but the Siglo de Oro Espanol (Renaissance music of Victoria and Morales).

### **About Joel A. Martin, piano**

Joel A. Martin's classical piano career spans 40+ years, including solo performances with the New York Philharmonic, Philadelphia Orchestra, Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Delaware Symphony Orchestra, New Hampshire Festival Orchestra, Springfield (Massachusetts) Symphony Orchestra, and Hartford Symphony. He has given recitals at Purchase College Performing Arts Center, Severance Hall, Phillips Collection, Guggenheim Museum, Kennedy Center, New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival, Kaukametsa Hall in Finland, and L'Opéra Comique in Paris in a command performance for French President François Mitterrand. He has performed on stage or in the pit for Broadway shows *The Full Monty*, *The Wild Party* with Eartha Kitt, and *The Ride Down Mount Morgan* with Patrick Stewart, and he was the Assistant Pianist for the Tony Award-winning musical *Caroline, or Change*.

From 2006–2010, Mr. Martin was the five-time Gold Medal pianist-arranger-collaborator for the American Traditions Competition for Singers in Savannah, Georgia, before elevating to a two-year stint as Artistic Director. In the last couple of years, he has collaborated with and/or written music for Grammy Award-winners Brooklyn Youth Chorus, cellist Eugene Friesen of the Paul Winter Consort, and Rock and Roll Hall of Famer Jaimoe of the Allman Brothers, among many other artists.

In October 2013, Mr. Martin produced his seventh Jazzical CD, *Jazzical Meets Menken*, honoring multiple Oscar-Grammy-Tony Award-winning Disney/Broadway composer Alan Menken.

With stellar performances by Broadway legends Liz Callaway, Amanda McBroom, Christine Pedi, and the Gay Men's Chorus of Los Angeles, *Jazzical Meets Menken* included two world premieres penned by Alan Menken specifically for this CD. On July 18, 2014—the capstone event of International Mandela Day celebrations at the United Nations—Mr. Martin produced *Footsteps of Mandela*, an all-star tribute concert to Mandela at NYC's Riverside Church. He has since produced several critically acclaimed *Footsteps* concerts in West Palm Beach, Hartford, and Bridgeport. Plans for 2017 include a national tour of *Footsteps of Peace*, producing six CD projects for jazz and gospel singers, duo pianos, and cello-piano duo. He will release his eighth Jazzical CD, *Jazzical Rocks!*, featuring the Jazzical Symphony Orchestra in January, 2017 with a national tour to follow.

### **About The Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts (The Soraya)**

The Soraya opened its 2017-2018 season on September 16 with a performance of *AMADEUS Live* (Milos Foreman's 1984 Academy Award-winning Best Picture with live orchestra) with the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra and members of the LA Opera Chorus. The evening honored the Younes and Soraya Nazarian Foundation in recognition of the family's recent \$17 million gift that will rename VPAC as the Younes and Soraya Nazarian Performing Arts Center, known as The Soraya. The gift is one of the largest in the history of the California State University and the system's largest single gift to support the arts; gift to support the programming and operations of the award-winning Valley Performing Arts Center – which has become one of the cultural jewels of the region in the six years since it opened.

The 2017-18 Soraya season signals a new era for the premier event venue. Under the leadership of Executive Director Thor Steingraber, the renamed Younes and Soraya Nazarian Performing Arts Center expands its programming and outstanding multidisciplinary performances. The mission of The Soraya is to present a wide variety of performances that not only includes new and original work from the Los Angeles region but also work from around the world that appeal to all of LA's rich and diverse communities.

Located on the campus of California State University, Northridge, The Soraya's season offers a vibrant performance program of nearly 50 classical and popular music, dance, theater, family and international events that will serve to establish The Soraya as the intellectual and cultural heart of the San Fernando Valley, and further establish itself as one of the top arts companies in Southern California. The award-winning, 1,700-seat theatre was designed by HGA Architects and Engineers and was recently cited by the Los Angeles Times as "a growing hub for live music, dance, drama and other cultural events."

### **Calendar Listing for Kathleen Battle: Underground Railroad—A Spritual Journey**

**Date:** Thursday, March 29 at 8:00pm

**Venue:** The Younes and Soraya Nazarian Center for the Performing Arts (The Soraya)  
18111 Nordhoff Street, Northridge, CA 91330

**Tickets:** **Prices** Starting at \$43. Prices subject to change.  
**By Phone** (818) 677-3000  
**Online** [ValleyPerformingArtsCenter.org](http://ValleyPerformingArtsCenter.org)

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