



HOPKINS CENTER
FOR THE ARTS

presents

An Evening with Gregory Porter

Gregory Porter *vocals*

Chip Crawford *piano*

Emanuel Harrold *drums*

Tivon Pennicott *tenor saxophone*

Jahmal Nichols *bass*

Ondrej Pivec *Hammond organ*

Post-performance discussion with Chip Crawford

Funded in part by the Class of 1961 Legacy: The American Tradition in Performance Fund, the Bob Gatzert 1951 Jazz Series Fund for the Hopkins Center, Hopkins Center Members, and a Gift of Robert O. Wetzel '76 and Brenda Mainer

Tue • February 13, 2018 • 7 pm
Spaulding Auditorium • Dartmouth College

Program

This performance is presented without intermission.

Selections will be announced from the stage.

About the Artists

Gregory Porter vocals says the influence of Nat King Cole on his life and music runs deep, a through line that reaches back into some of his earliest childhood memories, and culminates in the release of the two-time Grammy-winning vocalist's stunning fifth studio album *Nat King Cole & Me*, a heartfelt tribute to the legendary singer, pianist and Capitol recording artist. "He was one of a kind. He left such great music—such beautiful things to listen to that you can't help but be influenced by that extraordinary timbre, style and ultimate cool," Porter enthuses.

"My mother said I wrote this little song when I was 5 and put it on a tape and played it for her when she came home from work," recalls Porter. Upon hearing it his mother, Ruth Porter, exclaimed "Boy, you sound like Nat King Cole," a compliment that sent the curious young Gregory delving into her record collection.

"I remember thinking how strange that name was, going through her records, and first seeing his image: this elegant, handsome, strong man sitting by a fire, looking like somebody's daddy. Then I put the vinyl on the player and out of those speakers came that voice, that *nurturing* sound. It filled a void in me. My father wasn't in my life; he wasn't raising me; he wasn't showing any interest in me. So Nat's words, '*pick yourself up, dust yourself off, start all over again*'—all of these life lessons and words of wisdom were like fatherly advice. They were coming out of the speakers like Nat was singing those words just to me. I would listen to his albums and imagine that Nat was my father."

Porter's love for Cole's music blossomed so much that he adopted Cole as his surrogate father. After his role in the Tony-nominated musical *It Ain't Nothin' But the Blues*—but before rising to international acclaim in his

solo career thanks to his mellifluous baritone, poignant originals and invigorating concerts—Porter dramatized his deep appreciation for Cole in a semi-autobiographical musical, *Nat King Cole & Me*, which premiered in 2004.

"That musical was a way of me trying to find my father," Porter explains. "I wrote it after my father [Rufus Porter] had passed. The musical was of Nat King Cole; and half of the music was of my original writing. But the story is how I came to Nat's music in the absence of my father. So in a way, it was some self-prescribed, self-written therapy and emotional medicine for myself. It just so happened that 800 people came to see it a night. After the play, I felt a lighter feeling about my father and a deeper appreciation for both my mother and the great music of Nat King Cole."

That musical underpins Porter's third Blue Note Records release, *Nat King Cole & Me*, the follow-up to his Grammy-winning albums *Liquid Spirit* (2013) and *Take Me to the Alley* (2016), which established Porter as his generation's most soulful jazz singer-songwriter. "It's only natural that I go to the root of my inspiration and where I come from. And that root would be my mother and gospel music and Nat King Cole," Porter says.

With the help of six-time Grammy-winning arranger Vince Mendoza and a core band featuring pianist Christian Sands, bassist Reuben Rogers and drummer Ulysses Owens, Porter revisits some of Cole's most cherished classics such as "Smile," "L-O-V-E," "Nature Boy" and "The Christmas Song." Mendoza's lush arrangements, animated by the London Studio Orchestra, cushion Porter's brawny crooning to astonishing widescreen effect.

"Vince captured the delicate and powerful messages

About the Artists continued

in Nat's songs through his arrangements," Porter praises. "As a singer and carrier of the message, those messages are equally carried through the instrumentation. Vince just did an extraordinary job with the arrangements."

The album begins with Cole's signature hit, "Mona Lisa," which he recorded in 1950. Porter's assured, languid phrasing paired with Mendoza's cinematic arrangement, gives the classic newfound magnetism. A reading of the Charlie Chaplin standard, "Smile," which Cole recorded in 1954, follows as Porter imbues the melody and verses with all the sincere reassurance that he gained from Cole. Even before creating the musical *Nat King Cole & Me*, Porter sang "Smile" on the 1998 album *Hubert Laws Remembers the Unforgettable Nat King Cole*, which marked Porter's recording debut.

The sepia-toned allure continues with Porter's gorgeous rendering of "Nature Boy," which Cole recorded in 1948. Porter's measured singing magnifies the song's deep sense of longing and mystery. "In a way, there's a sweet, sophisticated sorrow in the song. And I was just a little boy when I first heard it, so I identified with this nature boy," Porter says.

Porter's core band lifts the mood with a lively makeover of "L.O.V.E.," which was the title-track of Cole's final studio album recorded in 1964. Sands, Rogers and Owens quicken the momentum, and just as Cole's version featured trumpeter Bobby Bryant, Porter's version features trumpeter and fellow Blue Note artist Terence Blanchard unfurling a glistening solo.

The singer demonstrates his acumen with singing in Spanish with his sensual take on "Quizas, Quizas, Quizas," a popular tune written by Cuban songwriter Osvaldo Farrés that Cole featured on his 1958 LP, *Cole Español*. The album reaches its most theatrical flair with the extravagant treatment of Cole Porter's "Miss Otis Regrets." Porter's voice bounces atop Mendoza's ebullient arrangement of "Pick Yourself Up," which Cole recorded with pianist George Shearing in 1961.

"When Love Was King" is the album's sole Porter composition, originally recorded on *Liquid Spirit*, and here underscored by Mendoza's suspenseful orchestral strings. "Of all the songs that I've written, 'When Love Was King' is probably one that's the most influenced by Nat," Porter explains. "Nat always chose these message songs—songs that left you with a thought that you'd want to carry throughout the entirety of your life."

"Nat was also very instrumental in me finding my voice through my own writing," Porter continues. "It wasn't until I wrote the musical that I was fit to call myself a songwriter. Before that, I would write different poems but they had no music. The musical was the first time that I had a vehicle to put my work in one place and say, 'this is what I did.' So that musical brought out my songwriting and the confidence to write other songs."

Sweet, sophisticated sorrow also permeates "The Lonely One," a tender ballad that appeared on Cole's 1957 LP, *After Midnight*, while another emotional lift follows with a rousing take on "Ballerina," which Cole recorded in 1957. Porter's yearning for his father becomes most vivid on the misty-eyed "I Wonder Who My Daddy Is," a tune that was recorded by Nat's brother, the vocalist Freddy Cole. "It was so interesting and strange that the message of this song, sung by Nat's brother, was essentially telling my story," Porter marvels.

"I went about selecting the songs like I always do—first in a very emotional way," Porter says. "I just gathered the songs that meant something to me over the years. There was a period in college when I had an injury to my shoulder and I needed music to soothe me at that time. So I ended up going back to Nat's records. Then I did the same thing during the passing of my mother. In a way, there's a familiarity and a calming effect to Nat's music. Recording Nat's music was very personal because I could hear and feel my mother. And I still feel myself searching for my father."

This is Gregory Porter's first engagement at the Hopkins Center for the Arts.

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Chip Crawford piano was born in North Carolina and studied music at Berklee College of Music, graduating in 1971. Crawford is the recipient of numerous composing awards including twice winning the North Carolina Jazz Composers Fellowship, and the International Songwriters Award for Jazz. He taught improv jazz at Duke University, and arranged for the Wilmington Symphony Orchestra and the Bella Russ National Orchestra.

Crawford has toured with the Four Tops, and recorded on "Keeper of the Castle" and "Ain't No Woman Like the One I Got" as well as Donald Byrd, recording "Love Byrd," produced by Isaac Hayes. He has also arranged for Miles Davis's producer, Teo Macero, featuring Wallace Rooney.

Emanuel Harrold drums began his professional drumming career at 17. Performing is all Harrold has known since childhood. A Native of St. Louis, he was born into a rich musical heritage, with ancestors dedicated to their craft, extremely talented and award-winning. Harrold graduated from the New School University in New York City in 2008 with his BFA and has been no stranger to the grind since arriving on the scene in that city. Harrold performs, records, and tours the world with a plethora of the greats such as James Spaulding, John Hicks, Ronnie Mathews, Donald Brown, Rene McLean, Roy Hargrove, Bill Saxton & Willie Akins, to name a few.

Currently touring globally with critically acclaimed and Grammy award-winning artist Gregory Porter, Harrold's drumming contributions can be heard on Porter's recordings "Water," "Be Good" and album *Liquid Spirit*. A genre-spanning talent that knows no bounds, Harrold has worked with hip-hop legends De La Soul (US), Damon Albarn (UK), Kids in The Hall (US), Tony Allen (Nigeria) and Hypnotic Brass Ensemble (US). He also has a production company, Key Kat Productions, with brothers Keyon and Jasson Harrold. Harrold draws profound inspiration from the freedom and spirit of music that speaks to audiences globally, along with the great enrichment of knowledge and insight drawn from virtuosic mentors such as Charlie Persip, Reggie Workman, Lewis Nash and Bernard 'Pretty' Purdie. His

distinct percussive sound is praised, awarded and recognized internationally.

Jahmal Nichols bass is also a composer, arranger and producer, and was born and raised in St. Louis. Nichols is from a rare breed of bassists able to go fluently from electric bass to acoustic bass on any genre of music. His goal ultimately is to bring the world a new sound and voice on the bass and provide a great musicianship to any artist that he works for as a sideman.

Nichols comes from a very musical family and was introduced to the bass at the age of 13, after years of watching his father play bass at church and for numerous local artists on the R&B scene. He started his own musical journey at Central Visual & Performing Arts High School and North Carolina Central University, where he majored in music. It was there he was introduced to the upright bass and later to the electric bass. From that point on, Nichols worked intensely on perfecting his craft. With 20 years of experience, he has shared the stage with artists from all over the world including Gregory Porter, Fontella Bass, Jon Faddis, Sean Jones, Terrell Stafford, Houston Person, Eric Roberson, Matt Wilson, Anat Cohen, Frank Foster, Julie Dexter, Anthony David and many more.

Nichols has released an album titled *2 Worlds 1 Mind* and has a current single out called "Whatever You Want."

Tivon Pennicott tenor saxophone was born and raised in Marietta, Georgia, in 1985. He began studying tenor saxophone in high school, garnering recognition early on as an outstanding soloist in the Lincoln Center's Essentially Ellington competition, as well as the Georgia All-state Jazz Band. In 2004 he relocated to Miami to study at the University of Miami where he had the opportunity to perform alongside artists such as Dave Liebman, Randy Brecker and Maria Schneider.

While still in college, Pennicott was invited to join the quintet of guitar legend Kenny Burrell. Pennicott would go on to appear on Burrell's 2008 live release, *Be Yourself*. Pennicott's continuing association with Burrell has led to numerous performance opportunities at many of the world's greatest jazz venues including Blue

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Note, New York City, Blue Note Tokyo, Billboard Live (Japan), Catalina's Jazz Club (Los Angeles), Yoshi's Jazz Club (San Francisco and Oakland, California), and Smalls Jazz Club alongside special guests like Stevie Wonder, Wynton Marsalis, and many others.

Pennicott moved to New York in 2009 and has since established himself as a talented young leader. He enjoys collaborating with a variety of bandleaders in their own tours as well as their recording projects. He's recorded on multiple Grammy-winning albums including on two-time Grammy winner Gregory Porter's albums *Be Good*, *Liquid Spirit* and *Take Me to the Alley*, as well as with two-time Grammy winner Esperanza Spalding's crossover success, *Radio Music Society*. He currently tours with Gregory Porter, the masterful drummer Al Foster, Roy Hargrove's RH Factor, Roy Hargrove Big Band, jazz songstress Nellie McKay, R&B crooner Joe Thomas and such central figures in the contemporary jazz scene as Ari Hoenig, E.J. Strickland, Marko Djordjevic, and many more. Pennicott's own endeavors as a leader showcase his tenacity as a player, while also providing a forum for his audacious compositions. His unique style incorporates his masterful attention to rhythm, tasteful melodic lines and a deep understanding of the importance of the groove. His maturity as a player extends far beyond his years, facilitating music that is refreshing, insightful and deliciously exciting. Pick up his debut album *Lover of Nature* via CD Baby, iTunes, Amazon, etc.

Ondrej Plvec *Hammond organ* was born and raised in the Czech Republic. He started playing music at the age of three as a classical pianist, but soon turned to jazz and began to play the Hammond organ in his teens. While still in his teens, he had begun studying with well-respected organists in Europe (Mike Carr and Alberto Marsico) and the US (Joey DeFrancesco, Sam Yahel, Pat Bianchi, Pastor Tyrone Holmes and Shedrick Mirchell). In 2007, he graduated from the Prague Post-Secondary Jazz College with a degree in jazz history, arranging, harmony and jazz piano performance. Plvec has performed with renowned jazz and R&B artists (Gregory Porter, Jason Marshall, Paul Bollenback, Nathaniel Townsley, Joel Frahm, Yvonne Sanchez, Christian Rover) at renowned venues all over the World (Symphony Space NYC, Bowery Ballroom NYC, Blues alley Washington DC, Sun-Set club Bei-Jing China, Blue Note Dresden Germany). His band has opened for Billy Cobham's Culture mix on their European tour and for The Robert Glasper Experiment. Plvec is a double recipient of a Grammy in his home-country and five other awards from abroad. He's recorded five albums under his own name and appeared on twenty-nine as an accompanist. He currently lives, performs and records in New York City, works as a minister of music at Antioch Baptist Church in Harlem and as an organist for the gospel choir of Marble Collegiate Church on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan.

Connecting Artists to the Community

While at Dartmouth, Gregory Porter's Music Director Chip Crawford will participate in a post-performance discussion. For more information on Hop Outreach & Arts Education, call 603.646.2010 or visit hop.dartmouth.edu/online/outreach.

Upcoming Events



Barbary Coast Jazz Ensemble

Taylor Ho Bynum, director

Fri • February 24 • 8 pm

New director Taylor Ho Bynum leads this student ensemble through exciting explorations of jazz past and present.



Daymé Arocena

Thu • April 12 • 7 pm

Dazzling young Havanan sings Afro-Cuban music suffused with jazz, soul and funk.



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