

Saturday, November 17, 2018 at 8pm  
Richardson Auditorium, Alexander Hall

**JAZZ**

at **PRINCETON**  
UNIVERSITY

presents

**SMALL GROUP I**

Rudresh Mahanthappa, Director

with special guest

**AMBROSE AKINMUSIRE, *Trumpet***

Will Grear '20, *Trumpet*

Alex Laurenzi '20, *Alto Saxophone*

Benny Rosenzweig '22, *Tenor Saxophone*

Sam Bartusek '20, *Guitar*

Phillip Taylor '21, *Piano*

Gus Allen '22, *Bass*

Maya Stepanksy '22, *Drums*

*Slightly Left of Sorrow's Song*

by Ambrose Akinmusire

*Dark Veil*

*Niagara part 1*

*Niagara part 2*

*Nul (novoid)*

*Philly Neg Stats*

*Sisirc*

*Web & Wash*

## ABOUT THE PROGRAM

### *Slightly Left of Sorrow's Song*

**AMBROSE AKINMUSIRE**

By Alexander Laurenzi '20 ©2018

“I generally don’t do these type of commissions because Du Bois as a historical figure is already associated with the sonic implications of his time.” When I asked Ambrose why he accepted Rudresh’s offer for this special commission and collaboration, he mentioned not only his history with Rudresh, but that he had personally reached a perhaps controversial opinion of Du Bois through his own studies of his work. He saw the commission as an opportunity to explore his personal critiques of Du Bois. His main question was: What does it mean to have distance from the subject of your work, especially when that subject is the community you come from? He said that he questions Du Bois’ ability to remove himself from his community, considering in that historical moment (just a generation removed from enslavement) if it is really possible to separate the academia from the experience. Compositionally, the suite is the manifestation of this very consideration: how can we as artists create work that is about the problems and experiences of our communities if we are creating distance between us, the artists, and the subjects of our work? Ambrose said he wants to create change within the art itself. While many artists write self-proclaimed protest music, framing their music as social or political commentary, Ambrose wants to cause emotional reactions that themselves manifest as the change. His music communicates urgency and situates himself at the center of the political and social change he seeks rather than as an authority from the distance. While Du Bois’ place in his historical moment, as an academic trailblazer to the degree that he created fields of American social science, may have forced him to wholly embrace his stature and thus his distance from the black community, I interpret Ambrose’s tribute as a response to Du Bois’ intellectual authority, building off of Du Bois’ work by reconnecting it to the source and examining it from the center of the black community.

## ABOUT THE GUEST ARTIST

Regarded as “one of the most talked-about names in contemporary jazz” (*NPR Music*), 35-year-old trumpeter **Ambrose Akinmusire** has proven himself an artist of rare ability and wide-ranging aesthetic interests.

In 2007 Akinmusire won the prestigious Thelonious Monk International Jazz Competition, decided by a panel of judges that included trumpeters Terence Blanchard, Quincy Jones, Herb Alpert, Hugh Masekela, Clark Terry, and Roy Hargrove. That year Akinmusire also won the Carmine Caruso International Jazz Trumpet Solo Competition and released his debut album *Prelude...To Cora* on the Fresh Sound label. He moved back to New York City and began performing with the likes of pianists Vijay Iyer, Aaron Parks, and Jason Moran, and bassist,

Esperanza Spalding. It was also during this time that he first caught the attention of another discerning listener, Bruce Lundvall, President of Blue Note Records.

Akinmusire's Blue Note debut *When The Heart Emerges Glistening* was released in 2011 to rave reviews. The *Los Angeles Times* praised his "chameleonic tone that can sigh, flutter, or soar," adding that "Akinmusire sounds less like a rising star than one that was already at great heights and just waiting to be discovered." *DownBeat* described his playing as "spectacular and not at all shy — muscular, driving, with a forward sound, pliant phrasing, and a penchant for intervallic leaps," concluding that "clearly something very special and personal is at work here, a vision of jazz that's bigger than camps, broader and more intellectually restless than blowing sessions." With his expansive new double-album, *A Rift in Decorum: Live at the Village Vanguard*, Akinmusire reaches a new pinnacle: he and his longtime bandmates Sam Harris (piano), Harish Raghavan (bass) and Justin Brown (drums) join a distinguished strata of jazz artists who have made live recordings in this hallowed New York City venue.

During his 15-year career, Akinmusire has paradoxically situated himself in both the center and the periphery of jazz, most recently emerging in classical and hip hop circles. He is on a perpetual quest for new paradigms, masterfully weaving inspiration from other genres, arts, and life in general, into compositions that are as poetic and graceful as they are bold and unflinching. His unorthodox approach to sound and composition make him a regular on critics polls and have earned him grants and commissions from the Doris Duke Foundation, the MAP Fund, the Kennedy Center, the Berlin Jazz Festival, and the Monterey Jazz Festival. While Akinmusire continues to garner accolades, his reach is always beyond himself, his instrument, genre, form, preconceived notions, and anything else imposing limitations.

Akinmusire is a rigorous practitioner with an uncompromising dedication to creation. "I've learned to accept the consequences of believing in invention and creativity. You're gonna be misunderstood. But my horse blinders have gotten a lot longer and a lot thicker over the years."

## **ABOUT THE PROGRAM DIRECTOR**

Hailed by *Pitchfork* as "jaw-dropping... one of the finest saxophonists going," alto saxophonist, composer, and educator **Rudresh Mahanthappa** is widely known as one of the premier voices in jazz of the 21st century. He has over a dozen albums to his credit, including the acclaimed *Bird Calls*, which topped many critics' best-of-year lists for 2015 and was hailed by *PopMatters* as "complex, rhythmically vital, free in spirit while still criss-crossed with mutating structures." He has been named alto saxophonist of the year for seven of eight years running in *Downbeat Magazine's* International Critics' Polls (2011-2013, 2015-2018), and for five consecutive years by the Jazz Journalists' Association (2009-2013) and again in 2016. He won alto saxophonist of

the year in the 2015-2017 *JazzTimes Magazine* Critics' Poll and was named the *Village Voice*'s "Best Jazz Artist" in 2015. He has also received the Guggenheim Fellowship and the Doris Duke Performing Artist Award, among other honors, and is currently the Anthony H. P. Lee '79 Director of Jazz at Princeton University.

Born in Trieste, Italy to Indian émigrés in 1971, Mahanthappa was brought up in Boulder, Colorado and gained proficiency playing everything from current pop to Dixieland. He went on to studies at North Texas, Berklee, and DePaul University (as well as the Stanford Jazz Workshop) and came to settle in Chicago. Soon after moving to New York City in 1997 he formed his own quartet featuring pianist Vijay Iyer. The band recorded an enduring sequence of albums, *Black Water*, *Mother Tongue*, and *Codebook*, each highlighting Mahanthappa's inventive methodologies and deeply personal approach to composition. He and Iyer also formed the duo Raw Materials.

Coming deeper into contact with the Carnatic music of his parents' native southern India, Mahanthappa partnered in 2008 with fellow altoist Kadri Gopalnath and the Dakshina Ensemble for *Kinsmen*, garnering wide acclaim. *Apti*, the first outing by Mahanthappa's Indo-Pak Coalition (with Pakistani-born Rez Abbasi on guitar and Dan Weiss on tabla), saw release the same year; *Agrima* followed nine years later and considerably expanded the trio's sonic ambitions.

Mahanthappa has also worked with drummer, Jack DeJohnette, bassist, Mark Dresser, pianist, Danilo Pérez, Arturo O'Farrill's Afro-Latin Jazz Orchestra, the collaborative trios MSG and Mauger, the co-led quintet Dual Identity with fellow altoist Steve Lehman, and another co-led quintet with fellow altoist and Chicago stalwart Bunky Green (*Apex*). His exploratory guitar-driven quartets on *Samdhi* and *Gamak* featured David Gilmore and Dave "Fuze" Fiuczynski, respectively. In 2015 he was commissioned by Ragamala Dance to create *Song of the Jasmine* for dancers and a hybrid jazz/South Indian ensemble. He was also commissioned by the PRISM Saxophone Quartet to compose a chamber piece, *I Will Not Apologize for My Tone Tonight*, which can be heard on the quartet's 2015 double-disc release *Heritage/Evolution, Volume 1*.

Mahanthappa is a Yamaha artist and uses Vandoren reeds exclusively.

JAZZ AT PRINCETON UNIVERSITY serves to promote this uniquely American music as a contemporary and relevant art form. Our goals are to convey the vast musical and social history of jazz, establish a strong theoretical and stylistic foundation with regard to improvisation and composition, and emphasize the development of individual expression and creativity. Offerings of this program include academic course work, performing ensembles, master classes, private study, and independent projects. We thank you for joining us on this evening's journey of beauty, exploration, discovery, and hope.