POPS AT MUSIC HALL | 2020–2021 SEASON
FRI APR 2, 7:30 pm | SAT APR 3, 2 pm | SAT APR 3, 7:30 pm

MIDCENTURY SONGBOOK

John Morris Russell, conductor
Mandy Gaines, vocalist
Darius de Haas, vocalist

STRINGS ON FIRE
(WHAT A) WONDERFUL WORLD
BUT NOT FOR ME
THAT THING CALLED LOVE
SOUL BOSSA NOVA
NATURE BOY
DAY DREAM
I AIN’T GONNA PLAY NO SECOND FIDDLE
SELECTIONS from ZODIAC SUITE
Virgo | Scorpio | Gemini
HALLELUJAH, I LOVE HER SO
UNFORGETTABLE
CLOSE YOUR EYES
A CHANGE IS GONNA COME

These performances will last approximately 1 hour. There is no intermission. Program subject to change.
The April 3 evening performance will be livestreamed; it will also be available for on-demand streaming starting April 23. Visit cincinnatipops.org for details.

The Cincinnati Pops Orchestra is grateful to Pops Series Sponsor PNC Bank, Pops Artist Series Sponsor Lincoln of Cincinnati, and Presenting Sponsor The Dr. John & Louise Mulford Fund for the CSO.
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Post-Concert Q&As are endowed by Melody Sawyer Richardson.
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Steinway Pianos, courtesy of Willis Music, is the official piano of the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and Cincinnati Pops.
If It Sounds Good, It Is Good
by John Morris Russell, Pops Conductor

Just about everyone knows that I am crazy about jazz—everything from Dixieland and bebop to swing, big band and fusion. Jazz is as American as apple pie; it is our unique musical art form, venerated around the world. In the middle of the 20th century, American popular music and jazz became intertwined and spawned the golden age of the Great American Songbook. Much of that music was clothed in silky strings, shimmering woodwinds, and brass—the orchestra became the ultimate extension of the jazz band, and it was luscious. Our April Pops program features original arrangements, crafted by luminaries like Nelson Riddle and Frank DeVol, of “standards” that are at the core of the American soundscape, as well as quintessential works by Henry Mancini, Quincy Jones and Mary Lou Williams that define the era.

The music of George Gershwin was a great favorite of Ella Fitzgerald’s, and she created some of the most beloved recordings on the planet of his music, as arranged by Nelson Riddle, including the classic “But Not for Me.” Riddle also crafted one of Nat Cole’s most famous recordings, “Unforgettable.” The simple elegance of these tunes is enhanced by the gossamer scoring of strings and filigree of piano, harp and woodwinds. Frank DeVol, a veteran Hollywood composer and arranger, best known for the TV theme to My Three Sons, created the exquisite “Nature Boy” for Nat and a sultry arrangement of “Close Your Eyes” for Ella. The latter was composed by Bernice Petkere—dubbed the “Queen of Tin Pan Alley” by Irving Berlin—who was one of the few women who hit the big time as a songwriter during the era. Petkere wrote hits for EVERYONE, including Bing Crosby, Tony Bennett, Doris Day, Nancy Wilson, Harry Belafonte, and even Queen Latifah.

The centerpiece of the program is three movements from the Zodiac Suite by Mary Lou Williams. We performed the “Cancer” movement of the Suite last autumn and wanted to feature the orchestra in a few more of these jazzy selections, which combine both orchestrally conceived music and improvisation. It is a delight! Williams was a brilliant pianist, arranger, teacher and composer, and she appeared in the Music Hall Ballroom with Andy Kirk and the Clouds of Joy in 1942. It’s been a real joy bringing her music back to life.

We’ll also pay tribute to two “wonder women” who ushered in the Jazz Age and paved the way for Black women as performers, arrangers and composers. Mamie Smith grew up right here in Cincinnati on Perry Street near the current Duke Energy Center. She started in show business as a kid—likely at the theatre at the end of her street. After establishing her career in vaudeville and theatre across the country, she became the first Black female artist to record the blues. Her recording of “Crazy Blues” in 1920 was a huge hit and earned her the moniker “Queen of the Blues.” The following year, at the height of her fame, she returned home to perform in Music Hall—only the second Black headliner to appear on the Springer Auditorium stage up to that time. We can’t wait to pay homage to this Queen on this program and perform another of her hits, “That Thing Called Love.” A wave of singers followed in Mamie Smith’s footsteps in the next decade, including Bessie Smith (no relation), who recorded over 200 singles in her career. Since the title “Queen of the Blues” was already taken by Mamie, Bessie was nicknamed the “Empress of the Blues.” Her influence on the evolution of jazz is undeniable when you hear her one-of-a-kind voice on her recordings. “I Ain’t Gonna Play No Second Fiddle” speaks to the tenacity and assurance of these two trailblazers who built hugely successful careers despite the unbelievable challenges that most Black women faced at the time.

As the mid-century music scene evolved into the 1960s, the influence of blues, jazz, gospel and early rock created a new sound: soul. Sam Cooke was as revered a singer of rock and pop as he was of jazz and soul. “(What a) Wonderful World” and “A Change is Gonna Come” both possess the smooth mid-century sound with an R&B sensibility that would have its full flowering in the latter half of the 20th century. It was this unique blend that informed the Motown sound, with groovy string writing, infectious rhythms, and colorful splashes of brass.

Our guest soloists are two of my favorite people around. We’re delighted to welcome back Darius

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de Haas. He’s performed with us numerous times (including as a last-minute replacement for Smokey Robinson!) and always lights up the house. Fans of the Amazon series The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel might recognize his voice as that of Shy Baldwin. This is also the Pops debut of Mandy Gaines, who is a fixture in the Cincinnati jazz scene. What most folks don’t know is that she is one of Cincinnati’s most prominent musical ambassadors, who performs, literally, all over the world. I first met Mandy when The Pops was on its latest Asia tour; our Pops drummer, Mark Wolfley, introduced us at our hotel restaurant in Taiwan between gigs. Besides annual residencies in Taiwan, and appearances in clubs and festivals across Europe and Asia, you can check her out at any number of jazz venues around town. It’s a treat to finally get to perform with Mandy at Music Hall with the Pops.

In his tenth year as conductor of the Cincinnati Pops Orchestra, JOHN MORRIS RUSSELL continues to redefine the American orchestral experience, leading performances at Music Hall and concerts throughout the region, as well as domestic and international tours, cultivating the reputation of Greater Cincinnati as one of the world’s leading cultural centers. JMR has contributed six albums to the recorded legacy of the Cincinnati Pops, including the latest, Voyage, which debuted at No. 6 on Billboard’s Classical Chart in August of 2019.

Guest Artists

MANDY GAINES, vocalist

Mandy Gaines entertains and delights audiences throughout the world through her gifted interpretations of jazz, pop, R&B and soul classics, as well as writing and performing her original works. She is making her Cincinnati Pops debut this weekend.

Mandy began singing at an early age in school and church. She holds a B.A. from The College of Wooster in Speech/Arts and has continued her studies through private vocal instruction and various workshops emphasizing oral interpretation, jazz improvisation and vocal technique, as well as theatre and broadcasting/media studies.

Throughout her career, Mandy has performed with jazz greats such as Wynton Marsalis, Dany Doriz, Randy Brecker, Scott Hamilton, Eldee Young, Redd Holt, Rhoda Scott, and many others. She has performed in clubs, concerts and festivals throughout Europe and Asia, where she continues to be invited back annually.

Mandy has been featured vocalist at The Oldenberg Dinner Theatre Entertainment Complex and The Star of Cincinnati, and in 2018 she was inducted into the Cincinnati Jazz Hall of Fame.

Among her recordings are With a Song in My Heart, Taking a Chance, Have a Seat, In Matters of Love and Faith Journey.

DARIUS de HAAS, vocalist

Darius de Haas enjoys a multifaceted career as an award-winning and widely acclaimed singer and actor. Born and raised in a musical family, his performances have ranged from the Broadway stage, where he made his debut in the original Kiss of the Spiderwoman, to ground-breaking Off-Broadway pieces to recordings to concert venues throughout the world. He made his Cincinnati Pops debut at Riverbend in 2007 and returned to Riverbend in 2013 (stepping in for Smokey Robinson) and 2014.

His stature as a solo artist was launched in 1999, when he made his Carnegie Hall debut stepping in last minute with the Cincinnati Pops and Erich Kunzel, and he has since performed with top orchestras and ensembles, as well as legendary solo artists. His voice can be heard on the soundtracks of the films Anastasia and Chicago and on the TV show The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel.

His solo recordings include Darius de Haas: Day Dream (Variations on Strayhorn) and Quiet Please with pianist Steven Blier.

Darius is proud to work with The Fair Housing Justice Center and serves on the International Board of Directors for Covenant House, serving homeless youth throughout North and South America.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about this concert and guest artists, as well as a roster of Cincinnati Symphony and Pops Orchestra musicians, visit cincinnatipops.org/songbook, or point your phone’s camera at this QR code:
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THE GREAT

FILM SCORES

Grab your popcorn and go! Pops Principal Guest Conductor Damon Gupton leads the Pops in a collection of celebrated film scores. Settle in for a program of music from cinematic favorites including Forrest Gump, Schindler’s List, Lincoln, The Mission and more.

MAY 7–9*
FRI 7:30 pm; SAT 7:30 pm; SUN 2 pm
Damon Gupton conductor

*Live Digital Premiere MAY 8; Available on-demand JUNE 5

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JOHN MORRIS RUSSELL, Pops Conductor
Louise Dieterle Nippert & Louis Nippert Chair

Damon Gupton, Pops Principal Guest Conductor

Wilbur Lin, Assistant Conductor, Pops