



## **The Williamsburg Symphony Orchestra stands in solidarity with Black community at First Baptist Church prayer vigil**

### **Performed commissioned musical works by Jeraldine Herbison, Local Black Female Composer**

WILLIAMSBURG, Va. (Sept. 11, 2020) — The Williamsburg Symphony Orchestra's 11-member string ensemble joined historic First Baptist Church on Sept. 6 on a grassy field along South Nassau Street for an evening of prayer and celebration. The prayer vigil marked the start of an archaeological excavation at the site to unearth the church's first permanent structure and better understand the lives of enslaved people who lived and worshipped there nearly 250 years ago.

The string ensemble, under the direction of Reginald Fox, music director of First Baptist Church and nationally recognized choral director and artist, performed two works commissioned to honor the occasion. Jeraldine Herbison, a local Black artist and composer, was in attendance as her works, Serenade No. 1 "Devotion" and Suite No. 2 in F, Op. 5 were performed.

Rev. Dr. Reginald Davis, pastor of First Baptist Church, and Rev. Christopher Epperson, rector of Bruton Parish Church where enslaved and free Blacks worshipped before First Baptist Church organized in 1776, led the onsite and online gathering in prayer, song, and praise to bless the excavation work that began Sept. 8 on this nationally significant and sacred space. Onsite attendance at the prayer vigil was limited to 50 people in accordance with state guidelines to limit the spread of COVID-19. The vigil was streamed live and archived on Colonial Williamsburg's website, and a recording is available by visiting [colonialwilliamsburg.org/firstbaptist](http://colonialwilliamsburg.org/firstbaptist).

"This clarion call for the community to come together to understand the past, acknowledging that some of it was filled with pain, and some of it filled with hope, serves as an example to the Commonwealth and the country that there is no better time than now to uncover important history and to engage in important conversations," said Connie Matthews Harshaw, president of First Baptist Church's Let Freedom Ring Foundation and its spokesperson for the excavation.

The WSO string ensemble also accompanied Alvy Powell, a celebrity baritone, who gave voice to the powerful poem written by the Commonwealth's 17th Poet Laureate Henry Hart, that was dedicated this year to the church's founders. A spirit-filled selection closed the ceremony, offered by The WSO and a talented quartet from First Baptist Church.

"We could not imagine an occasion more important to our community to have been asked to commission a piece and play for this national audience. Our musicians are deeply honored to come together in person for the first time since the pandemic began, to be included in a project of such historical importance. We have ignited a spark for seeking unexpected ways to perform and will continue to find opportunities to touch our local and national communities," said Carolyn Keurajian, Executive Director of The Williamsburg Symphony Orchestra.

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#### ***About The Williamsburg Symphony Orchestra***

The Williamsburg Symphony Orchestra is a professional orchestra based in Williamsburg, Virginia. Now in its 37th season, the orchestra offers a

five-concert Masterworks series, Pops concerts, and a series of educational initiatives. An active search is currently underway for the organization's new Music Director. The orchestra is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

**For immediate comment, contact: Carolyn Keurajian at 201-218-8114 or [carolyn@williamsburgsymphony.org](mailto:carolyn@williamsburgsymphony.org).**

#### ***About First Baptist Church***

The Historic First Baptist Church exists to honor and glorify God by obeying Jesus' command to make disciples of all people groups. We accomplish this through our Mission and Core Values. As a Christian church, we believe in unity, inclusiveness and diversity as essential keys for the strength and growth of our congregation. Our mission is to seek divine guidance concerning Jesus and to proclaim as effective witnesses that He is Christ so that others may know, worship and follow Him. As Disciples of Christ, we demonstrate his love and compassion by helping to meet the needs of all people. By the fruit of the Holy Spirit, we minister to the members and community to grow the church, inspire our youth, witness to the lost, feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, work for justice and peace and do the work of the Kingdom of God in the 21st Century.

#### ***About The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation***

The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation preserves and operates Virginia's 18th-century capital of Williamsburg. Innovative and interactive experiences highlight the relevance of the American Revolution to contemporary life and the importance of an informed, active citizenry. The Colonial Williamsburg experience includes more than 600 restored or reconstructed original buildings, renowned museums of decorative arts and folk art, extensive educational outreach programs for students and teachers, lodging, including the Forbes 5-star Williamsburg Inn, culinary options from historic taverns to casual or elegant dining, the Golden Horseshoe Golf Club featuring 45 holes designed by Robert Trent Jones and his son Rees Jones, a full-service spa and fitness center, pools, retail stores and gardens. Philanthropic support and revenue from admissions, products and hospitality operations sustain Colonial Williamsburg's educational programs and preservation initiatives.

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Pictured: The WSO String Ensemble, under the direction of Reginald Fox, music director of First Baptist Church and nationally recognized choral director and artist

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