



## Carlos Simon, biography

“My dad, he always gets on me. He wants me to be a preacher, but I always tell him, ‘Music is my pulpit. That’s where I preach,’” Carlos Simon reflected for The Washington Post. Having grown up in Atlanta, with a long lineage of preachers and connections to gospel music to inspire him, GRAMMY-nominated Simon proves that a well-composed song can indeed be a sermon. His music ranges from concert music for large and small ensembles to film scores with influences of jazz, gospel, and neo-romanticism.

Simon is the current Composer-in-Residence for the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and frequently writes for the National Symphony Orchestra and Washington National Opera. Simon also holds the position of inaugural Composer Chair of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the first in the institution’s 143-year history.

In the 2024/25 season, Simon will have premiere performances with the National Symphony Orchestra, Boston Symphony Orchestra, BBC Symphony Orchestra for the Last Night of the Proms (in his BBC Proms commissioning debut), Jacksonville Symphony Orchestra, Cincinnati Pops Orchestra, Carnegie Hall for the National Youth Orchestra of the USA. The season also features the premiere of Simon’s Gospel Mass with Gustavo Dudamel and the LA Philharmonic, a work reimagining the traditional mass with gospel soloists and choir, with visual creations from Melina Matsoukas (Beyoncé Formation, Queen and Slim).

This follows previous commissions from the likes of the San Diego Symphony Orchestra, Washington National Opera (in collaboration with Mo Willems), New York Philharmonic and Bravo! Vail, Minnesota Orchestra, American Ballet Theatre, and Detroit Symphony Orchestra.

As well as his composition work, Simon frequently curates concert programmes, which often highlight his own music as well as that of close collaborators. Curation concerts have recently been programmed by Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, Boston Chamber Players, Tanglewood Festival for Contemporary Music, and the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. Simon also curated and arranged Coltrane: Legacy for Orchestra, a new project co-commissioned by TO Live (for the Toronto Symphony Orchestra) and the San Francisco Conservatory of Music, in partnership with the Coltrane Estate.

August 2024 saw the release of Simon's first full-length orchestral album, *Four Symphonic Works*, comprised of live concert recordings by the National Symphony Orchestra from the Kennedy Center Concert Hall, conducted by Gianandrea Noseda. Simon also composed the original soundtrack for the PBS documentary *Shame of Chicago: Shame of the Nation*, which was released as a digital album in April 2024.

In September 2023, Simon released two albums on Decca. Together is a compilation of solo and chamber compositions and arrangements featuring Simon and guests such as J’Nai Bridges, Randall Goosby, Seth Parker Woods and Will Liverman. The work draws on Carlos’ personal experience as an artist to highlight the importance of heritage and identity, and the power of collaborative music-making.

Simon also released the live premiere recording of *brea(d)th*, a landmark work commissioned by Minnesota Orchestra and written in collaboration with Marc Bamuthi Joseph, conducted by Jonathan Taylor Rush. “Arguably the most important commission of Simon’s career so far” (New York Times), *brea(d)th* was written following George Floyd’s murder as a direct response to America’s unfulfilled promises and history of systemic oppression against Black Americans.

Simon was nominated for a 2023 GRAMMY Award for Best Contemporary Classical Composition for his previous album, *Requiem for the Enslaved*. The requiem is a multi-genre musical tribute to commemorate the stories of the 272 enslaved men, women, and children sold in 1838 by Georgetown University, released by Decca in June 2022. This work sees Simon infuse his original compositions with African American spirituals and familiar Catholic liturgical melodies, performed by Hub New Music Ensemble, Marco Pavé, and MK Zulu.

Acting as music director and keyboardist for GRAMMY Award winner Jennifer Holliday, Simon has performed with Boston Pops, Jackson Symphony, and St. Louis Symphony. He has also toured internationally with soul GRAMMY-nominated artist Angie Stone and performed throughout Europe, Africa, and Asia.

Simon earned his doctorate degree at the University of Michigan, where he studied with Michael Daugherty and Evan Chambers. He has also received degrees from Georgia State University and Morehouse College. He is an honorary member of Phi Mu Alpha Music Sinfonia Fraternity and a member of the National Association of Negro Musicians, Society of Composers International, and Pi Kappa Lambda Music Honor Society. He has served as a member of the music faculty at Spelman College and Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia and now serves as Associate Professor at Georgetown University. Simon was also a recipient of the 2021 Sphinx Medal of Excellence, the highest honor bestowed by the Sphinx Organization to recognize extraordinary classical Black and Latinx musicians, and was named a Sundance/Time Warner Composer Fellow for his work for film and moving image.