The Fromm Players at Harvard present
BLACK SPECULATIVE MUSICALITIES
Two Concerts & a Symposium curated by Vijay Iyer

CONCERTS
Friday April 3 and Saturday April 4, 2020
Doors at 8:30, shows at 9pm
Oberon, 2 Arrow Street, Cambridge
FREE TIX AVAILABLE BEGINNING MARCH 6 AT NOON
ONLINE OR IN PERSON AT THE LOEB DRAMA CENTER BOX OFFICE
https://americanrepertorytheater.org/shows-events/fromm-players-at-harvard/#book
Open 12-6 Tuesday through Sunday

“The title Black Speculative Musicalities is meant to celebrate African American artists who, through their powerful imaginations, have challenged and expanded our notions of what music is, what it can be, and what it can do. These events shine a bright light on the radical sonic imaginings of the African diaspora,” says Vijay Iyer, curator of this year’s Fromm Players concerts.

Friday, April 3
Visionary singer/songwriter/bassist Meshell Ndegeocello presents her ensemble with Chris Bruce, Jebin Bruni, and Abraham Rounds. Also part of this evening is Harvard composer and sound artist Yvette Janine Jackson’s Radio Opera Workshop featuring Esperanza Spalding, Tia Fuller, Rajna Swaminathan, Davindar Singh, Taiga Ultan, and Judith Hamann.

Saturday, April 4
Fusing electronics and African Vodou rhythms, Val Jeanty’s NiteBjuti (Jeanty, Candice Hoyes, Mimi Jones); vocalist, composer and librettist Imani Uzuri’s solo cantata, Conjure Woman; and a set by NEA 2020 Jazz Master Roscoe Mitchell w/ his Quartet (Roscoe Mitchell, saxophones, flutes, percussion; Ambrose Akinmusire, trumpet; Junius Paul, bass; Vincent Davis, drums)

April 4 Symposium
In conjunction with the concerts, there will be a public symposium on Black Speculative Musicalities bringing together scholars, artists, and students in a series of talks from 10:30am to 4:00 in the Thompson Room of the Barker Center, 12 Quincy Street, Cambridge. Confirmed speakers include 2019 MacArthur Fellow Saidiya Hartman, scholar and activist Shana Redmond, prolific cultural critic Greg Tate, innovative gospel scholar and practitioner Braxton Shelley, Vijay Iyer, and others.

Yvette Janine Jackson: Radio Opera Workshop

Radio Opera Workshop is an electronics and instrumental chamber ensemble established to perform the radio operas of Yvette Janine Jackson. The sextet features Esperanza Spalding (double bass), Rajna Swaminathan (mrudangam) Davindar Singh (bass clarinet, bari sax), Taiga Ultan (flute, bass flute), Tia Fuller (alto sax) Judith Hamann (cello). Building on her experience as a theatrical sound designer, Jackson blends various forms into her own aesthetic of narrative soundscape composition, radio opera, and improvisation. Her works often draw from history to examine relevant social issues.
Meshell Ndegeocello
w/ Chris Bruce, guitar; Jebin Bruni, keys; Abraham Rounds, drums

Ndegeocello is an American singer-songwriter, rapper, and bassist. Her music incorporates a variety of influences including funk, soul, jazz, hip hop, reggae, and rock. Nominated ten times for a Grammy, she has been credited for helping to have “sparked the neo-soul movement.” Ndegeocello has played on records by Madonna, the Stones, and Chaka Khan, and collaborated with Herbie Hancock and John Mellencamp. Her music has been included on film soundtracks including How Stella Got Her Groove Back, Batman & Robin, Love & Basketball, Talk to Me, and Soul Men, among others. Ndegeocello can be seen in the documentary Standing in the Shadows of Motown, singing The Miracles’ “You’ve Really Got a Hold on Me” and The Temptations’ “Cloud Nine.”

Val Jeanty: NiteBjuti
w/ Val Jeanty, Candice Hoyes, Mimi Jones

Jeanty is a drummer and sound engineer whose music is a fusion of electronics and African Vodou rhythms that has been described as spiritual, or, as she says “on a frequency people are not used to hearing.” Jeanty’s work has been showcased in New York City at the Whitney Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, the Brooklyn Academy of Music, the Village Vanguard, and internationally at Saalfelden Music Festival in Austria, Stanser Musiktage in Switzerland, Jazz à la Villette in France, and the Biennale Di Venezia in Italy. Jeanty collaborated with Yosvany Terry on his album “New Throned King,” and was the sound designer for the off-off-Broadway production Facing Our Truth: 10-Minute Plays on Trayvon, Race and Privilege presented by the National Black Theater.

Imani Uzuri: Conjure Woman

Uzuri is an award-winning vocalist, composer, librettist, and improviser called “a postmodernist Bessie Smith” by the Village Voice. She composes, creates interdisciplinary works and performs at international venues and festivals. Of Conjure Woman, she says, “I come from a family of quilt makers. I am intrigued by the rich history of Black American quilt making tradition, the diverse vibrant patterns, the stories and mythologies of how these quilts were used to cover family members,
as secret codes along the Underground railroad, and sometimes as mystical protective amulets. I embedded these ideas within my compositional form using polyrhythms, recurring melodic motifs, multi-layered harmonies, and some elements of improvisation. The text for the piece is inspired by poetic memoir reflecting on my rural North Carolina childhood, a traditional Navajo prayer, and an excerpt from Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*: “the singing woman…wrapped herself up in an old quilt…her eyes fixed…she sang in a powerful contralto.”

Roscoe Mitchell Quartet

w/Roscoe Mitchell, saxophones, flutes, percussion; Ambrose Akinmusire, trumpet; Junius Paul, bass; Vincent Davis, drums

Mitchell is an American composer, jazz instrumentalist, and educator. The Penguin Guide to Jazz described him as one of the key figures in avant-garde jazz, and All About Jazz places him “at the forefront of modern music” for the past 35 years. Critic Jon Pareles in the *New York Times* writes that Mitchell “qualifies as an iconoclast.” In addition to his own work as a bandleader, Mitchell is known for cofounding the Art Ensemble of Chicago and the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM). He is a prolific musician, with credits on more than 100 albums, and has awards from the International Jazz Critics Poll, Down Beat, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People’s Image Award, among many others. Most recently, he was awarded the title of NEA Jazz Master for 2020.

The Fromm Players at Harvard

The Fromm Music Foundation was founded by the late Paul Fromm in 1952. Since 1972, it has been located at Harvard University where it has operated in partnership with the Harvard University Music Department. Over the course of its existence, the Fromm Foundation has commissioned over 400 new compositions and their performances. The Fromm Foundation has also sponsored hundreds of new music concerts and concert series, among them Tanglewood’s Festival of Contemporary Music, American Composers Orchestra, and the Fromm Concert Series at Harvard University. The foundation has also supported a Fromm Visiting Professorship for established composers in the Department of Music, and the Paul Fromm Composer-in-Residence program at the American Academy in Rome. The Fromm Players at Harvard concerts feature performances of new works by living and influential composers performed by a professional ensemble dedicated to the performance of contemporary music. They are curated by a faculty member of the Harvard Department of Music. This year’s events are curated by Franklin D. and Florence Rosenblatt Professor of Music Vijay Iyer.