



CONTACT: John Connolly

EMAIL: johconn@gmail.com

Refugee Orchestra Project Appoints Portia Dunkley as Executive Director

(Boston, MA, October 8, 2020)—Refugee Orchestra Project (ROP) is delighted to announce the appointment of Portia Dunkley in the role of Executive Director, taking over from Allison Provaire who now assumes the position of Director of Operations for the organization. Dunkley joins the leadership team alongside founder and Artistic Director, Lidiya Yankovskaya.

Born to immigrant parents, Portia Dunkley is a native of Miami, FL with Bahamian and Haitian Caribbean roots. Early on in life, she was introduced to the double bass and continued her studies graduating from The New World School of The Arts in Miami, FL and attended Florida State University where she received both a Bachelor Degree in Performance and a Master Degree in Arts Administration. She currently resides in South Florida where she continues the joy of creating music with her husband, jazz trombonist, Waldron Dunkley and daughter Auriel, who also plays double bass.

In 2017, Portia started Teeny Violini, a mobile music education program for preschools and after-school programs, providing music education services for historically underserved communities, reaching over 600 students from preschool-5th grade weekly through programming. In 2019 Portia was chosen as a Fellow for the SphinxL.E.A.D (Leaders in Excellence, arts and Diversity) inaugural cohort. In that same year she was recognized by the Knight Foundation with an Arts Challenge Grant to establish a new South Florida ensemble for her project, Music of the Unsung America, a multi event lecture-concert series that highlights music compositions by Black composers in the shadows of history. This project creates opportunities for Black and Latinx professional classical musicians in South Florida to perform works by Black and other minority composers left out of the “traditional” canon of music.

“I am excited and grateful to take on this new role with The Refugee Project Orchestra. I hope that my work with both Unsung America and The Refugee Orchestra Project will help build communities of belonging, amplify the voices and creative talents of marginalized artists, and inspire young people of all cultures to see themselves reflected in classical music,” said Dunkley.

Dunkley joins the organization in what are challenging times for the performing arts in general. The organization has successfully pivoted in recent months, however, to set up a fundraising initiative for its artists where the public are invited to commission original works. One commission has been completed and performed with another four being produced. ROP also performed a short weekend series of open-air, socially distanced concerts in Chicago at the end of August alongside Chicago Opera Theater.

ABOUT REFUGEE ORCHESTRA PROJECT

The Refugee Orchestra Project intends – through music – to demonstrate the vitally important role that refugees from across the globe have played in our culture and society.

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The project was conceived by conductor Lidiya Yankovskaya, who realized in the wake of the Syrian refugee crisis that many of her own closest colleagues and friends were not aware that she – and many others like her – had come to the U.S. as refugees to seek asylum from violence and persecution abroad. Due to the traumatic nature of their experience, refugees are often hesitant to speak openly about their history, and it is common for people to be unaware that their neighbors, coworkers, and friends have been taken in by the United States as refugees at a time of crisis.

The Refugee Orchestra Project brings together musicians whose friends and families have fled to this country to escape violence and persecution, in performances that loudly proclaim these individuals' importance to our cultural wealth. Performances have included appearances at the United Nations, National Sawdust, and venues across New York City, London, Boston, Chicago, Washington, D.C., and London, England.

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