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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

ATLANTA MUSIC FESTIVAL 2021
EXPLORES CONFLUENCE OF ARTS AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

Festival “Seeks to Expand Boundaries of Understanding of Social Justice through Transformative Power of the Arts”

- The 2021 Atlanta Music Festival—focusing on Proctor Creek and the West Atlanta watershed, tributaries of the Chattahoochee River that flow through the West side of Atlanta and the communities that surround them—will offer [daily performances and engagements online](#) from January 25-January 30, 2021. The performances are intended to entertain, stimulate, engage, and open the hearts and minds of audience members to the confluence of the environment, social justice and racial reconciliation. Proctor Creek was chosen as the focus of the festival because of its complex community history in which race, poverty, segregation, environmental degradation and commerce intersect.
- [The Atlanta Music Festival](#) is an annual series of events dedicated to promoting the arts and social justice through the presentation of African American concert music and poetry. The [2021 Atlanta Music Festival](#) (AMF) addresses the importance of the environment to social justice and equality through the arts. Dr. Dwight Andrews is Artistic Director; Dr. Steven Darsey is Music Director.
- Performances by musicians, poets, dancers, and visual artists as well as interviews and lectures by scientists, environmentalists, educators, students, historians, and activists are designed to contribute to a deeper understanding of Atlanta’s racial and environmental history. The week will culminate with a concert featuring opera stars [Morris Robinson](#), [Timothy Miller](#), and [the Meridian Chorale](#), performing the concert music and poetry of African Americans focused on the natural world. [Molly Samuel](#) and [the Reverend Thee Smith](#) will narrate.

Atlanta, GA, December 17, 2020—During an extraordinary time of triple crises—pandemic, upheaval, and racial unrest—the 2021 Atlanta Music Festival draws attention to the environment, an often-overlooked aspect of social justice and equality. [The Atlanta Music Festival](#) is an annual series of events dedicated to the

arts and social justice through the presentation of classical African American concert music and poetry. Dr. Dwight Andrews serves as Artistic Director and Dr. Steven Darsey is Music Director for the Festival.

2021 is the first year that the Atlanta Music Festival has expanded its scope to encompass environmental justice. The 2021 Atlanta Music Festival will focus on Proctor Creek and the West Atlanta watershed, tributaries of the Chattahoochee River that flow through the heart of Atlanta. The history of these waters, their overflows of raw sewage into historic Atlanta neighborhoods, and the work of the organizations that have attempted to deliver justice to its watershed, speak loudly about the identity of Atlanta as a city.

Told through a week-long series of engagements broadcast on [Vimeo](#) January 25-30, 2021 the Atlanta Music Festival stories will highlight the importance of the environment in achieving racial and social justice by presenting a series of online performances, interviews and lectures culminating with a concert of works given by opera stars Morris Robinson, Timothy Miller, and the Meridian Chorale featuring the concert music and poetry of African Americans focused on the natural world. [Molly Samuel](#) and [the Reverend Thee Smith](#) will narrate.

Performances by musicians, poets, dancers, and visual artists as well as interviews and lectures by scientists, environmentalists, educators, students, historians, and activists are designed to contribute to a deeper understanding of Atlanta's racial and environmental history. Writer and filmmaker [Hal Jacobs](#), whose work focuses on the arts, social justice and the environment, will shoot video and produce all of the engagements included in the 2021 festival. Each event will be posted to the [Atlanta Music Festival site](#) at 7:30 p.m. on the performance date and will remain available through 2021.

- **Monday, January 25**
The Beauty of Proctor Creek: Dance performance by [Glo ATL](#). Glo ATL movement artists Ashley Ianna Daye, Christina Hiroko Kelly and Mechelle Tunstall perform “i came to explore the sun, of something more permanent, the moves are maps,” in and around Atlanta’s Proctor Creek. In the work, choreographed by Lauri Stallings for the Atlanta Music Festival 2021, the performers dance in the bright waters and falls of Proctor Creek, and play with light and shade. The work is meant to serve as a catalyst for discussion on equity, race, history and who gets to dance.
- **Tuesday, January 26**
A Walk Through the Environmental, Social and Cultural History of the West Atlanta Watershed with environmental historian Dr. Will Bryan and community and cultural and social historian the [Reverend Doctor Skip Mason](#). This tour of the west Atlanta watershed walks participants through sites of scientific, environmental and cultural significance on the creek.
- **Wednesday January 27**
Seeing Proctor Creek through the Eyes of Future Environmentalists/Artists. Students and teachers from [Booker T. Washington High School](#) create art on the Proctor Creek PATH following a visit to the creek’s plastic trap led by Darryl Haddock of [West Atlanta Watershed Alliance](#). Yinzi Kong of the [Vega String Quartet](#) performs “water” music and plein air artist [Emily Hirn](#) paints a view of the creek, working on-site, in the moment.
- **Thursday, January 28**
The Rev. Dwight Andrews interviews artist [Radcliffe Bailey](#). This interview includes a walk through the artist’s studio and a discussion of the influence of the environment, music, and history on Bailey’s art, with particular attention to his newest work to be installed at Cascade Springs in the West Atlanta watershed.

- **Friday, January 29**
Science and Environmental and Community Activism: The story of the [West Atlanta Watershed Alliance \(WAWA\)](#). This event features WAWA's [Darryl Haddock](#) and [Dr. Na'Taki Osborne Jelks](#). The organization has worked for 30 years to improve water quality in Proctor and Utoy Creeks. Haddock and Osborne Jelks explain the science of creek restoration and how the communities around the creeks have been galvanized to work for environmental justice in the watershed.
- **Saturday, January 30**
Concert featuring internationally [acclaimed](#) bass opera singer [Morris Robinson](#), tenor [Timothy Miller](#), and the Meridian Chorale performing an array of works, including pieces by composer [Trevor Weston](#). Molly Samuel narrates.

"The Atlanta Music Festival seeks to build a more just and equitable world through mutual understanding and the arts," said the Reverend Dr. Dwight Andrews, Professor of Music Theory and African American Music at Emory University and Senior Pastor at the First Congregational Church of Atlanta. "Traditionally, the Festival celebrates African American poetry and music. But today, as our society grapples with triple crises—pandemic, economic upheaval and racial unrest—while still emphasizing this music, we also are addressing social justice through the transformative power of the arts."

Proctor Creek has a complex environmental and community history. With headwaters in downtown Atlanta, flowing into the Chattahoochee River, the creek meanders through the center of Atlanta, touching historic neighborhoods occupied by prominent African American Atlantans, along with some of the most economically disadvantaged communities in the city. During its history, Proctor Creek has served as a lifegiving source of clean water, a polluted dumping ground for toxics, garbage and raw sewage, and flowed by the notorious Chattahoochee Brick Factory, where mostly Black contract prison laborers were brutally worked, starved, whipped and tortured, to make bricks for commercial sale.

"Proctor Creek can be seen as a metaphor for Atlanta, which is why we chose it to represent environmental justice for the 2021 Atlanta Music Festival," said Dr. Steven Darsey, artistic director of Meridian Herald. "Today, cleanup work on the creek is in process, neighborhood by neighborhood, through the efforts of many organizations and volunteers. While there is much more work to be done, the creek's beauty, struggle and renewal have inspired a wide range of artists, scientists and educators to prepare mind- and heart-opening performances designed to move audiences toward mutual understanding and racial and social justice," Dr. Darsey added.

The first [Atlanta Music Festival](#) was held in 1910, four years after the 1906 [Atlanta race riots](#). The [Reverend Henry Hugh Proctor](#), the first African American pastor of Atlanta's First Congregational Church, conceived a concert series to promote racial reconciliation through the arts. Proctor's festival introduced Atlanta's black and white audiences to renowned African American concert musicians of the day. Thousands of patrons, including Atlanta Mayor [Robert Maddox](#), attended the events held at the Georgia Armory. Performers included [Harry T. Burleigh](#) and [Sissieretta Jones](#), also known as the Black Patti. The annual festival continued until around 1918.

The festival was revived in 2001 through a partnership between Reverend Dr. Dwight Andrews, Professor of Music Theory and African American Music at Emory University and Senior Pastor at Atlanta's First Congregational Church of Atlanta, and Dr. Steven Darsey, artistic director of the non-profit arts organization Meridian Herald. The principal Meridian Herald performing vehicle is the Meridian Chorale.

Dr. Andrews and Dr. Darsey, who are longtime friends as well as colleagues, sought to explore the dynamic character of America through the lens of classical African American music with a concert series celebrating

underperformed and new works by African American composers. Previous festival performances have featured [Jessye Norman](#); [Timothy Miller](#); [Calvin Griffin](#); [Wanda Yang Temko](#); [The Vega Quartet](#); historian [Taylor Branch](#); theologian Rev. Dr. [Robert Franklin Jr.](#); and the [Spelman](#) and [Morehouse](#) College Glee Clubs. The Festival has included works by contemporary African American composers [Alvin Singleton](#), [T. J. Anderson](#), [Dorothy Rudd Moore](#), [Uzee Brown](#), [Robert Tanner](#), [Dwight Andrews](#) and a commissioned work by composer [Adolphus Hailstork](#).

Honorary Chairs of the 2021 Atlanta Music Festival are Ambassador Andrew Young, Mrs. Carolyn Young, the Reverend Gerald Durley and Mrs. Muriel Durley.

The 2021 Atlanta Music Festival is part of CONFLUENCE, a series of programs in 2020 and 2021 focused on visual, musical and written art created by amateur and professional Georgia artists, children and adults, who have been inspired by Georgia's natural beauty and whose works inspire others to preserve and protect Georgia's environment. CONFLUENCE is produced by Meridian Herald, the Governors Award-winning arts and humanities nonprofit organization, and guided by a steering committee that includes [100 Miles](#), the [Chattahoochee Nature Center](#), the [Georgia Council for the Arts](#), the [Georgia Humanities Council](#), the [South Fork Conservancy](#), the [Trust for Public Land](#), Exploring Georgia, the Ossabaw Island Foundation, the West Atlanta Watershed Alliance and numerous individual artists and community volunteers.

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Editor's Note: Elaine Martone, producer of the Atlanta Music Festival compact disc "Bound for the Promised Land," has been honored with a Grammy nomination for 2021 classical music producer of the year. This recording is one of five she produced supporting her nomination for 2021.