

**SFJAZZ and Opera Parallèle Present Exclusive On-Demand Broadcast of  
*Champion - An Opera in Jazz* by Terence Blanchard  
Based on the life of Boxing Champion Emile Griffith**

**Premieres Wednesday, October 21, 2020**

**Direct from [SFJAZZ.org](https://www.sfjazz.org)**

**Virtual Broadcast of February 2016 Performance from  
SFJAZZ Center in San Francisco**

(San Francisco, CA, October 1, 2020) – SFJAZZ, in collaboration with San Francisco’s Opera Parallèle, will present a special online-only broadcast of the 2016 production of *Champion - An Opera in Jazz* by Terence Blanchard on Wednesday, October 21, 2020 at 6:00pm PDT. *Champion* will premiere on Wednesday, October 21 at 6:00pm PDT and be available to stream on-demand until Saturday, October 24 at 11:59pm PDT. The airing of *Champion* is free to SFJAZZ members and SFJAZZ digital memberships start at \$5.00. During the broadcast window, a tip jar will be available for viewers to financially contribute directly to the composer, performers, and production staff. For more information, visit [SFJAZZ.org](https://www.sfjazz.org).

*Champion* was originally staged over nine sold-out performances at the SFJAZZ Center in February 2016 and featured music from SFJAZZ Resident Artistic Director Terence Blanchard. Based on the life of African-American boxing champion Emile Griffith (1938-2013), *Champion* marked Opera Parallèle’s first foray into an operatic jazz idiom and SFJAZZ’s first opera. This broadcast will be the first time this production of *Champion* will be made available to audiences around the world.

Former SFJAZZ Resident Artistic Director Terence Blanchard has firmly established himself as one of the most forward-thinking musicians in jazz. The SFJAZZ Resident Artistic Director program allowed Blanchard to curate exclusive programming of new works, unprecedented collaborations, and boundary-breaking configurations. *Champion* was Blanchard’s first project as Resident Artistic Director and illustrated Blanchard’s breadth as a composer and SFJAZZ and Opera Parallèle’s commitment to pushing musical boundaries.

Blanchard is jazz’s foremost renaissance man. A savvy bandleader, celebrated film composer, brilliant jazz writer and influential educator, the five-time GRAMMY-winning New Orleans native is a creative force who sits at the apex of the modern jazz scene. Since first writing music for Spike Lee’s 1990 jazz-set

movie *Mo' Better Blues*, Blanchard has become a renowned film composer with over 50 scores to his credit including *Malcolm X*, *Clockers*, *Summer of Sam*, *25th Hour*, *Inside Man*, *Miracle at St. Anna*, *BlackKlansman*, and the Hurricane Katrina documentary *When the Levees Broke* for HBO. Most recently he scored the hit HBO series *Perry Mason* and Lee's acclaimed 2020 film *Da 5 Bloods*.

"SFJAZZ is extremely excited for this unprecedented presentation with Terence Blanchard and Opera Parallèle," says SFJAZZ Founder and Executive Artistic Director Randall Kline. "Our Resident Artistic Director program of which Terence was a member challenges artists to look forward, break rules, and present music that pushes the envelope. Terence embraced this concept and pushed it further than we could have imagined. The SFJAZZ Center was designed and built with productions like *Champion* in mind."

"Opera Parallèle is so honored to work with Terence Blanchard and SFJAZZ, two incredible leaders in the field," says Opera Parallèle founder and Artistic Director Nicole Paiement. "The story of Emile Griffith is extremely powerful and personal and at the same time his dreams, determination and triumphs will resonate with just about everyone who has passion and drive. It is perfectly suited to Opera Parallèle's style of operatic story-telling."

#### **ABOUT CHAMPION, AN OPERA IN JAZZ**

A groundbreaking work combining the disciplines of opera and jazz, Terence Blanchard's *Champion, An Opera in Jazz* (2013) tells the real-life story of world champion boxer Emile Griffith, a man haunted by memories of his past who struggled to reconcile his sexuality in the hyper-macho boxing world. *Champion* is a visually stunning production featuring full staging and video elements with soloists, a jazz trio, orchestra and Gospel chorus, bringing out the full glory of Blanchard's soulful score as it illuminates Griffith's triumphs and struggles, which are still broadly and powerfully relevant today.

Tormented by the death of opponent Benny Paret following their 1962 bout for the welterweight title, Griffith spent his life questioning himself and a society that would accept his accidental killing of a fellow athlete, but not his sexuality. The opera features a libretto by Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Michael Cristofer and premiered to widespread critical acclaim at Opera Theatre of Saint Louis in June 2013, starring Denyce Graves, Aubrey Allicock, Arthur Woodley, Robert Orth and Meredith Arwady. It was one of five finalists for the International Opera Award in 2014. Terence Blanchard re-orchestrated the score especially for the Opera Parallèle/SFJAZZ production.

## **Team and Cast**

Opera Parallèle's creative team includes Nicole Paiement, Artistic Director and conductor; Brian Staufenbiel, Creative Director & Resident Stage Director; Brian Staufenbiel, set and lobby installation designer; Matthew Antaky, lighting designer; Joe Orrach, choreographer, boxing movement coach, speedbag artist; Christine Crook, costume designer; Frédéric Boulay, projection designer; David Murakami, media designer; and Jeanna Parham, wig and make-up designer. The cast features baritone Arthur Woodley as Old Emile Griffith, mezzo-soprano Karen Slack as Emelda Griffith, Emile's mother; baritone Robert Orth as Howie Albert, Emile's trainer; and bass-baritone Ken Kellogg as the young Emile Griffith. A gospel chorus performs as reporters, photographers, hat makers, men at the boxing gym, Caribbean paraders, and female impersonators.

## **About SFJAZZ**

Founded in 1983, SFJAZZ presents the greatest names in jazz, Latin and global music and nurtures the art of improvisation through its year-round concert, commissioning and education programs. The West Coast's biggest jazz presenter serves over 250,000 fans and students every year and has several award-winning resident jazz ensembles - the world renowned SFJAZZ Collective and the SFJAZZ High School All-Stars. SFJAZZ Center opened in 2013 in the vibrant performing arts district of San Francisco. The luminous SFJAZZ Center was designed by San Francisco architect Mark Cavagnero and the LEED-Gold certified center offers the superb acoustics of a great concert hall and the relaxed intimacy of a jazz club.

## **About Opera Parallèle**

Celebrating its 11th season in 2020-2021, award-winning Opera Parallèle develops and performs contemporary operas in a dynamic balance of known and new works, in new productions that shed light on their subject matter and engage audiences' senses and sensibilities. Opera Parallèle is the only organization in the Bay Area presenting fully-casted and staged contemporary operas exclusively. Opera Parallèle also commissions new orchestrations of contemporary grand operas, to give a sense of intimacy to its productions and to give a new life to works that might not otherwise be performed. See their latest work, an 11-minute 'graphic-novel opera' to be premiered during their upcoming virtual gala on October 8, 2020. For more information visit, [OperaParallele.org](http://OperaParallele.org)

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