

A Note From *Bill's Desk*

McCarter

Get a behind-the-scenes glimpse via Bill Lockwood, Director of Special Programming at McCarter, about how and why he brings phenomenal artists to our McCarter stages. This week, he spotlights two artists that will be on stage this weekend: Terence Blanchard and Jan Lisiecki.

October 12, 2021

There is certainly no lack of focus right now on the jazz artist [Terence Blanchard](#), who brings his E-Collective to our stage on **Saturday, October 16** in a collaboration with the Turtle Island Quartet. Blanchard's opera *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* opened the Metropolitan Opera season on September 27 and, as the first opera ever commissioned by the Met from a Black composer, has become a media sensation. (There is a matinee performance at the Met on the very day that he is at McCarter in the evening!) But it is all too easy to overlook Blanchard's long-standing presence and influence as a jazz artist, and as a composer – he's written the score for more than sixty films, and been nominated for an Academy Award twice. If you've seen any of Spike Lee's movies, from *Do the Right Thing* right up to *Da 5 Bloods* and *BlacKkKlansman*, it is Blanchard's music you have heard; he has been Lee's "house composer" for years, including most recently his new PBS oral history *NYC Epicenters 9/11=2021 ½*, his four-part love letter to New York City.

It's difficult to over-emphasize how significant *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* has become, not only for its crossover between the opera and jazz worlds, but for American musical culture in general. Jazz technique is the foundation of Blanchard's composing style, and his "opera in jazz" (as he calls it) blends elements of jazz, blues, big band, and beyond into his own compositional voice, which includes even a Louisiana honky-tonk and a gospel choir. *The New York Times* has called Blanchard's body of work "one of the broadest and most imposing of any living jazz musician," stating that there is a huge potential audience for *Fire* "even for people who may not think of themselves as operagoers." If you are among them, here's your chance to hear what caused all the fuss and has become the cultural event of the New York season so far.

Fresh, new, exciting piano voices abound these days, and it's hard to keep up with the latest emerging talent, but every so often someone comes along who makes you sit up and take notice. When the young Canadian pianist [Jan Lisiecki](#) made his McCarter recital debut at the age of 23 in 2019, the impact on our audience was such that I was eager to bring him back, but we had to wait until it was safe to do so. Here he is, now all of 26, on **Friday, October 15**. As he previously demonstrated, Lisiecki is a specialist in the works of Chopin, so what could be

more appropriate than an all-Chopin program, devoted largely to the composer's Etudes and Nocturnes – especially the nocturnes, all 21 of which have long intoxicated pianists, and which he has just recorded. Lisicki has been called a “thinking man’s pianist,” and he has said that indeed, he thinks of the nocturnes as pieces he plays for himself, alone, at night, “with phrases that drift off and dynamics that recede into nothingness” – which helps explain why his first McCarter recital was appropriately entitled “Night Music.” But referring to his Chopin, no one has said it better than Anthony Tomassini of *The New York Times*: “Lisiecki’s blend of youthful brilliance, refinement, and grace are perfect for this music.”

—William L. Lockwood, Jr.
Director of Special Programming

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "William L. Lockwood, Jr." in a cursive script.