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 Matthew Whitaker, who will be on stage this weekend.

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How often do you sit at a jazz concert and say to yourself, “I don’t believe what I’m hearing!” Often, I would hope. But it’s probably less often that you also find yourself saying, “I also don’t believe what I’m seeing” – and that would certainly apply if you were listening to and watching Matthew Whitaker, performing Friday October 29. That can help explain why the 60 Minutes segment on this 20-year old genius has been re-broadcast three times – a record for the CBS program. Since his fingers first touched a keyboard at the age of three, his career has given new meaning to the overused cliché “prodigy” – and in this case, it applies. Whether at the piano, the Hammond B-3, or with his new quartet, Whitaker has never stopped astonishing everyone with whom he comes in contact – audiences and colleagues alike. He began teaching himself to play the B-3 at age nine and was endorsed by Hammond four years later, so what sets him apart from the precocious virtuosity we might expect from a wunderkind? Quite simple. Whitaker’s approach is to entice and entertain, rather than dazzle, echoing Hammond’s own trademark: it’s the sound, the soul, the one. And now adding composer, arranger and band leader to his resume, it’s hard to think of worlds he has yet to conquer. As is so often the case, Whitaker himself has said it best: “I am a musician who happens to be blind. I have been blessed with a God given gift and my prayer is that I can continue to be a blessing and inspiration to others.” His latest CD is aptly named Connections, reflecting his own matter-of-fact understatement: “What I enjoy best is playing music.”

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