Mechanics Hall
Where Community and Culture Meet

PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Contacts:

Kathleen Gagne, Executive Director, 508-752-5608 x222, kgagne@mechanicshall.org

Amy Sklar, Director of Sales & Marketing, 508-752-5608 x239, asklar@mechanicshall.org

Mechanics Hall jazz series honors the lives of four 19th-century Black Americans

Performances inspired by Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, and William and Martha Brown

Worcester, MA — August 22, 2024 — This fall Mechanics Hall presents a jazz series inspired by the lives and legacies of four influential nineteenth-century Black Americans, whose portraits now grace its iconic concert hall. Beyond the Frames: A Series in Jazz features three performances by musicians who are celebrated for their innovative styles and use of jazz as a medium for storytelling. Each concert includes compositions inspired by the subjects of three recently installed Mechanics Hall portraits: Sojourner Truth (performer: bassist Avery Sharpe on September 19), William and Martha Brown (performer: pianist Barron Ryan on October 3), and Frederick Douglass (performer: vocalist Ruth Naomi Floyd on October 24). Each evening performance begins at 7:00 p.m. Tickets for individual concerts are $25-$30; $68 for all three concerts. Mechanics Hall Members receive a 15% discount on individual concert tickets. Tickets can be reserved at mechanicshall.org. Mechanics Hall is located at 321 Main Street in Worcester, MA.

"We are thrilled to invite our community to experience a musical journey that celebrates the courageous lives and enduring legacies of Sojourner Truth, Frederick Douglass, and William and Martha Brown," said Kathleen Gagne, executive director of Mechanics Hall. "These performances by some of today's most creative jazz artists are sure to captivate the imaginations of all music lovers."

Beyond the Frames: A Series in Jazz kicks off on Thursday, September 19 at 7:00 p.m. with celebrated bassist Avery Sharpe. A Massachusetts resident, Sharpe is known for his original compositions that blend the political,

spiritual and soulful to create rich, rhythmic melodies. Sharpe's Jazz Sextet features Zaccai Curtis on piano, Jonathan Barber on drums, Charles Langford on saxophones, Haneef Nelson on trumpet, and Maya Sharpe on vocals. The group will present *Sojourner Truth - "Ain't I a Woman,"* music inspired by and based on Truth's remarkable story. Photograph of Avery Sharpe is available here.

On Thursday, October 3 at 7:00 p.m., pianist Barron Ryan will perform his signature program that weaves a musical story of classical works, renditions from great jazz pianists, pop tune arrangements and original compositions. For his Mechanics Hall concert, Ryan will also perform for the first time a piece he composed honoring the portrait subjects William and Martha Brown. The Tulsa, Oklahoma, native was named one of the "Ten Innovators to Watch in 2021" by Smithsonian Magazine for his composition commemorating Tulsa's 1921 massacre. The piece for piano trio, titled "My Soul is Full of Troubles" was commissioned by Chamber Music Tulsa in 2021. Photograph of Barron Ryan is available here.

The final concert in the series takes place on Thursday, October 24 at 7:00 p.m. with Philadelphia-based vocalist Ruth Naomi Floyd and her septet. Inspired by the defiantly proud Frederick Douglass portrait now hanging in Mechanics Hall, their one-of-a-kind program comes from The Frederick Douglass Jazz Works, a groundbreaking body of music that honors the legacy of the great African American abolitionist, orator, statesman, and writer. Paired with Douglass' words from the speeches and writings, Floyd's original compositions embody the rich, powerful, and vibrant sounds of jazz music. Photograph of Ruth Naomi Floyd is available here.

About the Mechanics Hall Portraits

In the fall of 2022, Mechanics Hall commissioned three portraits depicting four Black individuals who lived lives of extraordinary courage during the nineteenth century. The finished portraits were unveiled to the public on March 14, 2024 with a gala community celebration. The portrait subjects include Worcester business owners and abolitionists William Brown and Martha Ann Tulip Lewis Brown, painted together by Brenda Zlamany of Brooklyn, NY; formerly enslaved abolitionist and women's rights activist Sojourner Truth,

painted by Manu Saluja of Long Island, NY; and the formerly enslaved civil rights leader, orator and writer Frederick Douglass, painted by Imo Nse Imeh of Holyoke, MA.

The Mechanics Hall portrait gallery is a commanding installation honoring 19th-century Worcester innovators, social reformers, Civil War heroes and political leaders. The portrait subjects represent a combination of interests that honor the values of the Worcester County Mechanics Association, which founded Mechanics Hall in 1857. These interests include education, the pursuit of excellence, human welfare, and a wider vision of human endeavor. Four prominent women of the same time-period were added in 1999, and now four impactful Black Americans—including two formerly enslaved persons—have joined the gallery of distinguished individuals. Full information about the portrait subjects and artists can be found at mechanicshall.org/portraits-project.

About Mechanics Hall

Built in 1857, Mechanics Hall is internationally regarded as one of the world's great concert halls for its superb acoustics and 19th-century elegance. Regionally, it is widely considered to be Worcester's finest meeting place. The world's most renowned orchestras and performers—from the London Philharmonic to Yo-Yo Ma and Ella Fitzgerald to Linda Ronstadt—have taken the Hall's stage. Among the many luminaries who have spoken at Mechanics Hall are Charles Dickens, Susan B. Anthony, Frederick Douglass, and Mark Twain. In addition to serving as a premiere venue and recording site, Mechanics Hall offers inspiring cultural experiences for diverse audiences through a variety of creative initiatives—including free concerts, community events, a youth chorus, and collaborative programs with local colleges and non-profit organizations. A non-profit organization, Mechanics Hall is owned and operated by the Worcester County Mechanics Association (est. 1842). It is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Learn more at mechanicshall.org.

The accessible entrance to Mechanics Hall is located on Waldo Street. Elevators are available in the ground-floor Waldo lobby and provide access to the second and third floors. There is no elevator access to the balcony. The concert will take place in the Great Hall on the third level. Those who need assistance can contact the Mechanics Hall Ticket Office, Wednesday through Friday from 11:00 am to 5:00 pm, by calling 508-752-0888.