



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
January 24, 2020

## **Chan Centre Presents a Heartfelt, Joyous Celebration of Gospel and Civil Rights Music from Award-Winning Producer and Musical Director Damien Sneed**

***Inspired by the words and actions of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Sneed brings together a phenomenal roster of musicians and Vancouver's own Universal Gospel Choir for a program of civil rights anthems and other favourites.***

**Vancouver, BC — The Chan Centre for the Performing Arts** at the University of British Columbia marks the final day of Black History Month with an uplifting evening of music featuring a talented group of artists, spearheaded by one of America's foremost gospel and soul musicians. ***We Shall Overcome: A Celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. featuring Damien Sneed*** takes place in the Chan Shun Concert Hall on Saturday February 29, 2020 at 8pm, part of a 40-city tour across North America. The Vancouver debut showcases familiar repertoire from across the African American music traditions that electrified generations of civil rights activists and defenders, with interwoven spoken word from Dr. King's recorded speeches.

"While the civil rights movement and life's work of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. are deeply American stories, Canada certainly has a shared historical experience of racism and the struggle to overcome that prejudice with the rise of civil liberties groups across our country in the 1960s and beyond," says Joyce Hinton, Co-Managing Director of the Chan Centre. "The music performed by Sneed and his exceptional ensemble in *We Shall Overcome* seeks to unite everyone with messages of hope and promise—promise in the strength of a collective, and in the power of the arts. We can't wait to welcome this triumphant and important project to our stage."

*We Shall Overcome* was first performed in 2017 at Ginny's Supper Club in Harlem when Sneed was asked to put together a program of MLK-inspired music. The result wowed both audiences and IMG Artists—who subsequently decided to grow the project into an album and major North American tour. The production ties together a living lineage of artists and songs that include traditional gospel, modern gospel, classical, jazz, Broadway, and spirituals—from Nina Simone to Stevie Wonder to Dionne Warwick. Sneed's unique understanding of a breadth of genres and icons allows for significant musical ground to be traversed in a single performance, pulling from a circulating repertoire of more than 50 beloved songs. The program also highlights anthems that celebrate victorious moments in the civil rights movement, including Duke Ellington's "Freedom", and the traditional title tune "We Shall Overcome."

On stage in Vancouver will be a star ensemble of vocalists including **Chenee Campbell, Anitra McKinney, Alicia Peters-Jordan, Markita Knight, and Linny Smith** as well as instrumentalists **Marquéz Cassidy** (keyboards/organ), **Arthur Sutton** (bass), and **Joel Tate** (drums), alongside pianist and bandleader Sneed and the contributions of the **Universal Gospel Choir** led by **Lonnie Delisle**.

"As our North American tour grows, it continues to be such a joy to travel to many different communities," says Sneed. "I look forward to finally having an opportunity to perform in Vancouver as many of my friends that I attended school with at the Peabody Institute are now living and performing there. In each city we visit, we enjoy connecting with local singers of all ages and backgrounds to celebrate timely messages of peace and unity that are at the core of the teachings of the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. At the Chan Centre in Vancouver we will be working with the Universal Gospel Choir, whose multi-faith and social justice-oriented mission is a great fit for this project."

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Born and raised in Augusta, GA, Damien Sneed is a pianist, conductor, composer, producer, and arts educator whose body of work spans multiple genres and includes collaborations with Wynton Marsalis, Stevie Wonder, Diana Ross, Lawrence Brownlee, and many others. He was a frequent accompanist and collaborator of both Jessye Norman and Aretha Franklin in their later years, considering them great mentors, and acted as the musical director and arranger at Norman's hometown funeral service in October 2019. Sneed has studied at some of the finest music conservatories and universities, including Howard University, the Peabody Conservatory of Johns Hopkins University, New York University, the University of Southern California, and the Manhattan School of Music, where he is also on faculty.

In 2013, Sneed and his vocal ensemble Chorale Le Chateau joined the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra with Wynton Marsalis on a 16-city tour across the American south performing the sweeping composition *The Abyssinian Mass*, Marsalis' piece commemorating the 200th anniversary of Harlem's Abyssinian Baptist Church. Sneed was awarded the prestigious Sphinx Medal of Excellence in 2014, presented annually to emerging Black and Latino leaders in classical music. In 2015, he established the Damien Sneed Performing Arts Institute, a division of the Damien Sneed Foundation. Sneed was also commissioned by the Houston Grand Opera to compose the music for a new full-length opera based on Marian Anderson; *Marian's Song* will have its world premiere on March 5, 2020 at Houston's Cullen Theater.

### **Chan Centre Connects Events ([chancentre.com/connects](http://chancentre.com/connects))**

Programmed in conjunction with Chan Centre performances, exploring the role of arts and artists in society.

- **Film Screening: *Journey to Justice* — Thursday February 13, 7pm at The Cinematheque (1131 Howe St).** This powerful documentary tells the story of six unsung heroes of the Canadian civil rights movement, among them Viola Desmond and Fred Christie. Tickets at [thecinematheque.ca](http://thecinematheque.ca).
- **Pre-show Talk with Marcus Mosely - Saturday February 29, 7:15pm in the Royal Bank Cinema at the Chan Centre.** A moderated conversation about gospel music with acclaimed vocalist **Marcus Mosely**.

### **About the Chan Centre for Performing Arts at UBC ([chancentre.com](http://chancentre.com))**

Since 1997, the Chan Centre for the Performing Arts has earned an international reputation for its striking design, stellar acoustics, and exceptional programming. Artists, critics, and patrons alike are unanimous in their praise of the facility, winning it a place among North America's top-rated performing arts spaces. Featuring three unique venues—the Chan Shun Concert Hall, the Telus Studio Theatre, and the Royal Bank Cinema—the Chan Centre is a vital part of UBC campus and community life where artistic and academic disciplines merge to inspire new perspectives on the world around us. Past performers and speakers include Wynton Marsalis, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Renée Fleming, Dan Savage, Yo-Yo Ma, Jane Goodall, Herbie Hancock, Lila Downs, and Anoushka Shankar.

#### **LISTING INFORMATION**

Date:

Ticket Prices:

Address:

Box Office:

Website:

Link to Artist Photos:

#### **Chan Centre Presents: We Shall Overcome: A Celebration of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. featuring Damien Sneed**

Saturday February 29, 2020 at 8pm

From \$38

Chan Centre for the Performing Arts

University of British Columbia

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