

Preview: 'Two Wings' sings of the Great Migration in the South for the first time



Photo courtesy of Alicia Hall Moran



Cydney Lee



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Jason Moran and Alicia Hall Moran draw on personal family traditions and stories for their Spoleto Festival USA performance this week to explore the Great Migration — the historic movement that saw 6 million African Americans relocate from the rural South to various Northern cities and beyond from 1916 to 1970.

The Morans bring *Two Wings: The Music of Black America in Migration* to Spoleto Festival USA on June 11 at 9 p.m. As seasoned composers, both have extensive experience writing and recording albums for themselves and other artists.

“Black people have coded their music forever, and we were coding ways of getting routes to take North by talking about neighborhoods that people arrived at during the Great Migration,” Jason said.

Jason is a jazz pianist and visual artist and has composed scores for Ava DuVernay’s “Selma” and “13th” as well as Ta-Nehisi Coates’s stage version of “Between the World and Me.” He is also the artistic director of Jazz at The Kennedy Center. Alicia is a trained mezzo-soprano vocalist. She has been commissioned by The Museum of Modern Art, The Kitchen and Art Basel Miami and has collaborated with the band Harriet Tubman, visual artist Carrie Mae Weems and more.

The artistic couple first premiered *Two Wings* at Carnegie Hall in 2019 before bringing the show to The Kennedy Center, The Elb in Hamburg and Symphony Center at Orchestra Hall in Chicago. The two are no strangers to Spoleto, performing at the festival in 2016. This year’s performance marks the first performance of *Two Wings* in the American South.

Through rhythm and blues to gospel, classical to Broadway, work songs to rock and more, the concert will feature various musicians and is adapted to each performance location.

“Here at Spoleto, Julie Dash, who has written a book for her film ‘Daughters of the Dust,’ is going to read to the audience,” said Alicia.

Dash’s film explores the Gullah culture of the sea islands off the coast of South Carolina and Georgia. She would frequently visit her father’s family in Charleston when she was young and she has taught film classes at College of Charleston.

The concert’s name derives from a spiritual by the same name that Alicia recorded for her 2017 album, “Here Today.”

“I want two wings to veil my face Lord, I want two wings to fly away / Meet me, Jesus, meet me in the air / And if these two wings fail me, then give me another pair,” the song goes, Alicia recalled.

“So very much that’s a song about spiritual cleansing and renewal, but also the space and creative distance between your past and your future,” she said.

Along with Dash’s reading, the concert will feature performances from the Morans, woodwind ensemble Imani Winds, trombonist Wycliffe Gordon, violinist Curtis Stewart, jazz vocalist Sharón Clark, folk singer Toshi Reagon, cellist Seth Parker Woods; and a string section comprised of Juliette Jones, Chala Yancy, Tia Allen and Ismail Akbar. The musicians will perform originals written and composed by the Morans as well as songs and artistic work by Florence Price, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Duke Ellington and more.

“We frame the music by the language of history, and better if the music is framed by very personal history of whoever’s speaking, whether it’s Alicia, myself or the author,” said Jason. “One thing we always make sure we have done *before* this concert is acknowledge our ancestry through our songs. This will be the first time we will perform this in the South, which has a very different meaning for the Great Migration.”

With *Two Wings*, Alicia said she hopes the audience can resonate with the concert in a way that evokes reflection.

“Everybody in our audience has come from somewhere,” said Alicia. “And hopefully for them it will be an evening of listening, fun, enjoyment and reflection on where they’ve come from and what’s been sacrificed for them to be in those seats that night.”

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