

FOR RELEASE:
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Photos [here](#)

The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts
and Georgetown University
present the

Let Freedom Ring Celebration

featuring

CHRISTOPHER JACKSON

ESPERANZA SPALDING

Nolan Williams Jr.

with additional artists to be announced

**In a musical tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
Sunday, January 19, 2025, at 7:30 p.m.**

(WASHINGTON)—The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and Georgetown University will celebrate the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. with a free, ticketed musical tribute, the **Let Freedom Ring Celebration**. The annual program, part of the Center’s Millennium Stage series, will feature musical performances by **Christopher Jackson**, **esperanza spalding**, and the Let Freedom Ring Choir, led by Music Producer **Nolan Williams, Jr.**

The event will take place on Sunday, January 19, 2024, at 7:30 p.m. in the Kennedy Center Concert Hall.

Georgetown University will present the annual John Thompson Jr. Legacy of a Dream Award to **Paula C. Thompson** of Voices for a Second Chance. Voices for a Second Chance (VSC) provides essential reentry support and resources to individuals navigating the complexities of incarceration and reintegration. With a mission centered on empowering justice-involved individuals and fostering family and community connections, VSC has become a vital lifeline for

over 2,000 individuals annually. The Legacy of a Dream Award is given by Georgetown University to a local individual who exemplifies the spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. For more information about the Legacy of a Dream Award, please visit <https://www.georgetown.edu/mlk-initiative/>.

Tickets will be available on a first-come-first-serve basis beginning at 6 p.m. on January 19, 2025 in the Kennedy Center Hall of Nations and will be limited to two tickets per person. This performance will be captioned. If you or a member of your party requires accessible seating or seats in the captioned section, please notify staff when you reach the front of the ticket distribution line. The performance will also be live streamed on the Kennedy Center's Facebook and YouTube pages, and on its website at www.kennedy-center.org.

ABOUT CHRISTOPHER JACKSON

Christopher Jackson is a Tony Award®-nominated actor as well as a Grammy® and Emmy Award®-winning songwriter/composer best known for starring as George Washington in the critically acclaimed, award-winning musical, *Hamilton*, on Broadway and Disney+. According to Variety, Disney+ saw a 72% surge in U.S. downloads during the premiere weekend. Christopher was most recently seen starring in the hit CBS drama *Bull* which came to an end after 6 seasons.

He can now be seen in season 2 of the HBO Max reboot of *Sex and the City, And Just Like That...*

In early 2020, Christopher closed a limited run of *Freestyle Love Supreme* on Broadway alongside Lin-Manuel Miranda, which has been adapted into a documentary, *We Are Freestyle Love Supreme*, directed by Thomas Kail now streaming on Hulu. After a successful run, Chris returned as a guest performer in *FLS* which opened last fall on Broadway. Additionally, he starred in Ava DuVernay's Netflix mini-series *When They See Us* with Michael K. Williams, Vera Farmiga, and John Leguizamo.

In December 2018, "One Last Time (44 Remix)" was released as a part of the Hamildrop series which featured Christopher alongside President Obama and BeBe Winans.

His Broadway credits include *Holler if Ya Hear Me*, *After Midnight*, *The Bronx Bombers* (Derek Jeter), *In The Heights* (Benny), *Memphis* (Delray Farrell), and *The Lion King* (Simba). Off Broadway includes *Bronx Bombers* (Primary Stages); *The Jammer* (Atlantic Theater Co.); *Lonely, I'm Not* (Second Stage); *In the Heights* (37 Arts); and *Cotton Club Parade* (ENCORES at City Center).

Additional TV and film credits include *Freestyle Love Supreme* (Pivot Network), *Person of Interest*, *A Gifted Man*, *Fringe*, *Gossip Girl*, *Tracers*, *Afterlife*, and *In The Heights*.

Christopher has recorded an original song written by Lin-Manuel Miranda for the Disney film *Moana* and was also a Composer/Songwriter for *Sesame Street* (6 Emmy® nominations and 1 win) and co-Music Supervisor and Writer for *The Electric Company* (PBS).

Jackson won an Emmy Award® for his song with Will.I.Am, “What I Am.” In 2010, he released his first solo album titled, *In the Name of Love* with Yellow Sound Lab Records and is currently working on his 2nd album. Christopher has performed sold-out concerts all over the U.S. including at Carnegie Hall and the Kennedy Center.

ABOUT ESPERANZA SPALDING

Born in 1984 in Portland, Oregon, esperanza spalding (a.k.a. irma nejando) is an eaabibacliitoti* artist, trained and initiated in the North American (masculine) jazz lineage and tradition. Her work interweaves through various combinations of instrumental music, improvisation, singing, composition, poetry, dance, therapeutic research, storytelling, teaching, regenerative agriculture, urban land & artist-sanctuary custodianship, and growing in love as a daughter, sister, cousin, niece, auntie, great-auntie, friend, while collaboratively decolonizing within and through her hometown community.

She co-founded and serves as lead curator for Prismid Inc., a non-profit that creates and stewards artist residency, performance, and workshop space in Portland, Oregon. *Milton + esperanza* is esperanza’s latest album release in collaboration with revered Brazilian singer-songwriter Milton Nascimento. With the Songwrights Apothecary Lab, she leads multi-week performance, teaching, workshop, and therapeutic-arts research residencies in collaboration with colleges and arts venues across the Americas and throughout the world.

**European-African ancestry being influenced by American cultures living in Indigenous Territories of Turtle Island*

ABOUT NOLAN WILLIAMS, JR.

Nolan Williams, Jr., Music Producer of Let Freedom Ring and founding CEO of [NEWorks Productions](#), a leading producer of impact-arts programming and entertainment since 2003, is best described as a creative force. An award-winning producer, music director, composer/lyricist, playwright, filmmaker, musicologist, and cultural curator, the multi-hyphenate Williams, Jr. has dedicated his professional career to creating works that illuminate issues of civil rights, social justice, and cultural curiosities. His body of work includes: choral/orchestral works premiered by major American orchestras and performed by the London Symphony Orchestra; music for television; the best selling [African American Heritage Hymnal](#) (over 500,000 copies sold worldwide); songwriting credits on two Grammy®-nominated projects; arts and educational festivals produced in partnership with The Kennedy Center and Philadelphia’s Mann Center; cultural programming developed with the Smithsonian, U.S. State Department and multiple embassies; a slate of theatrical productions, including his critically-hailed new musical, [GRACE](#) (winner of eleven 2022 [Broadway World Washington, DC](#) awards, including Best Musical and Best New Musical); and video & documentary projects, including the star-studded viral video “[I Have A Right To Vote](#)” (over two million global media hits), “[Becoming Douglass Commonwealth](#)” (winner of ten media prizes), and his most recent work, the film short “[Rise Up & Fight](#)” (recipient of 18 international film prizes, including Best Animation Music Video in the 2024 Europe Music Video Awards & 2024 Los Angeles Movie & Music Video Awards and Best Music Video in the 2024 London Global Film Awards, 2024 Paris International Short Festival, and 2024 Los Angeles Film Awards). This is the 20th year Williams, Jr. has given musical leadership to this “Let Freedom Ring” concert.

ABOUT THE AWARDEE

As the President and CEO of Voices for a Second Chance (VSC), Paula C. Thompson has dedicated her career to dismantling barriers to reentry and creating transformative pathways for individuals returning to society. This year, VSC proudly celebrated 55 years of operation, a testament to its enduring commitment to justice, equity, and community transformation.

At the helm of VSC, Paula has redefined the organization's mission, broadened its scope, and deepened its impact. Her innovative leadership has resulted in the creation of groundbreaking programs, including gender-specific trauma counseling, initiatives for children of incarcerated parents, and family reunification services that restore hope and stability to countless lives. Paula's strategic vision and compassionate approach have positioned VSC as a cornerstone of empowerment for justice-involved citizens and their loved ones.

Paula's career reflects a deep commitment to justice and equity. As a federal lobbyist and policy advocate, she worked tirelessly to design public policy agendas that address housing, economic development, and social justice issues. She has also mentored nonprofit leaders nationwide, equipping them with the tools to drive sustainable change in their communities. Paula's breadth of experience spans roles at Samaritan Inns, where she led fundraising and communications to develop the concept for creating housing and treatment services for women with children, and Voices for America's Children, where she led national development campaigns advancing youth-focused policies rooted in equity and justice.

Paula also serves as the founder and Co-Chair of the DC Reentry Action Network (RAN), former Commissioner on the DC Reentry and Returning Citizens Commission, Vice Chair of the CORE DC Community Relations Board, Board Director for the Council for Court Excellence, and Member of the DC Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee, Reentry Subcommittee.

Paula's unwavering dedication to social equity is complemented by her ability to cultivate partnerships, secure resources, and inspire collective action. Her influence extends beyond Washington, D.C., as her work sets a national standard for reentry services and advocacy.

ABOUT LET FREEDOM RING CELEBRATION

As part of Georgetown University's MLK Initiative: Let Freedom Ring!, this event builds on the success of the first joint program in January 2003, which featured the legendary Roberta Flack and attracted more than 5,000 patrons. The second, held in August of 2003, commemorated the 40th anniversary of Dr. King's "I Have a Dream" speech, and featured actor and civil rights leader Ossie Davis. Past concerts featured Jessye Norman in 2004; Aaron Neville in 2005; Yolanda Adams in 2006 and in 2016; Brian McKnight in 2007; Denyce Graves in 2008; Aretha Franklin in 2009; India.Arie in 2010; Patti LaBelle in 2011; Bobby McFerrin in 2012; Smokey Robinson in 2013; Dionne Warwick in 2014; Natalie Cole in 2015; Gladys Knight in 2017; Vanessa Williams in 2018; Audra McDonald and Brian Stokes Mitchell in 2019; Chaka Khan in 2020; Leslie Odom Jr. in 2023; and Jordyn Sparks in 2024.

ABOUT GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

Established in 1789 by Archbishop John Carroll, Georgetown is the oldest Catholic and Jesuit university in the United States. Located in Washington D.C., Doha, Qatar, and around the world, Georgetown University is a leading academic and research institution, offering a unique educational experience that prepares the next generation of global citizens to lead and make a difference in the world. For more information about Georgetown University, visit [Georgetown.edu](https://www.georgetown.edu) or connect with Georgetown on [Facebook](#), [X](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Instagram](#), or [Threads](#).

Georgetown's annual MLK Initiative honors Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. through a series of academic, artistic, and extracurricular programs that examine Dr. King's life and work and address the contemporary challenges our nation faces in order to fulfill his dream of justice and equality for all people.

ABOUT THE KENNEDY CENTER'S MILLENNIUM STAGE

Millennium Stage embodies the Kennedy Center's mission and vision, inviting audiences to celebrate our collective cultural heritage in an inclusive, accessible way. Millennium Stage, now in its 27th season, explores countless artistic styles and inspires the community to engage in the performing arts. Welcoming local, national, and international artists, the Kennedy Center's Millennium Stage offers live shows and events presented Wednesday through Saturday, with live streaming available via the Kennedy Center's [Digital Stage](#). The **Extraordinary Cinema** series presents screenings Sundays at the REACH's Justice Forum.

For more information about the Kennedy Center, please visit our [website](#).

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