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Oxford American, New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park, and Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site Present Virtual Jazz / Civil Rights Outreach Programs and Concert *No Tears Suite* November 5-6, 2020

The full concert performance will premiere via Facebook on December 3

October 14, 2020—LITTLE ROCK, AR—The *Oxford American* is excited to announce ***No Tears Suite: Live from New Orleans***, a collaboration with the National Park Service, that consists of two virtual events. The first is a panel discussion, *Civil Rights in Jazz: Then and Now*, on Thursday, November 5, followed by a pre-recorded performance of the suite on Thursday, December 3. Both are free and will be accessible to the public. The events are made possible by Lower Mississippi Delta Initiative, New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park, Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site, Stella Boyle Smith Trust, and Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve.



The live-stream panel discussion will begin at **7:00 P.M. CST on November 5**, and will focus on the deeply rooted, sometimes subtle ways in which the jazz genre has impacted the Civil Rights movement in America. Moderating the event is journalist and public radio veteran **Gwen Thompkins**. Thompkins is currently the host of *Music Inside Out* on WWNO and the New Orleans correspondent for NPR's *World Cafe* program. Panelists include *No Tears Suite* composers **Christopher Parker** and **Kelley Hurt**, as well as saxophonist **Bobby LaVell**. [Click here](#) to register for this event. If unable to attend live, a recording of the panel will be released at a later date.

On November 6, *No Tears Suite* musicians will engage in local outreach by teaching a virtual jazz masterclass. The event is private and limited to participating schools, but will simultaneously engage high school and university students both in New Orleans and in Little Rock, Arkansas, including band students at Little Rock Central High School, University of New Orleans, Xavier University of Louisiana, and Little Rock Episcopal Collegiate School.

While in New Orleans, the ensemble will record the *No Tears Suite* at a local studio. The full concert video will then premiere via *Oxford American*, New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park, and Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site's Facebook pages on **December 3, at 7:30 P.M. CST**. Performing the suite are composer/pianist **Christopher Parker**, lyricist/vocalist **Kelley Hurt**, percussionist **Brian Blade**, bassist **Roland Guerin**, tenor saxophonist **Bobby LaVell**, trumpeter **Marc Franklin**, and alto/baritone saxophonist **Chad Fowler**.

The *No Tears Suite* is available as a studio album (released by Mahakala Music in September 2020) is available for purchase at OxfordAmericanGoods.org, Bandcamp.com, and is available to stream via **Spotify** and **iTunes**.

ABOUT *NO TEARS SUITE*

In September 1957, 61 years after the “separate but equal” ruling of *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, in Little Rock, Arkansas, nine Black high school students finally broke through the threshold of Little Rock Central High School after a month of facing protestors and blockades by the Arkansas National Guard. *No Tears Suite*, composed by Arkansas-native and music teacher Christopher Parker and his wife, jazz vocalist Kelley Hurt, was initially written to commemorate and celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Little Rock Nine's historic enrollment and their continued courage and fortitude, which has inspired every generation thereafter.

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When the piece premiered in September 2017, the group of GRAMMY award-winning drummer Brian Blade, bassist Bill Huntington, trumpeter Marc Franklin, and saxophonists Bobby LaVell (tenor) and Chad Fowler (alto) was so successful in communicating Hurt and Parker’s vision, that the composers began to explore how they could continue to expand the *No Tears Suite*. Their solution manifested itself in a new collaboration between the seven-piece jazz ensemble and the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra, with the incomparable, GRAMMY-nominated arranger, composer, and bassist Rufus Reid penning expanded orchestral arrangements, flawlessly infusing the sweeping grandeur of the ASO’s 16-piece ensemble into the *No Tears Suite*. A recording of the live orchestral version of the suite that premiered in March 2019 in Little Rock, is available as a free streaming-only album on Spotify and iTunes.

Largely inspired and informed by the memoir *Warriors Don’t Cry* by Melba Pattillo Beals, a member of the Little Rock Nine, the music of *No Tears Suite* reflects the resilience of those students as they ascended the steps of Central High School in 1957 and shifted the course of American history. The tension of inequality and oppression felt by these students is felt on “Roll Call,” as Hurt details the lives of those involved Little Rock Nine and others involved in Arkansas’, and America’s, educational integration over an unsettled and lamenting pool of instrumentation. But ultimately, *No Tears Suite* emphasizes emotions of power and joy, highlighting the significant progress and lasting brightness the Little Rock Nine brought to Arkansas and the country. [“Jubilate”](#) bounces and uplifts, and [“Don’t Cry \(Warrior’s Song\)”](#) struts with a confidence and strength—similar to Mingus’ composition on the same subject matter, “Fables of Faubus,”—Hurt sings words of grit and motivation over the soulful swing: *“Beaten, bruised, yeah you refused / there are no cowards here.”*

No Tears Suite never loses sight of the astounding humanity of the nine students that prompted the piece in the first place. In speaking on the development of the music, Parker said, “We just wanted to put the spotlight on those kids... how can anyone not be proud of those kids?”

Written by members of the Little Rock community, for the Little Rock-based literary magazine, *Oxford American*, about a pivotal moment in the city’s civil rights history, *No Tears Suite* is the result of and a testament to a community that believes in celebration, perseverance, and growth, and serves as an enduring reminder of the progress made and the progress still required.

Thanks to all the partners who supported the creation of
the project and recording of *No Tears Suite*.



*Lower Mississippi Delta Initiative, Jean Lafitte National Historical Park and Preserve,
New Orleans Jazz National Historical Park, and Little Rock Central High School National Historic Site.*