



EASTMAN
SCHOOL OF MUSIC
UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**EASTMAN PRESENTS CONCERT SERIES KICKS OFF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY MONTH
WITH PERFORMANCE BY KATHLEEN BATTLE AND JOEL A. MARTIN**

*“Underground Railroad: A Spiritual Journey” to Deliver Emotional Experience
with Narration by Nora Cole and David Shakes from Geva’s To Kill A Mockingbird*

Rochester, N.Y. – January 8, 2016 – The Eastman School of Music is excited to present *Underground Railroad: A Spiritual Journey* with five-time Grammy Award-winning soprano Kathleen Battle and her longtime collaborator, jazz pianist Joel A. Martin. Part of the Eastman Presents concert series and a kick-off to Black History Month, the concert will feature traditional slave spirituals, with narration based on selected writings of abolitionists Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass interspersed between songs.

Underground Railroad: A Spiritual Journey will be held at Kodak Hall at Eastman Theatre on Saturday, January 30, 2016, at 8:00 p.m.

Kathleen Battle’s luminous voice has been called “...without qualification, one of the very few most beautiful in the world” (*The Washington Post*). Beyond her singing, in a career filled with countless accolades, honors, and milestones, what distinguishes her most is her ability to create an unwavering emotional bond between herself, the music, and her audience.

Originally, Cyrus Chestnut was scheduled to perform with Kathleen Battle, but due to unforeseen circumstances, was replaced by Joel A. Martin. A multitalented and versatile artist, pianist/producer/composer/arranger Joel A. Martin is the creator of Jazzical[®], a genre-bending musical marriage of classical, jazz, and more. In 1985 he was the first African American pianist, as well as the youngest competitor, ever to participate in the Van Cliburn International Piano Competition. In recent years, he has collaborated with and/or written music for popular and Grammy Award-winning artists including Alan Menken, Fergie of the Black Eyed Peas, Brooklyn Youth Chorus, Rock and Roll Hall of Famer Jaimoe of the Allman Brothers, and many more.

The collaborative concert encompasses a multifaceted cross-section of our community. Kathleen Battle and Joel A. Martin will be joined by the Rochester Festival Chorus, which was created exclusively for this project. The chorus is comprised of fifty Rochester-area singers from various gospel and church choirs, as well as the Eastman School of Music, School of the Arts, Rochester Lyric Opera, Akoma, Voices of Thunder, Oratorio Society, Finger Lakes Opera, and the Eastman-Rochester Chorus. Jason Holmes, an Eastman alumnus, leads the ensemble.

Douglass’ and Tubman’s writings will be narrated by actors Nora Cole and David Shakes, stars of Geva Theatre’s upcoming production of *To Kill A Mockingbird*. David Shakes is a longtime resident of Rochester; his work as an actor, director, guest artist, and producer with various theatres in the Rochester community has received critical and public acclaim. He is in high demand as a historical interpreter of Frederick Douglass, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Langston Hughes. Nora Cole is an accomplished actor and playwright who has appeared on Broadway and television in addition to numerous national

tours. She returns to Rochester following her tenure last year as a TCG/Fox Foundation Resident Actor Fellow with the world premiere of her original play *Katherine's Colored Lieutenant* at Geva Theatre.

"We are delighted to host this performance as a kick off to Black History Month," said Keith C. Elder, Director of Concert Activities at Eastman School of Music. "Kathleen and Joel's performance promises to be a truly fitting celebration of the rich history and diversity of Rochester. This *Underground Railroad: A Spiritual Journey* is sure to be a thrilling highlight of Eastman Present's concert season."

Other upcoming performances as part of Eastman Presents include Eastman Wind Ensemble under the direction of Mark Davis Scatterday, with banjo virtuoso Béla Fleck and the Toronto Symphony Orchestra with conductor Peter Oundjian and pianist Angela Hewitt. For more information on these and other exciting performances at Eastman Theatre, please visit www.eastmantheatre.org.

About Eastman Presents

Eastman Presents first launched in the 2014-2015 season at the Eastman School of Music. The series of monthly concerts features international artists from a variety of musical genres at Kodak Hall at Eastman Theatre in Rochester, New York. In its second year, the 2015-2016 season offers another exciting line-up of world-renowned performers. The season kicked off with the delightful wit and musical virtuosity of the Ukulele Orchestra of Great Britain followed by another Broadway great, Kristin Chenoweth; a holiday concert with Wynton Marsalis and the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra; and a moving tribute to the Underground Railroad by soprano Kathleen Battle and pianist Joel A. Martin. The season closes with concerts from two outstanding ensembles: the Eastman Wind Ensemble under conductor Mark Davis Scatterday with guest soloist and remarkable banjo player and multi-Grammy Award winner Béla Fleck; and the venerable Toronto Symphony Orchestra under conductor Peter Oundjian will be joined by pianist Angela Hewitt to perform music of Bach and Shostakovich. For more information on the Eastman Presents concert series and other performances at Eastman Theatre, visit www.eastmantheatre.org.

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