

Mon & Tue
NOV 10 & 11
7:30 pm

Pavilion

Sharel Cassity & Richard Johnson

Just Friends Jazz Series



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We are pleased to partner with
the Lied Center of Kansas to present
the *Just Friends Jazz Series*.

There will be no intermission during this performance.

Song selections will be announced from the stage.

Saxophonist, composer and educator **Sharel Cassity** is a nationally acclaimed saxophonist prominent on the New York and Chicago jazz scenes. Named Rising Star Alto Saxophone of 2023 in *DownBeat* magazine with a cover story, Cassity has appeared on the *Today Show*, *Good Morning America* and *The Colbert Show*. She is in the Oklahoma Jazz Hall of Fame and a recipient of the ASCAP Young Jazz Composers Award. A sought-after collaborator, she has worked with many Grammy Award-winning artists, such as Jennifer Hudson, Natalie Merchant, Aretha Franklin, Vanessa Williams and Trisha Yearwood, among others. She has also performed alongside NEA Jazz Masters and Grammy Award-winning artists Herbie Hancock, Wynton Marsalis, Roy Hargrove, Dee Dee Bridgewater, Jimmy Heath and Christian McBride, and she has been a featured guest soloist with the Cincinnati Pops Orchestra and the Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra.

As a bandleader, her five albums have received top-rated reviews in publications, like *The Chicago Tribune*, *The New York Times*, *JazzTimes*, *Jazziz*, *DownBeat*, *American Indian News* and a cover feature in *Saxophone Journal*. Cassity earned a master's degree under full scholarship at Juilliard in NYC and gives back to the next generation teaching at DePaul University and Elgin Community College. She is currently a member of the Dizzy Gillespie Afro Latin Experience, Nicholas Payton's TSO and the Dizzy Gillespie All-Star Big Band. She also runs her record label Relsha Music and is the director of her non-profit educational program Jazz Up. Sharel Cassity is a Yamaha and Vandoren Performing Artist.

Born in Pittsburgh, home to jazz greats Art Blakey, Ray Brown, Jeff "Tain" Watts and Ahmad Jamal, pianist **Richard Johnson** has strong territorial jazz roots. He was first introduced to the piano at the age of five by his father, a gospel pianist from Baltimore, MD. Since then, he has cultivated a rich and pedigreed musical background, being educated by some of the most legendary jazz musicians and studying at the most esteemed institutions of music. After receiving a scholarship and graduating from the Berklee School of Music in just two years, he entered the Boston Conservatory, where he earned a master's degree in jazz pedagogy in three semesters. He then went on to receive an artist performance diploma at the Herbie Hancock Institute of Jazz Performance at New England Conservatory, under the direction of the influential Ron Carter.

Johnson was a member of the Wynton Marsalis Septet and the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra from 2000 to 2003. He also played as part of the Russell Malone Quartet, Delfeayo Marsalis Quintet and The Bobby Watson Quartet. After completing his tenure with those groups, Johnson started the Reach Afar program for young people (ages 7-17), educating them about elements of jazz in hip-hop.

He has traveled extensively, sharing the gift of jazz to audiences around the world. As a representative of the U.S. through the State Department, Johnson was named a U.S. Musical Ambassador. During that time, he did six State Department tours that took him to Central and South America, Africa and the Middle East, affording him the opportunity to perform in more than 76 countries. He has also accompanied such jazz icons as Wayne Shorter, Herbie Hancock, Jimmy Heath and, recently, Stevie Wonder.

Currently, Johnson is the CEO of AFAR Music, a jazz record label focusing on musicians from Chicago. He is an associate jazz professor at the Peabody Conservatory of John Hopkins University in Baltimore, MD, as well as the piano instructor for the Ravinia Jazz Program and Jazz Up in Chicago. An accomplished composer and arranger, he has eight musical releases as a leader. Richard Johnson is a Yamaha endorsed piano artist.