

**JACKSONVILLE SYMPHONY OPENS 2019-2020 SEASON WITH  
JACKSONVILLE-BORN PIANIST MARCUS ROBERTS AND JAZZ TRIO**

Jacksonville, FL (September 9, 2019) – The Jacksonville Symphony will begin their 2019-2020 season with the third annual *Fanfare! Opening Night* featuring Jacksonville's own Marcus Roberts with his jazz trio performing Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*. Marcus Roberts, who has been hailed as, "a genius of modern piano" and his trio join forces with Courtney Lewis and the Symphony to bring a fresh vibe to Gershwin's masterpiece on Saturday, September 28 in the Times-Union Center for the Performing Arts' Jacoby Symphony Hall.

The concert begins at 8 p.m. with Dukas' Fanfare from *La Péri*. The highlight of the evening will be the Marcus Roberts Trio's performance of Gershwin's jazz and classical fusion, *Rhapsody in Blue*. The concert will end with Dvořák's Eighth Symphony.

Doors will open at 7 p.m. for concert-goers to walk the red carpet and enjoy an hour long, pre-concert performance by Jacksonville local, the "Sultry Sister of Soul," Mama Blue performing in the Uible lobby.

**Marcus Roberts** grew up in Jacksonville, FL where his mother's gospel singing and the music of the local church left a lasting impact on his own musical style. He began teaching himself to play piano at age five after losing his sight but didn't have his first formal lesson until age 12. Despite that late start, he progressed quickly through hard work and good teachers. At age 18, he went on to study classical piano at Florida State University.

In 2014, the celebrated CBS News television show, *60 Minutes*, profiled Roberts' life and work on a segment entitled "The Virtuoso." The show traced Roberts' life to date from his early roots in Jacksonville and at the Florida School for the Deaf and Blind to his remarkable career as a modern jazz musician.

Roberts has won numerous awards and competitions over the years, but the one that is most personally meaningful to him is the Helen Keller Award for Personal Achievement. While Roberts is known throughout the world for his development of an entirely new approach to jazz trio performance, he is equally known for his remarkable ability to blend the jazz and classical idioms to create something wholly new while retaining the authenticity of each art form. His 1996 Sony Classical recording (*Portraits in Blue*) was among the first to fully integrate the jazz and classical genres.

The pianist has long been dedicated to the training and development of younger musicians. Each year, he returns to the Savannah Music Festival where he serves as an Associate Artistic Director as well as the Director of the annual Swing Central Jazz programs that bring high school students from all over the country to Savannah for educational programs and a band competition. Roberts is an associate professor of music at the School of Music at Florida State University. He holds an honorary Doctor of Music degree from The Juilliard School.

**Mama Blue** is an original. She brings the "live" in live performance. Her connection with her audience, whether they've ever heard her before, or even heard of her, has to be experienced to be appreciated.

Mama Blue's songs are about her own life, the lives of people she's known, and the lives of everyone. They're about the joy and pain of love, about being a mother, about the social forces that influence our lives. Combine that original material with a selection of songs by artists who've inspired Mama Blue – ranging from soul sisters Aretha Franklin, Etta James, Alicia Keyes and Nina Simone to rock bands like Queen and The Rolling Stones – and you have a musical journey through modern American life.



**COURTNEY LEWIS**  
MUSIC DIRECTOR  
HASKELL ENDOWED CHAIR  
**DAVID M. STRICKLAND**  
CHAIR

Born and raised in Jacksonville, Florida, Mama Blue graduated from the city's prestigious Douglas Anderson School of the Arts. She earned a scholarship to Jacksonville University, where she majored in vocal performance and drama. She and her crew have performed at festivals from Springing the Blues, Dancin' in the Streets and Porch Fest in Jacksonville, to the International Blues Challenge in Memphis, and at events and nightclubs across Northeast Florida and beyond.

Join Courtney Lewis, the Marcus Roberts Trio and the Jacksonville Symphony for this unforgettable, one-night, red carpet event. Tickets can be purchased at [www.JaxSymphony.org](http://www.JaxSymphony.org) or by contacting the Ticket Office at 904.354.5547.

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The Jacksonville Symphony is North Florida's leading music nonprofit offering live performances at Jacoby Hall in the Times-Union Center for the Performing Arts and other venues throughout the area. In addition, the Symphony provides music instruction for youth and operates the Jacksonville Symphony Youth Orchestras. For more information about the Symphony, visit [jaxsymphony.org](http://jaxsymphony.org), like them at [facebook.com/jaxsymphony](https://facebook.com/jaxsymphony), follow them on @jaxsymphony, on Instagram at JaxSymphony and on YouTube at JacksonvilleSymphony.