



## Meet the Lotus Festival Artist: Joshua Thompson

### Can you tell us about yourself?

I was born in Indianapolis in 1982 and I'm the second out of three kids. I have an older sister and I have an identical twin brother. And we all grew up as musicians. I'm a pianist and a trumpet player. We just grew up always doing music, but also sports and just about anything that you can think of.



Photo credit: Paul DeAngelo Best taken on location at The Jazz Kitchen in Indianapolis, IN

I've played piano since I was five and have enjoyed a lot of composers that we know, like Mozart and Beethoven, Maurice Ravel, Claude Debussy, Stravinsky, Aaron Copeland - the list goes on and on, and I love them. I always remember thinking as a kid: "Why is it that we don't have music by composers who look like me or why I don't see peers and colleagues who looked like me playing this type of music?" It just seemed weird.

I went to North Central High School in Indianapolis and then I went to DePauw University on a trumpet scholarship. I actually got my degree in sociology and did not do anything related with music, but I kept playing on my own and had a pretty long career as a social worker and a program director for the Damien center, which focuses on working with people who are infected and affected by HIV and AIDS. I have a really wonderful career in life that has been able to mix social service and community activism and advocacy for people who need a bullhorn for their voice.

## **Can you tell us a little bit about your performance for Lotus Festival?**

As a classical pianist, I exclusively program and perform classical masterworks that are written by composers of African descent. So that includes African Americans, Caribbean, Afro Cuban, Western African - the whole globe. What I'm going to do this year is tell a story through music of the natural progression of what we call the *African Diaspora*, which is about all of the countries that had the influence of Africa in them. I'm putting together a program called "Black Keys – The Evolution of the Black Classical Arts." It is really thought-provoking music and I'm bringing in a special guest who is a ballet and contemporary dancer, Toni Moore - because movement and music go hand in hand with the music. I'm really excited and I hope you all enjoy it.

## **What is it like to be a musician today?**

Speaking of social unrest and things that have come to a boil - we're at a point where we have an opportunity to change that cycle or we have an opportunity to not change it. It's completely up to us how we choose to do that. That also explains why I play the music that I play. I'm 5'8" and 130 pounds, I'm a little guy, but I feel unbelievably powerful and I feel wildly capable and committed to using this small frame to express something larger than myself, which is the music of composers of African descent.

Art and music have always done that. We give you the soundtrack to what's going on. We give you the spoken and unspoken messages, the voice of the outraged and the voice of the dreams and ideals that we all share on a human level. It's tragic that we have to be here. But again, it's a moment of opportunity, an opportunity to suggest that there are opportunities to create change.

## **If there is a kid who is interested in starting to learn music, do you have any advice for them?**

I say go for it! Learn however you learn, pick whatever instrument you want to and have fun! And if it doesn't work now, that's okay, because it will work out anyway. I mean, music doesn't always have to be serious. It doesn't always have to be a career. Sometimes there's a lot to be said for just trying something different. Enjoying a hobby can help you balance your life and your brain. So, go for it, do it, figure it out.

***Joshua Thompson will perform at Lotus Festival on Sunday, September 27, 2020***  
***For more information, visit: <https://www.lotusfest.org/schedule/>***