

CENTER FOR THE PERFORMING AND CINEMATIC ARTS
Boyer College of Music and Dance

**Small Jazz Ensemble:
The Najwa Parkins Ensemble**

April 14, 2025
The Art of Bread Café

Monday
1:15 PM

Program

Selections will be announced from the stage

About the Artist

NAJWA PARKINS is a Philadelphia-based vocalist, educator, and songwriter/composer. Her voice has often been described as smooth, smoky, and soulful— with a profound range of emotion. With a B.M. In Jazz Studies and Vocal Performance from Temple University, Parkins specializes in performing and teaching within the jazz idiom, but is a multi-disciplinary vocalist, seamlessly transitioning between many genres including blues, RnB, pop, and folk styles (and for those who still need this credential, yes, she has undergone many years—before, during, and after college—of classical training). Parkins has been praised for her lyrically and musically engaging compositions. True to the spirit of multi-potentiality, Parkins also has a background as a dancer and a competitive gymnast and can also be seen performing in the Philadelphia area as an aerialist from time.

Parkins is a first generation American, born to Jamaican parents. As a young child, she made the commute from the Poconos to New York City with her parents every morning on their way to work. In the car, they listened to American music of the 50's, 60's, and 70's as well as the ska, reggae, and dub of Jamaica. At home her three older brothers were actively listening to the hip-hop of the day, making their own beats, and writing rhymes. As a result, Parkins' creative taste is as eclectic and varied as her upbringing. Her musical journey formally began at 9 years old, when she started studying guitar privately and playing trombone in the elementary school band.

At 13 years old, Parkins attended a show led by her (late) trombone teacher (and proud New Orleans native) Alex Watkins, featuring jazz vocalist and electric bassist, Nancy Reed. She immediately recognized a kindred spirit and fell in love with Nancy's voice. Parkins soon began studying voice and electric bass with Nancy, and at 14 years old, she was performing in jazz groups at various local venues, for public and private events. Parkins will always credit Nancy as the

Three hundred sixtieth performance of the 2024-2025 season.

reason she became a jazz vocalist and remains close with her today. Through Nancy, she also met Bob Dorough and was subsequently mentored in songwriting by him— Parkins also remained close with Bob until his passing in 2018.

Parkins graduated from Temple University with a B.M. in Jazz Studies and Vocal Performance, where she studied jazz voice with Philadelphia's own Joanna Pascale and Carla Cook, studied trombone with Luis Bonilla, and studied classical voice with Dr. Julie Snyder. As a trombonist and vocalist for the Temple University Big Band — under the direction of Terrell Stafford— Parkins performed at various prestigious venues and festivals and shared the stage with artists including Benny Golson, Nicholas Payton, Branford Marsalis, Karin Allyson, Dena DeRose, and The Vanguard Jazz Orchestra. After graduating from Temple, Parkins released her self-produced debut album, “Not the Next Someone Else” in 2011. Parkins was a member of Phil Woods and the Festival Orchestra— Performing as both a vocalist and trombonist. She is also the featured vocalist on the 2013 release, *New Celebration*, by Phil Woods and the Festival Orchestra. Deer Head Inn Records produced a live recording of a 2014 performance at the Deer Head Inn, featuring Najwa and saxophonist, Larry McKenna.

Parkins has performed in various schools, performance venues, and festivals in the United States and Europe including the Levitt Pavilion Pasadena, The New Brunswick Jazz Project performance series, The Kimmel Center, ArtsQuest Center at SteelStacks, Musikfest, the Detroit Jazz Festival, the Hague Jazz Festival, The COTA Jazz Festival, Rockwood Music Hall, the Barnes Foundation, the Deer Head Inn, The Jazz Bridge Neighborhood Concert Series, The African American Museum in Philadelphia, the Twin City Opera House, The Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Academy of Music, and Historic Hotel Bethlehem.

She leads several of her own bands and projects in the Philadelphia area, to support the multi-dimensional nature of her vocal stylings and musical interests. Parkins also works as a featured vocalist with groups led by friends and colleagues, including the South Philly Big Band. As a recovering perfectionist, Parkins cannot tell you precisely when to expect releases of new music but has several projects and recordings in the works that she aims to release soon. As an artist and performer, she believes in the importance of connecting with audiences by telling stories through music. She draws on life experiences in writing her own music and lyrics as well as in her interpretation of the music and lyrics of others.