

FEBRUARY 25 & 26

MEMORIAL HALL

OMAR

MUSIC BY **RHIANNON GIDDENS** AND **MICHAEL ABELS**

CONDUCTED BY **JOHN KENNEDY**

DIRECTED BY **KANEZA SCHAAL**

ORCHESTRA PROVIDED IN PARTNERSHIP
WITH THE **NORTH CAROLINA OPERA**

NC PREMIERE OF RHIANNON GIDDENS' PROPULSIVE NEW WORK

What does it mean to tell a story? How do we reckon with the gaps in our history? These questions animate the North Carolina premiere of *Omar*, an opera from Southern Futures at CPA Artist-in-Residence Rhiannon Giddens and acclaimed composer Michael Abels. This expansive new work transcends bare biographical facts to illuminate the life of Omar ibn Said, a West African scholar enslaved in the Carolinas.



CAROLINA PERFORMING ARTS

CPA AND MDC INVITE YOU TO:

**THE STATE OF THE SOUTH, OMAR IBN SAID:
A CONVERSATION BETWEEN
DR. YOUSSEF CARTER AND DR. WILLIAM SPRIGGS**

Tuesday, February 21, 5–6:30 PM | CURRENT Studio
FREE TO ATTEND. REGISTRATION REQUIRED.

Omar ibn Said's story illuminates the historical and geographical relationships between Black Muslim religious empowerment, forced and chosen migration, and labor. As we think of the future of the South—as well as its present—understanding this history is essential to imagining economic systems rooted in equity.

Join us for a dialogue between Dr. Youssef Carter, an Assistant Professor of Religious Studies and the Kenan Rifai Fellow in Islamic Studies at UNC-Chapel Hill, and Dr. William Spriggs, the former Chair of the Department of Economics at Howard University and Chief Economist to the AFL-CIO. This dialogue will be moderated by MDC Senior Program Director Kerri Forrest. Together, we will explore and bear witness to the historical conditions of slavery faced by ibn Said, while envisioning how we might realize systems that value humanity.



CAROLINA PERFORMING ARTS

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CPA AND THE UNC DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC INVITE YOU TO:

**PERFORMING & IMAGINING THE AMERICAN
SOUTH “OPEN CLASSROOM” ON OMAR
RHIANNON GIDDENS IN CONVERSATION
WITH DR. NAOMI ANDRÉ**

Thursday, February 23, 11:15 AM–12:15 PM

Moeser Auditorium in Hill Hall at UNC

FREE TO ATTEND

The university community is welcome to join the students in Performing and Imagining the American South (IDST 121) for a conversation between Rhiannon Giddens and Dr. Naomi André on *Omar*, music, and the American South.

Dr. Naomi André is the David G. Frey Distinguished Professor of Music at UNC-Chapel Hill.



CAROLINA PERFORMING ARTS

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CPA, UNC PRESS, AND UNC AFRICAN STUDIES CENTER INVITE YOU TO:
“WHAT IS THE ‘AUTOBIOGRAPHY’ OF OMAR IBN SAID?” WITH DR. CARL W. ERNST AND DR. MBAYE LO

Thursday, February 23, 5:30–7 PM

FedEx Global Education Center, the Atrium

FREE TO ATTEND. REGISTRATION REQUIRED.

Omar ibn Said (1770-1863), a West African Muslim scholar, was sold into slavery in America, where he spent over half a century enslaved to a prominent North Carolina family. He left behind a small collection of documents in Arabic that remain poorly understood. This presentation is based on Dr. Ernst and Dr. Lo's book, *I Cannot Write My Life: Islam, Arabic, and Slavery in Omar ibn Said's America*, forthcoming from UNC Press in August 2023. Why, at the beginning of his 1831 “Autobiography,” did ibn Said announce “I cannot write my life”? What is the significance of his quotations from Islamic theological and mystical texts, which have escaped notice until now? Ernsts and Lo will address these questions and more. Join us to learn more about their major reassessment of this important witness to the presence of Islam and Arabic at the beginning of America's history.

Moderated by Mark Simpson-Vos, the Editorial Director for UNC Press.

Mbaye Lo is an Associate Professor of the Practice of Asian and Middle Eastern Studies & International Comparative Studies at Duke University.

Carl W. Ernst is the William R. Kenan, Jr., Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies at UNC-Chapel Hill.



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UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL WITH OMAR IBN SAID MATERIALS: INSTRUCTION SESSIONS IN WILSON SPECIAL COLLECTIONS LIBRARY

Session 1: Monday, February 27, 9–10 AM

Session 2: Wednesday, March 1, 3–4 PM

Session 3: Thursday, March 2, 12–1 PM

All sessions located in Wilson Library, Room 901

For folks who were able to see the *Omar* opera or are simply curious about its inspiration, we are offering three opportunities for our Carolina campus community to get up close and personal with documents and other materials related to Omar ibn Said. Guests who sign up online will have a chance to see the original 19th century artifacts featuring or written by Omar himself. In addition, guests will have the opportunity to speak with UNC reference librarians and learn even more ways to engage with Omar's story and special collections at UNC Libraries.



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