



Jazz Vocalist Samara Joy and Guitarist Pasquale Grasso Kick off The Annenberg Center's Spring 2021 Digital Season with Livestream Performance Thursday, February 4

(Philadelphia – January 15, 2021) — The **Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts** kicks off its spring 2021 digital season with two rising jazz stars, vocalist **Samara Joy** and guitarist **Pasquale Grasso**, who make their **Annenberg Center** debuts. Their live performance on the Annenberg Center stage on **Thursday, February 4** at **7 PM** will be streamed online. Visit AnnenbergCenter.org for more details.

Samara Joy, the 2019 winner of the prestigious Sarah Vaughan International Jazz Vocal Competition, is already a veteran performer at famed New York jazz clubs, with a much-anticipated debut album featuring the Pasquale Grasso Trio, due by mid-2021. A New York City native, she has musical roots in Philadelphia through her paternal grandparents, Elder Goldwire and Ruth McLendon, founders of the well-known Philadelphia-based gospel group, The Savettes. Award-winning guitarist **Pasquale Grasso** has garnered critical acclaim and high praise from jazz great Pat Metheny. Displaying talent that belies their youth, the duo will perform a mix of originals and American Songbook classics, offering a glimpse at the future of jazz. The event includes an interactive Q&A with the performers.

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

Samara Joy

Samara Joy resides in the place of her birth, the Castle Hill section of the Bronx in New York. Growing up, music was a pervasive presence due to the inspiration of her grandparents and her father, who toured with the renowned gospel artist Andrae Crouch. Her home was filled with the sounds of not only her father's songs and songwriting process, but the inspiration of many gospel and R&B artists, including Stevie Wonder, Lalah Hathaway, George Duke, Musiq Soulchild, Kim Burrell, Commissioned and many others.

Samara was first exposed to jazz while attending Fordham High School for the Arts, where she performed regularly with the jazz band and eventually won Best Vocalist at JALC's Essentially Ellington competition. However, jazz was not her focus until the time came to choose a college. Samara picked SUNY Purchase, gaining acceptance into their acclaimed jazz program, with a faculty that includes many jazz masters (including Pasquale Grasso and drummer Kenny Washington). "My friends were all into jazz and started sharing their favorite recordings with me to check out. The turning point was when I heard both Sarah Vaughan's version of 'Lover Man' and Tadd Dameron's recordings featuring trumpeter Fats Navarro. I was hooked." From that point, Samara began to pursue her jazz studies with an intense passion, eventually being named the Ella Fitzgerald Scholar and winning the 2019 Sarah Vaughan International Jazz Vocal Competition.

With a voice as smooth as velvet, Samara's star seems to rise with each performance. She has already performed in many of the great jazz venues in NYC, including Dizzy's Club Coca Cola, The Blue Note and

Mezzrow, in addition to working with jazz greats such as Christian McBride, Pasquale Grasso, Jon Faddis, Kirk Lightsey, Cyrus Chestnut and NEA Jazz Master Dr. Barry Harris. [Samara Joy full biography.](#)

Pasquale Grasso

One of the most strikingly unique artists of his generation, Pasquale Grasso has undoubtedly changed the way the world views jazz guitar. Born in Ariano Irpino, Italy, Grasso began playing guitar at a very young age. By the summer of 1997, his parents recognized the depth of their young son's talent and sought out the instruction of guitarist and jazz innovator Agostino Di Giorgio. Barry Harris, the world-renowned jazz educator and bebop piano master, became an extraordinary influence when Grasso attended his jazz workshop in Switzerland during the summer of 1998. Harris, a contemporary of Miles Davis, Sonny Stitt and Cannonball Adderley, took Grasso and his brother, Luigi, under his wing. Over the next five years, the Grasso brothers became pillars of Harris' international workshops and were quickly promoted from mere attendees to instructors for the other students. Grasso was named Harris' guitar teaching assistant and, for the last 10 years, has conducted workshops in Italy, Switzerland, France, Spain, Holland and Slovenia.

In 2008, Grasso pursued classical guitar studies at the Music Conservatory of Bologna under Professor Walter Zanetti. During his time at the conservatory, he developed a new approach to the guitar, combining classical tradition with Chuck Wayne's modern technique. In 2012, he moved to New York City and quickly made a name for himself in the city's vibrant jazz scene. Grasso became part of the Ari Roland Quartet and the Chris Byars Quartet, performing in clubs and music festivals, and recording in the studio regularly. Later that year, Grasso was named a Jazz Ambassador with the U.S. Embassy, going on to tour extensively across Europe, Kuwait, Kazakhstan, Cyprus, Lithuania, Ukraine and more. Despite his young age, Grasso has performed with many leading musicians of the international jazz scene. Grasso is currently a Sony Masterwork artist and teaches at SUNY Purchase's College of Music. [Pasquale Grasso full biography.](#)

About the Annenberg Center's 2020-21 Digital Season

The Annenberg Center's 2021 spring digital season comprises livestreamed performances featuring world premieres and Philadelphia debuts by top dance companies, outstanding jazz artists, and collaborative music performances, in addition to screenings of recently released independent films (to be announced soon). Designed specifically for the digital stage, the live performances are broadcast using state-of-the-art digital technology from the Prince or Zellerbach Theatre, integrating live chat, and concluding with interactive discussions with the creators and performers. Livestreamed performances are available online for 48 hours after the start time for those who purchased access. Full season calendar can be accessed [here](#).

About the Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts

The Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts serves as a major cultural destination and crossroads connecting the University of Pennsylvania and the Greater Philadelphia region through innovative human expression in theatre, music, dance and film, serving an annual audience of over 80,000. The Annenberg Center also serves as a key resource for the arts at Penn, connecting master artists with Penn students in support of and as an enhancement to the arts curriculum. Student performing arts groups are also key users of the Annenberg Center's multiple performance and rehearsal spaces, while also staffing many operational roles throughout the academic year. In reflection of Penn's core values as a world-respected academic institution, the Annenberg Center emphasizes artistic and intellectual excellence, diversity and rigor in its presentations; prioritizes broad inclusiveness in the artists, audiences and groups it serves; manages outstanding performance, conference and meeting facilities; and stresses comprehensive event planning, production support and customer service. The Annenberg Center is a major provider of performing arts access for school children and actively engages a

broad range of primary, secondary and post-secondary student audiences and inclusive constituencies from the campus, community and surrounding region. Visit [AnnenbergCenter.org](https://www.annenbergcenter.org).

LIVESTREAM

Samara Joy & Pasquale Grasso

Thursday, February 4, 7 PM

Two rising jazz stars make their Annenberg Center debut. Samara Joy won the prestigious Sarah Vaughan International Jazz Vocal Competition in 2019, and now at only age 21, she's already a veteran performer at famed New York jazz clubs with a much-anticipated debut album due by mid-2021. Samara Joy will reunite on stage with Pasquale Grasso, an award-winning guitarist whose technique and "practically faultless" (*DownBeat*) playing has garnered high praise from jazz great Pat Metheny. With talent that belies their youth, this duo will perform a mix of originals and American Songbook classics, offering a glimpse at the future of jazz.

This is an original, live event, performed on the Annenberg Center stage and streamed online, and includes an interactive Q&A with the performers.

Access Information for Samara Joy & Pasquale Grasso

Visit [AnnenbergCenter.org](https://www.annenbergcenter.org) to purchase access to this show until 7:30 PM on February 4. The performance may be watched live at 7 PM on February 4 to participate in the chat and artist Q&A. It will be available on-demand to ticketholders through February 6. Visit the Annenberg Center's digital streaming [FAQs](#) for additional details.

#

CONTACTS:

For the Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts

Katherine Blodgett, Communications Consultant

katherineblodgett@gmail.com

215.431.1230

Alexander Freeman, Director of Marketing and Ticketing

Annenberg Center for the Performing Arts

freemana@ac.upenn.edu

215.898.9081