

Roots, Water, and Sunlight: A Contemporary Octet Expedition through the Expressions of James Baldwin

By Kevin Harris

[Berklee Performance Center, Boston](#)

February 5th, 2019 - 8:00pm



A distinctive trait of Kevin Harris is his desire to constantly grow, evolve, improve, and advance.

In looking to expand his skills as a composer, Harris set out to put music to the renowned and significant thoughts shared by James Baldwin, in particular those from the book *'The Fire Next Time'*.

The actualization of this idea is his project *"Roots, Water, and Sunlight"*, which comprises three movements for a wind octet to be accompanied by rhythm section, digital instrumentation, and recorded words of Baldwin. It is set to debut at the

Berklee Performance Center on February 5th.

Kevin Harris has assembled an extraordinary team of musicians who have shown to have their own voice and are eager to bring the audience through this journey. In this through composed piece, Harris' instrument will not be his piano. Instead he will be at the very forefront, leading the ensemble in executing and delivering his message through the notes he has composed.

In *"The Fire Next Time"* Baldwin courageously addresses racial injustice in America. With his composition, Harris aspires to convey, through musical expression, Baldwin's perspective on how blacks and whites must transcend what they think they know, believe, understand and fear, and that only by expanding their perception on both sides, they can fulfill and honor the way society can and perhaps should be.

In the words of Baldwin: *"Try to imagine how you would feel if you woke up one morning to find the sun shivering and all the stars aflame"* is the reminder that when our reality is unexpectedly shaken up by presenting itself in a different way, it is only by engaging with this new reality that we can actually find beneficial conclusions.

Baldwin's unique understanding of the racial undertones of the 60's seems to be quite close to what we are experiencing today, where challenged realities are not met with a willingness to evolve.

Harris' ultimate desire is that his music will inspire his audience to listen carefully, to be in tune with all positive stimuli that surround us and continuously be committed to positive and courageous changes.

Roots, Water, and Sunlight

First movement: *Reality Dissipating*

Comfortingly harmonious, Harris' first movement slowly transports the listener from a feeling of familiarity to one of ambiguous sense of not knowing what will occur next. As the more pleasant harmonies (reality) dissipate, one can hear Baldwin softly whispering to the observer "*who will you become as the stars above you (your reality) change position or fall from the sky?*"

Second movement: *The Uphill Quest for Fragility, Courage, and Curiosity*

The second movement strives to represent the listener's struggle to wrestle with his or her ever changing reality. "*When stretched*" Harris asks, "*what new shape can we develop/evolve into*"? Harris wishes to remind the listener that just like water, we have the unquestionable ability to masterfully adapt to a society of different social classes, ethnicities, genders, and so forth.

Third movement: *Horizon of an Unknown Star*

The closing movement is an encouragement to embrace change, leverage one's creativity and boldness, and go beyond one's own limitations. Harris' statement that "*perhaps one of life's greatest rewards is coming to embrace change after having resisted it for so long*" is the source of inspiration for this final movement. His concluding thought is that collectively, we can improve our society in wondrous ways we have yet to know.

Personnel

- **Composer and Director**

Kevin Harris

- **Wind Section**

Anggie Obin	<i>Flute</i>
Jonathan Suazo	<i>Alto Sax</i>
Gregory Groover	<i>Tenor Sax</i>
Noah Slate	<i>French Horn</i>
Jason Palmer	<i>Trumpet</i>
John Bradford	<i>Trumpet</i>
Brandon Lin	<i>Trombone</i>
Max Agree	<i>Trombone</i>

- **Rhythm Section**

Max Ridley	<i>Bass</i>
Tyson Jackson	<i>Drums</i>
Nikolai Mishchenko	<i>Piano</i>

- **Electronic Digital Instrumentation**

Calvin Limuel