

# Gateways Music Festival performers discuss representation and the next generation

By TIANNA MANON • AUG 11, 2017

The Gateways Music Festival (<http://gatewaysmusicfestival.org/>) is in full swing and musicians from all over the world have flocked to Rochester to be a part of the classical music festival.

“It is so dynamic,” said Amadi Azikiwe, violist and son of the festival’s founder, Armenta Adams Hummings Dumisani. He was part of a live rehearsal for WXXI’s Backstage Pass (<http://classical915.org/post/backstage-pass-gateways-music-festival-encore-81317-1pm>) on Friday. “I feel energized. It’s almost like professional development being here with so many people to make contacts, to see people I haven’t seen for two years. To meet people I’ve never met... you meet so many amazing people and, yeah, it’s great.”



*Gateways Music Festival showcases classical musicians of African descent.*

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Now in its 24th year, the Gateways Music Festival showcases artists of African descent but organizers also hope to encourage local youth to explore classical music. Ultimately, Festival President and Artistic Director Lee Koonce is hoping to create a pipeline that allows young children to get involved early, train for years and then potentially even make a career out of it.

Jamal Rossi, dean at the Eastman School of Music, said the School shares the same goal: “What Lee and I are working on in trying to create an opportunity for young musicians to train to be inspired, to come to Eastman and eventually sit on this stage as part of the Gateways Music Festival.”

And the best way to do that, according to Azikiwe, is to show the children successful musicians that look like them.

and I've looked at the different methods and outreach programs, and the different methods used to raise awareness and I'm finding just letting our art do it- the music is the most important thing," he said.

For many of the artists performing in the festival, it is a reunion but almost all of them said it's also a breath of fresh air to perform with other artists of African descent and simply celebrate their pride in their culture, race and background.

"It's a little overwhelming to see so many people who look like me and who come from so many different environments but are all so incredibly talented and skilled at what we're doing," said Thapelo Masita, another performer in Friday's rehearsal. Masita is a recent graduate of Eastman School of Music who is participating in his first Gateways Festival. He said he encourages people to go to the festival and see the performers.

All of the events are free and the festival runs until Sunday. Organizers also announced the biennial festival will begin occurring annually starting in 2018.