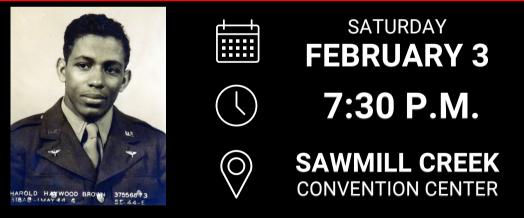




FIRELANDS SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

A Journey of a Tuskegee Airman

Featuring the Michael Shirtz Quartet with Sadiyah Babatunde, William Barrett, Regional Singers, Symphony Strings, Van Parker conducting.



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Good evening and welcome to the Firelands Symphony's Guest Ensemble Concert featuring the Michael Shirtz Quartet and honoring the life and legacy of Lt. Col. Harold Brown.

The quartet is joined by vocalist Sadiyah Babatunde, narrator William Barrett, a string ensemble from the Firelands Symphony Orchestra and a chorus with members of the FSO Chorale, the Terra Choral Society from Terra State Community College, and students from Heidelberg University School of Music & Theatre.

While we are going to hear about Lt. Col. Brown's legacy this evening, you actually will have a chance to be a part of that legacy. A life-sized sculpture of Lt. Col. Brown has been commissioned and will be on permanent display at the Liberty Aviation Museum in Port Clinton. There is an opportunity for you to contribute, and you will hear more about that later in the program.

We also welcome members of several local veteran communities, whom we have invited to join us this evening. We thank you for your service and we hope that you enjoy tonight's concert.

The practice is over, the voices are warmed up, the instruments are tuned, and the story is ready to be told. Please enjoy the Michael Shirtz quartet and friends, as they present To Rise Above – A Journey of a Tuskegee Airman.

Ron Brook

Ron Brooker, FSO Executive Director





CARL TOPILOW, MUSIC DIRECTOR AND CONDUCTOR



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A performer, composer, and conductor, Michael Shirtz is known for his versatility with jazz, contemporary, and classical music audiences. Credited as a "songsmith" with his interpretations as a vocalist and pianist, Shirtz has worked with such artists as Dave Brubeck, Kevin Mahogany, Melissa

Manchester, Ellen Winters, Elizabeth von Trapp, and tenure as music director/producer for Maureen McGovern. Performing frequently as a guest artist and with Michael Shirtz Quartet, he blends traditional jazz with Blues, Funk, Rock, Gospel and Singer/Songwriter styles into his performances. Shirtz' most recent album and show "Blue Skies" were released in 2018. With a passion for fostering creativity and collaboration, Shirtz has emerged as a respected figure in both the jazz and choral communities as a conductor and educator. His work as a composer contains music for choir, orchestra, musical theatre; including the oratorio *In God's Light* (2005), the cantata *The Solemn Blessings* (2009), *Jazz Impressions on Reflections* (2003), *Sailing the Bay Jazz Suite* (2009), *Hymn to the Earth Jazz Suite* (2010), *Gift of a Generation* (2014), the musical *Sparkler* (2016), *Headliner The Musical* (2018), *Prayer for New Hope* (2021), and *To Rise Above: The Journey of a Tuskegee Airman* (2022).

An active vocal coach and music director for educational, repertory theatre, and pops music productions, he has served on the faculty of Capital University Conservatory of Music, American Music Academy, Terra State Community College, Pellissippi State-Knoxville, and Lakeside Chautauqua. Shirtz received a Bachelor of Music in Jazz Studies from Capital University and Master of Music in Conducting from California State University, Los Angeles. Currently, Shirtz serves as associate director for Tri-C JazzFest & Performing Arts Series, producer of the JAZZ@8 Series, conductor of the Symphony Chorale and School of Music of the Firelands Symphony, and on faculty at Heidelberg University School of Music & Theatre. Shirtz is a member of ASCAP, African American Jazz Caucus, American Choral Directors Association, Jazz Education Network, and an advocate for mental health awareness. Shirtz is a Prima Music Foundation Artist.

To Rise Above: A Journey of a Tuskegee Airman is a five-movement musical work for theatrical or concert presentations highlighting the experiences of World War II Tuskegee pilot, Col Harold Brown. Based on his 2017 biographical memoir, <u>Keep Your Airspeed Up: The Story of a Tuskegee Airman</u>, written by Brown and his wife, Dr. Marsha Bordner, this musical narrative outlines Brown's journey through five movements – The Dream, The Struggle, The Mission, The Man and The Dream Lives On. Each movement features a narrated journey through Brown's perspective accompanied by a series of musical themes and anthems throughout. Michael Shirtz wrote this musical dramatization on Brown's childhood dream of flying, overcoming the despair of racial segregation, his passion for education both as a military aviator and a leader in higher education, and the lessons for all people found in the six principles of the Tuskegee Airmen: "Aim High, Believe in Yourself, Use Your Brain, Be Ready To Go, Never Quit, and Expect To Win."

For nearly two decades, Shirtz and his wife Pamela have been close friends with Dr. Harold Brown and Dr. Marsha Bordner. Together, the four shared in their love of music, education, service, and food. Fascinated by aviation, Shirtz spent countless hours talking with Brown about his career in the Air Force and time serving as a Tuskegee Airman. As Shirtz began focusing his attention on composing music to stories that provide inspiration and lessons in humanity, what better journey than to honor musically his dear friend, retired Col. Harold Brown. While Shirtz created the music and narration for *To Rise Above*, he credits both Brown and Bordner for suggestions and edits to the overall work.

The five movements open and close with the idea of the P-51 Red Tail fighter taking off in the morning beginning the opening movement with "Morning Flight" and returning home in the quiet of the setting sun during final movement, "Evening Flight." The opening and closing movements are a reminder of Harold's dreams of flying, setting goals, and accomplishing them. His call to follow our dreams is the mission we are left with to take into our own lives.

The second movement shares Harold's experience of dealing with race and segregation in this country and throughout his career. Using themes discussed with Harold, Michael wrote the anthem "A Place for All Mankind" to conclude this movement with a message of hope and a directive of kindness and unity for everyone.

The third and fourth movements present Harold's legacy as a war hero and defining leader in education. Brown was not a musician, (even joked about taking piano lessons as a child and again in his 90s) however, he had a deep appreciation for jazz, big band, and classical music, particularly opera. Wanting to highlight these interests, Shirtz uses the musical elements in the third movement by creating a fiery classical fugue depicting his battle engagements in the skies, a solo cello melody representing his feeling of being alone behind enemy lines, and a neo-classical aria exploring the emotions of being a POW. In the fourth movement Shirtz uses the big band style with a strong Count Basie feel to celebrate Harold's many achievements in the Air Force and the higher educational two-year college movement.

Meant to inspire, entertain, educate, and share the story and legacy of the Tuskegee Airmen, there is something for everyone and all ages in To Rise Above: A Journey of a Tuskegee Airman. Col. Harold Brown unfortunately passed away on January 12, 2023, at the age of 98. His legacy lives on for future generations through the work of CAF's Rise Above Programs, the Liberty Aviation Museum, and *To Rise Above: A Journey of a Tuskegee Airman*.

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Dwight Bailey (bass/vocals) was born in Detroit but credits much of his musical development to the heavy influence of musicians based in Central Ohio. During his teenage years he began playing predominately gospel and working with artist like Bobby Jones, LaShaun Pace & Douglas Miller. Dwight has spent the last several years touring all over the world and has performed on some of the most prestigious platforms in music, such as the Monterey Bay Blues/Jazz Festival, the North Sea Jazz Festival, The London Jazz Festival, Carnegie Hall and the Primivera Music Festival, to name a few.

Reggie Jackson (drums) is equally at home to both the jazz and the pop/commercial music scenes. Based in Columbus, OH, Reggie built a reputation from an early age as a powerful drummer who could cover many styles such as be-bop, Latin, big band, fusion, pop and gospel. Over the last two decades Reggie expanded his reach beyond the Columbus scene through worldwide tours with the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame inductee Dr. John as well as the Grammy Award winning jazz singer Diane Schuur.





George Michael (saxophone) is a NYC based saxophonist and educator who has over 20 years of professional musical experience as a music educator, performer, clinician, composer and arranger. George can be heard at a number of venues around NYC including Carnegie Hall Music Educators Workshop, NYC Jazz Workshop, and the Michael Shirtz Quartet. George was also one of the founding members of the Washington Heights Jazz Festival which features numerous musicians from upper Manhattan and the surrounding New York City area.

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Van Parker (conductor) enjoys a dynamic career as a highly sought-after conductor, orchestral and chamber musician, soloist, recording artist, new music collaborator, and music educator. An advocate for the works of living composers and composers from under-represented communities, Van has participated in premieres of works by Eric Whitacre, Lewis Nielsen, John Wineglass, Deborah Phelps, Ahmed Al-Abaca, and Buck McDaniel. In recent seasons Van has prepared choirs for NBC Universal's Saturday Night Live and the St. Georges International Music Festival in Guadeloupe (France). Van is a member of the Firelands and Lima Symphonies and also performs frequently with the Akron, Ashland, Mansfield, and Youngstown Symphonies, as well as the Cleveland Pops Orchestra and Cleveland Opera Theater. Van is on faculty at the Beck Center for the Arts in Lakewood, Ohio in addition to being an assistant director of the All-Ohio State Fair Band.

Sadiyah Babatunde (vocalist) graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Vocal Performance from The Ohio State University. As a former member of the Columbus Symphony Chorus, she was a featured soloist in 'The American Festival' singing the choral solos within George Gershwin's Porgy and Bess. She also soloed in CSO's performance of Bach's St. John Passion. Sadiyah has gone on to win the OSU Wilson Competition and OSU Undergraduate/Masters Concerto Competition. She claimed second prize in the Senior Voice Division of the Lima Symphony Orchestra's 60th Annual Young Artists' Competition. Major concert performances include presenting John Carter's Cantata with the OSU Symphony Orchestra, Robert Cohen's Alzheimer's Stories with the Bexley HS Symphony and Chorale, Mozart's Requiem with the Lima Symphony Orchestra, Beethoven's Mass in C with the Firelands Symphony Orchestra, and Michael Shirtz' TO RISE ABOVE: A Journey of Tuskegee Airman with the Michael Shirtz Quartet.







William Barrett (narrator) is an amazing multi-talented person as a worker, a coach, an athlete, and sometimes he sings....sometimes. Canton native and now from Sandusky, Ohio, Barrett began studying theatre at Firelands College in the late 90s and since then has taken rolls in such productions as Into the Woods, Art, and Voices of Freedom, among others. On a break from the stage to focus on his running career, Barrett actively participates in Runs These Streets with Half Marathons and Full Marathons across the country and around the globe. He is the Assistant Coach of Track & Field and the Head Coach of Cross Country at Sandusky High School. His future goals in running include participating in the Boston Marathon in 2025. After that, his plans are to return to the stage and world of acting. Following the principles of the Tuskegee Airmen, Barrett believes in striving to meet his goals and there's nothing he can't do.

Nataliya Pshenychna (cello), born and raised in Kyiv, Ukraine, in a musical family due to her grandmother. She started playing piano at a very early age, and cello, when she was 6 years old. Nataliya came to the United States in 2005 to attend Kent/Blossom Music Festival, where she met her future teachers, cellists Keith Robinson and Stephen Geber. She holds her Master in Music degrees from Kyiv Tchaikovsky Conservatory, Kent State University, and Artist in Cello Performance from Cleveland Institute of Music. Nataliya has worked and performed with Kyiv National Opera, National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine, The Cleveland Orchestra, Apollo's Fire Orchestra, Canton and Akron Symphonies, City Music Cleveland Chamber Orchestra, Cleveland Pops. Nataliya's is currently a Principal Cello with Snowbelt Symphony, and Firelands Symphony Orchestra where she has been performing since 2009.





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Van Parker, Conductor

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Ron Brooker Yaryna Tsarynska Erin Kim Hayley Camp

<u>Violin II</u>

Gina Buzzelli Adam Murray Rebecca Rhoades Maria Vinas

<u>Viola</u>

Rosalind Soltow Patrick Prejean Jacob Campbell Jaylon Hayes-Keller

<u>Cello</u>

Nataliya Pshenychna Brian Shifflet

<u>Bass</u> Rachel Kost

Letter Excerpts Read By:

"WWII Veteran Pilot" by Jim Brokov

"The Daughter and Mother of Pilots" by Jennifer Wertz

"Former College Student" by Myles Bailey

"Airforce Service Woman" by Evelyn Rash

"School Teacher" & "Elementary School Students" by Pamela Shirtz

CHORNS VOCALISTS

Van Parker, Conductor

Alto

Karen Bacni F Amanda Blankenbeker T Melissa Cullen F Stacey Depner F, T Betsy Dupler F Carol Dusdieker H Sarah Jewell H Virginia Mamere F Samantha Stack-Gonzalez F Diane Stalling F Victoria Wheeler F Abigail Yarris H Peyton Zamarelli F

Mezzo-soprano

Soprano

Karen Abbott F Connie Carnicom F, T Mary Foland F Susan Fritz F Bev Hart F, T Megan Kaufman F Lindsey Lemons F Carol Phillips F Sally Ploger F Angela Young F, T Pam Benedict F, T Deborah Billow F.T Sue Blankenbeker T Wendy Brown F, T Sheryl Cawrse F Sarah Christophel F Karen Demandos F Rebecca Eppard H Karen Gerold F Alvna Hinsch F Judy Hoffman F.T Natalie Joritz H Sari Kellev F Cynthia Klein F Beverly Mendoza F Valerie Myers T Deborah Randall F, T Yvette Rash F Fonda Robinson F Heidi Sarvis-Sapp F Olga Trumpower F Carrie Jo Wahl F Terri Wilhelm F

<u>Tenor</u>

Robin Mygrant **F, T** Jim Obergefell **F** Pamela Sayre **F** William Shannon **F** Sandy Spayd-Kilko **F** Tom Thorbahn **F, T** Marianne Weaver **F**

Baritone

Taylor Colaizzi **F** Tom Curry **F, T**

<u>Bass</u>

Ron Blake **F, T** Tom Dewey **T** Lou Engler **F** Ellen Hanck **F** Dermot Healey **H** Jack Hubbard **F** Dave Kocsis **F** Nathan Loudenslager **F, T** Rick Noderer **F** Chris Petersen **F, T** Guy Thiboutot **F**

F= member of Firelands Symphony Orchestra Chorale

T = member of Terra Choral Society

H = member of Heidelberg University School of Music & Theatre

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CONCERT PROGRAM

To Rise Above: A Journey of a Tuskegee Airman Music & Text by Michael Shirtz

William Barrett, narrator | Sadiyah Babatunde, soprano Michael Shirtz Quartet | Nataliya Pshenychna, cello To Rise Above Chorus | Firelands Symphony Orchestra Strings Van Parker, conductor

I. The Dream

Introducing Harold's childhood experience, developing his strong work ethic, and his dream of becoming a pilot and heading to Tuskegee.

Follow Your Dreams Morning Flight Improvisation Reflection Follow Your Dreams

II. The Struggle

The Tuskegee Airmen faced incredible challenges with race throughout their service. Witnessing Harold's experience as a Black man in a segregated military, the progress of civil rights throughout his career, and the lessons to continue the fight for equality, kindness, and unity for all mankind.

Change Your Seat, Switch Cars Improvisation Reflection A Place for All Mankind

III. The Mission

Following his training at Tuskegee through flying missions in Europe, this movement highlights Brown's story as a fighter pilot, his crash and time as a POW, and his liberation by Patton's army and return to the U.S. following the war.

Beginning Flight Counter Flight The Flight Improvisation Reflection Dog Fight Fugue Have You Forsaken Me? Quiet Remembrance Flight Liberated

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William Barrett, narrator | Sadiyah Babatunde, soprano Michael Shirtz Quartet | Nataliya Pshenychna, cello To Rise Above Chorus | Firelands Symphony Orchestra Strings Van Parker, conductor

IV. The Man

Written in the style of Big Bands, Brown's life and career after the war years as an Air Force aviator, educator and college administrator, and a look at his personality and interests.

You'll Be Harold Brown!

V. The Dream Lives On

Reflection of narrated excerpts from letters to Brown received over the years in appreciation for his service and inspirational spirit to others.

Evening Flight Letters Follow Your Dreams

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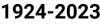
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Songs to be announced from stage.



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The Liberty Aviation Museum, located in Port Clinton, Ohio, has an opportunity for you to honor one of the most important and influential men in the military and education, Lt. Col. Harold H. Brown. They are working with nationally recognized sculptor, Andy Sacksteder, to create a lifesize bronze sculpture of Dr. Brown to grace the entrance of the Museum. As one of the Tuskegee Airmen, Harold H. Brown made history as a combat pilot during World War II. He was not only an airman, but also as an educator; one of the fathers of the two-year college option, giving young students new confidence toward stellar careers. Harold passed away in 2023 at the age of 98, but his legacy lives on.

Now, The Liberty Aviation Museum and you have the honor and opportunity to help make this sculpture a reality. Visit this link to make a donation today. And, thank you.

http://www.libertyaviationmuseum.org/HaroldBrownSculpture.html

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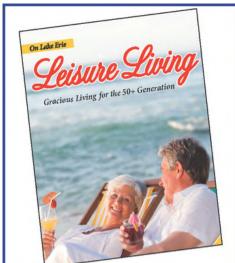
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Sonata, cont. (up to \$149)

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