

Performance showcases work of Black composers

African American Composer Initiative to host annual concert, donate funds to EPA school

- [By Ana Mata, Daily Journal staff](#)
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Musicians of the African American Composer Initiative perform at Eastside College Preparatory for an annual concert that raises money for the school.

Photo courtesy of AACI

LaDoris Cordell, retired from the bench and eager to return to a childhood joy, was taking piano lessons when she realized nearly every piece she was learning was written by a white composer.

The retired judge's question to her piano instructor, Jodi Gandolfi, "Are there any Black composers?" began a shared quest to find the answer and share their findings.

The result was the African American Composer Initiative, a dedication to present the works of living and historical Black composers in concert, publish videos of the performances and commission new compositions by modern musicians.

The organization, led by Cordell and Gandolfi, hosts an annual concert that not only presents and performs concert pieces worthy of being in the canon, but also raises money for local students in East Palo Alto.

Returning for the 15th year on Jan. 31 and Feb. 1, the concert's theme will be "Hold Out for Joy." The theme is particularly timely, Gandolfi and Cordell said, and will feature works curated to tell a story of hope and resilience by Black composers.

"With so much going on, and most of it negative, it's easy for people to become paralyzed with fear or to just become overwhelmed," Cordell said. "All of the music in this program is tailored to the theme."

The concert will open with a spiritual rendition of "Didn't My Lord Deliver Daniel," and end with Earth Wind and Fire's "Shining Star." Those, with each piece in between, will share the message that people should be resilient and fight for joy, Cordell said.

"The music of African American composers, I don't care from how far back in the day, it's always relevant. It's relevant," Cordell said.

All money raised by tickets to the annual concert go directly to the Eastside College Preparatory School, a 100% scholarship based private school largely serving Latino and Black students.

For Cordell, supporting the East Palo Alto community is meaningful. After graduating from Stanford Law, Cordell opened her own practice in EPA, and in 1983 she swore in the first East Palo Alto City Council after the city became incorporated.

"It's a community that's dear to my heart," Cordell said. "Our concerts have become a part of the life there."