

# Khari Joyner

## Speaking through the cello



Looking through your biography, you've had an impressive number of successes, awards and achievements at the start of your career. Help us sort them out. What musical and/or non-musical achievements are you most proud of, and why?

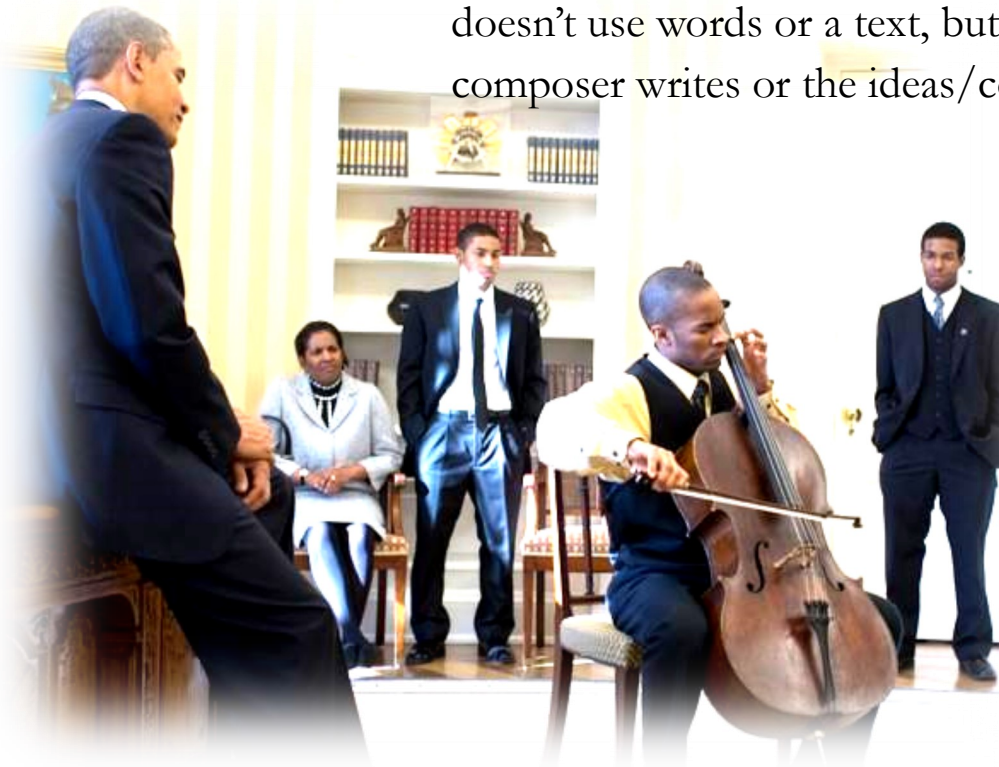
Thank you very much! It's rather difficult for me to say which particular accomplishments I am most proud of, as all of them have really shaped who I am as a person and musician today. I can say that some of my most favorite memories and achievements have been performing for distinguished individuals such as President Obama, the late Coretta Scott-King, and Maya Angelou. Each of these experiences were special in their own way, and I was most humbled and honored to be in the presence of these individuals— sharing my love of music with them. I feel blessed to be able to meet so many people through music, and to continue to grow as an artist with each new venture I embark on musically and non-musically. If there is especially one thing I am proud of, even more than the accomplishments in the form of awards or honors, it would be the lessons of resiliency and courage I have been taught through life experiences.

These have undoubtedly brought me to where I am today.

*“...classical music is where I can most easily find my voice.”*

## You had to opportunity to play for President Obama. Tell us about the experience.

The opportunity to perform for President Obama was definitely one of the most memorable moments for me. The performance was in partnership with the Make-A-Wish foundation of which I had been a recipient, and I initially thought I would only be performing in the White House, with President Obama possibly in attendance. The date of the performance had to be pushed back several times, due to the President's ever busy schedule. However, once it was finally organized, I realized on the morning I arrived at the White House that I would be giving a private performance for the President in the Oval Office. I was most humbled and honored by the experience, as he opened his office door to greet me and my family, and I performed the Prelude from J.S. Bach's Sixth Cello Suite. He was elated, moved, and so generous to allow me into his personal space and offer the performance to him. I will definitely never forget the short conversation that we exchanged after performing—although it was brief, it felt like time had somehow stopped!



## You have performed in a variety of settings, and with different genres of music. Why is classical music important to you?

For me, classical music is where I can most easily find my voice. Whether performing music from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, 17<sup>th</sup> century, or later in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, I have learned how to take many different musical languages and speak them through the sound of the cello. I think playing classical music has taught me how to be adaptable more than anything, and how to develop an even keener sense of listening. One of the most fascinating things for me as an instrumentalist is finding ways to emulate the sound of the voice, and furthermore communicating through people a medium that doesn't use words or a text, but rather the notes that a composer writes or the ideas/concepts that are innate

within a body of music. I do enjoy performing other genres as well—I've done quite a bit of concerts in collaboration with jazz, pop music, and non-Western traditions as well.



**Like many professional musicians, you come from a musical family. How does the experience of playing with your brothers in the KAJ Trio differ from playing chamber music with other colleagues.**

I think the biggest difference is that often with family, there are many things that come naturally in regards to mannerisms of playing or personality that you often take for granted, because you know the person so well, especially if you've grown up in the same household with them : ) I can think back to many times when my brothers and I were younger when we would practice, we would sometimes never be able to agree on one thing because of our ways as brothers (my parents still joke about this to this today when reminiscing on hearing us in the house!), but at the same time, other moments would come so naturally we didn't even have to think about how we would do it! Passages in a Mozart trio for example, would be so synchronized and emotionally in unison that it was amazing! These are things that often take more rehearsing and understanding when playing with colleagues that you meet along the way, even if they are close friends. One of the most important things though, is that growing up with a musical family helps to prepare one for many relationships of music making that will follow in years down the road. I think playing with my older brothers has made me more aware of musical decisions and overall musicianship as a chamber musician, so I'm lucky to have had that!

**What composer or artist are you really into right now? Who is currently on the top of your itunes playlist?**

Ah another tough question! : ) Several composers and artists, but I will say I have recently taken to late style of Gabriel Fauré, as I never explored it until very recently for a research project in my doctoral studies. Having performed both cello sonatas and having heard many of his other late chamber works, I find a very peculiar but intriguing quality of poetry and stream of consciousness in these works. I hope to be able to perform his last work that he finished in early 1924, the String Quartet—it is one of my favorite works of his. I also have taken a keen interest recently in the music of Kaija Saariaho. I am giving the New York Premiere of her Cello Concerto 'Notes on Light' in early December, and I think it is a fine piece! I really love her compositional language, and think it is very well-crafted cello writing as well.