

# SERIOUS

AYANNA

## Biography

Unique and captivating, Ayanna Witter-Johnson is a composer, vocalist, cellist and pianist who has developed musically from a diverse background of mixed cultures. Her compositional versatility includes writing for symphony orchestra, chamber ensembles, big bands, string quartets and choirs, as well as songs, soundscapes and pieces for solo instruments and tape, across a range of styles including jazz, classical, contemporary, R&B, soul, reggae, electro-acoustic and black folk.

Ayanna graduated from Trinity College of Music in London with a First Class Degree and the *Vivian Prindl Outreach Prize* for the *Most Innovative Professional Skills Project*. At Trinity, she studied composition with Alwynne Pritchard and classical 'cello with David Kennedy. She has studied composition with John A. Thomas, Errollyn Wallen and Andrew Poppy; arranging with Paul Bartholomew; orchestration with Stephen Montague and classical 'cello with Sue Sutherley (London Philharmonic Orchestra). Throughout 2008 Ayanna was a participant in the London Symphony Orchestra's Discovery Panufnik Young Composers Scheme, which is designed to facilitate the development of orchestral writing for talented young composers. In addition, she was an Emerging Artist in Residence (EAR) at London's Southbank Centre. In 2011, having won the *Edward and Sally Van Lier Fund Scholarship*, she completed a Masters of Music in Composition at the Manhattan School of Music.

Continually developing as a performer and composer of extraordinary versatility, Ayanna made her debut at the London Jazz Festival in 2008, opening for Intercontinental – a project that features jazz drumming legend Jack DeJohnette and the Queen of South African jazz Sibongile Khumalo. In 2009 she continued, to great acclaim, her association as vocalist, cellist and featured artist with Courtney Pine's Afropeans: Jazz Warriors. In 2010, her new trio – featuring Fraser Fifield on pipes, whistles and saxophone and Robert Mitchell on piano – made its debut at Dartington and toured the UK during the summer. In the autumn Ayanna won *Amateur Night Live* at the legendary Apollo Theater in Harlem, NYC, following in the footsteps of Ella Fitzgerald, Michael Jackson and others. In 2011 she was commissioned by Bath Festival to create a new programme in response to the work of Nina Simone, the legendary singer, songwriter and civil rights activist. In September Ayanna will showcase her current band at Decibel Performing Arts Showcase.

Ayanna has worked with groundbreaking composer Nitin Sawhney on his *Aftershock* project for the re-opening of the Royal Festival Hall and with award winning film composer Jocelyn Pook, preparing music for her ensemble. She is a regular collaborator with Jason Yarde and has worked on three of his large scale projects: as a performer in the B-Trade ensemble; the assistant orchestrator on the landmark *Urban Classic* project, which brought together leading UK Grime artists and the BBC Concert Orchestra conducted by Charles Hazlewood; and as arranger and orchestrator for *Belief!*, a concert with the London Symphony Orchestra and legendary South African trumpeter Hugh Masekela.

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Ayanna's radio credits include original material on Courtney Pine's *Jazz Crusade* and *Jazz Line-Up* (BBC Radio 3), *In Tune* (BBC Radio 2), the BBC Asian Network and *Woman's Hour* (BBC Radio 4). She was also invited to feature as a cellist and musical arranger for the BBC documentary *Little Angels*. In 2007 she was commissioned by the Liverpool Lighthouse to compose a choral piece for young vocalists in the Merseyside area to commemorate the Bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act. Ayanna has also been commissioned to compose the soundtrack for the feature length film *Disoriented Generation*.

A member of the National Youth Theatre and Youth Forum of the National Portrait Gallery, Ayanna has much experience as a Compositional Workshop Leader, working alongside Jackie Walduck for the Creative Partnerships Scheme in association with the *Raising the Roof* programme for a school in the London Borough of Lewisham. This led to managing her first solo project, *Sojourner Truth's Story*, in connection with Kori Arts at the National Portrait Gallery in 2008. Most recently she collaborated with ensemble Ignite to deliver *On The Record*, a workshop for young musicians at the Wigmore Hall in London. She has also delivered workshops on jazz with a group of elite music students at Aldeburgh Music.

**For more information:**

[www.serious.org.uk/artists/ayanna-witter-johnson](http://www.serious.org.uk/artists/ayanna-witter-johnson)

[www.myspace.com/ayannawitterjohnson](http://www.myspace.com/ayannawitterjohnson)