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Social Media, Opera Star Babatunde Akinboboye to join Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra in Summermusik's We Are One: Roots Festival

CINCINNATI, OH – Summermusik will present the fifth installment of its We Are One festival series March 12-15, 2026 with guest artist Babatunde Akinboboye, an operatic baritone who has amassed over 1 million followers on TikTok and Instagram with his exciting performances that blend hip-hop and opera (“hip hopera”). We Are One: Roots will explore the relationship between West African music and African American music in a series of three public performances and in-school workshops. In partnership with **Elementz**, the festival will conclude with a music production competition and workshop for middle, high school, and undergraduate students. For the first time, the festival will implement a Pay What You Decide model – ensuring that all can attend.

“I started creating Hip Hopera from the belief that classical music doesn’t have to leave anyone behind,” **Akinboboye states**. “Being part of We Are One: Roots is a meaningful continuation of that mission. They’re building space for cultural fusion, storytelling, and real community connection. I’m honored to join a festival that’s reshaping what tradition can look and sound like.”

Public events will take place at Artsville in Madisonville, House of Joy Christian in Clifton, and Lincoln Heights Missionary Baptist Church in Lincoln Heights. The Music Production Workshop and Competition Exhibition will take place at the Elementz headquarters on Central Parkway.

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Each of the three public performances is a unique concertgoing experience that is not to be missed. The first concert on March 12 at Artsville, entitled “Owanbe”, will feature a Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra string quintet playing chamber music written and inspired by West African composers after which members of the Bi-Okoto Cultural Center will join the group to present traditional West African music and dance (and maybe get the audience involved, too!). On March 13, Babatunde Akinboboye presents “An Evening with Tunde”: an electrifying solo concert of “Hip Hopera” at House of Joy Christian in Clifton, with Elementz teaching artist providing a pre-show DJ set. The festival culminates with “Roots”, a concert featuring the entire Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra and Akinboboye on a program that celebrates the breadth and influence of West African music taking place at Lincoln Heights Missionary Baptist. “Roots” will showcase rarely heard orchestral compositions by Nigerian composers, African American spirituals, and selections from Akinboboye’s signature “Hip Hopera” hits arranged for orchestra.

Chinonye Izu from the Bi-Okoto Cultural Center writes: “Bringing the pulse of African drums together with the voice of strings, we unite rhythm and melody in one unforgettable Summermusik performance – engaging audiences and bridging gaps with African Culture!”

We Are One: Roots will also feature a first-of-its-kind music production competition in partnership with **Elementz**. Middle, high school, and college students have the opportunity to submit a backing track inspired by the operatic aria “Votre toast” (the “Toreador” song) from *Carmen*. The winning tracks from the middle school/high school and

college categories will be performed by Akinboboye at the We Are One: Roots Music Production Workshop held at Elementz on Thursday, March 12. The winners will also each receive a \$250 cash prize. More information can be found [here](#). The submission deadline for the competition is February 9, 2026.

We Are One: Roots will showcase community partnerships throughout the festival with organizations such as Ijo Ugo Performing Arts, African Fabrics and Things, African Women Alliance, Tabital Pulaaku Americas and more. Community partners will have exhibitions before and after the initial performance during the festival.

Associate Conductor **Daniel Parsley** says: "Summermusik's We Are One: Roots Festival will ignite the stage with guest artist Babatunde Akinboboye, uniting community partners in a powerful celebration of West African identities. Each performance shines a spotlight on the rich tapestry and dynamic melting pot of cultural expressions that shape and celebrate our community's unique identity."

For more information and ticket reservations –

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About Summermusik: Founded in 1974, Summermusik with resident ensemble Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra creates intimate, transformative experiences that connect the musically curious. Under the direction of Music Director Eckart Preu, Summermusik provides a vibrant musical experience in an intimate and informal setting for both the seasoned and novice concert patrons. The Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra is comprised of 32 professional musicians, the ideal ensemble size for presenting orchestral works from the Baroque and Classical eras as well as commissioned works by contemporary composers. Often, the ensemble shrinks down to as small as three musicians, which allows for flexibility and creativity in programming. Collaborations are a hallmark of Summermusik, including partnerships with Walk with Amal, CET, Cincinnati Ballet, and Cincinnati Art Museum, among others. The We Are One Festival series was launched in 2022 and amplifies under-represented voices by acknowledging historical and contemporary inequities and celebrating unique cultures.

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