

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Media contact: Darren DeLuca  
[darren.deluca@gmail.com](mailto:darren.deluca@gmail.com)  
603-489-7624



**CREATING A PATHWAY FORWARD INSPIRED  
BY THE IDEOLOGIES OF OCTAVIA E. BUTLER**

----

**TOSHI REAGON LAUNCHES  
*PARABLE PATH BOSTON*  
A YEAR LONG ARTIST RESIDENCY AT  
EMERSON COLLEGE**

----

**PARABLE PATH BOSTON KICKS OFF FRIDAY EVENING, MAY 22ND  
WITH A ONE-NIGHT-ONLY LIVE STREAM EVENT THAT INCLUDES  
“OCTAVIA E. BUTLER’S PARABLE OF THE SOWER: THE CONCERT  
EXPERIENCE” AND ACCOMPANYING PANEL CONVERSATIONS**

[Boston, MA – May 15, 2020] – ArtsEmerson, the professional presenting and producing organization at Emerson College, is thrilled to announce that renowned musician, composer, producer, and activist Toshi Reagon is launching a new community engagement initiative on May 22, which she calls **Parable Path Boston**, based on the tenets of Octavia E. Butler’s novel *The Parable of the Sower*. Reagon is Emerson College’s current artist-in-resident through June 2021 funded by the Fresh Sound Foundation and the Doris Duke Foundation.



**Left:** Boston artists (left to right) Nahdra Ra, Kendra Hicks, Ngoc-Tran Vu, Melissa Alexis, Latifa Ziyad and Letta Neely meet with Toshi Reagon (center) at Dorchester’s Oasis Vegan Veggie Parlor to discuss the Parable Path Boston. **Right:** Boston artists (left to right) Latifa Ziyad, Nahdra Ra, Ngoc-Tran Vu, Letta Neely, Melissa Alexis and Kendra Hicks meet with Toshi Reagon (second from left) at Dorchester’s Oasis Vegan Veggie Parlor to discuss the Parable Path Boston. (Photos: Craig Bailey/Perspective Photo)

Anchored by the creative process and presentation of her work **Octavia E. Butler’s Parable of the Sower**, Reagon’s residency creates a framework for community organizing through artistic engagement. **Parable Path Boston** will include community led activities surrounding the belief

systems and interrelated social issues that impact climate justice and survival in Boston. During her time at ArtsEmerson she will work with a team of artists, cross-sector activists and nonprofit and municipal administrators to listen to and engage communities in efforts to bring greater visibility to the impending sociological outcomes of climate change and the need to increase our methods of survival.

**Parable Path Boston** will kick-off on Friday evening, May 22 with a one-night-only streaming event, the centerpiece of which is a full presentation of **Octavia E. Butler's Parable of the Sower: The Concert Experience**, as part of ArtsEmerson's current digital programming and engagement initiative, **Together Apart: Explore New Worlds from Your Home**. Filmed in September 2015 at [The Arts Center at NYU Abu Dhabi](#), a developed version of that concert experience was presented at ArtsEmerson in March 2017. Reagon's fully realized staged production was originally scheduled as a part of ArtsEmerson's 2019/20 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary season, but was postponed as part of the civic response to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

An adaptation of Octavia E. Butler's award-winning masterpiece, with music and lyrics composed by Toshi Reagon and Bernice Johnson Reagon, the opera version of **Parable of the Sower** brings together over 30 original musical anthems and requiems drawn from 200 years of black music to bring this Afrofuturist masterpiece to the stage while telling the story of a young woman who lives in a not-so-distant America where climate change has driven society to violence and the brink of extinction. When she loses both family and home, she ventures out into the unknown. What begins as a desperate fight for survival leads to something much more profound: a startling vision of human destiny that births the seeds of a new faith. A triumphant, mesmerizing theatrical work of rare power and beauty, **Parable** illuminates deep insights on gender, race and the future of human civilization.

"Wherever she goes, Toshi Reagon creates transformation in her audiences and in the communities where they live, and that makes ArtsEmerson a perfect fit for this ambitious residency," says ArtsEmerson Artistic Director David Dower. "And the focus of her work, which here will center on the visionary fiction of Octavia E. Butler, is so urgent and on time for Boston, for Emerson, and for ArtsEmerson that we are feeling doubly blessed to be able to spend this time together with her and the people she is gathering around us. Toshi's adaptation of Butler's novel is a teacher, a call to action, and boost for the soul in the way it points to pathways for thriving, not just surviving, beyond the sort of global calamity we're in the middle of right now. People will have a chance to get a sense of how powerful this show and this residency will be when we kick it off with this May 22nd concert and conversation. We are proud to be her Boston home and grateful to Doris Duke and Fresh Sound, and to NYU Abu Dhabi, for making this all possible."

Toshi Reagon states clearly and directly, "My idea was that this work would gather folks interested in not having a diabolical existence on earth." She continues, "It would serve as a belly button where a multitude of collaborations and events would circulate before and after. Because Octavia Butler lays out so clearly our contemporary issues anyone could participate. I see theaters as potential holders of mass meeting in the position of churches during the Southern freedom movement of the 60's. I see theaters that are on college campuses as additional classroom spaces. ArtsEmerson has met me here in this vision with this residency."

"When talking about how we offer our creative space to a public, I think these questions of engagement get asked as an opportunity for systemic change and access," continues Reagon. "Maybe even healing. If you are a holder of space, you have the opportunity to walk outside of the doors of your space, and to house within your walls not just dynamic and interesting art from everywhere, but offer a feeding of the spirit and a restoration of the congregations that surround you. ArtsEmerson embodies this - and it's why I'm drawn to collaborate with them."

The May 22 event kicks off at 6:00pm, when Reagon engages in conversation with panelists who participated in **Parable Path** residencies in Durham, NC and St. Paul, MN -- two cities

where Reagon previously paved the pathway with local artists and activists. Viewers will then be treated to a stream of the Concert Experience at 7:00pm followed by a talk-back with Toshi Reagon and other performers from the show at 8:30pm.

One of ArtsEmerson's primary strategies is to create long arcs of relationships with innovative theater companies and artists. Fresh Sound residencies at Emerson College are opportunities not only to develop new work, but to involve artists intimately with the Emerson community.

**Parable Path Boston** is Toshi Reagon's commitment to investigating the ideologies inside Octavia E. Butler's by putting them to work in real life and in real time – discovering and creating a pathway forward. Reagon has assembled a team that includes playwrights, fashion designers, dancers, poets and other artists and educators to help lead activities surrounding the belief systems and interrelated social issues that impact climate justice and survival in Boston.

One member of that team is Associate Professor in Marketing Communication at Emerson College, Nejem Raheem, who recently accepted the 2020 Helaine and Stanley Miller Award for Outstanding Teaching. "One reason I work at Emerson is that I hoped to reintegrate the performing arts into my work as an economist; Toshi's residency has allowed me to do just that," says Raheem. "This kind of partnership is rare in my field, and Toshi's openness to what I have to offer is incredibly rewarding. I hope this collaboration can show our students and our community the importance of moving across perceived barriers to improve our understanding of each other and to genuinely help the world."

Past events during Toshi's current residency have included a partnership with New Roots Church and The Boston Public Library for **Parable Read**, a city-wide read of **Parable of the Sower** promoting conversation about climate change, survival, and ways of deepening our humanity. In December 2019, Emerson College also hosted a live recording of the podcast *How to Survive the End of the World*, a show featuring sister hosts Autumn Brown and adrienne maree brown (*Emergent Strategy*), who interviewed Reagon.

To access any or all of the May 22 online events, please visit [ParablePathBoston.com](https://ParablePathBoston.com).

[For production stills and other media kit assets, click here.](#)

### **About Toshi Reagon**

Toshi Reagon is a talented and versatile singer, composer, musician, curator and producer with a profound ear for sonic Americana—from folk to funk, from blues to rock. While her expansive career has landed her at Carnegie Hall, the Paris Opera House and Madison Square Garden, you can just as easily find Toshi turning out at a music festival, intimate venue or local club. She has collaborated with many artists including Carl Hancock Rux, Ani DiFranco, Lenny Kravitz, Elvis Costello and Nona Hendryx. As a composer, she has worked with Katori Hall, Urban Bush Women and The Jane Comfort Dance Co., among others. She is currently touring Bessie Award-winning *The Blues Project* with tap dancer Michelle Dorrance and Dorrance Dance. She founded WORD\*ROCK\*&SWORD, a community festival that takes place throughout New York City every September. Together with her mother Bernice Johnson Reagon, she has created two operas with director Robert Wilson, *The Temptation of St. Anthony and Zinnias*, *The Life of Clementine Hunter*. Toshi co-composed music for two Peabody Award-winning films and received a NYFA Award for Music Composition, the 2010 OutMusic Heritage Award and The Black Lily Music and Film Festival Award for Outstanding Performance. She is a National Women's History Month honoree and was named a 2015 Art of Change Fellow by the Ford Foundation. 2018 United States Artist Fellow, 2018 Andrew W. Mellon Creative Futures Fellow Carolina Performing Arts. UNC Chapel Hill

### **About Fresh Sound Artist Residency**

Funded by Emerson College's World On Stage Fund - an endowment initiated and funded in part by the Trustees of the Fresh Sound Foundation in honor of Emerson Alumna Helen Rodger

Cutherbert, class of 1911 - the Fresh Sound Artist residency is managed by ArtsEmerson in support of its ongoing commitment to give voice to diverse stories and perspectives not often seen or heard in the traditional mainstream. Former Fresh Sound artists include Anne Bogart, Suzan-Lori Parks, Ayad Akhtar, Walter Mosley, Claudia Rankine, and Guillermo Calderon.

### **About the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation**

The mission of the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation (DDCF) is to improve the quality of people's lives through grants supporting the performing arts, environmental conservation, medical research and child well-being, and through preservation of the cultural and environmental legacy of Doris Duke's properties. The Arts Program of DDCF focuses its support on contemporary dance, jazz and theater artists, and the organizations that nurture, present and produce them. For more information, please visit [www.ddcf.org](http://www.ddcf.org).

### **About ArtsEmerson**

ArtsEmerson is Boston's leading presenter of contemporary world theatre. Our mission is to bring people together to experience powerful performances that delight, provoke, and inspire, celebrating both our differences and common humanity. Founded in 2010 by Robert J. Orchard — the year the U.S. Census confirmed there was no single cultural majority in Boston — we committed to building a cultural institution that reflects the diversity of our city. Our imaginative season of globe-spanning performances, film, and dialogue invites each of us to be part of a Boston that is more creative, equitable, and connected. ArtsEmerson is led by Artistic Director, David Dower and Executive Director, David Howse. For more information, visit [ArtsEmerson.org](http://ArtsEmerson.org).

### **About Emerson College**

ArtsEmerson is the professional presenting and producing organization at Emerson College. Based in Boston, Massachusetts, opposite the historic Boston Common and in the heart of the city's Theatre District, Emerson College educates individuals who will solve problems and change the world through engaged leadership in communication and the arts, a mission informed by liberal learning. The College has 3,780 undergraduates and 670 graduate students from across the United States and 50 countries. Supported by state-of-the-art facilities and a renowned faculty, students participate in more than 90 student organizations and performance groups. Emerson is known for its experiential learning programs in Los Angeles, Washington, DC, the Netherlands, London, China, and the Czech Republic as well as its new Global Portals, with the first program launching this fall in Paris. The College has an active network of 39,000 alumni who hold leadership positions in communication and the arts. For more information, visit [Emerson.edu](http://Emerson.edu). For media inquiries specific to Emerson College, please contact Michelle Gaseau (E: [Michelle\\_Gaseau@emerson.edu](mailto:Michelle_Gaseau@emerson.edu), O: 617-824-3547, C: 617-429-2624).

# # #