



Sharon Prince and Chelsea Thatcher join the musicians onstage in the Sanctuary on Saturday, January 10th (Melani Lust)

Grace Farms Celebrates Milestone Weekend with Lecture and Concert Series with Sold-Out Yo-Yo Ma Performance



Sharon Prince presents the inaugural Lecture with Concert series (Melani Lust)



Grace Farms celebrated a transformative weekend on January 10-11 with the launch of its innovative Lecture with Concert series. Sharon Prince, CEO and Founder of Grace Farms, delivered the inaugural lecture. The following day, Yo-Yo Ma and pianist Solon Gordon performed to a sold-out crowd of 700 in Grace Farms' Sanctuary, the world's only fully-enclosed glass performing arts space. It is the first time Yo-Yo Ma and Solon Gordon have performed a recital together.

The Grace Farms Lecture with Concert series introduces a new concept in which music and ideas converge in dialogue with one another. Grace Farms' Artist-in-Residence and renowned cellist Arlen Hlusko curates each concert as a direct response to the lecturer's life's work.

On January 10, Prince opened the series by sharing her remarkable journey and determination to create a boundary-defying space that is free and open to the public, nurtures grace and peace, and connects people to achieve new outcomes. Since opening ten years ago, Grace Farms has welcomed one million visitors to encounter nature, arts, justice, community, and faith.

"We all build – our homes, our families, our work and our future. Consider grace and peace as you build," said Prince in her lecture. "We have tremendous agency to participate in creating a more just, equitable world through how we build and which values we prioritize."

Prince's lecture was followed by a specially curated chamber music performance featuring an ensemble of 13 extraordinary

musicians, including MacArthur Fellows, GRAMMY nominees, Avery Fisher career grant recipients, and Sphinx Medal of Excellence recipients: Jennifer Frautschi, Vijay Gupta, Blake Pouliot & Michelle Ross, violins; Ayane Kozasa & Melissa Reardon, violas; Gabriel Cabezas & Arlen Hlusko, cellos; Anthony Manzo, bass; Pallavi Mahidhara, piano; Emi Ferguson, flute; Yoonah Kim, clarinet; and Gina Cuffari, bassoon. The artists were selected by Hlusko to express the theme of ingenuity that has defined Prince's remarkable career and life's work.

The weekend culminated on Sunday, January 11 with a sold-out recital by Yo-Yo Ma and Solon Gordon, accompanied by the backdrop of nature and Grace Farms' 80 acres of landscape visible behind the performance.

The recital program included Five Pieces in Folk Style, Op. 102 (Robert Schumann), Cello Sonata, L. 135 (Claude Debussy), 4 Romantic Pieces (Antonín Dvořák), The Hanging Garden (Branford Marsalis), and Sonata in A Major for Violin & Piano (César Franck).

"These programs were uniquely designed for Grace Farms in response to this landscape, architecture, and season. The Music at Grace Farms concert series, including this past weekend's performance by Yo-Yo Ma, creates shared gatherings that reveal humanity's potential to inspire one another. Through the connection to the land and to each other, we can find deeper

meaning and a shared commitment to create a more just, sustainable, and peaceful world," said Founding Creative Director Chelsea Thatcher. Thatcher developed the Lecture with Concert and Music at Grace Farms series as part of Grace Farms' 10-year anniversary celebration, centered on the theme "We all build."

The Grace Farms Lecture with Concert series will continue throughout 2026, bringing together world-renowned thinkers and musicians in this innovative format that recognizes the intersection of transformative ideas and art. Dr. Miroslav Wolf, leading religious thinker and Founding Director of the Yale Center for Faith & Culture and Dr. Robin Wall Kimmerer, botanist and New York Times bestselling author, will give the remaining two lectures on February 7 and March 7, respectively.

The string quartet performing February 7 are Adrian Anantawan, violin, who has performed at the Athens and Vancouver Olympic Games, Lun Li, violin, Arlen Hlusko, cello, and Celia Hatton, viola. They will perform works including Arvo Pärt: Fratres. The flute quartet performing March 7 features Alex Sopp, flute, Simone Porter & Owen Dalby, violins; Milena Pajaro-van de Stadt, viola; and Arlen Hlusko, cello. In response to Kimmerer's work, this musical program features composers who often derive musical inspiration from their relationships with nature, including Mozart, Paul Wiancko, Gabriella Smith, Leilehua Anne Lanzilotti, Reena Esmail, Valerie Coleman, and Joan Tower.

OUT OF DARKNESS BY ICY FRANTZ CONTINUED From Page 1

early morning. We have no shades, so when the sun rises, the light enters slowly and quietly, giving me time to adjust.

I am in good company. Toni Morrison rose at five, made her coffee, and waited for the sun to appear – or, as she put it, she watched the light come.

And maybe that is how we should approach the light in 2026 – slowly, quietly.

Personally, I like the light. I've grown accustomed to doing a small mental dance when December 21st passes and the days begin to lengthen. It makes me happy. Even though it's still dark at five, we are moving in the right direction.

I am no green thumb, but on occasion I've watched my plants grow toward the light. Somehow, even a plant knows the light is nourishing.

So, what might it look like to step into the light?

Not all at once. Not dramatically. Not with resolutions that demand transformation by February.

Maybe it looks like turning a chair slightly or choosing not to close the shade. Or shifting the

clasp from the back to the side. Letting one honest thing be seen. Staying a moment longer instead of rushing to the next task.

Maybe it means allowing ourselves the same permission that Vermont pastor offered – to fidget, to be imperfect, to go outside when we need air. To believe that comfort and holiness can occupy the same space.

Stepping into the light might mean noticing what already holds us together – the unseen clasp, the quiet strength, the work done without applause – and honoring that as real value, not something to be hidden or apologized for.

It could mean slowing down enough to let morning arrive, trusting that the light will come whether or not we chase it. Watching instead of forcing. Adjusting gradually.

For me, stepping into the light of 2026 doesn't look like brightness without shadows. It looks like standing still long enough to let the shadows fall behind me.

And I think back to that church in Vermont – the plain room, the single tree, the people in boots and flannel. No velvet. No fur. Just voices rising together, holding small electric candles, singing Silent Night into the darkness. Each light modest on its own, but connected in community, held in place, doing its quiet work. Something small and essential keeping everything from coming undone. A simple light passed hand to hand.

Enough.