

Actress and Playwright Danai Gurira '01 to join Gary Hines '74, Sounds of Blackness Music Director and Producer, as Macalester's Commencement Speakers

St. Paul, Minn. Actress and playwright Danai Gurira '01 will join Gary D. Hines '74, music director and producer of the three-time Grammy award-winning Sounds of Blackness, as the 2016 Commencement speakers at Macalester College on May 14. Karinthia Lowe, of Boston, Massachusetts, is the senior class speaker and her speech is titled, "The Patterns We Find, The Paths We Form." Lowe is an English (Literature) major, with minors in Chinese and Media Studies.

Commencement will be held at 1:30 p.m., Saturday, May 14, at the college.

"As a playwright, an actress, and an activist, Danai Gurira has been an extraordinary success since graduating from Macalester," said President Brian Rosenberg.

"When she agreed to speak at commencement with Gary Hines, we simply could not pass up the opportunity to have two artists of their caliber, whose work has so clearly embodied the values of the college, celebrate Commencement with us."

In early March, two of Gurira's plays opened in New York. *Eclipsed* (http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/07/theater/review-in-eclipsed-a-captive-lupita-nyongo-is-captivating.html?_r=1), which is on Broadway, is set amidst the Liberian civil war and tells the story of five extraordinary women brought together by upheaval in their homeland. It is the first Broadway play whose creative team is entirely female. *Familiar* (<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/04/theater/review-familiar-a-comic-clash-of-assimilation-on-the-path-to-a-wedding.html>), which opened Off-Broadway, is about a Zimbabwean-American family in Minnesota preparing for the wedding of their daughter.

Gurira has previously won accolades for her writing, including an Obie Award, an Outer Critics Circle Award, and a Helen Hayes Award.

As an actress, Gurira is best known for her character Michonne in the popular AMC television series *The Walking Dead* (<http://www.amc.com/shows/the-walking-dead>). In it, she wields a very mean katana.

Gary Hines is among the most accomplished musicians ever to graduate from Macalester.



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“Since he founded the Sounds of Blackness at Macalester over 40 years ago, Gary Hines has been responsible for making the kind of music that both lifts people up and brings them together,” said Rosenberg.

Whether it’s pop, hip-hop, rhythm & blues, jazz, Latin, rock, blues, reggae, ragtime, classical or gospel, Gary Hines can do it all. He has recorded, performed, toured, written for and appeared with Quincy Jones, Jimmy “Jam” Harris & Terry Lewis, Prince, Usher, Stevie Wonder, Michael Jackson, Luther Vandross, Aretha Franklin, Elton John, Johnny Gill, Patti LaBelle, Sting, Dolly Parton, Danny Glover, Jordin Sparks, and many others. Along with the Sounds of Blackness, Hines has performed in every major city in the U.S. and in many locations around the world.

Hines has conducted music workshops, seminars, lecture-demonstrations and master classes across the United States and internationally about the history, impact and evolution of African American music and culture.

The recipient of such honors as a Grammy, International Time For Peace Award, and the Minnesota Music Academy Awards, Hines has also received the Minnesota Music Hall of Fame Award, Golden Scroll For The Promise of Greatness Award, the Macalester Distinguished Citizen Award, and an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from Macalester.

Sounds of Blackness began on Macalester's campus more than four decades ago. Last year, Turck Formal Lounge was renamed “The Sounds of Blackness Lounge.” At the renaming ceremony, Hines recalled practicing in the lounge at times when the music building was full. Sounds of Blackness’s latest CD, “The Sounds of Blackness” won a 2012 NAACP Image Award.

This year’s honorary degree recipients are retiring faculty member **Sung Kyu Kim** and **Danai Gurira '01**.

Sung Kyu Kim. Professor of physics, teacher, scholar, storyteller. In more than five decades at Macalester, Kim may have taught more students, and touched more lives, than any other professor. He came to the U.S. from Korea, earning a bachelor’s degree from Davidson College, and a master’s and PhD from Duke University. In 1965, he joined the physics faculty at Macalester, inaugurating a career that has informed the minds and influenced the lives of more than 10,000 students. Kim created a physics course for students not majoring in the sciences. It quickly became so popular that for decades nearly half of Macalester graduates had “Contemporary Concepts of Physics” on their transcripts, including a number of students who have since become his faculty colleagues. Kim wrote the book on teaching physics to non-science majors, and coauthored one for majors. For 17 years he collaborated with cosmologist David Schramm, exploring the philosophical implications of Big Bang cosmology, and developing a manuscript for liberal arts students. With philosophy professor David White, he developed the lecture series “Cosmology, Quantum Physics, and Consciousness.” It was a hit with 100 students registered and an additional 200 regularly drawn to hear speakers such as physicist John Wheeler, who coined the term “black hole.” For more than 20 years, word-of-mouth alone drew pre-medical students from across the country to his Summer Physics Institute. In 1993 Kim was presented with the Burlington Northern Citation for “unusually meritorious service in teaching,” and the Princeton Review named him one of “300 Best Professors.” The following is Kim’s conclusion to the Contemporary Concepts course: “This is your story, your cosmic heritage. Your existence is rooted in 14 billion years of cosmic history. The universe, this universe, is on your side. You are made of star stuff, therefore, you are special.”

Danai Gurira '01. Macalester alumna, activist, actor, and playwright. Born in Iowa, Gurira moved to her parents’ native Zimbabwe with her family when she was five years old. She grew up there, and then returned to the Midwest to attend Macalester. Her passion for theater flourished here. A psychology major, Gurira

planned to pursue a PhD in that field until her study away experience in South Africa when she realized she could use theater as a mechanism to effect social change. Back on campus, Gurira created her first theater piece as part of her senior honors project. After graduation, she earned an MFA in acting from NYU's Tisch School of the Arts. Her plays delve into issues surrounding the confluence of cultures that she experienced firsthand as, in her word, a "Zamerican." Much of her work focuses on Africa, exploring civil war in Liberia, women living with HIV/AIDS, and Zimbabwe's struggle for independence. Gurira's commitment to representing the stories of African and African diasporic women has changed the representational landscape in film, television, and the stage. Her first play, *Into the Continuum*, germinated as her Macalester honors project and took shape during her graduate work at NYU. For it, she received numerous accolades, including the 2006 Obie Award for playwriting and the 2007 Helen Hayes Award for best lead actress. For her second play, 2009's *Eclipsed*, she received a grant to travel to Liberia where she interviewed more than 30 women. *Eclipsed* won Best New Play at the 2010 Helen Hayes Awards, and she won Best Playwright at the NAACP Theatre Awards the following year. This year, *Eclipsed* and her newest play, *Familiar*, both opened in New York in March to critically acclaimed reviews. *Eclipsed* made history as the first Broadway play with an all-women cast, director, and playwright. And now, *Eclipsed* has received six Tony Award Nominations including one for Best Play. As an actress, Gurira has had starring roles in the films *The Visitor* and *Mother of George* and on Broadway in *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*. She's performed in film and on television shows including *Treme*, *Law and Order*, *Life on Mars*, and *Lie to Me*. Today, millions of television fans know Gurira as Michonne on AMC's *The Walking Dead*, the highest-rated series in cable television history. This year, she was also cast as Tupac Shakur's mother in the upcoming biopic about the rap star. Through it all, she continues to focus on social justice. Gurira is the president and co-founder of Almasi Arts Alliance, a non-profit organization that strives to create and facilitate artistic collaborations among African artists and American artists and institutions.

Commencement ceremonies will include an academic procession led by the Macalester Pipe Band, flag bearers representing 39 countries of the 65 graduating international seniors plus the U.S. and U.N. flags, faculty in academic robes and the 491 seniors.

Macalester College, founded in 1874, is a national liberal arts college with a full-time enrollment of 2,138 students. Macalester is nationally recognized for its long-standing commitment to academic excellence, internationalism, multiculturalism, and civic engagement. Learn more at [macalester.edu](http://www.macalester.edu) (<http://www.macalester.edu/>).

March 25 2016

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