TANESHIA NASH LAIRD

THE CHANGE AGENT

Taneshia Nash Laird is a social change agent and community developer who centers cultural equity in her work. She is the President and CEO of Newark Symphony Hall, a historic performing arts center located within the Lincoln Park neighborhood of Newark, NJ. Since her appointment in November 2018, she has expanded programming to respond to community needs and announced plans to restore the 1925 opened concert hall in a $40 million renovation. She will do so not only with philanthropy, but also by leveraging the property's status on the National Register of Historic Places for federal historic tax credits and location in a Designated Qualified Opportunity Zone and NJ Urban Enterprise Zone for additional investment.

Taneshia previously served as Executive Director of the Arts Council of Princeton, notably as the first person of color in that role. Taneshia has also served as Director of Economic Development & Acting Director of Housing Production for the City of Trenton (NJ), Regional Director of the U.S. Women's Chamber of Commerce, and was the Executive Director of the Trenton Downtown Association, where she initiated Destination Trenton, an award-winning arts and tourism program in NJ's capital city.

Taneshia is an adjunct professor in Drexel University's Entertainment & Arts Management Bachelor of Science degree program. As an entrepreneur Taneshia is the founder of Legacy Business Advisors, a consultancy serving social entrepreneurs, nonprofits, and government agencies. She previously co-founded Legendary Eats in the Staples Center in Los Angeles with NBA legend James Worthy. With her late husband Roland, Taneshia also co-founded MIST Harlem, a popular entertainment center in New York City. Together Taneshia and Roland also co-authored the critically acclaimed book Still I Rise: A Graphic History of African Americans.

A passionate advocate for increasing economic opportunity and access to arts and heritage, Taneshia was a special government employee in the Obama Administration as a grants panelist for the National Endowment for the Arts. She was previously appointed by NJ Governor Jon Corzine to the governing body of the NJ Urban Enterprise Zone Authority. Her nonprofit board service has included the Preservation NJ, the Advocates for NJ History, and Artpride NJ where she co-chaired the equity, diversity and inclusion committee. In the summer of 2019 Taneshia was elected to a three-year term as president of the board of Rush Philanthropic Arts Foundation, the community arts organization founded in 1995 by siblings Danny, Russell, and Joseph "Rev Run" Simmons. [Bio updated July 2020]

As seen on:

CBS New York — Once-Great Newark Symphony Hall Rising Again As Destination Venue

Forbes — How Taneshia Nash Laird Built A Legacy While Pivoting Through A Personal Tragedy

NJTV — New director inspires new enthusiasm for Newark Symphony Hall's future

"My first day of work [as a summer intern at American Ballet Theatre] was a trip to New Jersey to discuss a budding community engagement program. I met Taneshia Nash Laird, the president and CEO of Newark Symphony Hall. She described her vision for the company, and I was moved by her determination to hold social activism at the center. It meant so much to me to see an empowered woman of color leveraging her position to specifically uplift marginalized communities. It was one of the first times I've been able to point to someone and say, "that's the work I want to do."

~Victoria Briones, University of Michigan, Class of 2020