



Contact: Diana Hernandez  
(504) 520-5120 | [dhernan1@xula.edu](mailto:dhernan1@xula.edu)

## **Xavier University of Louisiana to Honor Its Own at Commencement**

New Orleans LA – Xavier University of Louisiana will honor four of its own graduates – three prolific medical doctors and a world-renown vocalist – during its 92nd annual graduation ceremony Saturday, May 11, at 10:00 a.m. in the University’s Convocation Center.

The physicians – Dr. Pierre Johnson '02, Dr. Maxime Madhere '02, and Dr. Joseph Semien '01 – who are co-authors of the book *Pulse of Perseverance*, in which they share their personal struggles and ultimate triumphs in an effort to empower and inspire black youth to work towards their goals, will be the keynote speakers for the commencement. They are expected to address some 550 undergraduate, graduate, and pre-professional students and their families. They will all receive honorary degrees.

They will be joined on stage by vocalist Gail Gilmore '72, a celebrated Opera star, who will also be awarded an honorary degree from her alma mater.

Other scheduled commencement-related events include the Graduate Programs hooding ceremony Thursday, May 09, at 6:00 p.m. in the University Center Ballroom; the College of Pharmacy Hooding Ceremony Friday, May 10, at noon in the Convocation Center, and the Baccalaureate Mass/Honors Convocation Friday, May 10 at 5:00 p.m., in the Convocation Center.

Commencement is a ticketed event. All others are open to the public.

### **Pierre Johnson, M.D. '02**

Growing up on the South Side of Chicago where parental drug addiction put him in the role of father to his four siblings, Dr. Pierre Johnson learned barbering to earn money, realizing then that God had gifted him with steady and nimble hands.

Although Johnson was a good student, he quickly learned that his education in a segregated, failing high school hadn't prepared him for the strong curriculum he found at Xavier. Blessed to meet Maxime Madhere and Joseph Semien his first semester of college, he found brothers who shared a similar background and the same commitment to succeed as himself. Failure for one was considered failure for all.

After graduating from Xavier, Johnson attended MEDPREP at Southern Illinois University. Despite financial setbacks and personal struggles, and in spite of the discrimination and institutional racism he encountered throughout his time in medical school, he went on to complete his internship at Washington Hospital Center in General Surgery and residency at Southern Illinois University in obstetrics/gynecology.

In 2015 Johnson was certified by the American Board of Obstetrics and Gynecology. A year later, he was recognized with the highest accreditation in his field – Fellow of The American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

Now that Pierre is at the pinnacle of his career, he wants to help impact underrepresented communities by establishing community outreach clinics (COC) across the country, starting in his hometown. These COC's will offer refuge to children in need of advice, direction, counseling or medical attention.

Johnson currently lives and practices close to home in the Chicagoland area and is the father of twins.

### **Maxime Madhere, M.D. '02**

Dr. Maxime Madhere is a double-board certified cardiac anesthesiologist. In private practice since 2013, Madhere now resides in Baton Rouge LA with his wife Andrea and three children.

His story, however, begins back in Brooklyn NY, where his immigrant parents refused to let him envision his future within the confines of his neighborhood's crime and poverty-ridden streets. Instead, they instilled in him strong values of family, grit, and determination, which he considers critical to his eventual success. His life took another leap forward when Madhere met Joseph Semien and Pierre Johnson while a student at Xavier. They banded together to help one another through college, refusing to let any one of them accept failure as an option.

Madhere went on to graduate with honors from Xavier and subsequently earned his medical degree from the Howard University College of Medicine. It was at Howard where he found a passion for anesthesiology because it allowed him to help patients during some of the most vulnerable moments of their lives. Madhere completed his residency and pursued a fellowship in cardiothoracic anesthesia at Henry Ford Hospital. Eventually, he earned the title of Diplomate from the National Board of Echocardiography, making him one of the most highly-accredited anesthesiologists in the country.

Today he is an active member of 100 Black Men of Metro Baton Rouge, where he was recently honored as the 2017 "Member of the Year." He is also a member of the Urban Congress on African American Males, an advocacy group that seeks to improve the lives and expand the strengths of black males and local black communities.

### **Joseph W. Semien, Jr. M.D. '01**

Growing up in New Orleans, Dr. Joseph Semien, Jr. experienced a tough, violent environment where selling drugs and fierce interactions were the norm.

Even after he was accepted into Xavier, he still found himself running with the wrong crowd. In search of self-discipline, he left college and enlisted in the Army, where he trained as a medical specialist. Military life started him down the road towards being a calmer, more mature young man, with stronger resolve.

Upon returning home, however, he found himself reverting back to many of his old habits. After some trouble with the law, Semien swore off that part of his life for good. Returning to Xavier, he had the good fortune of meeting Maxime Madhere and Pierre Johnson, brothers in whom he saw a better reflection of himself. With this new-found support, he never returned to his old life of drugs and violence.

Unable to gain entrance to medical school, Semien opted for the master's degree program at the Tulane University School of Public Health. It was at that time he found God's calling, and began teaching high school chemistry to inner-city kids, while at the time encouraging them to change their lives like he had changed his.

Eventually granted admission to St. Matthew's University School of Medicine in the Grand Cayman Islands, he completed his residency at Central Michigan University and become a board-certified obstetrician and gynecologist.

Simien sees it as his responsibility to speak to young black men about ambition and achieving their dreams.

Simien is married with a son, residing and practicing in Lake Charles, La

### **Gail Gilmore '72**

Gail Gilmore was born in Washington DC, and raised in New Orleans. She studied music at Xavier and later at Indiana University in Bloomington.

At the age of 24, Gilmore started her career in Germany, where she immediately attracted notice with her exceptional musical talent, acting ability, and the unmistakable dark vocal timbre of her voice. Her breakthrough performance came in the role of Kundry in *Parsifal*. In that production, she appeared in major opera houses all over the world – such as Teatro de le Fenice, La Scala, Bolshoi Theatre, Teatro Colon, Metropolitan Opera, and Carnegie Hall – eventually assuming the title role.

Thereafter she performed many years in the *Arena of Verona* as Carmen, as Amneris in *Aida*, Ulrika in *Ballo in Mascera* and as Azucena in *Il Trovatore*, before returning to the Metropolitan Opera to star in such productions as *Tatnhäuser* and *Ariadne auf Naxos*. Her opera repertoire – 40 in all – is impressively extensive.

Her concert repertoire includes performances with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra at the Royal Albert Hall in London and with the Dresdner Philharmonic Orchestra in Dresden and Berlin, among many others.

From the very beginning of her career, Gilmore was celebrated for concerts in which she sang songs by American composers and arrangements of Gospels and spirituals with only piano accompaniment. She was the founder of the Oldambster Musikfestival in Bellingwolde (the Netherlands), which invited artists from all over the world to perform genres as varied as opera, musicals, jazz, Gospel and blues.

Performance is not her only legacy. Gilmore has taught voice in the fields of opera, musicals, jazz, pop, and Gospel at private music schools in Munich, and has lectured extensively on musical therapy for children at the University of Applied Sciences Würzburg-Schweinfurt and other venues.

# # #



Dr. Pierre Johnson



Dr. Maxime Madhere



Dr. Joseph Semien



Gail Gilmore

### **About Xavier University of Louisiana**

Being America's only historically Black and Catholic University is just the first of the distinctions that have set Xavier University of Louisiana apart for more than eight decades.

Despite its relatively small size (3,300 students), Xavier is a nationally recognized leader in the STEM

and the health sciences, producing more African American students who graduate from medical schools each year than any other university in the United States. Its College of Pharmacy is among the top producers of African American pharmacists.

Its liberal arts based programs in such areas as art, business, education, psychology, and political science – as well as such recent additions as bioinformatics, data science, neuroscience, crime and social justice, and jazz studies – offer students an unbeatable combination of traditional classroom study, hands-on research, service-learning opportunities, and life experiences.

The winning Xavier formula? Provide students with a well-balanced curriculum and an environment that nurtures their intellect and feeds their souls.

At Xavier *eXcellence awaits yoU*. For more information about Xavier University of Louisiana visit us online at [www.xula.edu](http://www.xula.edu) or follow us on Facebook, YouTube, or Twitter @XULA1925. To book interviews and/or to speak with our experts in the field of pharmacy, education, premed, public health, science, technology, math, business, English, communications and the arts, contact Diana Hernandez at (504) 520-5120 or [dhernan1@xula.edu](mailto:dhernan1@xula.edu).