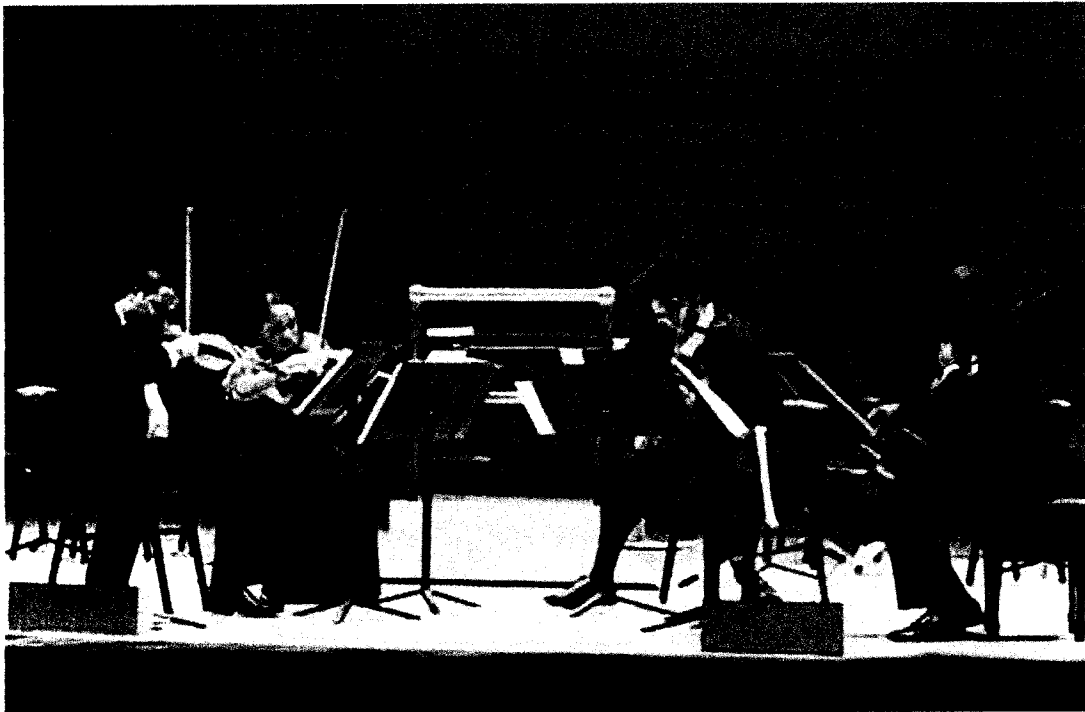


THE MUSIC OF AFRICAN AMERICAN
COMPOSERS
It's Not Just the Blues



Excerpts from the session presented at the 2009 American String Teacher's
Association National Conference

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ASTA Session

The Music of African American Composers, it's Not Just Jazz
Saturday March 21, 2009

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With the increasing awareness of the need for diversity in all aspects of daily life experiences, music is no exception.

As educators, musicians, spectators, performers, we all have some knowledge or have been exposed to jazz, blues, soul, and various other popular genres of music. Although it has been easier to acquire information about music in these popular genres and the composers who wrote the music, the classical music of black composers is much harder to find and acquire.

Publishers have responded to the higher demand for the traditional European composers and have an abundance of printings of the music of these composers. Much of the music of Black and minority composers is not available except through rental and require much more research to locate.

My goal is to provide a listing of these Black composers and along with references to their music, accomplishments, and recordings where possible. It is my hope that you will take this information and share it with colleagues and students.

Names like William Grant Still and Ulysses Kay are known to a select few as composers of merit. However, there are many more composers that have written in the classical genre, whose compositions rival any of the compositions of their European counterparts.

NY Times Article Feb. 15,2009

By EDWARD ROTHSTEIN Published: April 24, 1994

THE FOUR NEW COMPOSITIONS PLAYED earlier this month at a Detroit Symphony Orchestra symposium for black American composers hardly seemed black at all.

Apart from their programmatic aspects -- the pieces were simply examples of various American styles, executed with varying degrees of expertise. Whiffs of jazz and blues and Haitian folk tunes could be heard, but neither these works nor the fourth piece -- Jonathan B. Holland's "Martha's Waltz," inspired by Edward Albee's "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf" -- attested to a hyphenated identity. At times it seemed that their composers and the others at the symposium were unified only by their apparent lack of interest in black pop culture. Defining a black American musical tradition for the concert hall was one of the symposium's preoccupations, and it was difficult not to sense that this tradition is now tenuous.

Although blacks continue to play crucial roles in jazz, blues, gospel, hip-hop and other popular styles, fewer than 2 percent of orchestral musicians and perhaps only a few dozen classical composers are black. **But as Eileen Southern's distinguished work "The Music of Black Americans" shows, a long history of black involvement with the concert hall precedes contemporary affirmative action programs.**

In 1844, for example, when the black composer Francis Johnson died, he was hailed as "one of the most celebrated personages of Philadelphia." He founded a school for black musicians, toured the country with his music and appeared in concerts with white musicians. He wrote more than 200 pieces, including dances, ballads and arrangements of opera arias and minstrel songs. He inspired a generation of black composers whose works were well represented in a national catalogue of sheet music in 1870.

Many important black choruses evolved from church singing groups. But most startling are the numbers of black orchestras that were established in major cities. In the 1830's in New Orleans, the Negro Philharmonic Society, with more than 100 members, offered concerts for the "free colored." Two other black orchestras later gave regular concerts in New Orleans. A black symphony was founded in Philadelphia in 1904. At least three black orchestras gave concerts in Chicago during the early decades of this century. Between 1912 and 1915, both white and black listeners went to Carnegie Hall to hear the Clef Club Symphony Orchestra, which used mandolins and banjos on the second-violin parts. It played music by black composers like Will Marion Cook, Harry T. Burleigh, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor and its conductor, James Reese Europe.

All-black music schools, including the Martin-Smith School of Music and the Music School Settlement for Colored in New York and the University of Music in Chicago, created generations of trained musicians and composers. Black composers' works were given prestigious premieres: William Grant Still's "Afro-American Symphony" (just recorded in a fervent performance by Neeme Jarvi and the Detroit Symphony on Chandos) was played in 1931 by the Rochester Philharmonic; the Chicago Symphony played Florence Price's Symphony in E minor in 1932, and the Philadelphia Orchestra William Levi Dawson's "Negro Folk Symphony" in 1934. This roster of ensembles, institutions and compositions barely scratches the surface.

Much of the music is hard to find, though the Detroit Symphony printed a valuable discography of black concert music in the symposium booklet. At least until World War II, black American concert music tended to be nationalistic according to Dvorak's formula, quoting jazz, the blues, spirituals or black church hymns; in addition, much of the music was programmatic, reaching out to a black community of listeners. *

Black History Classical Awareness

Recordings of Black and African heritage composers

Less well known and often “invisible”, black and African heritage classical composers span three centuries and come from the continents of Europe, Africa, and the Americas. In an effort to increase awareness, initiatives are being undertaken to unveil and to acknowledge black composers and their creative output within the rich tapestry of classical music.

It may also be of interest to learn that in 1934 the Philadelphia Orchestra, conducted by Leopold Stokowski, premiered William Levi Dawson's *Negro Folk Symphony*. For the classical music world, this was significant and historic -but it was not a first. Dawson was only one among many talented African heritage composers whose musical voices began to emerge in the early 1900s.

Currently, more than 120 black composers have been recorded on compact discs. It is up to individual listeners to sample this output and discover the many historic, varied and worthwhile musical voices now available.

Explore some of the following selected recordings.

RG

CONCERTOS

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor / Antonin Dvorak (AVIE) Violin Concerto in G minor by Coleridge-Taylor.

American Trombone Concertos (BIS) Concerto for Trombone and Orchestra by George Walker.

Violin Concertos by Black Composers of the 18th & 19th Centuries (Cedille) Concertos by Chevalier de Meude-Monpas, Jose White and others.

ORCHESTRAL MUSIC

Milhaud, Maurice, Forsyth, Sowande (CBC Records) African Suite for strings and harp by Fela Sowande.

African Heritage Symphonic Series - Volume II (Cedille) Lyric for Strings by George Walker. Works by Ulysses Kay, Roque Cordero, Adolphus Hailstork and Hale Smith.

Florence Price, The Women's Philharmonic (Koch) Symphony No. 3, The Oak, and the Mississippi River Suite are by Price.



Joseph Boulogne Chevalier de Saint-Georges ca 1745-1799

Composer of many violin concertos, sonatas and string quartets.

CHAMBER MUSIC

Cafe Music - Schoenfield, Copland, et al / The Samaris Trio (Newport Classic) Roots II, a trio for:violin, cello and piano, by David Baker.

Quartet Antares: Saint-Georges String Quartets (Integral Records) Quartets by Joseph Boulogne Chevalier de Saint-Georges.

The Classical Underground-Imani Winds (Koch) Homage to Duke, a wind quintet, by Jeff Scott. Also Concerto for Wind Quintet by Valerie Coleman.

SOLO INSTRUMENT

Piano Music by African-American Composers (CRI) In the Bottoms by R. Nathaniel Dett. Works by William Grant Still, John W. Work, Hale Smith and others. Performed by Philadelphia native Natalie Hinderas

Spiritual Fantasy (Albany) Organ works by Fela Sowande, William Grant Still and others.

VOCAL/CHORAL & ORCHESTRA


Dance Like the Wind (Clarion) From VocalEssence Witness Collection. Title work by William Banfield. Also works by Billy Childs, Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson and others.

FURTHER READING

Southern, Eileen. (1997) *The Music of Black Americans: A History*. W.W. Norton

For additional information about composers and recordings contact Richard Greene - rgreene@temple.edu or visit website <http://astro.temple.edu/~rgreene/BlackComp>

Online broadcasts, streaming broadcasts and podcasts

 **ONLINE BROADCASTS, PODCASTS, etc.** - In addition to CDs, there are new modes of music listening opportunities. Selected online options have been identified and are now available.

It is my anticipation these will become an important adjunct to how classical music is made available in the future.

Upcoming and specific online programs include:

Classically Black – A public radio program devoted to black classical musicians and composers. Broadcast from WILL-FM (Urbana-Champaign, IL), individual online program segments are now available and can be heard at a listener's convenience.

The host and producer is Roger Cooper. Classically Black has been on the air since 1989 and can be heard on additional national public radio stations throughout the U.S.

Link: www.will.uiuc.edu/fm/programs/classicallyblack/default.htm

Basic Black - On January 11th, the **Imani Winds** are to be featured. Broadcast from WGBH (Boston), this program will also be available as a podcast* to be downloaded.

In describing their music, The New York Times said, "Imani Winds spices up chamber music with global flavors." This superb wind quintet was founded in 1997 and its CD, *The Classical Underground*, received a Grammy nomination in 2005.

This "Basic Black" episode features an interview with guest host Howard Manly and includes performances in the WGBH studio.

Link: www.wgbh.org/schedules/program-info?program_id=25065

***Podcasting:** listen when and where you want

A "podcast" is a downloadable file, typically MP3 audio, delivered via the internet. You can download the file to a personal listening device (e.g. iPod) and listen wherever you like, or you can download the audio directly to your hard drive and listen from your computer.

BLACK COMPOSER INFORMATION SOURCES:

Sphinx

<http://www.sphinxkids.org/index.html>

AfriClassical.com

<http://chevalierdesaintgeorges.homestead.com/index.html>

Richard Greene - Temple University

<http://astro.temple.edu/~rgreene/BlackComp/>

http://astro.temple.edu/~rgreene/BlackComp/5_references.htm

Africlassical Blog

http://africlassical.blogspot.com/2008/01/black-history-month-resource-sheet_12.html

Gerri Greebe – educational sources, music of African American composers (audio sources)

<http://creativefolk.com/blackhistory/blackcomposers.html>

Indiana University

BlackGrooves

<http://blackgrooves.org/?cat=5>

<http://www.indiana.edu/~aaamc/>

Univ. of California-Irvine course offering

<http://fusion.hpl.hp.com/OfCourse/search.do?action=showCachedData&md5=e40c925f18ad6365d6dc4d3266aa599b&keyword=information%20retrieval&sortRank=0>

Temple University Resources

<https://listserv.temple.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind0607&L=net-gold&P=29375>

Sphinx kids

http://www.sphinxkids.org/Minority_Composers.html

Sphinx Video

http://www.sphinxmusic.org/about/overview_video.html

Here is a link to the Composers List at MMB Music, which has works of many Black composers in its catalog:

http://www.mmbmusic.com/concert_music/mmb_composer.aspx

Living Composers listed:

George Walker, Gregory Walker, Julius Williams, Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson, Ron Carter, William Banfield, David Baker,

Sheet music sources

Sheet Music Plus

<http://www.sheetmusicplus.com>

International Opus Music Publisher

Woodwinds

<http://www.internationalopus.com>

Audio of music of Black Composers

Paul Freeman Introduces...String Concertos. Albany Records, 2003. Available at Amazon.com

Czech National Symphony Orchestra, Paul Freeman Conductor. Milos Jahoda, Cello. Program notes enclosed.

Jeffrey Mumford. the promise of the far horizon. Albany Records, 2004. Available at Albany Records.

Each of the chamber works on this CD was recorded by the performer(s) for whom it was composed. "wending" (Wendy Richman, viola); "the promise of the far horizon" (Corigliano Quartet); "a landscape of interior resonances" (Margaret Kampmeier, piano); "a window of resonant light" (CORE Ensemble); "the millner's fancy" (Rhonda Taylor, alto saxophone.)

Paul Freeman Introduces...String Concertos. Albany Records, 2003. Available at Amazon.com

Czech National Symphony Orchestra, Paul Freeman Conductor. Milos Jahoda, Cello. Program notes enclosed.

I am primarily interested in works by African American composers, and there are two concertos here by the legendary David Baker. "Concert Piece for Viola and Orchestra" is unusual for Baker in that there is no hint of a conscious jazz influence...he states that his references are Bartok, Tchaikovsky and Shostakovich. It is rich, fluid and emotional. "Concerto for Cello and Chamber Orchestra" starts lyrically, and ends with jazz-influenced themes. Interestingly enough, there are no cellos in the orchestral accompaniment. (This work is also found on AFRICAN HERITAGE SYMPHONIC SERIES VOLUME III on Cedille Records.)

New American Scene II: 5 Distinguished African American Composers. Albany Records, 1998. Available at Amazon.com.

Cleveland Chamber Symphony, Edwin London, Conductor. Howie Smith (Saxophone) Neal Creque (Piano) T. J. ANDERSON (b. 1928): "Chamber Concerto (Remembrances)"; DAVID BAKER (b. 1931): "Parallel Planes "; LEROY JENKINS (b. 1932): "Wonder Lust"; WENDELL LOGAN (b. 1940): "Roots, Branches, Shapes and Shades (of Green) Collard Series No. 2 " DOLORES WHITE: "Crystal Gazing"

Symphonic Brotherhood: The Music of African-American Composers. Albany Records, 1993. Order or listen at Amazon.com

Bohuslav Martinu Philharmonic, Julius P. Williams, conductor. Everett McCorvey, Tenor. Biographical information and program notes enclosed. Adolphus Hailstork (b. 1941) "Symphony No. 1"; Henry (Harry) Thacker Burleigh (1866-1949) "The Young Warrior"; Julius Penson Williams (b. 1954) "Is It True?"; Gary Powell Nash (b. 1964) "In Memoriam: Sojourner Truth"; David Nathaniel Baker (b. 1931) "Kosbro." This CD emphasizes the mainstream character of the compositions; as it says in the program notes, "The fact that these five composers...are of African descent will become clear only when viewing the photographs." And yet, some of the compositions incorporate very slight elements of jazz, gospel and spirituals. Interestingly, Burleigh's "Young Warrior" gained great popularity in Italy during WWI as a "patriot anthem."

Videmus.org

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Carnegie Hall Honor

Celebration of The African American Cultural Legacy

<http://www.carnegiehall.org/honor/index.html>

