

Gulf Coast Symphony Orchestra

2022 - 2023 Season

TRIBUTE TO MLK

January 14, 2023, 7:30PM, iMPAC, Gulfport &
January 15, 2023, 3:00PM, PHPAC, Pascagoula

Featuring



Soprano
Luvada Harrison



Narration by
Rip Daniels

Duke Ellington Excerpts from *The River*

Edward Kennedy ("Duke") Ellington was born on April 29, 1899 in Washington, D.C. and died on May 24, 1974 in New York City. *The River* was first performed in an incomplete form on June 25, 1970 at Lincoln Center in New York City. The work is scored for two flutes (2nd doubling piccolo), two oboes (2nd doubling English horn), two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, jazz bass, harp, piano, and strings.

Duke Ellington's legacy as a composer rests largely on those immortal tunes that he wrote to be performed with his big band, covering roughly the two decades between 1930 and 1950. Songs like "Mood Indigo," "Sophisticated Ladies," "It Don't Mean a Thing if it Ain't Got That Swing," and "Don't Get Around Much Anymore" earned a permanent place in the Great American Songbook, that compendium of the best of American popular song. The polish and sophistication of Ellington's big band was legendary, as was the distinctive timbre of the band, which could go from a mellow smoothness to a joyous stomp and still sound like the Ellington band, with a different sound than every other big band of the time, and yet always evolving. Ellington had a particular knack for showcasing the talents of his band members, with subtle changes in sound as his personnel changed over the years.

For most composers, this output (estimated at nearly 2000 songs) would be enough for a career, but Ellington was seeking connections between jazz and other musical genres and even other art forms. Over the course of a career that spanned seven decades, he wrote jazz suites for his band intended as concert music, not just for dancing. He produced film scores, jazz reworkings of classical music (like Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker Suite*), ballet music, incidental music, sacred music, music for jazz ensemble with symphony orchestra, and music for orchestra alone, all with roots in blues, jazz, and gospel. Through works like *Harlem*, *Black, Brown, and Beige*, *Three Black Kings*, and *New World a Comin'*, Ellington spoke eloquently through his music about the African-American experience in the United States during a time of racism and segregation.

In 1970, Ellington joined with legendary choreographer Alvin Ailey and his American Ballet Theater on a ballet entitled *The River*. Initially suggested by ABT director Lucia Chase, the ballet project was greeted with enthusiasm by both composer and choreographer. Ellington took to studying other composer's scores written about water – Handel's *Water Music*, Britten's *Peter Grimes*, Smetana's *The Moldau*, and Debussy's *La Mer*.

Ellington's working methods were far from conventional, probably from necessity, as he was writing the ballet while on tour with his band. The music started life as a piano solo, which Ellington then handed to his arrangers, and then Ellington and his band would create several different versions of each piece. It didn't take long before Alvin Ailey was driven to distraction by Ellington's unorthodox methods of composition. He wrote later:

The music was just beautiful, but it was driving me out of my mind...I talked to people who worked with him. They said, 'Well, that's the way he works. You're just going to have to learn how to work with him like that.'

He'll take 16 bars into a studio, eight bars of this and two bars of that, and come out four hours later with eight fantastic pieces. That's just the nature of the way he works.' He wrote with the orchestra - the orchestra was his instrument. He composed in the recording studio; his band was his Stradivarius.

While Ellington ended up producing twelve pieces for the ballet, Ailey ended up choreographing only seven, which were presented at the first performance in Lincoln Center as "Seven Dances From a Work in Progress Entitled 'The River'". The orchestral versions, taken from Ellington's big band originals, were created by Canadian composer Ron Collier, who had arranged music for Ellington on several previous occasions.

The *New York Times*' music critic Clive Barnes included a concise synopsis of the work in his review of the first performance:

Ellington's score is a tone poem, a suite that traces the meandering river's course and speed from birth as a spring, through rapids, over falls, spinning into whirlpools, subsiding into lakes, passing by cities, ending in the sea. It is a musical allegory in the course of which the river from spring to sea parallels the course of life from birth to death, a cycle, according to Ellington, of 'heavenly anticipation of rebirth.' The music is itself like a river, constantly flowing, changing speed and shape, instantly accessible melodically. Ellington parades it all from the slow, folk-song opening 'Spring' through the jazzy swingtime 'Vortex' to the spiritual and blues of Two Cities.'

Throughout the ever-changing kaleidoscope of styles and orchestral colors of *The River*, Ellington's voice manages to speak of the flow of water and the flow of life, singing of both in music of immense richness and beauty.

William Henry Curry: *Eulogy for a Dream*

William Henry Curry was born in Pittsburgh in 1954. *Eulogy for a Dream* was written in 1999 and first performed on June 13, 1999 by the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra under the direction of the composer. The work is scored for three flutes and piccolo, two oboes and English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, celesta, harp, and strings.

Born in Pittsburgh in 1954, William Henry Curry forged a long and brilliant career as a conductor and composer. Beginning his studies in both disciplines at the age of 14, he went on to become Assistant Conductor of the Richmond Symphony at age 21, followed by appointments with the Baltimore Symphony, the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, the Indianapolis Symphony, and the Durham Symphony Orchestra. He has conducted orchestras from Bangkok to Los Angeles, opera productions in Houston, New York, and Chicago, and ballet performances with the New York City Ballet.

William Henry Curry's *Eulogy for a Dream* has become his most often performed composition. Written for the Indianapolis Symphony in 1999, it incorporates the spoken words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. into its musical texture. It has been performed by orchestras around the country and around the world and has been broadcast to a nationwide audience.

William Henry Curry wrote this summation of *Eulogy for a Dream* for the Durham Symphony Orchestra.

I was born in 1954, the year of Brown vs. Board of Education. Every African American born that year had a parent who said at one point, "This one will have a brighter future."

My mother was such a parent, and she introduced me to the joys of reading and culture. Being informed about current events was very important in my home. So in August 1963, the Curry family gathered around the television set as Dr. Martin Luther King gave his "I Have a Dream" speech during one of the largest political rallies in American history.

The crowd at this protest march was estimated at 250,000 people. According to Wikipedia, 75-80% of the attendees were African American. The purpose of the "March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom" was to lobby for civil rights and economic equality for African Americans.

According to the New York Daily News, More than 6,000 police, parade marshals, and military MPs were deployed throughout the capital to prevent any violence. Some 4,000 troops were kept on alert at two nearby bases. But as the great march and memorial rally came to an end, there had been only three arrests for minor violations—none by African Americans.

as William Warfield, Avery Brooks, and Jubilant Sykes. As the composer of *Eulogy for a Dream*, I had one of the most inspirational persons and eloquent wordsmiths in human history with whom to work. The music was written from the heart. May it go to the heart.

Material for these notes courtesy of
durhamsymphony.org

George Walker: *Lyric for Strings*

George Theophilus Walker was born in 1922 in Washington, D.C., and died in Montclair, New Jersey in 2018. *Lyric for Strings* was written in 1946 and given its first performance in 1947 in Washington, D.C. by the National Gallery Orchestra under the direction of Richard Bales. The work is scored for strings only.

He graduated from Oberlin College and then the Curtis Institute of Music. He later earned his doctorate at the Eastman School of Music. He gave his first important piano recital at Town Hall in New York, and made his debut with the Philadelphia Orchestra as soloist in the Rachmaninoff Third Piano Concerto. As a composer, he wrote over 90 published works, with commissions from the greatest orchestras, chamber ensembles, singers, and instrumentalists all over the world. His numerous prizes and awards included Fulbright, Rockefeller, and Whitney Fellowships. He studied composition in Paris with the legendary Nadia Boulanger, teacher of great composers from Aaron Copland to Quincy Jones. He taught and lectured at colleges and universities all over the country. He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in music in 1996, and he continued writing and publishing music beyond his 90th year.

This would be an impressive legacy for any musician, but even more so for a young African-American pianist, the son of a Jamaican doctor. George Walker was an African-American pianist and composer growing up during one of the most racially divisive periods of United States history. Of the awards and honors listed above, in many cases he was the first African-American to achieve such distinction, and his groundbreaking career paved the way for subsequent generations of minority composers, singers, and instrumentalists.

The *Lyric for Strings* began life as the slow movement of his String Quartet No. 1, written in 1946. The slow movement was originally titled *Lament*, and was composed in memory of Walker's grandmother, who had passed away the previous year. The work has much the same genesis as Samuel Barber's *Adagio for Strings*, and the warm lyricism and skillful counterpoint of Walker's work display musical parallels to Barber's. The interweaving melodic strands rise to an impassioned climax, but instead of collapsing in desolation, the music sings in tones of quiet solace all the way to the final cadence.

Three Spirituals:

My Soul's Been Anchored in the Lord
(Arr. Price/Curry)
Jesus Lay Your Head in the Window
(Arr. Hale Smith)
Ride On, King Jesus
(Arr. Dawson/Curry)

The African-American spiritual is the culmination of a musical journey that began in the heart of Africa, long before the European colonization of America. The slaves taken from their African homes who survived the long, torturous, and disease-ridden voyage from Africa to the Americas brought their centuries-old work songs and religious chants with them, music which soon took root in the New World. As slaves converted (or were forced to convert) to Christianity, the songs and dances of the slaves' native lands acquired Christian and English lyrics, much to the satisfaction of their owners, who believed that their slaves' acceptance of Christianity meant that they also accepted their bondage, a belief which was far from the truth.

While spirituals served to express the faith of the new converts, it also developed into a secret code conveying the hope of freedom and connections to the Underground Railroad. Many spirituals had texts that related their slavery to the sufferings of Christ, such as "Sometimes I Feel Like A Motherless Child." Others, like Wallis Willis' "Steal Away to Jesus," expressed the wish to break away from the bonds of slavery. Harriet Tubman was known to have used "Go Down Moses" as a signal to slaves that she could help them find passage to the northern U.S. The former

slave and abolitionist Frederick Douglass wrote in his book *My Bondage and My Freedom*, "A keen observer might have detected in our repeated singing of 'O Canaan, sweet Canaan, I am bound for the land of Canaan,' something more than a hope of reaching heaven. We meant to reach the North, and the North was our Canaan."

After the Civil War, collections of spirituals were collected and published in the United States, keeping the singing tradition alive. The term "spiritual" comes from Ephesians 5:19: "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." Publication of these songs made it possible for their dissemination to a wide audience and attracted the attention of new performers of freed slaves and their children. The Jubilee Singers from Nashville and the Hampton Singers from Virginia were two of the many African-American choirs who toured the United States and Europe in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, performing a *capella* arrangements of these songs. While some in the black community had severe reservations about continuing to popularize music associated with slavery, the popularity of these choirs both nationally and internationally created a brand-new audience for this heartfelt music, proving conclusively that the spiritual was not only worthy for performance in the fields and in the churches, but in concert halls around the world.

Spirituals formed the musical backbone of the Civil Rights movement, with many being with fitted with new, contemporary words, such as "We Shall Overcome," adapted from the gospel hymn "I'll Overcome Someday" and the spiritual "I'll Be All Right." They have influenced artists from Marian Anderson and Paul Robeson to Jessye Norman, Bob Marley, and Billy Bragg, and even today they inspire the fight for justice and freedom everywhere, including Russia, China, and South Africa. They have had a lasting influence upon our nation and the world, and these songs will continue to shine the light of freedom wherever one people or nation is oppressed by another.

Franz Schubert: Symphony No. 8 in B minor, D. 759, "Unfinished"

Franz Schubert was born January 31, 1797 in Liechtenthal, Austria (now part of Vienna) and died on November 19, 1828 in Vienna. The "Unfinished" Symphony was composed over the course of six days in October of 1822 and received its first performance on December 17, 1865 at the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna, conducted by Johann von Herbeck. The symphony is scored for two flutes, two clarinets, two bassoons, two horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, and strings.

While we think of music history as the intellectual territory of (to use Tom Lehrer's marvelous quote) "ivy-covered professors in ivy-covered halls," music history itself proves to be full of scandal, intrigue, and mystery. Why did Renaissance composer Don Carlo Gesualdo never face justice for the murder of his wife and her lover, and was this murderous streak why his music is so avant-garde to us even today? Who murdered French violinist/composer Jean-Marie Leclair? His body was found in a sordid suburb of Paris, his body pierced with sixty-four stab wounds made by a weapon that appeared to be a printer's chisel – did I mention that his ex-wife was the first French woman to print music? Did the Freemasons have Mozart killed for revealing too much about their rituals in *The Magic Flute*? Who was Beethoven's "Immortal Beloved"? What is the underlying enigma of Elgar's *Enigma Variations*? Sometimes it seems that the study of music history is more the provenance of supermarket tabloids than of dusty library volumes.

One of the most intriguing mysteries in music is that of Franz Schubert's *Unfinished* Symphony, a work left incomplete, with only two of the intended four movements completed before Schubert's death in 1828. Popular opinion would have you believe that Schubert left the work unfinished on his deathbed, with the composer unable to complete his final symphony due to the illness that finally killed him. Such a history portrays him dying a tragic and Romantic death huddled in a chilly garret somewhere in Vienna, living on watery soup and crusts of bread and having to burn his manuscripts for warmth.