

Chamber Music Fall Fest 2023 | Part 1 of 3 Program Notes

Adolphus Hailstork: “Three Spirituals”

Offering tuneful and innovative retellings of well-known negro spirituals interwoven with European musical ideas, “Three Spirituals” (published 2012) offers an interesting glimpse into Hailstork’s powerful compositional idiom, for which he has received many awards and worldwide acclaim. This impactful trio finds beauty in its simplicity of line, as well as its amalgamation of European and African influence, to create something truly wonderful and vocal in spirit.

In the first movement, Hailstork invokes a sense of Baroque solo, meshed into what many would consider the Negro national anthem, “We Shall Overcome.” The second movement, featuring the well-known African-American spiritual/campfire song “Kum Bah Yah,” uses bluesy harmony and gorgeously tender melodic writing to create a heartwarming, meditative atmosphere. After the peaceful night of “Kum Bah Yah,” the third movement, entitled, “Great Day,” is an encapsulation of black joy and a bright closure to this introspective work.

William Grant Still: “Miniatures”

William Grant Still is one of the most prolific American composers and one of the most performed American composers of his time, having written close to two hundred distinct works of music. He was a composer of many firsts, including being the first African American to lead a major symphony orchestra.

Composed in 1948 for Sir John Barbirolli and Lady Evelyn Barbirolli, his “Miniatures” are a collection of folk music adapted to the classical format gathered from Anglo, Latin, Native American, and African cultures. Written as a souvenir of the Barbirollis’ tour through the U.S, these “Miniatures” can be heard as a tour through the sonorities and sentiments of varying cultures, allowing for the performers to show off the piece’s stylistic contrasts.

Jacques Castérède: “Flûtes en Vacances”

Composer and teacher, Jacques Castérède, was born in Paris on April 10, 1926. He studied at Paris Conservatory, studying piano with Armand Ferté, composition with Aubin, and analysis with Messiaen. He won many prizes at the conservatory for his work, to include the Prix de Rome in 1953 for “La Boîte de Pandore.” In 1960, he returned to the Paris Conservatory as a professor of solfège, later being appointed as a head of piano studies in 1966, and professor of analysis in 1971.

The title, “Flutes en Vacances,” translates to “Flutes on Holiday” and was written in 1962 for three flutes (optionally with a fourth flute as well). The piece is known for its lively and playful character, often capturing the essence of a carefree holiday. Castérède's work often showcases his skill in crafting engaging and imaginative compositions.

Written with four distinct sections, this performance will feature the first three movements. The first, “Flûtes Pastorales” features a simple, idyllic melody; next comes “Flûtes Joyeuses” with an energetic dance; then “Flûtes Rêveuses,” which utilizes a theme similar to his “Twelve Studies” to create a dreamy and nostalgic scene; the fourth (not featured tonight), “Flûtes Légères” contains a light, sparkling melody.

Amy Beach: “Ah, love, but a day” and “Ecstasy”

Amy Marcy Cheney Beach was an American composer and pianist. She was the first successful American female composer of large-scale art music and was one of the most respected and acclaimed of her time. Her "Gaelic" Symphony, premiered by the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1896, was the first symphony composed and published by an American woman. As a pianist, she was acclaimed for concerts she gave featuring her own music in the United States and in Germany.

“Ah, love, but a day” is the second song in Beach's “Three Browning Songs, op. 44,” published in 1900. Featuring a text by Robert Browning, this song is highly chromatic. “Ecstasy” is the second song of Beach’s “Three Songs, op. 19,” written in 1891, and the text is from the composer herself.

For us, playing in this ensemble was a whole new experience. Both songs feature the violin, voice, and piano, which is a great challenge for learning sound balance. In this process, we learned to listen to everyone's voice, and that everyone's voice should be heard at the same time, whether it is strong or soft.

Ah, Love, but a day

Robert Browning (1812-1889)

Ah, Love, but a day,
And the world has changed!
The sun's away,
And the bird estranged;
The wind has dropped,
And the sky's deranged;
Summer has stopped.

Look in my eyes!
Wilt thou change too?
Should I fear surprise?
Shall I find aught new
In the old and dear,
In the good and true,
With the changing year?

Thou art a man,
But I am thy love.
For the lake, its swan;
For the dell, its dove;
And for thee — (oh, haste!)
Me, to bend above,
Me, to hold embraced.

Ecstasy

Amy Marcy Cheney Beach (1867-1944)

Only to dream among the fading flowers,
Only to glide along the tranquil sea;
Ah dearest, dearest, have we not together
One long, bright day of love, glad and free?

Only to rest through life, in storm and sunshine,
Safe in thy breast, where sorrow dare not fly;
Ah dearest, dearest, thus in sweetest rapture
With thee to live, with thee at last to die!

Julius Eastman: “Stay On It”

Julius Eastman was a Black American composer, pianist, vocalist, and overall artist in the world of music. A former native of New York, his compositions were a blend of minimalism and elements from pop music in what he liked to call ‘Organic Music.’ Eastman strived to be fully genuine in both his persona and art.

“To be what I am to the fullest: Black to the fullest, a musician to the fullest, and homosexual to the fullest...” is what he said to the citizens of Buffalo tuning in to watch the news in 1979. Sadly, Julius passed away at 49 with no one at his bedside during a time in which his compositions were considered controversial.

Stay On It (1973) is a large, open instrumentation piece that truly represents Eastman’s ‘fullest.’ Although written for ‘open instrumentation,’ keyboard, percussion, and voice have been a staple in most performances of this artwork. Minimalistic melodies, surprise aleatoric elements, free improvisation, and pop influences all shape this piece to be a unique experience for every performance.

To this date, there is no authenticated manuscript for this composition. Any recent performances presented are based on the recordings from the Creative Associates Ensemble at SUNY Buffalo from the 1960’s, as transcribed to score. We believe that it is important to recognize that performing on this recreated score will never authentically capture Eastman’s vision.

All notes written by the student ensembles, with light editing by the Chamber Music Department.