

University of Maryland School of Music Presents

Still's Symphony No. 1 "Afro-American"

UMD SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA




Saturday, October 5, 2024 • 8PM

Dekelbroum Concert Hall

at The Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center



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MUSIC**



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The UMD School of Music offers rigorous training alongside the resources and opportunities afforded by one of the country's top public research universities. In creating the next generation of artist-citizens, the school is fiercely dedicated to the highest standards of artistic and scholarly excellence, diversity in curriculum and programming, robust engagement with the world, entrepreneurial thinking and problem solving and the creation of an inclusive, open and welcoming community. The School of Music embraces the ever-changing world in cultivating a cohort of socially conscious artists who showcase the power and potential of the performing arts.

PROGRAM

University of Maryland School of Music
Presents

Still's Symphony No. 1 "Afro-American"

UMD SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

David Neely
Music Director

Robert Rocheteau
Soloist

Le carnaval romain, op.9

Hector Berlioz
(1803-1869)

Concerto for marimba and strings

Emmanuel Séjourné
(b. 1961)

- I. Tempo souple
- II. Rythmique, énergique

Robert Rocheteau, *marimba*

INTERMISSION

Symphony No. 1, "Afro-American"

William Grant Still
(1895-1978)

ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

DAVID NEELY

Described by Opera News as “a ninja warrior with a baton,” **David Neely** maintains an active career as a conductor of opera and symphonic music in both professional and educational settings.

Neely is director of orchestras and professor of conducting at the University of Maryland School of Music. He previously served on the faculties of the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music, the University of Kansas and the University of Texas. Neely remains a regular guest conductor at the Jacobs School.

As music director and principal conductor of Des Moines Metro Opera, a position he has held since 2012, Neely has played a key role in elevating the company to a position of international standing among summer music festivals. He has led critically-acclaimed performances of a broad range of new and traditional repertoire that includes the recent world premieres of Damien Geter and Lila Palmer's *American Apollo* and Kristin Kuster and Mark Campbell's *A Thousand Acres*, regional Emmy award-winning productions of *Manon* and *Billy Budd* for Iowa Public Television, and more than 30 other works including *Salome*, *Elektra*, *Wozzeck*, *The Love for Three Oranges*, *Bluebeard's Castle*, *Pikovaya Dama*, *Yevkeny Onegin*, *Rusalka*, *Jenůfa*, *Falstaff*, *Elektra*, *Peter Grimes*, *Dead Man Walking*, *Flight*, *Macbeth*, *Don Giovanni*, *Candide*, *La Fanciulla Del West* and *Turandot*. DMMO is a 2024 nominee for the International Opera Award in the category of Best Festival.

He has led productions with Atlanta Opera and Sarasota Opera as well as numerous European opera houses including Bonn, Dortmund, Halle, St. Gallen, and Saarbrücken. His performances have been praised in Opera News, Opera Today, Gramophone UK, The Guardian, Opernwelt, the Chicago Tribune, and the Wall Street Journal. Neely has led concerts with the Memphis Symphony Orchestra, Portland Symphony Orchestra, Dortmund Philharmonic, Bochumer Philharmoniker, Eutin Festival Orchestra, Bregenz Symphony Orchestra. His 2023 concert with the National Orchestra Institute was featured on NPR's Performance Today.

Concerto soloists with whom he has collaborated include Benjamin Beilman, David Chan, Roberto Diaz, Nicholas Daniel, Eric Kutz, Rainer Honeck, Bella Hristova, Delfeayo Marsalis, Ricardo Morales, Hai-Ye Ni, Ben Lulich and Joshua Roman. He has appeared as a collaborative pianist with numerous vocalists, including a recent recital with Joyce Castle and Schubert's *Winterreise* with David Adam Moore. He is a guest teacher of conducting for Washington National Opera's Cafritz Young Artist program, and was selected as conductor for WNO's 2021 American Opera Initiative. He recently appeared with the American Lyric Theater in New York.

Neely serves on the Artistic and Awards Committee of the Solti Foundation U.S.



ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES (CONT.)

ROBERT ROCHETEAU

An artist in contemporary classical music, percussionist **Robert Rocheteau** is known for diverse and engaging performances. Robert is an in-demand artist based in the Greater Baltimore/Washington D.C. area who performs with artists from across the globe. Recent highlights include performances in Washington D.C. at the Fête de la Musique Festival at the French Embassy, the Sound Scene Festival at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, and multiple performances at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts.

Robert is a founding member of the Pierrot plus Percussion Ensemble The Victory Players, the ensemble-in-residence to the historic Victory Theatre in Holyoke, Massachusetts. The ensemble prides itself in being a diverse new voice in contemporary classical music that reaches a broad range of audiences. The Victory Players recorded their debut album in 2021 titled *El Puerto Rico*. The album was also video recorded for use on TV and radio broadcasts by New England Public Media. The Victory Players commission new music, present masterclasses, and perform outreach concerts throughout the United States.

Robert is a proud alumnus of the University of Maryland College Park where he graduated in 2024 with his Doctor of Musical Arts in Percussion Performance and Literature. He had the privilege of studying with Jon Bisesi, Shaun Tilburg, and Jauvon Gilliam. Post-graduation, Robert has also enjoyed growing his private lesson studio and becoming a lecturer at George Mason University.



PROGRAM NOTES

***Le carnaval romain*, op. 9**

HECTOR BERLIOZ

Born Dec. 11, 1803, La Côte-Saint-André | Died Mar. 8, 1869, Paris

Hector Berlioz's first musical lessons were on the flageolet (a small wind instrument), flute, and guitar, an introduction that perhaps influenced Berlioz's interest in timbres and expanding the role of winds in the orchestra. While his father ruled that he should become a doctor and Berlioz obediently studied medicine in Paris from 1821-1824, he also studied with Jean-François Le Sueur, a composition teacher at the Paris Conservatoire. Berlioz formally matriculated at the Conservatoire in 1826, and soon after applied to the Prix de Rome for the first of three failed attempts. He eventually won the Prix de Rome in October 1830 and though he tried to delay (and even avoid) the required study in Italy due to increasing success in Paris, he did live and work in Italy for 15 months during 1831-1832. One of the works to be influenced by this residency was the opera *Benvenuto Cellini*.

Berlioz's opera depicts a love story between Italian Renaissance sculptor Benvenuto Cellini and Teresa. Originally intended to be an *opéra comique*, the love story included dramatic challenges—an antagonistic father, sword fights, murder, bribery, disguises and more—that Benvenuto and Teresa overcome to fulfill their love. The comedic tone led the work to be rejected for performance in 1834; after revisions to make it more serious, it was accepted to the Opéra de Paris in 1836 but had an infamously unsuccessful premiere in 1838. Berlioz later reworked some material from the opera into the concert overture *Le carnaval romain* (*The Roman Carnival*), which he conducted for its premiere on February 3, 1844. Unlike the operatic source material, *Le carnaval romain* has remained a success in the orchestral world.

Le carnaval romain imitates the general structure—fast introduction, slow section, fast section—of the original overture to *Benvenuto Cellini*, but it does not have the same musical material. Like the operatic overture, *Le carnaval romain* begins with a *tutti* allegro introduction that grabs the audience's attention, and after a pause it transitions to an andante sostenuto led by the English horn, an example of how Berlioz revolutionized the use of winds. The English horn plays the yearning melody from a duet between Cellini and Teresa in *Benvenuto Cellini*, in which Cellini sings of his adoration for Teresa (*ma chère vie / my dear life*) and Teresa struggles with her passion (*non, je ne dois plus vous revoir / no, I must not see you again*). Berlioz then puts the melody in the violas, another example of how he experimented with instrument roles. After woodwind flourishes, the tempo shifts to *vivace*, and a lively saltarello Italian folk dance begins. The saltarello rhythm is introduced in muted strings and *piano* flutes and oboes, creating a sense of hushed anticipation. As the brass and percussion join, the orchestra crescendos to a *fortissimo* statement of the dance theme, and we can imagine the riotous celebrations of the carnival season in Rome. The dance seems to slow as the texture thins and rhythmic pulse relaxes, preparing the bassoons to play the love duet melody, accompanied by the second violins playing the saltarello dance. Berlioz called this technique of combining two previously separate themes a "réunion de deux themes," and it is one of his typical compositional features. The dance then builds to an imitative fugato section leading to a *tutti* that is dominated by the full brass section, bringing the overture to a frenzied, celebratory close.

Concerto for Marimba and Strings

EMMANUEL SÉJOURNÉ

Born July 16, 1961, Limoges

French composer Emmanuel Séjourné started piano at age five, and the instrument remained his primary musical focus until age 17. He recalls practicing six hours a day, and credits his study of Beethoven, Brahms, Chopin, Debussy and Ravel for his interest in and talent for phrasing. A finger injury forced Séjourné to choose a new instrument at 17 years old. Inspired by the ensemble Les Percussions de Strasbourg which was based at the Conservatoire de Strasbourg and captivated by the interesting instruments, he chose percussion as his new focus, concentrating on vibraphone and marimba because of their similarity to the piano. Having switched instruments, Séjourné was now part of what he calls a “micro-society,” of percussionists with a “mentality [of] ‘we need to share, we need to help, we need to be together,’” that he loved after practicing solo piano for many years. Séjourné is dedicated to community and aims to emulate Armando Anthony “Chick” Corea’s persona of a “pianist and a composer...with a smile” that has left a permanent impression on Séjourné.

Because of the relatively small amount of repertoire available to percussionists—especially compared to the piano—Séjourné decided to compose for percussion very soon after switching instruments. The Concerto for Marimba and Strings, composed in 2005, is an example of how Séjourné has helped to expand and raise the level of difficulty within percussion repertoire. The internationally-famous Bogdan Băcanu commissioned the work, which originally had two movements. After several years, Băcanu asked Séjourné to compose a new first movement, so that the work would fit the traditional Classical solo concerto form: extended first movement—slow movement—fast movement. This evening’s performance of the Concerto for Marimba and Strings will feature the original two-movement version.

Marked “Tempo souple,” or flexible tempo, the first movement begins with lush strings, the first violins and then cellos singing a modal melody. The soloist enters at a much faster tempo with a cadenza, immediately showcasing their skills as well as the marimba’s full range. As the cadenza finishes with sustained chords in the marimba, the melody is carried up the strings before the marimba once again takes center stage. As the orchestra rejoins, the marimba ornaments the melody in a truly masterful balance that demonstrates Séjourné’s stated influence of Ravel’s piano concertos. As the movement comes to a close, the marimba has two short cadenzas, each one followed by a tutti statement of the theme. The soloist’s final statement accompanied by tremolo cello is delicate and meditative. An immediate contrast, the second movement, marked “Rythmique, Énergique,” begins with accented fortissimo sixteenth notes. Different mallets allow the soloist to change the sound quality and resonance of the instrument, creating another contrast with the previous movement. The middle section is dominated by the marimba soloist, accompanied by a repeating ostinato in the strings. Though the tempo of this section actually increases (or remains constant), it seems as if it is slower; it is the soloist’s skill that helps to create that illusion. A return to the furious first section leads into an unexpected recollection of the previous movement, which then crescendos into rapid, accented sixteenth notes runs by the soloist across the full instrument, their talent on full display. The concerto concludes with a five-octave *fortissimo* flourish in the marimba.

PROGRAM NOTES (CONT.)

Symphony No. 1, “Afro-American”

WILLIAM GRANT STILL

Born May 11, 1895, Woodville | Died Dec. 3, 1978, Los Angeles

William Grant Still, Jr. was born in Mississippi in his father’s hometown, where his parents moved after marrying. Still’s mother—an 1886 graduate of Atlanta University, a lifelong teacher, and a civil rights activist—was the main influence in his life as his father died when Still was just four months old. In Still’s words, his mother “impressed [him] with the thought that [he] should achieve something worthwhile in life.” While he matriculated at Wilberforce University to study medicine in obedience to his mother’s wishes, Still was more interested in music, teaching himself multiple instruments and leading school ensembles. He withdrew in his senior year and began working as a professional musician while also taking composition lessons at Oberlin Conservatory.

The “Afro-American” symphony, like most of Still’s works, fall into what he named his “racial” style, or works consciously influenced by African American idioms. Still’s goal for the “Afro-American” symphony was to write a symphony based on the blues, a distinctly African American musical genre. He stated that “[he placed] stress on a motif in [the] Blues idiom. It is employed originally as the principal theme of the first movement. It appears also in various forms in the succeeding movements, where [he] sought to present it in a characteristic (style) manner.” The English horn immediately introduces the melody, the lowered “blue” notes indicating the stylistic influence. A muted trumpet picks up the tune, accompanied by the traditional blues harmonic structure as the theme is passed through the orchestra. Entitled “Longing” in Still’s manuscripts, the first movement’s theme evokes a yearning and sorrowful feeling that is associated with the blues. The second Adagio movement (“Sorrow” in the manuscript) has call and response between the strings and winds, showing an influence from spirituals. The *Animato* third movement has puzzled listeners and scholars alike for its quote of George Gershwin’s “I Got Rhythm,” unexpected for a work meant to be based on African American styles. Some have argued that Still was the original creator of that distinctive tune, which Gershwin heard as Still improvised within the pit orchestra of *Shuffle Along*. Still entitled the third movement “Humor” in his manuscript, perhaps hinting at some hidden story, while at the same time drawing on the traditional scherzo (“joke”) for a symphony’s third movement. The final movement (“Aspiration” in the manuscript), recalls the first movement’s primary blues theme in the woodwinds, then echoed throughout the orchestra. In the published score of the work, each movement is also accompanied by excerpts of poems by African American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, who worked in the late nineteenth century and whose writings grapple with African American identities.

The “Afro-American” symphony premiered in 1931 by the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra, becoming the first symphony composed by an African American to be performed by a major symphony orchestra, just one of many racial barriers Still broke in his lifetime. Now known as the “Dean of African American composers,” Still was active in the civil rights movement and worked against

Program notes by Elizabeth Massey, Ph.D.

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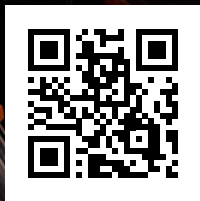


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