

Living Arts CONCERT SERIES CHURCH OF THE RESURRECTION

Presents
Black Is Beautiful

*African American composers' approach to modern classical music
(with more than a hint of jazz and blues)*



Featuring Members of the Great Noise Ensemble:

Blair Goins, tuba - Hilary Van Wagenen, piano
Anthony Shields, violin - Michelle Acton, alto saxophone
Jason Solounias, piano - Tim Thulson, cello

Sunday, November 10th, 4:00 pm - Resurrection
Tuesday, November 12th, 7:30 pm - Riderwood Chapel

Program

David Baker **Roots II (1992)**

2. Dance in Congo Square
4. Boogie Woogie
5. Jubilee

Anthony Shields, violin; Tim Thulson, cello; Jason Solounias, piano

Lance Reddick **Town Square (2016)**

2. Bells
3. Dance

Jason Solounias, piano

William Grant Still **Summerland for Violin and Piano (*from Three Visions*) (1936)**

Anthony Shields, violin; Jason Solounias, piano

Oliver Nelson **Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano (1957)**

3. With Vigor

Michelle Acton, alto sax; Hilary Van Wagenen, piano

Blair Goins **Trio for Alto Sax, Tuba, and Piano (2018)**

1. On a Ride
2. Enjoying the View
3. A Rollicking Good Time
4. A Theme and Four Variations

Michelle Acton, alto sax; Blair Goins, tuba; Hilary Van Wagenen, piano

Program Notes

David Baker: Roots II

“In 1978, I wrote a work entitled Roots which was commissioned by and dedicated to the Beaux Arts Trio. Two movements of Roots, Incantation and Sorrow Song, appear in Roots II, a five-movement suite completed in 1992.”

“Each of the five movements, Incantation, Dance in Congo Square, Sorrow Song, Boogie Woogie, and Jubilee, is a stylized portrait of a musical form from the African-American tradition. This tradition, which includes work songs, field hollers, blues, ragtime, boogie woogie, rhythm & blues, spirituals, gospel songs, calypso, rock & roll, rap, and of course jazz, provided the rich resources on which I drew. In composing this work, I made use of some of the musical features common to these varied styles, among them, rhythmic pre-eminence, the spirit and attitude of the blues call and response and ostinato.”

“Dance in Congo Square is an allusion to the area in nineteenth-century New Orleans where blacks periodically congregated to perform a wide variety of music, dances, and religious rituals that might have been explicitly forbidden in a less liberal environment. This movement is an attempt to capture the spirit and vitality of the music of the West Indies.”

“Boogie Woogie is a stylized version of a popular black piano music which flourished from roughly 1938 to 1945. Also known as “fast Western,” “juke,” and “rent party music,” this style was based on the blues form and a left hand ostinato. Boogie woogie was the basis of the rhythm & blues and rock & roll of the 1940’s and 1950’s. As in the original, the piano is the focus of this movement.”

“Jubilee, reminiscent of the festive celebratory dances which occurred on rare rest days, is perhaps the most complex and abstract of the five movements. It is built on a pedal-point which represents an attempt to recall the drones that accompanied the sea chanteys of black workers on the levees of the South. The movement is rhythmically and harmonically intense and virtuosic in its scope.”

- David Baker

Lance Reddick: Town Square

“Bells and Dance are the second and third pieces of an intended set of five pieces, that I plan to form into a suite called Town Square, which is, in an obviously very abstract way, a day in the life of a small town square almost anywhere in Europe, or perhaps South America. For me, Bells is meant to call to mind the church bells ringing at noon. Having grown up singing in the

choir in the Episcopal church, the rich, open choral sounds of renaissance music bouncing off the high ceilings and stone walls of the 16th century styled architecture made a lasting impression on my ears and nervous system. Bells, in a way, is a call back, an homage, if you will, to those intoxicating sounds from my youth.”

“With Dance, I imagined a spontaneous musical event sparking the people in the square in the late afternoon into being moved to dance. I have always been a great lover of counterpoint, so whereas Bells is more of an exploration of sound, per se, Dance is an exploration of line and rhythm, recalling the influence of Bach, Beethoven, and Ravel. And also, of course, I love to dance.”

- Lance Reddick

William Grant Still: Summerland for Violin and Piano (from Three Visions)

Summerland is the middle movement of Three Visions for Solo Piano. Today, we present the version for violin and piano. There are also arrangements for 2 pianos, solo harp and organ, wind ensemble, string quartet, and small and large orchestra.

Summerland is considered Still’s vision of our home after death. It mixes elements of jazz harmony and European impressionist styles with many parallel harmonic movements and harp-like arpeggios (broken chords). At the time of its first appearance as a solo piano piece in 1936, Still was also writing a lot of music for the film industry, and the piece owes some of its sound world to that style. It has the overall form of ABA, also known as three part song form.

- Notes by Dan Locklair

Oliver Nelson: Sonata for Alto Saxophone and Piano

There is very little written about this brilliant work. Perhaps, some understanding of the piece is revealed through a look at Nelson’s background. He was an American jazz saxophonist, clarinetist, arranger, composer, and bandleader. One of the most significant historic jazz recordings is his album, The Blues and the Abstract Truth, and Nelson’s Stolen Moments is key to that recording and has become a jazz standard.

Nelson was in the Marines (playing woodwinds in the band), and while stationed in Japan, attended a concert by the Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra and heard Maurice Ravel’s Mother Goose Suite and Paul Hindemith’s Symphony in E-Flat. He later recalled that this “was the first time that I had heard really modern music, for back in St. Louis, I hadn’t even known that Negroes were allowed to go to concerts. I realized everything didn’t have to sound like Beethoven or Brahms. It was then that I decided to become a composer.”

Upon his return to Missouri from military service, Nelson studied music composition and theory at Washington and Lincoln Universities. He studied with composers, Elliott Carter, Robert Wykes, and George Tremblay. After completing his degree in 1958, Nelson moved to New York City and played with an amazing array of jazz legends and bands including Erskine Hawkins and Wild Bill Davis. The west coast followed, where he played with Louie Bellson big band, and began recording for Prestige Records, and briefly played with Count Basie, Duke Ellington, and the Quincy Jones big band.

Nelson was also involved in writing music for the television and movie industry, and in 1967, moved to LA to be closer to that work. He composed background music for television in *Ironside*, *Night Gallery*, *Columbo*, and *The Six Million Dollar Man*, and in films such as *Death of a Gunfighter* and *Skullduggery*. He was also the arranger and producer for albums for Gato Barbieri, Nancy Wilson, James Brown, the Temptations, and Diana Ross.

The combination of classical and jazz elements in his training and experience is quite apparent in the Sonata movement presented today. It is amazing how he can take standard jazz and blues chord progressions, and turn them into something extraordinary via his rhythmic energy and the rich colors he creates both harmonically and through his choice of instrument combinations, such as in his *Sound Pieces For Jazz Orchestra* or his quintessential *Stolen Moments*. These jazz elements interweave throughout the Sonata, within an essentially modern classical style and form.

- Notes by Rhonda Buckley and Blair Goins

Blair Goins: Trio for Alto Sax, Tuba, and Piano

“Two things excite me as a composer: Infusing traditional classical music with the unpredictable syncopated rhythms and distinctive harmonies of jazz, and interweaving and overlapping chords and melodic lines in unusual ways, creating a colorful collage of sound. When Carl Banner, pianist and founder of Washington Musica Viva, commissioned me to compose this new trio, I couldn’t have been more excited. This combination blends well together, and it’s the perfect vehicle to express these two compositional ideas.”

“You’ll hear shameless mixing, overlapping, and alternating between modern classical and jazz/blues elements in all four movements. Perhaps a little more difficult to hear is my use of traditional tonal harmonies in atonal ways. For instance, I may combine an F-sharp major melody on top of a C major chord, creating an uncommon polytonal color. It’s all about aural sensations that hopefully either move you or make you dance in your seat.”

- Blair Goins

About the Artists

Born into a musical family in Baltimore, **Anthony C. Shields** started playing the violin at the age of eight. In his early years, he studied with Rhadi Santos, Linda Molina, and Matthew Horowitz-Lee at the Peabody Conservatory. He received his Bachelors in Music Performance at Shenandoah Conservatory where he studied with Akemi Takayama, Concertmaster of the Roanoke Symphony, and Oleg Rylatko, Concertmaster of the Washington Opera. After graduating in 2014, Anthony went on to serve as a section violinist for the National String Symphonia, conducted by David A. Fanning. He would later perform with the Mid-Atlantic Symphony, under the baton of Julien Benichou. Anthony Shields is also an avid and passionate teacher of violin as well as viola, both privately and in group settings, at all levels from beginner to advanced in the Harford/Baltimore County area.

Tim Thulson is a veteran of DC's freelance scene. Recent solo work includes premieres for the Great Noise Ensemble, the Atlas Emerging Composers' Forum, and for the historic St. John's Church in Lafayette Square. He has toured as a member of the Pan American Symphony Orchestra in Lebanon's prestigious Al-Bustan music festival. And he appears within several of Northern Virginia's fine regional orchestras, including the Arlington Philharmonic, Opera NOVA, the Manassas Ballet Theater Orchestra, and the Fairfax Symphony. Tim is perhaps best known as a sensitive chamber musician, and in this capacity, he serves as a director and principal cellist for the uncondacted Ars Nova Chamber Orchestra. He holds degrees from Wheaton College, where he studied with Dr. Daniel Davies, and from George Mason University School of Law. He lives with his family in Alexandria, VA.

Jason Solounias has performed across the US and Europe, ranging from the Kennedy Center to Southwark Cathedral, including performances at the Lincoln Theater, Steinway Society of Puerto Rico, Duomo di Almalfi, and Anthony "Junior" Soto Recital Hall. He has collaborated with 6821 Quintet, The Tango Cammerata and has appeared as a soloist with the Trinity Chamber Orchestra and the Pan American Symphony Orchestra. Jason studied with Irene Yeakel and went on to complete his Bachelors of Arts at Shepherd University with Scott Beard. He received his Master's of Music and Doctorate of Musical Arts from the Catholic University. He has also worked with Emanuel Krasovsky, John Perry, and Leon Fleisher. Jason is the Director of the Puerto Rico International Piano Festival, the co-artistic director of the Kosciusko Foundation Chopin Competition for Young Pianists, and Assistant Director of the Tureck International Bach Competition. Solounias is a faculty member at Levine Music in Washington, DC and at Opal Music Studio in Alexandria, Virginia.

Michelle Acton has played with Great Noise Ensemble since 2008 and has recorded a CD with them. She is a saxophonist in The United States Army Band, “Pershing’s Own,” and leads the Army Band Saxophone Quartet. She could be heard on WPFW with Shannon Gunn and the Bullettes Big Band, and has also made appearances with Chesapeake Symphony and National Philharmonic. She earned degrees from Baylor University and the University of North Texas. Her principal teachers were Dr. Michael Jacobson and Jim Riggs.

Blair Goins earned his degree in composition with primary study on tuba at the Eastman School of Music. Two years after graduating, he was commissioned by the University of Vermont to compose a work for full orchestra in celebration of Martin Luther King, Jr. Since moving to Washington, DC, Blair has performed with Washington Musica Viva, the Modern Brass Trio, Great Noise Ensemble, the Landon Symphonette, and the Monumental Brass Quintet, amongst others, and has composed original works for the first three groups. Blair has also played tuba with the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra and the Go Go Symphony. For four years, he taught music theory and tuba at the Duke Ellington School of the Arts. Currently, Blair is the principle tuba player in the Symphony of the Potomac, as well as one of the resident composers in the Great Noise Ensemble.

Dr. Hilary Van Wagenen has enjoyed a successful career as soloist and chamber musician in a variety of venues throughout Europe and the United States. Twice selected as a La Gesse Foundation fellow, she played recitals at Carnegie Hall’s Weill Hall, and in France and Germany. She earned her doctorate and master’s degrees from Catholic University as a student of Dr. Ivo Kaltchev, and is the winner of several competitions. She’s passionate about the human need for beauty in everyday life, and is starting a business teaching classical piano online to equip people with the tools to create beautiful moments for themselves and those around them. When she’s not involved in music-related activities, Dr. Van Wagenen enjoys tromping around on muddy hiking trails, giving belly rubs to her goldendoodle dog, and talking baseball with her husband and son.

