

Cultural Crossroads: Dvořák in America v.1 soprano
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Butterflies Dancing (Ball de Papallones)

R. Carlos Nakai (1946-)

Program Note by R. Carlos Nakai

In Canyon de Chelly, kaleidoscopes of Monarch butterflies congregate to obtain sustenance and much needed provisions to continue their varied migratory journeys from this overwintering site.

String Quartet No. 12 in F major, Op. 96, B. 179, "American"

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

Kai Christiansen

Antonín Dvořák was the most prolific chamber music composer of the late nineteenth century. He wrote numerous excellent works in every standard form as well as for novel ensembles. His natural and seemingly effortless proclivity for chamber music resulted in a body of work that was unusual for a composer of the Romantic period, a time in which the exploration of large forces, extra-musical programs and expansive, subjective forms had little to do with this intimate and formalized genre most associated with the Classical era. It was characteristic of his time for Dvořák to express his musical nationalism; strong elements of his native Bohemian (i.e. Czech or Slavonic) folk music appear in his music in the dance and narrative forms of the furiant and the dumka respectively. But despite such general influences of form, rhythm and mood, Dvořák's music was always entirely original, characteristic, and, by the standards of the best chamber music, masterful. Though he was not a pioneer, his music has a freshness, a clarity of texture and a bounty of dramatic lyricism that makes it original.

Dvořák's most well-known works date from the 1890's during his three-year sojourn to America where he served as director of the National Conservatory in New York. They include the New World Symphony, the Viola Quintet and the "American" String Quartet. Dvořák encountered American folk music in the form of Native-American drumming and African-American spirituals, the latter of which he regarded as profoundly original music that might serve as a basis for a national style. Many find strong influences of both genres in Dvořák's own "American" compositions while others claim that his music is entirely consistent with his own European folk and classical traditions. Dvořák himself denied that he intentionally incorporated any American elements. Nonetheless, the "American" String Quartet in particular bears the stamp of the time and place of its composition.

Additional note by anonymous:

The *Finale* opens with a driving rhythmic motif, thought to be inspired by Native American drumming. Against this energetic backdrop, the first violin introduces a buoyant, dance-like melody, soon joined by a series of equally spirited themes, all brimming with good humor and vitality.

Partway through the movement, the momentum softens as Dvořák introduces a chorale passage—likely based on a hymn he enjoyed playing during church services at Saint Wenceslas in Spillville, Iowa.

This reflective moment is followed by a brief return of earlier themes, leading the quartet to a resolute and joyful close.

Florence Price

(1887-1953)

Sunset

Night

Biographical Information from BlackPast.org

Florence Beatrice Smith, the first black woman composer to garner an international reputation. Born in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1887, her father was a dentist and her mother was a former school teacher and private lesson piano teacher, who also managed several local businesses. Under her mother's musical tutelage, Smith was quickly recognized as a prodigy. While attending Capitol Hill School in Little Rock, she published her first composition when she was eleven. At fourteen, she studied music at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, Massachusetts, graduating in 1907 with a Bachelor of Music degree. Smith taught at the Cotton Plant-Arkadelphia Academy and at Shorter College until 1910. At just 23, she accepted a position as Chair of the Music Department at Clark University in Atlanta, Georgia.

In 1912, Smith returned to Arkansas where she wed Thomas Jewell Price, a well-known Little Rock, Arkansas attorney. The couple had three children, a son, who died in infancy, and two daughters. Price started a music school and continued to compose piano pieces, but she was denied membership in the Arkansas State Music Teachers Association because of her race. When serious racial unrest erupted in Little Rock, the family moved to Chicago, Illinois in 1927. It was here that Price was able to reach her full musical potential. Unfortunately, her marriage did not last, and she divorced in 1935.

Price studied at the American Conservatory of Music and the Chicago Musical College. Her compositions combined the melody and rhythms of black culture, black religious spirituality, and European romantic mood and techniques. In 1928 G. Schirmer, a major publishing house, accepted her work at the Cotton Gin. She composed *Fantasie Negre* in 1929 for piano. In 1932 she won multiple prizes from the Wanamaker Foundation for Piano Sonata in E Minor and her most famous work, *Symphony in E Minor*. The Chicago Symphony Orchestra performed *Symphony in E Minor* at the Chicago World's Fair in 1933, followed quickly by orchestras in Michigan and Pennsylvania. Eventually, European orchestras also performed her works. Price was the first black female classical composer to achieve this level of recognition in the United States and Europe.

Throughout the rest of the 1930s, Price taught music lessons, continued to compose for piano and organ, and worked as an orchestrator for WGN radio and as an organist for silent films. Under the name Vee Jay, she also wrote several popular tunes such as *Songs to the Dark Virgin* and *Hold Fast to Dreams*. Marian Anderson chose Price's arrangement of *My Soul's Been Anchored in de Lord* when she gave her historic concert at the Lincoln Memorial in 1939. In 1940 the WPA Symphony in Michigan performed her new composition, *Symphony No. 3 in C Minor*. Price died in Chicago in 1953, leaving a vast legacy of orchestral, choral, vocal, chamber, spirituals, piano, and organ work.

Harry Thacker Burleigh

(1866-1949)

Swing Low, Sweet Chariot

My Lord, What a Morning

By 'An By

Biographical Information from BlackPast.org

Harry Thacker Burleigh was the first and one of the most influential of the African American composers who emerged in the U.S. after the Civil War. Born in Erie, Pennsylvania in 1866, Burleigh showed an early passion for music and sang in local church choirs, but was unable to afford formal lessons until 1892 when he attended New York's National Conservatory of Music on a scholarship. While there he developed a friendship with Antonín Dvořák, the school's director, and the two shared an interest in using Negro spirituals and folksongs as inspiration for classical compositions.

After graduating, Burleigh began his musical career as a vocalist. He was selected as the baritone soloist in 1894 at St. George's Episcopal Church in New York City and was the choir's first and only black chorister. In 1900, he broke precedent again by becoming the first black soloist at Temple Emanu-El, a Jewish synagogue. The success of his singing career established Burleigh as a professional musician. As an acclaimed soloist, he was highly sought after, even singing at a command performance for King Edward VII of England.

In 1898, Burleigh married poet Louise Alston. Their son, Alston, was born the following year. In the same year, he began to compose music. In 1911, with a publishing contract with G. Ricordi and Company, he shifted his concentration from singing to composition.

Burleigh's dedication to preserving the flavor of traditional Negro songs in composed forms was the trademark of his career as a composer, and a testament to his time spent with Dvořák. Especially unique to Burleigh's work was his arrangement of spirituals for the solo voice. By arranging spirituals in the form of fine art songs, Burleigh made African American music accessible to concert singers for the first time.

During his lifetime, Burleigh composed more than 300 pieces including such well known titles as Six Plantation Melodies for Violin and Piano (1901), From the Southland (1914), Southland Sketches (1916), Saracen Songs (1914), Five Songs (1919), Little Mother of Mine (1917), I Love my Jean (1914, a Robert Burns poem), Under a Blazing Star (1918), and In the Great Somewhere (1919).

In 1917, Burleigh was awarded the Spingarn Achievement Medal from the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) for excellence in the field of creative music. He also received an honorary master's degree from Atlanta University and an honorary Doctor of Music from Howard University. In 1929 he published a collection of simply arranged Negro spirituals called the Old Songs Hymnal. At 75, Burleigh was the first African American to serve on the American Society of Composers, Authors, and Publishers' board of directors.

Harry Burleigh died in Stamford, Connecticut on September 12, 1949.

String Quintet No. 3 in E-flat major, Op. 97, B. 180, "American"

Antonín Dvořák (1841-1904)

Program Note by Elizabeth Dalton

The quintet begins with a slow introduction. The main theme begins with pianissimo, but soon reaches a resplendent climax. As it dies away, accompanied by a drum-like repeated-note figure in dotted rhythm on the first viola, Dvořák introduces his second subject, based on the same rhythmic idea. This energetic theme moving constantly between the keys of G minor and B flat major predominates in the central development section, and in the recapitulation. The main theme is not heard until the end when it reappears fortissimo, and in emphatic octaves. During the closing moments,

the atmosphere becomes calmer, and Dvořák reintroduces the material of introduction, to bring the music full circle.

The rhythmically dynamic second movement is a scherzo and trio. It begins with the second viola tapping out a tricky one-note rhythm, an ostinato that continues to sound as melodic layers are added. A long and beautifully yearning melody with unexpected harmonic turns passes from first viola to violin in the trio section. Then a reprise of the scherzo, beginning pianissimo, includes a gentle reminiscence of the middle section with its melody now in the major key.

The expressive heart of the quintet lies in the slow movement, which is a set of variations on two themes, the first minor and the second major. Dvořák originally wrote the second theme as a prospective American anthem: a musical setting for "My Country, 'Tis of Thee." The minor-mode portion of the theme is played by the three lower instruments, with just a faint contribution from the second violin. The first violin does not sound until halfway through the major-mode melody with an intricately ornamented version of the theme in a delicate staccato throughout the first of the variations that follow. In the second variation it plays a broader melodic line against a subtle background of a pizzicato second-violin part, a rapid repeated-note figure alternating between the two violas, and a running tremolo line from the cello. The third variation is simpler in texture, and concentrates on the first half of the theme. The fourth variation, with the cello accompanied by the remaining instruments in shadowy tremolos, is followed by a concluding variation – a vehement outburst which culminates in a passionate restatement of the original minor-mode theme. This is balanced by a tender version of the major theme bringing the movement to a satisfying close. The finale is an exuberant rondo. The dotted rhythms in the theme itself are contrasted with smooth intervening episodes in music that is bouncy goodnatured and full of joy. It is a testament to the happy time Dvořák spent that summer in the Iowa countryside.

Clan of the Mists

R. Carlos Nakai (1946-)

Program Note by R. Carlos Nakai

The Anasazi of the American Southwest remain a mystery regarding the cultural experience and eventual dissolution of the community within the surrounding Chaco Canyon. Just exactly who were the people, what was the extent of their impact upon the surrounding environment, and what changes affecting their livelihood resulted in abandonment of the community and the surrounding outliers?

My own musical interpretation opens with the peaceful sounds of musings and daily activity, singular declarations by Elders about life and livelihood; then confusion reigns as many voices express divergent harmonies, then returns to a reiteration of an older melody as if destabilization eventually encouraged a resurgence of a new world of experience.

Goin' Home

Dvořák/William Arms Fisher

Program Note by Pamela Freund-Striplen

Antonín Dvořák's *New World Symphony* premiered at Carnegie Hall in New York City in 1893, marking a pivotal moment in American musical history.

The symphony's Largo movement, with its plaintive, lyrical theme, was so evocative of African American spirituals that it was long believed by many to be one. In reality, the melody was Dvořák's own creation—though deeply inspired by the spirituals he encountered during his time in America.

It was William Arms Fisher, a student of Dvořák's at the National Conservatory of Music, who later arranged the Largo theme into the song "*Goin' Home*," writing original lyrics and shaping it in the spirit of the spirituals that had so profoundly influenced his teacher.

As the final selection in our program, "*Goin' Home*" brings the journey full circle—a poignant reflection of Dvořák's vision for an American music rooted in the voices and traditions he so deeply respected.