

Saturday Evening, February 4, 2023, at 7:30

The Juilliard School

presents

Juilliard Orchestra

Roderick Cox, *Conductor*

Coco Mi, *Violin*

WILLIAM DAWSON (1899-1990) **Negro Folk Symphony** (1934/1952)

The Bond of Africa: Adagio—Allegro con brio

Hope in the Night: Andante—Allegretto (alla scherzando)

O Le' Me Shine, Shine Like a Morning Star: Allegro con brio

Intermission

SERGEI PROKOFIEV (1891-1953) **Violin Concerto No. 1 in D major, Op. 19** (1917)

Andantino

Scherzo: Vivacissimo

Moderato

COCO MI, Violin

CLAUDE DEBUSSY (1862-1918) **La mer** (1903)

De l'aube à midi sur la mer (From Dawn to Noon on the Sea)

Jeux des vagues (Play of the Waves)

Dialogue du vent et de la mer (Dialogue of Wind and Sea)

Performance time: approximately 1 hour and 40 minutes, including an intermission

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About the Program

By Cornelia Sommer

Negro Folk Symphony

WILLIAM DAWSON

*Born: September 26, 1899, in Anniston,
Alabama*

Died: May 2, 1990, in Montgomery, Alabama

In contrast to the other two pieces on tonight's program, William Dawson's *Negro Folk Symphony* was a complete success at its premiere, in 1934, with Leopold Stokowski conducting the Philadelphia Orchestra at Carnegie Hall. Not only were critics and the audience wowed, but Stokowski also became a primary advocate of the work in the years after its premiere. His efforts notwithstanding, however, *Negro Folk Symphony* inexplicably faded into obscurity for the remainder of the 20th century.

A musical prodigy from Alabama, Dawson earned the nickname "Dean of African-American Choral Composers" in part because of his work at the Tuskegee Institute. While a pre-college student there, he sang with the prestigious Tuskegee Singers, worked as a music librarian, became proficient at virtually every orchestral instrument, and began his compositional career. After college and graduate school in the Midwest, he returned to Tuskegee as its choir director in 1931, picking up a rich tradition of choral singing. Booker T. Washington, the school's founder, required all students to participate in weekly spiritual singing, and the Tuskegee Singers, a small choir made up of fewer than 10 students at a time, were formed to share spiritual singing with the world through touring. Dawson's focus as director was on the much larger school choir. Under his direction, the choir toured impressive venues, many of which were

hosting an African-American group for the first time, including Radio City Music Hall for its 1932 opening. The choir also appeared on television many times during the more than 20 years that Dawson led it.

Negro Folk Symphony, Dawson's only symphony, has its musical roots in the composer's most beloved musical genre—the spiritual. Though he borrows elements of the European symphonic tradition, his unique style places it apart from a typical symphony. This was his goal. In a 1932 interview, Dawson said, "I've not tried to imitate Beethoven or Brahms, Franck or Ravel—but to be just myself, a Negro. To me, the finest compliment that could be paid my symphony when it has its premiere is that it unmistakably is not the work of a white man. I want the audience to say: 'Only a Negro could have written that.'" Dawson includes several spiritual tunes in the work, which he intended as a symbolic link "uniting Africa and her rich heritage with her descendants in America." After a trip to West Africa in the 1950s, Dawson revised the piece to include African rhythms, further strengthening the piece's connection among African folk music, spirituals, and Western European concert music.

Musically, Dawson brings these connections to life with what he called the "missing link motive," a theme that pervades all three movements and represents what went missing from the culture when Africans were brought to America as slaves. The missing link motive functions as an *idée fixe* and is first stated in the horn at the opening of the first movement, "The Bond of Africa," which also includes a quotation of the spiritual "Oh, My Little Soul Gwine Shine Like a Star." The second movement, "Hope in the Night," features an English horn solo that is a new version of the missing link motive.

Dawson described the movement as having an “atmosphere of the humdrum life of a people whose bodies were baked by the sun and lashed with the whip for two hundred and fifty years; whose lives were proscribed before they were born.” Surrounded by this melancholy scene is a playful scherzo that represents children who have not yet learned of their inherited history. The final movement, “O, Le’ Me Shine, Shine Like a Morning Star,” includes a spiritual of the same name whose melody is a transformation of the missing link motive.

Negro Folk Symphony is a densely layered exploration of the African-American experience. Renewed interest of the past few years in music by composers of color may be what propels Dawson’s most important orchestral work back into the canon and the acclaim it achieved at its premiere.

Violin Concerto No. 1 in D major

SERGEI PROKOFIEV

Born: April 23, 1891, in Sontsivka, Ukraine

Died: March 5, 1953, in Moscow

Sergei Prokofiev’s Violin Concerto No. 1—which had its first performance in 1923, in Paris—was composed during the particularly fruitful year of 1917: in addition to this concerto, Prokofiev wrote his first symphony, several substantial solo piano pieces, and the Piano Concerto No. 3. In between the composition and premiere of the violin concerto, Prokofiev traveled to the U.S. for the first time and made a number of subsequent trips across the Atlantic, all with mixed success. Neither was the premiere in Paris of the violin concerto particularly successful, partially due to the soloist, Marcel Darrieux, who apparently did not perform the piece with enough zest. Furthermore, Parisians dismissed the piece as too Romantic—composer Georges Auric

called it “Mendelssohnian”—and missing the excitement of boundary-pushing Russian works such as the recent *Rite of Spring* by Stravinsky.

Nevertheless, the concerto soon found a permanent place in the repertory, thanks in part to the advocacy of Hungarian violinist Joseph Szigeti, who performed the piece many times during Prokofiev’s life. Szigeti captured the musical essence of the piece when he wrote of “its mixture of fairy tale naïveté and daring savagery in layout and texture.” Many, including Prokofiev himself, have commented on the lyricism of the concerto, evident from the violin’s soaring melody that opens the first movement. But it is not just a beautiful melody that makes up the lyric style; Prokofiev writes that lyricism “appears first as a thoughtful and meditative mood, not always associated with melody,” and goes on to list compositions that embody the style, most of which have to do with fairy tales, legends, or dreams. The connection to fairy tales, made explicit by Szigeti, can also be found in the concerto itself. For instance, flute, harp, and violins begin and end the first movement with a magical shimmering texture, the solo violin part’s initial melody is marked “dreaming,” and the virtuosic middle section of the movement clearly tells a story.

The second movement, a scherzo, is perhaps what creates the “daring savagery” that Szigeti identified. Full of pyrotechnics for the soloist, the music slides seamlessly from key to key, in classic Prokofiev fashion, as the rondo theme comes and goes. In the third movement, the orchestra, which had already been far from being mere accompaniment in the first two movements, becomes the driving force. Lyricism and dreaminess return, and the piece ends with a reprise of material from the first movement.

La mer

CLAUDE DEBUSSY

Born: August 22, 1862, in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, France

Died: March 25, 1918, in Paris

Though it is now a staple of the orchestral repertoire, the 1905 premiere of Claude Debussy's *La mer* in Paris was not an immediate success. The audience was critical of the piece itself ("I do not hear, I do not see, I do not smell the sea," said one critic), but *La mer's* poor reception probably had more to do with the conductor, who was uncomfortable with new music. When Debussy himself conducted the piece in Paris a few years later, it was met with great acclaim and has remained an audience favorite ever since.

Debussy's music is often called impressionistic, a label that he vehemently rejected. He preferred "symbolist," which associates him with French poets such as Mallarmé and Verlaine, both of whom inspired works by Debussy. Although he disliked being linked with the impressionist painters, the composer was influenced by other styles of visual art while writing *La mer*; in fact, he spent virtually no time by the sea during the composition process but instead took inspiration from art and literature. For the first printed edition of the

piece, Debussy requested that the cover art be *The Great Wave*, the well-known Japanese woodblock print by Katsushika Hokusai. Debussy also admired the paintings of British artist J. M. W. Turner, whose dramatic seascapes speak to the power of the ocean.

Debussy also loved the ocean itself. He spoke of his "sincere devotion to the sea" that began in his childhood, as the son of a Navy officer. In its reverence of the sea, *La mer* displays many hallmarks of Debussy's musical style, including pentatonic melodies, shimmering tremolos, tinkling harp, and a multitude of percussion timbres. The first movement, "De l'aube à midi sur la mer," begins with a melody that rises out of the mist in what is one of the most famous musical depictions of a sunrise. Later, a luscious soli for the cello section celebrates the break of day with surging of sea swells. In the second movement, "Jeux des vagues," Debussy evokes all sorts of aquatic motions in a scherzo style. Finally, "Dialogue du vent et de la mer" emphasizes the dramatic tension between powerful forces, culminating with triumphant fanfares in the brass.

Bassoonist Cornelia Sommer received her Doctor of Musical Arts degree from Juilliard in May 2022.

Meet the Artists



Roderick Cox

Berlin-based American conductor Roderick Cox won the 2018 Sir Georg Solti Conducting Award by the U.S Solti Foundation. Upcoming highlights include debuts with the Philadelphia and Mostly Mozart Festival orchestras, Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin, Staatskapelle Dresden, City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, and Barcelona Symphony, as well as returning to the Los Angeles and BBC philharmonics as well as the Philharmonia Orchestra. Recent highlights include his debuts with the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Die Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen, Malmo, Lahti, Boston, Cincinnati, and New World symphonies, and Orchestre de Paris as well as returning to the Detroit Symphony and Minnesota orchestras, Seattle Symphony, and Aspen Music Festival Chamber Orchestra. Cox has made important debuts at the Houston Grand Opera (*Les Pêcheurs de Perles*) and San Francisco Opera (*Il barbiere di Siviglia*) as well as recording Jeanine Tesori's *Blue* with the Washington National Opera. Last season, he returned for *Rigoletto* to the Opéra national de Montpellier, where he is also developing a relationship on the symphonic platform. With a passion for education and diversity and inclusion in the arts, Cox started the Roderick Cox Music Initiative (RCMI)—a project that provides scholarships for young musicians from historically marginalized communities, allowing them to pay for instruments, music lessons, and summer camps—in 2019. Cox and his new initiative are featured in

the documentary *Conducting Life*. Born in Macon, Georgia, Cox attended the Schwob School of Music at Columbus State University and later earned his master's in 2011 from Northwestern University. He was awarded the Robert J. Harth Conducting Prize from the Aspen Music Festival in 2013 and has held fellowships with the Chicago Sinfonietta as part of the Project Inclusion program and at the Chautauqua Music Festival, where he was a David Effron Conducting Fellow. In 2016, Cox was appointed associate conductor of the Minnesota Orchestra under Osmo Vänskä for three seasons, having previously served as assistant conductor for one year.



Coco Mi

Starting the violin at age 5, Coco Mi (BM '22, violin) began her music education in Princeton, then at the Manhattan School of Music Pre College with Elizabeth Faidley. She is pursuing her master's at Juilliard with Li Lin and Laurie Smukler. A top laureate in numerous competitions, Mi has played in venues including Carnegie Hall and Bruno Walter Auditorium. In 2017, she performed the Sibelius Violin Concerto with the Washington Heights Chamber Orchestra as its inaugural Concerto Competition winner. She has performed at Alice Tully Hall as a member of the Juilliard Orchestra and David Geffen Hall as a substitute with the New York Philharmonic. She has also been selected to participate in music festivals such as Kneisel Hall, Perlman Music Program, the Music Academy of the West, the Heifetz International Music Institute and the Aspen Music Festival. Mi has worked with such violinists as Glenn Dicterow, Stefan Jackiw, Jennifer Koh, and Aaron

Rosand. A passionate chamber musician, she has collaborated with coaches including Molly Carr, Ronald Copes, Joel Krosnick, Laurie Smukler, and Areta Zhulla. This evening, Mi will be performing on a violin by

Dom Nicolo Amati (c. 1740) on generous loan from Jonathan Solars Fine Violins, Inc.

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Juilliard Orchestra

Juilliard's largest and most visible student performing ensemble, the Juilliard Orchestra is known for delivering polished and passionate performances of works spanning the repertoire. Comprising more than 375 students in the bachelor's and master's degree programs, the orchestra appears throughout the season in concerts on the stages of Juilliard's Peter Jay Sharp Theater, Alice Tully Hall, and Carnegie Hall. The orchestra is a strong partner to Juilliard's other divisions, appearing in opera, dance, and drama productions as well as presenting an annual concert of world premieres by Juilliard student composers. This season, an impressive roster of world-renowned conductors leads the Juilliard Orchestra, including Giancarlo Guerrero, Manfred Honeck, Speranza Scappucci, Bertrand de Billy, Roderick Cox, Carlos Miguel Prieto, Simone Young, and Keri-Lynn Wilson as well as faculty con-

ductors David Robertson, director of conducting studies and distinguished visiting faculty, and Jeffrey Milarsky. Among the virtual projects students from the orchestra participated in during the 2020 lockdown was *Bolero Juilliard*, which became a viral sensation. The Juilliard Orchestra has toured across the U.S. and throughout Europe, South America, and Asia, where it was the first Western conservatory ensemble allowed to visit and perform following the opening of the People's Republic of China in 1987, returning two decades later, in 2008. In summer 2019, the orchestra traveled to London, performing alongside the Royal Academy of Music in Royal Albert Hall at the BBC Proms. Other ensembles under the Juilliard Orchestra umbrella include the conductorless Juilliard Chamber Orchestra, Wind Orchestra, Lab Orchestra, and contemporary music group AXIOM.

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Evan Yonce¹
Kate Wegener³

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Lirui Zheng, *Principal*¹
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Jin Yingcun Jin¹

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