



Program

Ev'ry Voice (2020)

Xavier Foley

(b. 1994)

Source Code (2013)

Jessie Montgomery

(b. 1981)

Quartet in F major, Op. 96, "American" (1893)

Antonín Dvořák

IV. Finale: vivace ma non troppo

(1841–1904)

Seven (2020) featuring Tommy Mesa, Cello

Andrea Casarrubios

(b. 1988)

"America" from *West Side Story* (1957)

arr. by Jannina Norporth (b. 1982)

Leonard Bernstein

(1918–1990)

***Delights and Dances* (2007)**

Michael Abels

(b. 1962)

Opening Act

Heath Quartet, Series Quartet-in-Residence

Oliver Heath and Sara Wolstenholme, Violins

Gary Pomeroy, Viola · Chris Murray, Cello



BEETHOVEN String Quartet No. 13 in B-flat Major, Op. 130

V. Cavatina

BEETHOVEN String Quartet No. 11 in F Minor, Op. 95

IV. Larghetto espressivo; Allegretto agitato; Allegro

Program Notes

Xavier Foley

Ev'ry Voice (2020)

This work is an homage and pays tribute to the Black National Anthem. *Lift Every Voice and Sing* was first written as a poem by James Weldon Johnson. Johnson was an American writer and civil rights activist, who also led the NAACP. Its first performance was in celebration of President Lincoln's birthday, on February 12, 1900, in Jacksonville, FL, performed by a group of schoolchildren. The poem was set to music by Johnson's brother, John Rosamond Johnson, and as a complete work, adopted by the NAACP as its official anthem. We often say that music is the soundtrack of our history and our lives. Today, we know *Lift Every Voice and Sing* as the soundtrack of the African American Civil Rights Movement. Xavier Foley, a brilliant bassist and composer, and the winner of the Avery Fisher Career Grant and a Sphinx Competition Laureate, created two separate versions of the work *Lift Ev'ry Voice*, commissioned by the Sphinx Organization. One of the versions is set for the Sphinx Virtuosi, while the second

incorporates use of Sphinx's professional vocal ensemble, Exigence. This piece was created in 2020 as a special feature under Sphinx's program umbrella of "Land of the Free," which illuminates the wealth of musical talent among American composers. Appearing now as part of our "This is America" digital program, this work has become a beloved standalone. The inspiration for the commission came at a time when the ideals of unity were invoked amidst uncertainty, tragedy, and hope. In his music, Foley brings out the sonority and virtuosity of the string instruments to feature the familiar melodic material, while uncovering new timbres and sounds, almost symbolically encouraging all of us to look and listen anew, beyond the isolation of the global pandemic and the racial and cultural divide in our country. Today's soundtrack for the hopeful times ahead are ushered in by Foley's new tribute to a treasured piece of the American historical and musical heritage.

Jessie Montgomery

Source Code (2013)

Whenever possible, we love to collaborate with and play music by our colleagues and friends. We feel that their voices resonate more deeply with the issues of current times, keeping our music fresh, relevant, and live. In this case, our own Jessie Montgomery, a violinist-composer extraordinaire, has toured with and led our ensemble many times. We felt that this piece pays tribute to a musical element that was the soundtrack of one of the most abhorrent periods of American history. We've asked her to share her inspiration behind this unique work: "The first sketches of *Source Code* began as transcriptions of various sources from African American artists prominent during the peak of the Civil Rights era in the United States. I experimented by re-interpreting gestures, sentences,... by choreographer Alvin Ailey, poets Langston Hughes and Rita Dove, and the great jazz songstress Ella Fitzgerald...Ultimately, this exercise of listening, re-imagining, and transcribing led me back to the black spiritual as a common musical source across all three genres. The spiritual is a significant part of the DNA of black folk music, and subsequently most

(arguably all,) American pop music forms that have developed to the present day.”

Antonín Dvořák

Quartet in F major, Op. 96, “American” (1893)

IV. Finale: vivace ma non troppo

While working in New York, Dvořák was persuaded by his student Josef Kovarik to visit his hometown of Spillville, Iowa in 1893. The town had a large Bohemian community, and Dvořák felt completely at home there. It was in this conducive environment that he composed the F major quartet in a short period of time, and Kovarik family initially read through the work. Themes in this quartet are believed to be derived from African American spirituals and Native American music, while also resembling both American and Bohemian folk traditions. This joyful work has maintained its status as a string quartet of universal appeal.

Andrea Casarrubios

Seven (2020)

Commissioned by Astral Artists and cellist Thomas Mesa for his project “Songs of Isolation,” *Seven* for solo cello is a tribute to the essential workers during the global COVID-19 pandemic, as well as to those who lost lives and suffered from the crisis. In this music, two opposites coexist: solitude and resilience, and a sense of community and solidarity. The piece ends with seven bell-like sounds, alluding to New York’s daily 7 PM tribute during the lockdown – the moment when New Yorkers clapped from their windows, connecting with each other, and expressing appreciation for those on the front lines.

Leonard Bernstein

“America” from West Side Story

One of the greatest American musicians of the 20th century, Leonard Bernstein was both a prolific composer and a conductor. The Music Director of the New York Philharmonic, he wrote three

symphonies and diverse concert works, and made extensive contributions to musical theater, one of his great loves.

“America” is a song from the musical *West Side Story*, for which Stephen Sondheim wrote the lyrics. In the original stage version, Anita, the most important female character after Maria, praises America, while Rosalia, another Puerto Rican immigrant, supports Puerto Rico. The song, “America” highlights the positive qualities of America, ironically using a robust Hispanic musical style, replete with Latin style percussion, guitar, and very complex cross rhythms. When Rita Moreno played Anita in the 1961 film version, she reinforced her American sentiments, while Bernardo replied with criticisms, which could be read as anti-immigrant prejudice: “Life is all right in America/If you’re all white in America.”) Subsequently some of the song’s lyrics were removed.

Michael Abels

Delights and Dances (2007)

Michael Abels – an African-American composer best known for combining classical music with African-American jazz, blues, bluegrass, and ethnic genres—has gained widespread recognition for his orchestral music. *Delights & Dances*, commissioned by Sphinx, captivates listeners with witty, soulful, and infectiously rhythmic music. A *New York Times* review described the piece as “an energetic arrangement . . . which incorporates jazz, blues, bluegrass and Latin dance elements.” *Delights & Dances* features quickly moving chord sequences and 16th note runs for the solo quartet, which are rhythmically varied by the insertion of triplet patterns that relax and slow down the pace. The introductory section begins slowly, *Largo*, *molto rubato*, with rhythmic freedom. The opening passage for solo cello sounds almost like a cadenza, then the solo viola plays the cello’s ascending motive, and the two play a brief duet in joined by the two solo violins. The orchestra enters, *pizzicato*, with short, detached, syncopated patterns. This section sounds like blues but is very rhythmic and has an optimistic feel. Each player in the solo group plays its own

riff. The final section, “Bluegrassy,” begins with a solo viola theme; soon all four soloists join in a spirited hoedown. Finally, the solo quartet and the orchestral strings play together for the spirited conclusion.

Ensemble Biography

Sphinx Virtuosi

Since its founding in 2004, Sphinx Virtuosi has defined



itself as the most diverse professional chamber orchestra in the country. The dynamism in this ensemble’s approach to music making offers an experience of unmatched vibrancy for seasoned and new audiences alike. Comprised of 18 of the nation’s top Black and Latinx classical soloists, these artists tour annually as cultural ambassadors to communities far and wide.

This unique self-conducted ensemble earned rave reviews from The New York Times, Washington Post, Chicago Sun Times, and beyond. Allan Kozinn of the New York Times described their performance as *“first-rate in every way...producing a more beautiful,*

precise and carefully shaped sound than some fully professional orchestras that come through Carnegie Hall in the course of the year."

Since their Carnegie debut in 2004, Sphinx Virtuosi have returned to Carnegie Hall annually from 2006, performing to sold-out halls and earning outstanding reviews.

At once a bridge between communities of color and the classical music establishment, Sphinx Virtuosi continue to garner critical acclaim during their annual national tours to many of the leading venues around the country. Inspired by Sphinx's overarching mission of transforming lives through the power of diversity in the arts, the Sphinx Virtuosi works to advance the social impact of music upon our greater society. Dedicated to new music, the ensemble has pioneered the discovery of gems by composers of color, with the aim of expanding the canon and amplifying new and important voices. Collaborations with composers like Michael Abels, Kareem Roustom, Jimmy Lopez, Gabriela Lena Frank, Jessie Montgomery, Daniel Bernard Roumain, Terence Blanchard, and Xavier Foley are among many exciting highlights. Masterworks by Shostakovich, Bartok, Schubert, Jennifer Higdon, John Adams, Bach, and Mozart are often woven into the carefully curated

programs, which combine risk, exploration, and homage. They have also collaborated with Denyce Graves, Sweet Honey in The Rock, Joshua Bell, Pinchas Zukerman, Chicago Children's Choir, Damien Sneed, and others.

As individual artists, Sphinx Virtuosi have performed as soloists with America's major orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic and the Cleveland, Detroit, Atlanta, Philadelphia, Seattle, and Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestras. Members also hold professional orchestral positions, and several have been named Laureates of other prestigious international competitions, including the Queen Elizabeth and Yehudi Menuhin. Roster members are graduates of the nation's top music schools including Juilliard, Curtis, and Cleveland Institutes of Music, Eastman School, and beyond. The Sphinx Virtuosi's first recording was released on the White Pine label and features music of Mendelssohn, Sibelius, Gabriela Lena Frank and George Walker. Sphinx Virtuosi are passionate about empowering the next generation of artists and audiences, and as such, enjoy building interactive, bilingual (English/Spanish) programs and working with schools in underrepresented communities.

Personnel for "This is America"

Violin I

Annelle Gregory

Rainel Joubert

Jessie Montgomery

Clayton Penrose-Whitmore

Patricia Quintero

Ruben Rengel

Meredith Riley

Melissa White

Violin II

Brendon Elliott

Alex Gonzalez

Sheena Gutierrez

Scott Jackson

Allison Lovera

Emile Mettenbrink

Chelsea Sharpe

Alexandra Switala

Viola

Caitlin Adamson

Drew Forde

Caleb Georges

Andrew Gonzalez

Celia Hatton

Dana Kelley

Bill Neri

Robert Switala

Cello

Gabe Cabezas

Sterling Elliott

Christine Lamprea

Tommy Mesa

Erica Snowden-Rodriguez

Caleb Vaughn-Jones

Marza Wilks

Personnel continued

Bass

Jonathan Colbert

Benjamin Harris

Chris Johnson

Aaron Olguin

Patricia Weitzel

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FALL 2020 VIRTUAL SEASON ■ FREE



Imani Winds

September 25 ■ 7:30 PM

Sphinx Virtuosi

October 2 ■ 7:30 PM



David Shifrin, Clarinet

October 9 ■ 7:30 PM

Michael Brown, Piano

October 16 ■ 7:30 PM



Arnaud Sussmann, Violin

October 23 ■ 7:30 PM

**Alessio Bax &
Lucille Chung, Pianos**

October 30 ■ 7:30 PM



Gilbert Kalish, Piano

November 6 ■ 7:30 PM

Jupiter Quartet

November 13 ■ 7:30 PM

