

GRANT PARK MUSIC FESTIVAL

Carlos Kalmar Artistic Director and Principal Conductor

Christopher Bell Chorus Director



Wednesday, July 26, 2023 at 6:30 p.m.

Jay Pritzker Pavilion

ELGAR CELLO CONCERTO

Grant Park Orchestra

Carlos Kalmar, conductor

Zlatomir Fung, cello

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor

The Bamboula

Edward Elgar

Cello Concerto

Adagio; Moderato

Lento; Allegro molto

Adagio

Allegro; Moderato; Allegro, ma non troppo

ZLATOMIR FUNG

William Dawson

Negro Folk Symphony

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

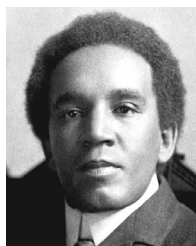
This concert is generously sponsored
by David H. Whitney and Juliana Y. Chyu.

Additional support for tonight's program is provided by ComEd.

Tonight's concert is being broadcast and streamed
live on 98.7WFMT/wfmt.com.



The first American in four decades and youngest musician ever to win first prize at the International Tchaikovsky Competition cello division, **Zlatomir Fung** is poised to become one of the preeminent cellists of our time. During the past season, Fung performed with orchestras and gave recitals in all corners of the world. Of Bulgarian-Chinese heritage, Zlatomir Fung began playing cello at age three. He studied at the Juilliard School under the tutelage of Richard Aaron and Timothy Eddy. Fung has been featured on NPR's Performance Today and has appeared on From the Top six times. In addition to music, he enjoys cinema, reading, and blitz chess.



SAMUEL COLERIDGE-TAYLOR (1875 - 1912)

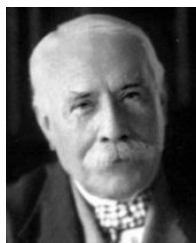
THE BAMBOULA, OP.75; RHAPSODIC DANCE NO.1 (1911)

Scored for: three flutes including piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four French horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, organ, and strings

Performance time: 8 minutes

First Grant Park Orchestra performance: July 10, 1935; George Dasch, conductor

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor was born in London, the son of a doctor from Sierra Leone and a white Englishwoman. Unable to practice medicine in England, Coleridge-Taylor's father was forced to return to Africa before Samuel was born. Despite these difficult circumstances, Coleridge-Taylor became one of the most performed composers in England at the turn of the twentieth century. After the first of three visits to the United States in 1904, Coleridge-Taylor became interested in incorporating African-American folk music into his compositions. His *Twenty-Four Negro Melodies*, composed for piano in 1905, are based on Black folk songs from Africa, the West Indies, and the United States. He adapted one of these piano pieces, *The Bamboula*, into a "Rhapsodic Dance for Orchestra" in 1910. The work was premiered by the New York Philharmonic that same year. The bamboula was a fast dance popular among enslaved people in Haiti and the (then) French colony Saint-Domingue. It eventually made its way to the United States via New Orleans in the nineteenth century. Coleridge-Taylor based *The Bamboula* on the same melody Louis Moreau Gottschalk used in his 1848 piano piece of the same name. The first iteration of the tune can be heard after the heroic brass fanfare and Rossinian galloping figure that open the work.



EDWARD ELGAR (1857 - 1934)

CONCERTO IN E MINOR FOR VIOLONCELLO & ORCHESTRA, OP.85 (1919)

Scored for: two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four French horns, two trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, strings, and solo cello

Performance time: 30 minutes

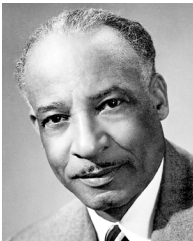
First Grant Park Orchestra performance: July 18, 2004; Carlos Kalmar, conductor and Alban Gerhardt, cello

"If ever you're walking on the Malvern Hills and hear that, it's only me. Don't be frightened." So said Edward Elgar feebly whistling the opening theme of his Cello Concerto to a friend near the end of his life. The Cello Concerto always carried a tragic connotation for the composer, both in its conception and reception. Though written fifteen years before his death, it was his last substantial work. He may have sensed that the inspirational wind had been knocked out of his sails because next to the entry for the Cello Concerto in his personal catalog of works, he wrote, "Finis. RIP"

Elgar began sketching the Cello Concerto shortly after the Armistice of World War I in late 1918, completing it the following summer. Elgar was deeply troubled by the war and felt the comfortable Edwardian world he knew slipping away. "Everything good and nice and clean and fresh and sweet is far away, never to return," he wrote. In addition to the tragedies of war, his wife had become gravely ill and would die six months after the premiere. He also faced financial insecurity and his own ill health, and he could sense that his music was starting to fall out of favor. As Britain reckoned with the aftermath of the war, attitudes toward music and art were starting to change, and Elgar no longer fit into the modern vision.

Adding insult to injury, the premiere by the London Symphony Orchestra in October 1919 was an unmitigated disaster, thanks to the conductor poaching Elgar's rehearsal time to rehearse other pieces on the program. Reviewer Ernest Newman wrote, "Never, in all probability, has so great an orchestra made so lamentable a public exhibition of itself." However, he still saw the work's greatness through the untidy performance, lauding the concerto for the "profound wisdom and beauty underlying its simplicity." Nevertheless, the cellist who premiered it, Felix Salmond, was so traumatized by the experience that he left Britain and refused to play or teach the concerto ever again.

Elgar's Cello Concerto speaks to his despairing outlook and difficult circumstances in 1919. Many consider it a requiem of sorts—an elegy for the sun-kissed days irrevocably swept away by the horrors of the war. It rarely displays the heroic virtuosity that one expects from a concerto. Apart from the demonstrative opening and almost brutal ending, the cello part remains largely introverted and uncertain. After the soloist's bold E minor introduction, the violas play the austere, searching main theme almost unaccompanied. The first movement then links into the second with a pizzicato allusion to the opening gesture, leading into a dark, perpetual-motion scherzo. After a meditative Adagio, a finale full of contrasts ensues, featuring an energetic main theme, accompanied cadenza, and a return to the melodic material of the Adagio and introduction. The concerto ends abruptly with unsettling bravado, as if to put on a stiff upper lip and say, "Keep calm and carry on."



WILLIAM DAWSON (1899 - 1990)

NEGRO FOLK SYMPHONY (1934)

Scored for: three flutes including piccolo, three oboes including English horn, four clarinets including bass clarinet and e-flat clarinet, three bassoons including contrabassoon, four French horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, and strings

Performance time: 36 minutes

First Grant Park Orchestra performance

“An audience of nearly 3,000 persons, hundreds of them in high silk hats, tail coats, trailing evening dresses and ermine capes, sat enraptured by Dawson’s *Negro Folk Symphony* as the one and only Leopold Stokowski conducted the great Philadelphia Orchestra in a masterly rendition of it,” wrote journalist Roy Wilkins after the premiere of what would be William Dawson’s only symphony. “The second movement so gripped the audience that once it was over, they broke the iron-clad rule against applause before the end of a number and applauded in unrestrained fashion.” Stokowski and the Philadelphia Orchestra gave four premiere performances of Dawson’s masterwork in November 1934. The final concert at Carnegie Hall was even broadcast nationwide over CBS radio. The hearty acclaim Dawson received from audiences and critics alike was, according to musicologist Gwynne Kuhner Brown, “of towering significance for thousands of African Americans across the United States, a symbolic triumph worthy of commemoration alongside contralto Marian Anderson’s performance on the steps of the Lincoln Monument five years later.”

Unfortunately, after a handful of performances in the 1930s, Dawson’s *Negro Folk Symphony* fell into obscurity. The piece would not see another outing until Stokowski recorded it in 1963. This dramatic fall-off in interest was mostly due to logistics; there simply weren’t enough copies of the score to meet the soaring demand following the premiere, and impatient conductors’ attentions soon turned elsewhere.

In the program notes distributed at the premiere, Dawson wrote, “The themes are taken from what are popularly known as Negro Spirituals. In this composition, the composer has employed three themes taken from typical melodies over which he has brooded since childhood, having learned them at his mother’s knee.” The first movement, “The Bond of Africa,” opens with a pentatonic horn theme, which appears in different guises throughout the symphony. This theme not only unites the work, but is also “symbolic of the link uniting Africa and her rich heritage with her descendants in America.” The second theme, introduced by the oboe, is then based on the folk song “Oh My Little Soul Gwine Shine Like a Star.”

The second movement that so moved the Carnegie Hall audience is titled “Hope in the Night.” After three ominous gong strokes, the strings pluck out a dirge-like accompaniment, “creating the 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.” The melody in the English horn, not based on a preexisting folk melody but of Dawson’s own invention, “describes the characteristics, hopes, and longings of a Folk held in darkness.” This melody contrasts with a lighthearted theme of childlike innocence—the ray of hope suggested by the title. Finally, this hope shines forth in the fast-paced, rhythmically intricate final movement, which quotes two folk melodies: “O Lem-me Shine” and “Hallelujah, Lord, I Been Down into the Sea.” Dawson revised this movement after a research trip to West Africa in the 1950s, giving the percussion section an even more prominent role.

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Best Wishes to All for a Wonderful Event.