Oakland Symphony

NOTES FROM THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

JOSEPH BOLOGNE, CHEVALIER DE SAINT-GEORGES (1745–1799)
Symphony No. 1 in G major, Op. 11
   I. Allegro
   II. Andante
   III. Allegro assai

ANTONIO CARLOS GOMES (1836-1896)
C’era una volta un principe from Act II of Il Guarany
   I. Allegro non troppo
   II. Allegretto con moto
   III. Allegro non troppo; Un peu moins vite

Shawnette Sulker, soprano

WILLIAM GRANT STILL (1895-1978)
Songs of Separation
   I. Idolatry
   II. Poème
   III. Parted

Shawnette Sulker, soprano
Her appearance tonight is generously underwritten by an anonymous donor

INTERMISSION

FLORENCE PRICE (1887-1953)
Symphony No. 3 in C minor
   I. Andante
   II. Andante ma non troppo
   III. Juba: Allegro
   IV. Scherzo: Final

EDWARD KENNEDY (DUKE) ELLINGTON
Harlem

TO BELONG HERE: NOTES FROM THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

FRIDAY, JAN 25 8PM
PARAMOUNT THEATRE
OAKLAND

Support provided by
The Wallace Foundation
Acclaimed for her “heartbreaking poignancy” and “beautifully tuned soprano” by the San Francisco Chronicle and for her “enchanting vocal splendor” by the Leipziger Volkszeitung, soprano Shawnette Sulker is a much sought-after artist in the United States and abroad. A consummate performer, her recent operatic roles include singing “The Queen of the Night” (The Magic Flute) with Opera Fairbanks and Hamster in the contemporary opera Animal Tales (Brazelton) with the Garden State Philharmonic in New Jersey. Recent concert performances include singing as a soloist for Fremont Symphony’s Valentine’s Day Concert, Beethoven’s Symphony No. 9 with the Santa Rosa and Peninsula Symphonies, and Orff’s Carmina Burana with Sacramento Choral Society & Orchestra. Internationally, Sulker has sung Adele throughout the Netherlands and Belgium in a tour of Die Fledermaus, as well as a recital at Red Door Studios in Amsterdam and an orchestra concert featuring Porgy and Bess highlights and Mendelssohn’s Psalm 42 in Leipzig’s Gewandhaus and Prague’s Smetana Hall.

Sulker has also sung with San Francisco Opera, Mark Morris Dance Group, American Bach Soloists, Hawaii Opera Theatre, Eugene Symphony, Union Avenue Opera, Opera Naples, Pacific Opera Project, West Edge Opera, and the Natchez Opera Festival, to name a few. Her roles include Zerbinetta in Ariadne auf Naxos, Cunegonde in Candide, Constanze in Abduction from the Seraglio, Musetta in La Bohème, Susanna in Le nozze di Figaro, and Lauretta in Gianni Schicchi. Some works on Sulker’s concert repertoire list include Mozart’s Grand Mass in C minor, Bach’s Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen, Mozart’s Exsultate, Jubilate, and Scarlatti’s Su le sponde del Tebro. Upcoming engagements will feature her singing as the Soprano I soloist for Bach’s Mass in B minor with California Bach Society, performing Lucy in The Telephone with Opera Memphis, singing the soprano solos in Handel’s Messiah with Pacific Chamber Symphony, and a Holiday Recital as part of the renowned Noontime Concerts at Old St. Mary’s in San Francisco.
**PROGRAM NOTES**

**SAINT-GEORGES**

**Symphony No. 1 in G major, Op. 11**

**JOSEPH BOLOGNE, CHEVALIER DE SAINT-GEORGES**

(1745–1799)

He was called “the black Mozart.” Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges, was born in the French colony of Guadeloupe, the son of the plantation owner George Bologne de Saint-Georges and his African slave Nanon. The family settled in Paris around 1749, where young Joseph was given fencing and riding lessons, as well as music instruction. He received the title of chevalier after becoming an “officer of the king’s bodyguard.”

In 1769, François-Joseph Gossec hired him as a violinist in his **Concert des Amateurs**. According to one account, they performed “with great precision and delicate nuances [becoming] the best orchestra for symphonies in Paris, and perhaps in all of Europe.” When Gossec moved on to the **Concert Spirituel** in 1773, Saint-Georges succeeded him as musical director of the **Amateurs**. When the **Amateurs** disbanded in 1781, Saint-Georges founded the **Concert de la Loge Olympique**, the same orchestra for whom Haydn composed his six “Paris” symphonies. It is possible that Saint-Georges met Mozart in Paris.

Between 1771 and 1779, Saint-Georges wrote eighteen string quartets, three violin sonatas, a sonata for harp and flute, six violin duos, a cello sonata, lost concertos for clarinet and bassoon, fourteen violin concertos, and eight Symphonie-concertantes. He also wrote six operas and a number of songs. His two symphonies were published as Op. 11 in 1779. Today, he is best remembered as the first classical composer of African ancestry.

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**DESTINY JUNIOR COMPANY (DJC)**

The Destiny Junior Company (DJC) is a rigorous training ground in dance, theater and performance for youth ages 9-12, modeled after the acclaimed Destiny Arts Youth Performance Company, a teen dance/theater company that creates original performance art pieces, in collaboration with professional artists, that combine hip hop, modern, and aerial dance, theater, martial arts, rap and song. Both companies are a dynamic, creative forum for the young people to express their fears, hopes, and strategies for confronting challenging personal and social issues. The companies come out of Destiny Arts Center, an Oakland-based nonprofit violence prevention and arts education organization that has been serving youth for over 30 years through after-school, weekend and summer programs in dance, theater, martial arts, self-defense, performance, and youth leadership, both at the center and in up to 45 Bay Area public schools annually. Destiny Junior Company’s Artistic Director is Mika Lemoine, a Destiny alum and a current Destiny hip hop instructor and teaching artist mentor.

**OAKTOWN JAZZ YOUTH ENSEMBLE**

Oaktown Jazz Workshops’ Youth Performance Ensemble features young musicians ages 12-18 who perform a variety of exciting and challenging jazz classics. Oaktown Jazz Workshops is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization and its year-round after school program passes on the musical language and traditions of jazz to the next generation of musicians. Youths learn from professional master musicians and perform for audiences throughout the Bay Area. Visit oaktownjazz.org for more information.

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**OAKLAND SYMPHONY**

C’era una volta un principe from Act II of *Il Guarany*  
**ANTONIO CARLOS GOMES**  
(1836-1896)

Born in Campinas in the Empire of Brazil (then a colony of Portugal), Gomes was a protégé of Emperor Dom Pedro II, who sent him to the conservatory in Rio de Janeiro. After graduation, Gomes wrote two operas, which convinced the Emperor to send him to study in Italy.

Interested in composing an opera on a Brazilian subject, Gomes chose the romance novel *O Guarani* by the Brazilian writer José de Alencar. The libretto (in Italian) was written by Antonio Scalvini and Carlo D’Ormeville and titled *Il Guarany*. Eugenio Tersiani conducted the world premiere at La Scala in Milan, on March 19, 1870. The success was enormous. Verdi called the work an expression of “true musical genius.” Liszt said that “it displays dense technical maturity, full of harmonic and orchestral maturity.” It was the first Brazilian opera to gain acclaim outside Brazil. The first Brazilian performance was given in Rio de Janeiro on December 2, 1870, and achieved the same success as Gomes had seen in Italy.
Set in Rio de Janeiro around 1560, the plot concerns the love of Perí, a Guaraní Indian chief, and Cecilia, the daughter of a Portuguese nobleman, all against a backdrop of both Portuguese and Spanish adventurers. In the second act, Cecilia takes up her guitar and sings of the power of love in her ballata, C'era una volta un principe ("There was a prince in olden times"). She then retires to dream of Perí, just before the Spanish adventurer Gonzales climbs through the window.

Songs of Separation
WILLIAM GRANT STILL (1895-1978)

"The Dean of Afro-American Composers," Still was born in Woodville, Mississippi. After his father died, his mother moved the family to Little Rock, Arkansas, where he began studying the violin. He later attended Wilberforce College and the Oberlin Conservatory. After serving in the navy during World War I, he played with W.C. Handy's band and studied with George Whitefield Chadwick and Edgard Varèse. He recorded with Fletcher Henderson's Orchestra, and played in the pit orchestra for Noble Sissle and Eubie Blake's musical, Shuffle Along. Still was the first African-American to conduct a major American orchestra (Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra). He moved to Los Angeles in the 1930s, where he arranged music for films, including Pennies from Heaven (starring Bing Crosby) and Lost Horizon (starring Ronald Colman, Jane Wyatt and Sam Jaffe). His Afro-American Symphony was the first symphony by a black American to be played by a major orchestra (Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra). Songs of Separation is a cycle of five thematically related songs set to texts by black poets. The first performance was given on January 23, 1946. The first three songs are "Idolatry," by Arnaud ("Arna") Wendell Bontemps (1902-1973), a member of the Harlem Renaissance; "Poème," by the Haitian poet Philippe Thoby-Marcelin; and "Parted," by Paul Laurence Dunbar from his Lyrics of Sunshine and Shadow (1905).

Symphony No. 3 in C minor
FLORENCE PRICE (1887-1953)

Born in Little Rock, Arkansas, Price played her first piano recital at the age of four. Her first composition was published when she was eleven. After graduation from high school, she enrolled at the New England Conservatory, where her teachers included Frederick Converse and Edward Krehbiel. After graduation, she taught music in Little Rock and Atlanta, then moved to Chicago in 1927. There she studied at the American Conservatory of Music, the University of Chicago, and Chicago Musical College. At the latter, she studied orchestration with Carl Busch. Price composed more than 300 works including symphonies, concertos, organ works, art songs, chamber works, and arrangements of spirituals. She was the first black female composer to have a symphony performed by a major American orchestra, when Frederick Stock and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra played the world premiere of her Symphony No. 1 in E minor, in 1933.

Price's Third Symphony was commissioned by the Works Progress Administration's Federal Music Project. It was first performed by the Detroit Civic Orchestra, conducted by Valter Poole, on November 6, 1940, at the Detroit Institute of Arts. Most of the reviews were positive. In the Detroit Free Press J. D. Callaghan said the composer 'spoke in the musical idiom of her own people, and spoke with authority.'

Price wrote that her third Symphony "is intended to be Negroid in character and expression. In it no attempt, however, has been made to project Negro music solely in the purely traditional manner. None of the themes are adaptations or derivations of folk songs. The intention behind the writing of this work was a not too deliberate attempt to picture a cross-section of present-day Negro life and thought, with its heritage of that which is past, paralleled, or influenced by concepts of the present day."

Harlem
EDWARD KENNEDY (DUKE) ELLINGTON (1899-1974)

Born in Washington, D.C., Ellington was a pianist, bandleader, and the composer of such standards as Caravan, I'm Beginning to See the Light, Mood Indigo, In a Sentimental Mood, Don't Get Around Much Anymore, Sophisticated Lady, I Got It Bad and That Ain't Good, Take the "A" Train, and Do Nothing Till You Hear from Me. Beginning in the 1930s, he began writing more extended works, such as Creole Rhapsody, Diminuendo and Crescendo in Blue; Black, Brown and Beige, and others.

Ellington and his band were returning from a European tour in 1950. Abroad the Île de France, he wrote Harlem, a work commissioned by Arturo Toscanini as part of a Portrait of New York Suite. Toscanini was too ill to perform it, so in 1954, Ellington recorded it, and the following year Don Gillis conducted it with the Symphony of the Air in Carnegie Hall.

In his memoirs, Music Is My Mistress, Ellington described Harlem as "a concerto grosso for our band and the symphony, it provides me with the opportunity to make some statements on the subject of Harlem, the music and the people…. We would like now to take you on a tour of this place called Harlem. It has always had more churches than cabarets. It is Sunday morning. We are strolling from 110th Street up Seventh Avenue, heading north through the Spanish and West Indian neighborhood toward the 125th Street business area. Everybody is nicely dressed, and on their way to or from church. Everybody is in a friendly mood. "Greetings are polite and pleasant, and on the opposite side of the street, standing under a street lamp, is a real hip chick. She, too, is in a friendly mood. You may hear a parade go by, or a funeral, or you may recognize the passage of those who are making Civil Rights demands. (Hereabouts, in our performance, Cootie Williams pronounces the word on his trumpet—Harlem!)

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