



MARCH 20, 2024

SPHINX VIRTUOSI GENERATIONS

QUENTON BLACHE

(b. 2001)

*Habari Gani**

*Habari Gani was commissioned with a gift from the
Keith and Renata Ward Emerging Composer Fund.*

JAVIER FARÍAS

(b. 1973)

*Abran Paso**

ADOLPHUS HAILSTORK

(b. 1941)

Sonata da Chiesa
VI. Dona Nobis Pacem
VII. Exultate

ANDREA CASARRUBIOS

(b. 1988)

*Herencia**

INTERMISSION

XAVIER FOLEY

(b. 1994)

**Concertante for Two Double Basses
and String Orchestra**
“Galaxy”

Xavier Foley and Kebra-Seyoun Charles, double basses

**COLERIDGE-TAYLOR
PERKINSON**

(1932-2004)

Sinfonietta No. 2 “Generations”*
Misterioso: Allegro
Alla sarabande
Alla Burletta
Allegro vivace

**new work for Sphinx Virtuosi*

Presenting sponsor



SPHINX VIRTUOSI

“[The performance] opened with a propulsive, richly hued interpretation...which demonstrated the ensemble’s polish and tonal allure.” – *The New York Times*

Sphinx Virtuosi is a dynamic and inspiring professional self-conducted chamber orchestra and serves as the flagship performing entity of the Sphinx Organization—the leading social justice non-profit dedicated to transforming lives through the power of diversity in the arts. Comprising 18 accomplished Black and Latinx artists, Sphinx Virtuosi aims to evolve and transform the face of classical music through artistic excellence, pioneering programming, and impassioned community engagement. Its members serve as cultural and diversity ambassadors for audiences and communities around the United States and abroad.

Since 2004, Sphinx Virtuosi concerts have been presented by leading arts organizations, including annual return visits to Carnegie Hall as an established highlight of the fall season. Frequently selling out venues, the ensemble has garnered effusive accolades including from *The New York Times*, which has described the group as “...top-notch...more essential at this moment than ever...a vibrant, assured performance...” and *The Washington Post*, which wrote “true to their name, the Sphinx Virtuosi call up the vision of an iconic mythological feline with its immeasurable power, unwavering command, and soulful beauty.” Their debut album, *Songs for Our Times*, was released on Deutsche Grammophon in July 2023 and represents the rich history of the Sphinx Organization and the vibrant future of classical music by centering the artistry of extraordinary composers and artistic visionaries of color.

Heralded for kaleidoscopically varied repertoire and bold thematic programming, Sphinx Virtuosi concerts give prominence to historically excluded Black and Latinx composers such as Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Alberto Ginastera, Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson, Florence Price, Heitor Villa-Lobos, and George Walker. In an effort to expand its repertoire and engage new audiences, the ensemble commissions new works annually. Commissions

SPHINX VIRTUOSI

Sphinx Virtuosi Personnel

VIOLIN 1

Alex Gonzalez, Concertmaster
Clayton D Penrose-Whitmore
Brendon Elliott
Adé Williams

VIOLIN 2

Patricia Quintero-Garcia,
Principal
Maithéna Girault
Caitlin Edwards
Thierry de Lucas

VIOLA

Celia Hatton, Principal
Robert Alvarado Switala
Bill Neri
Kayla Cabrera

CELLO

Tommy Mesa, Principal
Titilayo Ayangade
Diana Flores
Lindsey Sharpe

BASS

Jonathan Colbert, Principal
Christopher Johnson

have included major new works from Michael Abels, Terence Blanchard, Valerie Coleman, Xavier Foley, Ricardo Herz, Jimmy Lopez, Jessie Montgomery, Daniel Bernard Roumain, and Carlos Simon.

Members of Sphinx Virtuosi have performed as soloists with major American orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic and the Cleveland, Detroit, Atlanta, Philadelphia, Seattle, and Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestras. Members also hold professional orchestral and academic positions. The Sphinx Virtuosi's community engagement initiatives regularly extend beyond masterclasses and workshops to members leading DEI initiatives within arts organizations and connecting with other Sphinx programming to further the mission of achieving excellence through diversity. As a bilingual ensemble, these artist-citizens frequently break down existing barriers and empower the artform to connect with the broader community. During the pandemic in 2020-21 the ensemble found creative ways to connect with audiences and communities virtually through performances, panel discussions, masterclasses, Q&A sessions, and more, reaching over 30,000 people across 20 organizations.

Sphinx Virtuosi has collaborated with major artists such as Terence Blanchard, Denyce Graves, Sweet Honey in the Rock, Damien Sneed, Will Liverman, J'Nai Bridges, and Davóne Tines. Outside of the classical realm, its musicians have worked with leading international artists such as Beyoncé and Jay-Z and made high-profile appearances including The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon and the 2022 Grammy Awards. Their 2023-24 season includes performances for Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, Denver Friends of Chamber Music, Stanford Live, and a return performance at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum.

Sphinx Virtuosi Tours are made possible through the support of Robert F. Smith, JPMorgan Chase, and the National Endowment for the Arts. Sphinx Virtuosi is represented by MKI Artists.

NOTES

QUENTON BLACHE:
HABARI GANI (2023)

Habari Gani! This luminous opener owes its name to the Swahili greeting exchanged during the celebration of Kwanzaa. The ideals of unity and fellowship form the essence of this orchestral showpiece, where rhythm and dance lithely soar throughout. Featuring the number five in its meter and in its use of the pentatonic scale, *Habari Gani* springs forward like chatter of the latest news in a sub-Saharan community. On the score, the composer offers: “What’s the news? The news is joyful, exuberant, and wondrous.”

African American composer and cellist Quenton Blache is based in Los Angeles and holds degrees in cello performance and composition from the University of Southern California’s Thornton School of Music, as well as a minor in Chinese. His prolific compositional output is distinct beyond the concert stage and extends to scoring numerous short films and documentaries. A prize-winning cellist and participant in previous Sphinx Virtuosi tours, he returns to USC this season as a featured soloist with the Thornton Symphony. Current projects include pursuing a master’s degree in screen scoring and competing in national level chess tournaments. *Habari Gani* fuses the composer’s Cameroonian ancestral roots and character to form an electric string orchestra debut.

— Maithéna Girault

JAVIER FARIAS:
ABRAN PASO
(MAKE WAY!)

This expression refers to the way certain “tangueros” forcefully speak to their fellow dancers, demanding space on the dance floor to show off the brilliant, lithe choreographies they have prepared. This laconic statement immediately connected to the idea I had in mind when I began to write this piece: musicalize the acrobatic provocations and unrepentant attitude of the dancers and move it through each member of the orchestra, allowing for their own unique take on a storied tradition.

It should be said that this piece has nothing to do with tango; however, it does have a repetitive, rhythmic motive that is clearly identifiable as Latin American. Although the motive’s exact provenance cannot be pinpointed, I’ve used it many times because it is one with which I connect emotionally, due to its powerful, driving pulse. The only difference is that this time I’m not using the guitar, but rather transporting its characteristic “rasgueo” (strum) to bowed instruments.

Returning to the title...just as the great Astor Piazzolla unapologetically reinvented the tango as a genre in his country, I too have striven to do the same by working with music and rhythms unique to mine. With that said, I endeavor to move the strings of the guitar, the most representative instrument of Chile, to the strings of the orchestra, so that the richness of our musical traditions can be shared with the world.

Abran Paso!

— Javier Farías

Growing up as a chorister boy at the Cathedral of All Saints in New York, a fascination with the music of Arcangelo Corelli and a commission by Thomas Jefferson High School were the inspirations that helped the legendary Adolphus Hailstork curate the unicorn piece *Sonata da Chiesa*. By this point in his career, his works had been recorded and performed by some of the world's greatest orchestras, including the New York Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, and The Philadelphia Orchestra. *Sonata da Chiesa* premiered in 1992, and the title implies a style that harkens back to 17th-century religious music. Curiously, Hailstork chose to title the movements of this sonata using the standard choral liturgy. The *Dona Nobis Pacem*, filled with monophonic, chant-like music exploring open and parallel harmonic motion, flows seamlessly into the finale *Exultate*, a vigorous chorale verging on ecstasy. Hailstork ingeniously portrays a cathedral: large stone walls feature large blocks of sound and expansive chordal voicing. While the *Dona Nobis Pacem* is highly reverent and functional, it's also wandering and contrapuntal. The *Exultate* evolves into a boisterous, dance-like theme that eventually returns to the monophonic harmonic motion. The piece spans generations stylistically as Hailstork weaves his own harmonic language with the reverent tonal counterpoint of the 17th century.

— Aaron King Vaughn

In a work titled *Herencia*, Spanish for both "inheritance" and "heritage," it is natural for you to wonder about the roots of the piece itself, and the myriad stylistic threads with which it is woven. However, for this work my inspiration was not a particular musical heritage or genre; rather, it was the artists who would be playing it. I

ADOLPHUS
HAILSTORK: SONATA
DA CHIESA (1992)
Dona Nobis Pacem
Exultate

ANDREA
CASARRUBIOS:
HERENCIA FOR
STRING ORCHESTRA
(2023)

envisioned the remarkable musicians of Sphinx Virtuosi taking the stage to play this piece, and I thought of how each individual has trailing behind them a unique history of unfathomable complexity; an epic that they bring to bear in every moment of performance. I also imagined the way this collection of histories would one day coalesce with a shared intention to illuminate their world—your world—with music. This image was the seed from which *Herencia* came to be. As you listen, I encourage you to observe this phenomenon as it unfolds on stage, and at the same time to reflect on your own epic, in all its wondrous immensity, and how it has led to you sitting here in this moment.

— Andrea Casarrubios

XAVIER FOLEY:
CONCERTANTE
FOR TWO DOUBLE
BASSES AND
STRING ORCHESTRA,
"GALAXY" (2023)

When composing "Galaxy," I wanted to experiment with chord progressions one might imagine hearing when envisioning outer space as frequently portrayed in the media. Simultaneously, I wanted to build a conversation between the double bass soloists and the self-conducted ensemble. The intrigue and ethos of the work are to showcase the solo instruments as virtuosic and star-like, which is atypical for most conventional repertoire. While the double bass is not often thought of as a solo instrument, that framing has been important to me as both a frequent soloist and composer. Defying stereotypes and fully exploring the range of possibilities of the instrument is at the core of this concertante. In one way, the title suggests that the dominant solo voices are the brightest stars in the galaxy. In another, I imagine 100 billion stars, each offering a different amount and type of light. That perspective enriches our own understanding of the world and the great diversity of voices and lights that comprise such a rich galaxy. In imagining the different types of light, rather than prescribing the experience I would love for our audiences to explore each of the sound palates and allow their imagination to take them on a unique sonic journey as they experience this work for the first time.

— Xavier Foley

COLERIDGE-TAYLOR
PERKINSON:
SINFONIETTA
NO. 2,
"GENERATIONS"
(1996)

Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson shares the following information directly in the score for this piece: The inspiration for this composition, though non-programmatic, is somewhat autobiographical in that it represents my attempts at what were and are my relationships to members of my family, past and present. While each of the movements is without a strict "formal" mode, an informal analysis of their structures is as follows:

1. *Misterioso* and *Allegro* (to my daughter) is based on two motifs: the B-A-C-H idea (in German these letters represent the pitches B-flat, A-natural, C-natural, and B-natural), and the American folk tune "Mockingbird," also known as "Hush Li'l Baby, Don't Say a Word."
2. *Alla sarabande* (sarabande, a 17th and 18th-century dance in slow triple meter) is dedicated to the matriarchs of my immediate family (of which there were for me three), each of whom contributed a unique form of guidance for life's journey.
3. *Alla Burletta* (to my grandson). A burletta is an Italian term for a diminutive burlesca or burlesque-type work—a composition in a playful and jesting mood. Thematically, this movement is based on the pop tune "Li'l Brown Jug."
4. *Allegro vivace*. This movement is a loosely constructed third rondo, which thematically begins with a fughetta (original melody), has a second theme (African in origin), and a third theme ("Mockingbird" paraphrased). Once again, the B-A-C-H idea from the first movement is the musical thread that ties these elements together. This movement is dedicated to the patriarchs of my family, known and unknown, past, present and future, for generations.

How fortunate for us to have been left with such a descriptive intent behind this genius's work! The Sinfonietta is full of substance, contrast, and beauty. In the *Alla Burletta* movement listen for humor in the syncopated pizzicatos from each string section. The work, with its clear jazz influences, will lift your spirits, and the surprise ending is sure to leave any listener with a sense of effervescent delight.

—Afa Dworkin

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