

Montgomery Philharmonic 2019 - 2020

Our 14th Season : Editions

Concert 1, October 13, 2019 at 7 PM – The Dance Edition

Brahms | Still | Copland

About William Grant Still –

- **Born:** May 11, 1895, Woodville Mississippi
- **Died:** December 3, 1978, Los Angeles, California
- **Compositions:** 30 works for solo piano, 6 works for organ, 33 instrumental works, 8 song cycles, 11 operas, 4 ballets, 3 sets of incidental music to a play, 47 orchestral works, 5 symphonies, 27 works for orchestra and chorus or orchestra and soloists, 17 works for band, 5 works for brass ensemble, 16 works for string quartet
- **Parents:** Carrie Lena Fambro Still (1872–1927) and William Grant Still Sr. (1871–1895) – passed away when William was 3 months old; Charles B. Shepperson – stepfather

William Grant Still was undoubtedly one of the most influential African-American composers of the early 20th century. He started his musical career playing oboe in the pit orchestra of an All-Black musical, *Shuffle Along*, in 1921. His composition career started when he was awarded a scholarship to study at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music in the era of Jim Crow segregation, when Oberlin was one of the few major conservatories that admitted black students. The premiere of Still's *Afro-American Symphony* in 1931 signaled one of the earliest works by an African-American composer to gain a place in the orchestral canon, and it has held up well over time. In the work's title, Still identified his race with pride, inspired by the cultural activism of the Harlem Renaissance. Prior to studying music at Oberlin, Still studied medicine at Wilberforce University and served in the Navy during World War I. Later, he moved to New York and studied composition with George Chadwick and Edgard Varèse. He then traveled to Los Angeles, where he spent his final years and died on December 3, 1978.

Danzas de Panama (1953) – William Grant Still (1895–1978)

“When William was only a few months old, his father died and his mother took him to Little Rock, Arkansas, where she taught English in the high school. There his musical education began—with violin lessons from a private teacher, and with later inspiration from the Red Seal operatic recordings bought for him by his stepfather.”

Music for the native dancers of Panama has been notated so infrequently that it is still unknown to people outside of the country itself. It was Narciso Garay who first called the attention of Elizabeth Waldo to it and she, in turn, interested an American, William Grant Still, in developing it for concert use. Mr. Still has written, on Panamanian dance themes collected by Miss Waldo, a work that is adaptable to string quartet or string orchestra. Nothing like it had been done before in the literature for strings. Mr. Still departed from traditional practices by attempting to approximate the sounds of native instruments, giving the music an unusually interesting quality. There is a distinct unity and a touch of Caribbean color in the four dances. The first and last are African in origin, probably brought by the first slaves imported into Panama, while the second and third are of Spanish-Indian derivation.

Still had mixed feelings about the modernist *Dismal Swamp*. But it's an evocative picture of the desperate life of the escaped slaves who found refuge in the Great Dismal Swamp—that wilderness spanning North Carolina and Virginia. In *Danzas de Panama*, for string quartet, string quintet, or string orchestra, he branches out to ethnicities not his own, which he believed was what any composer rightly does.

Instrumentation – Violin 1, violin 2, viola, cello, double bass

Artifacts –

Program of concert given by the New York Philharmonic, November 20, 1935, featuring William Grant Still's *Afro-American Symphony*

Program given by the New York Philharmonic – *Music of America*, February 25, 1976

A page from Still's sketchbook.



Still: La Guiablessee, Danzas de Panama, Quit Dat Fool'nish, Summerland

Alexa Still

Serafin String Quartet

Serafin String Quartet

ASTA 2009 National Orchestra Festival Capital-South Charleston High School Combined Orchestras (Live)

ASTA 2009 National Orchestra Festival Capital-South Charleston High School Combined Orchestras

SHOP. CONNECT. ENJOY.



amazon

Privacy

I Dream a World: The Operas of William Grant Still

William Grant Still

William Grant Still (American Composers)

YouTube.com Links –

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mQ3DW8TCa94>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D73V-7KIsjw>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N8Dt6JgUsP4>