

## **Adam W. Sadberry Program Notes**

### **William Grant Still (1895-1978) – Mother and Child for Flute and Piano - 7'**

William Grant Still, often referred to as the "Dean of African American Composers," crafted *Mother and Child* as part of his 1943 suite *From the Land of Dreams*. *Mother and Child* was inspired by the art of Sargent Johnson, a visual artist and member of the Harlem Renaissance (along with Still), who created many pieces entitled *Mother and Child*, presumably influenced by the death of his mother when he was a teenager.

Still's *Mother and Child* was originally written for string orchestra, and this tender and evocative work was later adapted for various instruments, including flute and piano. The piece reflects Still's signature blend of classical forms with African American spirituals, blues, and folk music. In *Mother and Child*, the flute acts as the child, and the piano as the mother. The music gently unfolds with a serene lyricism, embodying the quiet, intimate connection between mother and child. As the piece progresses, one can hear the development of the mother and child's relationship, including periods of ease, conflict, despair, and completeness. The lush harmonies and singing flute lines evoke warmth, love, and nostalgia, showcasing Still's unique ability to create emotionally powerful yet understated music.

### **Fred Onovwerosuoke (b. 1960) – 6 Variations on a Pende Tune for Flute - 7'**

Fred Onovwerosuoke is a Ghanaian composer whose work spans multiple cultures and traditions, with influences ranging from African to South American to classical Western music. He is currently based in St. Louis, MO, and is married to a flutist. His repertoire includes works for chorus, orchestra, and piano, and he is most well-known for his chant *Bolingo*, which appeared in Robert de Niro's movie *The Good Shepherd*.

His *6 Variations on a Pende Tune* for solo flute is based on a traditional melody from the Pende people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Each variation introduces a new rhythmic or melodic transformation of the tune, showcasing the flute's versatility in tone, articulation, and expression. Onovwerosuoke's variations are deeply rooted in African rhythmic complexity, and the work bridges the gap between folk tradition and classical structure, offering a rich exploration of melody and rhythm. The piece depicts the journey of an orphan, from being newly alone to desperately seeking family, to being adopted into a good home, signified by the triumphant E minor chord at the very end.

### **Valerie Coleman (b. 1970) – Wish Sonatine for Flute and Piano - 13'**

Valerie Coleman is a flutist and a newly appointed professor of composition at The Juilliard School. She is known for weaving cultural narratives into her compositions. During Coleman's time as a member of the *Imani Winds*, a now Grammy-winning wind quintet, she developed a keen ear for collaboration. One can hear how the flute and piano in *Wish Sonatine* work both in tandem and as combatants to elucidate Coleman's musical ideas.

In *Wish Sonatine*, she viscerally depicts the *Middle Passage*—the selling, trading, and transporting of enslaved Africans from Africa to the New World, as referenced in the poem of the same title by Fred D'Aguiar. Throughout the music, one can hear the sounds of flowing waves, pounding djembe drums, whips striking African skin, primal screams, and even the sound of peace during which a mother holds her newborn child on a ship to the New World. These sounds are organically intertwined using elements of blues, dirges, spirituals, rhythmic ostinato, and more. This work is extremely powerful and serves as an authentic portrayal of one of the darkest moments in history, simultaneously recognizing the trauma and honoring the resilience sparked by it.

## **- INTERMISSION -**

### **L. ALEX WILSON VIDEO - 6'**

#### **\*\*Dameun Strange – NOT RUNNING - 25'**

Dameun Strange is a multifaceted composer, arts advocate, and sonic disruptor living in Saint Paul, MN. His compositions are often atmospheric and based in Afrofuturism, clearly voicing Strange's values around cultural competency and equity. His work uses both acoustic and electronic elements.

Dameun Strange wrote *NOT RUNNING* (The Life of L. Alex Wilson) in honor of Adam Sadberry's late grandfather, L. Alex Wilson, a pivotal journalist during the Civil Rights Movement who covered the Little Rock Nine, Montgomery Bus Boycott, and Emmett Till. The piece was co-commissioned by Concert Artists Guild and the BMI Foundation. It is for flute and electronics and is in five sections: water, earth, wind, fire, and aether.

Each section taps into an element of L. Alex Wilson's being. Water represents the infinity from which L. Alex Wilson was born—his connection with the endless waves and the freedom of the water, which has touched all. The earth movement sonically represents the sounds of a seed being planted and erupting into the mighty oak tree that was L. Alex Wilson. The background track sounds electrified and depicts the seed moving earth, scraping at earth, and blooming. The following movement, wind, is inspired by *Blackbird* by The Beatles. One can hear echoes of *Blackbird* lyrics like "take your broken wings and learn to fly" and "you have only been waiting for this moment to arise." The movement represents L. Alex Wilson receiving the mission of reporting on the lynching of Emmett Till, a life-threatening task. The fourth section, fire, features a trap beat and distorted sounds that represent the ancestral rage of Black Americans at the unjust treatment of Black people in Little Rock, AR. The track features an excerpt of L. Alex Wilson's writing, reflecting on his experience at Central High School. Lastly, the fifth section, aether, depicts L. Alex Wilson's transition into the next life. It is full of reverence and timelessness. Both fire and aether require the performer to improvise.

### **Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson – Lil' Lite o' Mine - 4'**

This *Little Light of Mine* is a spiritual with deep roots in the African American gospel tradition. Originally composed in the early 20th century, the song became an anthem of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s. The simple, yet profound, lyrics speak of letting one's inner light shine in the face of adversity and oppression. Its joyful melody is immediately recognizable, encouraging participation from listeners. Performances of *This Little Light of Mine* often carry a message of hope, resilience, and solidarity, making it a powerful piece in both religious and concert settings.

In his adaptation of *This Little Light of Mine*, often titled *Lil' Lite o' Mine*, Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson brings his distinctively American sound to this iconic spiritual. His arrangement reflects a deep respect for the gospel tradition while incorporating contemporary harmonies and rhythms that breathe new life into the familiar tune. The piece exemplifies his talent for merging different genres, drawing from jazz's improvisational spirit and the emotive power of African American sacred music. Through this, Perkinson's setting of *This Little Light of Mine* celebrates resilience and the joy of personal expression, making it a dynamic and spiritually uplifting work.

### **Traditional – Amazing Grace - 4'**

*Amazing Grace*, written in 1772 by Englishman John Newton, has become one of the most beloved hymns across the world. Newton, a former slave trader who later became an abolitionist and clergyman, wrote the hymn as an expression of his spiritual transformation and redemption. The melody we often associate with *Amazing Grace* was added later and is thought to have its origins in folk traditions, possibly African American spirituals. The hymn's timeless message of grace, forgiveness, and salvation transcends cultural and religious boundaries. Its haunting beauty, combined with its powerful history, has allowed it to remain a fixture in both sacred and secular music traditions. Whether arranged for voice, instrumental ensemble, or solo performance, *Amazing Grace* continues to resonate deeply with audiences around the world.

Like the Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson's arrangement of *Lil' Lite o' Mine*, his arrangement of *Amazing Grace* is filled with a rich sense of improvisation, sincerity, and harmony. It opens with an acapella flute line and ends with a tremendous sense of peace.