

Symphonic Legacies

Saturday, March 11, 2023 • 7:30 p.m.
Shorecrest Performing Arts Center

Harmonia Orchestra

William White, conductor



WILLIAM GRANT STILL (1895–1978)
Poem for Orchestra

Quinn Mason, conductor

QUINN MASON (*1996)
Symphony No. 5 (“Harmonia”) — WORLD PREMIERE

With solemn expression
Scherzo: Lively, but still solemn in spirit
In Memoriam 2020: *Adagio*

— **intermission** —

WILLIAM GRANT STILL
Threnody: In Memory of Jean Sibelius

JEAN SIBELIUS (1865–1957)
Symphony No. 3 in C minor, Op. 52

Allegro moderato
Andantino con moto, quasi allegretto
Allegro (ma non tanto) — Sempre energico

Please silence cell phones and other electronics, and refrain from the use of cameras and recording devices during the performance.

Harmonia Orchestra and Chorus

William White, music director • George Shangrow, founder

1916 Pike Pl. Ste 12 #112, Seattle WA 98101 • 206-682-5208 • www.harmoniaseattle.org

Maestro's Prelude

Dear Listeners,

Our theme this season is "Dialogue" and tonight's program is the clearest embodiment yet of that concept.

It all started with our featured composer this evening, Quinn Mason. Harmonia audiences may remember Quinn from our "Ancestors" concert in February of 2020, when we first showcased him as composer and conductor. The work of his that we premiered that night, *A Joyous Trilogy*, has had great success in the wider musical world, having now been performed by such illustrious groups as the Minnesota Orchestra, Utah Symphony and Italy's RAI Orchestra Milan. We therefore found it only natural to commission another significant new piece from Quinn, and we are thrilled to present his fifth symphony, subtitled "Harmonia."

It's one thing to write a new work for an orchestra, but it's another thing to compose a piece for a *specific* orchestra, which is what Quinn has done with this symphony. Quinn made his orchestral conducting debut with us back in 2020, so it's no wonder that he has remembered so well what our orchestra is all about, and has custom-tailored this new work with our musicians in mind. This is the essence of musical dialogue: a conversation between a composer and performers — and you, the audience.

In the spirit of dialogue, as I was contemplating this program, I asked Quinn to think about composers or works that would complement the symphony he was writing. He immediately suggested Jean Sibelius, and this was music to my very ears! I adore Sibelius, having earlier conducted his first, second and fifth symphonies — far and away his most popular works in the genre.

I decided, however, to program Sibelius' third symphony on tonight's concert, as it is a work that does not get nearly the love and attention it deserves. It contains what is probably the most beautiful, affecting slow movement that Sibelius ever wrote. And it also has a particular resonance for Quinn and myself: the last time we were together, it was to hear the live premiere of Quinn's *Toast of the Town* overture at the National Orchestral Institute, and it was paired with none other than Sibelius' third symphony!

Rounding out tonight's concert are two works by the great American composer William Grant Still. Quinn is the person who first turned me on to Still's *Poem for Orchestra*, so it seemed fitting that he should lead tonight's performance. And when I discovered that Still had composed a *Threnody* in memory of Jean Sibelius, it seemed downright impossible not to include that on the concert as well.

So there you have it: a program of richly interconnected works pairing an important new piece with its artistic forebears. That, in sum, is dialogue in action, and I am so happy you're here to be part of the conversation.



Guest Artist

Dallas-based composer and conductor **Quinn Mason** is currently artist-in-residence of the Hartford Symphony, and recently served as the Detroit Symphony's Classical Roots composer-in-residence (the youngest person ever appointed to that role) as well as the inaugural composer-in-residence for KMFA in Austin.

Mr. Mason has been described as "a brilliant composer just barely in his 20's who seems to make waves wherever he goes" (*Theater Jones*) and "one of the most sought after young composers in the country" (*Texas Monthly*). His orchestral music has received performances by renowned orchestras across the United States, including those of San Francisco, Minnesota, Seattle, Dallas, Detroit, Utah, Rochester, Fort Worth, Vermont, Rhode Island, Amarillo, Memphis, South Bend, Toledo and Wichita, plus the National Youth Orchestra of the United States, New World Symphony, University of Michigan Symphony and National Orchestral Institute Philharmonic, as well as numerous youth orchestras, Scotland's Nevis Ensemble, Italy's Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale della RAI and England's Sheffield Philharmonic. His works for wind ensemble have been performed throughout the United States and Canada.



Recent and upcoming premieres during the 2022–2023 season include *She Dreams of Flying* (Hartford Symphony), *This Is the Rope* (National Symphony), *Portrait of Scheherazade* (Canton Symphony), Symphony No. 4 ("Strange Time") for wind ensemble, *Inspiration!* (Festive Overture) and *The Sky Searching Within Itself* for wind ensemble.

Mr. Mason studied composition at Southern Methodist University's Meadows School of the Arts and with Winston Stone at University of Texas at Dallas, and has worked closely with renowned composers David Maslanka, Jake Heggie, Libby Larsen, David Dzubay and Robert X. Rodriguez. The recipient of numerous awards (from the American Composers Forum, Voices of Change, Texas A&M University, ASCAP and the Dallas Foundation, among many others), he was honored by *The Dallas Morning News* as a 2020 finalist for "Texan of the Year."

Quinn Mason made his public debut as a conductor on this stage in February 2020. He has since led the West Virginia Symphony, Inner City Youth Orchestra of Los Angeles, MusicaNova, Greater Dallas Youth Orchestra and the Houston Ballet. He studied conducting at the National Orchestral Institute with Marin Alsop and James Ross, and with Christopher Zimmerman, Kevin Sütterlin, Miguel Harth-Bedoya and William White. He also counts Richard Giangiulio, Edwin Outwater and John Axelrod as mentors. Next month he will make his conducting debut with the National Symphony Orchestra at the Kennedy Center.

Program Notes

William Grant Still

Poem for Orchestra

Still was born May 11, 1895, in Woodville, Mississippi, and died December 3, 1978, in Los Angeles. He composed this work in Los Angeles during the first half of 1944, completing it on June 6; Rudolph Ringwall led the Cleveland Orchestra in the first performance on December 7 of that year. The score requires 3 flutes (doubling 2 piccolos), 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons (one doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, 1 tuba, timpani, percussion (snare drum, bass drum, cymbals, gong, glockenspiel), celesta, harp and strings.

Widely regarded during much of his lifetime as “dean of Afro-American composers,” William Grant Still (who was known to respond, “Why then isn’t Aaron Copland called the dean of white composers?”) moved from Mississippi to Little Rock, Arkansas, with his mother, an English teacher, after his father died when he was an infant. He began studying violin at the relatively belated age of 15. After graduating from high school as valedictorian at 16, he enrolled in pre-med courses at Wilberforce University in Ohio, but became preoccupied by music, teaching himself to play oboe and conducting his own compositions and arrangements with the school band. After graduating, he studied composition at Oberlin with George Andrews, and would later study privately with George Whitefield Chadwick in Boston and Edgar Varèse in New York.

After service in World War I, Still landed in Harlem, working as an arranger and playing in pit orchestras. He received his big break as an orchestral composer in 1931 when Howard Hanson and the Rochester Philharmonic premiered his Symphony No. 1 (“Afro-American”), which for a time would become the most-performed symphony by any American. In 1934, he secured a Guggenheim Fellowship and moved to Los Angeles, working occasionally (and always uncredited) in the film industry. In 1936 he conducted the Los Angeles Philharmonic at the Hollywood Bowl in two of his own works, becoming the first Black musician to lead a major American symphony orchestra. Still would reside in Los Angeles for the rest of his life. His catalog eventually encompassed nearly 200 works, including nine operas and four more symphonies.

“In 1944, Erich Leinsdorf, then conductor of the Cleveland Orchestra, wrote to commission a new orchestral work from me,” Still remarked. “He placed no limitations on the kind of work I should write, nor was there any specification as to time limit. The commission was made possible by the Fynette H. Kulas Original American Composers Fund, created by Mr. and Mrs. E.J. Kulas, who are both trustees of the Cleveland Orchestra.” He dedicated the piece “to Arthur Judson, not only because I am personally grateful to him for many things, but also because I feel that he has been a constructive force in shaping and propagandizing American culture in various forms.

“At the time, my mind had already been turning toward a new orchestral work, so the commission came at an

opportune moment. I determined to express in music to the best of my ability the spiritual re-birth of mankind through a drawing closer to God. Accordingly, I wrote the *Poem for Orchestra*, and after it was finished, I asked my wife to write a short poem which would express in words what I tried to express in music:

Soul-sick and weary,
Man stands on the rim of a desolate world.
Then from the embers of a dying past
Springs an immortal hope.
Resolutely evil is uprooted and thrust aside;
A shining new temple stands
Where once greed and lust for power flourished.
Earth is young again and on the wings of its re-birth
Man draws closer to God.

— Verna Arvey

“The *Poem for Orchestra* is in three sections. The first, expressing the desolation of the world, is dissonant. The second section, a development of material that may be found in the opening section, is more like an energetic scherzo, signifying the building for a new world. The third section has in it completely new musical material — and this time the harmonies are consonant — signifying a spiritual re-birth and an exaltation in the approach to the Divine Force. At the very end of the work, there are some reminders of the opening thematic material, but these do not come with the same desolate feeling that they had in their first appearance.”

A *Plain Dealer* critic reviewing the Cleveland premiere found the work “deeply moving,” while *Musical America* deemed it “indeed beautiful, with distinctive themes, clever orchestration, lovely lyrical passages and stirring, forthright vitality.” Artur Rodzinski and the New York Philharmonic took it up in April 1946, followed by the Dallas Symphony in February 1948 and the Chicago Symphony under Rafael Kubelik in November 1950. Reviewing a 1979 performance at the University of Southern California, Daniel Cariaga of the *Los Angeles Times* called the *Poem for Orchestra* “a heroic, lushly textured work which uses the entire resources of the orchestra tellingly, an American *Heldenleben*, if you will, but one compressed into less than 10 minutes. Its Hansonian idiom and extreme attractiveness, two qualities once again acceptable in our concert halls, make it worthy of a currency previously withheld.”

Quinn Mason

Symphony No. 5 (“Harmonia”)

Mason was born in March 1996 and currently resides in Dallas, Texas. He composed this work, which receives its world premiere this evening, on commission from Harmonia. The score calls for pairs of woodwinds (including piccolo), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (tam-tam, triangle, suspended cymbal and bass drum), harp and strings.

Immediately after Quinn Mason conducted the world premiere of *A Joyous Trilogy* in February 2020, he began a conversation with Harmonia music director Will White about another work that he might compose for this group.

"I expressed that I had a piece long inside of me that I needed to write," he says. "That piece? My Symphony No. 5."

As with many of Mason's works, his fifth symphony "is the result of a long gestation period," which in this instance "was spent devising the form for the composition. Set in three movements, it is a journey that takes us through contemplation, jubilation and remembrance.

"The first movement quietly wonders about the journey it is about to embark upon, from the depths of a tranquil mood. While the music wants to explode in lyrical emotion throughout, it is mostly subdued, never leaving the inward-looking feeling with which it began.

"While the second movement is mostly lively in nature, the introspective memories of the first movement never left it, as it is intercut with dynamic outbursts. Here, the influence of Jean Sibelius is apparent.

"The third movement is an elegy in memory of the events of the year 2020. This was the first music conceived for the work that same year. It serves as an 'in memoriam' to those we lost, and of lost time as well. Most unusually, it features a mournful duet between piccolo and tam-tam. Although tragic in nature, as we begin to trek toward more hopeful music, it is a reminder that we have moved past these devastating times — although they have not and will not have completely left us. They remain in memory, as they have in the previous two movements."

William Grant Still

Threnody: In Memory of Jean Sibelius

Still completed this work in Los Angeles in January 1965, on commission from Fabien Sevitzky and the University of Miami Symphony, who gave the premiere on March 14 of that year in commemoration of the centennial of Jean Sibelius' birth. The score requires pairs of woodwinds, 3 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion (chimes, suspended cymbal, crash cymbals, snare drum), harp and strings.

When, on July 23, 1936, William Grant Still conducted two of his own works at the Hollywood Bowl, he shared the podium with Fabien Sevitzky (nephew of famed Boston Symphony music director Serge Koussevitzky). The two became "dear friends" and when Sevitzky, after nearly two decades leading the Indianapolis Symphony, became music director of the University of Miami Symphony Orchestra, he conducted that group in the 1961 world premiere of Still's tone poem *The Peaceful Land*, followed two years later by the first performance of Still's opera *Highway 1, U.S.A.*

"When Sevitzky asked Billy to compose a piece dedicated to Jean Sibelius," Verna Arvey recalled in her 1984 Still biography, *In One Lifetime*, "he wrote his short *Threnody: In Memory of Jean Sibelius* with a grateful heart, for the Finnish master, before his death, had been given a... recording of the *Afro-American Symphony*... and had remarked of Billy, 'He has something to say.' So it was a pleasure to honor him, and to have the little piece played magnificently and later broadcast over Finnish radio."

"Mr. Still can always be depended on to write music that is listenable and meaningful," wrote a *Miami Herald*

reviewer present at the premiere, "and his dirge in memory of Sibelius has mood, grace and true feeling. It disclosed the American composer's admiration for, and comprehension of, the work of the late Finnish composer, which was beautifully expressed."

Jean Sibelius

Symphony No. 3 in C major, Op. 52

Sibelius was born in Tavestehus, Finland, on December 8, 1865, and died at Jävenpää on September 20, 1957. He began this work in September 1904 and completed it during the summer of 1907, conducting the Helsinki Philharmonic in its premiere on September 26 of that year. The score calls for pairs of woodwinds, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani and strings.

"Sibelius was not merely the most famous composer Finland ever produced," writes Alex Ross in *The Rest Is Noise*, "but the country's chief celebrity in any field." Until marathoner Paavo Nurmi captured two gold medals at the 1920 Olympics, Michael Steinberg notes, "Sibelius was the only Finn whose name was known throughout the world." Even today, as Ross points out, "[w]hen Finns are asked to characterize their culture, they invariably mention, along with such national treasures as the lakeside sauna, Fiskars scissors, and Nokia cell phones, 'our Sibelius.'"

The son of a Swedish-speaking doctor (who died of typhus before the boy reached age three), Sibelius learned Finnish at prep school, later changing his given name of Janne to the French Jean. He originally sought a career as a celebrated violinist until a disastrous audition for the Vienna Philharmonic shifted his focus to composition. At the turn of the 20th century, his patriotic tone poem *Finlandia*, his 1902 Symphony No. 2 and his violin concerto (1904–1905) solidified Sibelius' reputation in the hearts of Finns as well as his position as a major composer on the world stage.

On September 24, 1904, Sibelius moved his family from Helsinki 45 km north to his newly completed country house near Lake Tuusula. It was here, over the next three years, that the composer worked on several compositions simultaneously. In addition to his third symphony, these included the tone poem *Pohjola's Daughter* and an abandoned oratorio, *Marjatta* — unused themes originally composed for both of these works found their way into the symphony.

Sibelius' symphonies were, he later said, "conceived and worked out and worked out as musical expression — without any literary basis" or programmatic subtext. (In response to his assertion in 1907 that "the essence of a symphony [is] severity of style and the profound logic that created an inner connection among all the motifs," Mahler famously disagreed, saying "No, a symphony must be like the world. It must embrace everything.") With the third symphony, Sibelius looks both backward and forward, echoing Beethoven and Brahms in the overall structure, while creating something wholly new in the third-movement scherzo.

In 1905, Sibelius made his first visit to England and subsequently promised he would premiere his third symphony with London's Royal Philharmonic Society in March 1907, but missed the deadline, conducting the first performance in

Helsinki six months later (on an all-Sibelius concert that included the revised version of his violin concerto). Nevertheless, he dedicated the symphony to English composer Granville Bantock, one of his early champions.

Of the work's Helsinki premiere, critic Karl Flodin asserted that it "meets all the requirements of a symphonic work of art in the modern sense, but at the same time it is internally new and revolutionary — thoroughly Sibelian." More recently, David Hurwitz has called the Symphony No. 3 "a milestone in symphonic thought" and "the first neo-Classical symphony, before neo-Classicism was a thing."

The first movement opens with a rustic, dance-like melody in the cellos and basses, followed quickly by a sixteenth-note-infused tune from woodwinds and violins, then a broader, heroic theme announced by the horns. The mood becomes hushed and cellos sing an expansive version of the horn theme, leading to a running sixteenth notes that will pervade much of the movement's development section, over which bits and pieces of the thematic material are broken apart and reassembled. (Donald Francis Tovey wrote that these sixteenth notes "are said to represent the composer's impression of fog-banks drifting along the English coast.") The movement ends with a chorale-like coda, one of many such interludes in the symphony, perhaps drawn from the religious oratorio *Marjatta*.

The second movement reveals Sibelius at his most Brahmsian, more of an intermezzo than a true slow movement. The meter is generally $\frac{6}{4}$ (*one-two-three-four-five-six*) but with each phrase ending in a $\frac{3}{2}$ (*one-two-three-four-five-six*) bar, looking back to Handel and the Baroque era. The key is G# minor, about as remote as one could get from the C major of the opening movement. The melody, which turns over on itself effortlessly, emerges in the flutes and is handed off to the clarinets. It appears several times, briefly interrupted by contrasting episodes, not so much a theme and variations as a theme subjected to continually altered orchestration and accompaniment.

The third movement is really two movements in one, opening with a scherzo that flows seamlessly into a finale, à la Beethoven's fifth symphony. In the scherzo, Sibelius throws together bits and pieces of new thematic material (and reminiscences of earlier movements) in seemingly haphazard fashion, frequently shifting tempos, as if listeners were thrust into the middle of a development section. At one point muted horns suggest a theme that is later taken up by violas as the scherzo subsides, leading to a full-throated statement as cellos join in. "All threads are gathered up in one tune," writes Tovey, "that pounds its way to the end with the strokes of Thor's hammer."

— Jeff Eldridge

Violin

Susan Beals
Lauren Daugherty
Dean Drescher
Jason Forman
Stephen Hegg
Jason Hershey
Manchung Ho
Maria Hunt
Fritz Klein*
Gregor Nitsche
Susan Ovens
Jean Provine
Stephen Provine**
Theo Schaad
Kenna Smith-Shangrow
Nicole Tsong

Viola

Deborah Daoust
Katherine McWilliams
Stephanie Read
Sam Williams*

Cello

Peter Ellis
Stephen Forster
Christy Johnson
Kira McDaniel
Katie Sauter Messick
Annie Roberts
Valerie Ross
Matthew Wyant*

Bass

Anthony Balducci
Jo Hansen
Kevin McCarthy
Steven Messick*

Flute

Virginia Knight Janof*
Melissa Underhill

Piccolo

Elana Sabovic-Matt

Oboe

Yuh-Pey Lin
Rebecca Salmon*

English Horn

Kamil Tarnawczyk

Clarinet

Steven Noffsinger*
Chris Peterson

Bass Clarinet

Cynthia Ely

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Rabi Lahiri
Janet Young*

Trombone

John Griffin
Nathaniel Oxford
Grant Reed*

Tuba

David Brewer

Timpani

Dan Oie

Percussion

Ginny Bear
Kathie Flood

Harp

Juliet Stratton

Celesta

William White

** concertmaster

* principal

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Sue Herring
Jason Hershey
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Matthew Tracy
Thurbon Tukey ♪ ♪
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In Memoriam

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Barbara Kidder (2)
Rebecca Cardiff McGoodwin
Eugene Smith (3)
Liesel van Cleeff (2)

In Honor of

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