

# Portraits of America

January 20-21, 2024

Sponsored by Capital City Bank

Darko Butorac, Conductor  
Darryl Jones, Leon County School Board, Narrator  
Nicholas Bardonnay, Multimedia Artist

Jennifer Higdon  
(1962-) *Cold Mountain Suite*

Aaron Copland  
(1900-1990) *Lincoln Portrait*

## INTERMISSION

Duke Ellington  
(1899-1974) Excerpt from *Black, Brown, and Beige*  
Black - Work Song  
Black - Come Sunday  
Black - Light

\*With "200 Years of Tallahassee" visual concerto

William Grant Still  
(1895-1978) Symphony No. 1 in A Flat Major, "Afro-American"  
Moderato assai  
Adagio  
Animato  
Lento, con risoluzione

*The Cold Mountain Suite was co-commissioned in partnership with New Music for America.*

*\*Commissioned by the Tallahassee Symphony Orchestra courtesy of Capital City Bank.  
Photography: Archival and Community submitted. Choreography & performance:  
Nicholas Bardonnay.*

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Despite having no formal musical training until she was 18, **Jennifer Higdon (b. 1962)**, has become one of America's foremost female composers. She taught composition at Curtis Institute for 27 years and has received many awards and accolades. Her *blue cathedral* (TSO, April 2007) is credited with being the most frequently performed American contemporary orchestral composition today. In 2010 she received the Pulitzer Prize in Music for her Violin Concerto as well as a Grammy for her Percussion Concerto. Additional Grammys were awarded to the Viola Concerto (2018) and Harp Concerto (2020), and the recording of her first opera, ***Cold Mountain***, received two Grammy nominations. Co-commissioned by Santa Fe Opera, Minnesota Opera, North Carolina Opera, and Opera Philadelphia, *Cold Mountain* premiered in Santa Fe and received the International Opera Award for Best World Premiere in 2016. The initial run was such a success that they added another performance, which sold out within a day. The buzz it created led to sell-outs at subsequent performances in Philadelphia and in North Carolina.

Higdon's collaboration with *Cold Mountain's* librettist Gene Scheer spanned twenty-eight months. Based on Charles Frazier's popular book, the opera is set during the Civil War. A wounded Confederate soldier deserts his unit and embarks on the dangerous journey home to his girlfriend Ada. The orchestral suite based on the opera, co-commissioned by thirty-six organizations including TSO, premiered in September 2022 and includes some new material not found in the original opera score. Instead of following the opera's plot chronologically, Higdon arranged the music for the suite based on the drama of the music. The composer explains, "While creating this suite, it was a wonderful challenge to determine which music to feature in order to create a dynamic and engaging orchestral work. Because *Cold Mountain* is

about love, war and death (imagine that in an opera!) there was a lot of dramatic music from which to pick. I chose various arias, duets and quintets, with the idea that they would be arranged not in story order, but in a manner to create the greatest contrast for the listener." After excerpts from the beginning of the second act and the ending of the first, the suite includes "Storm Music," "I Should be Crying" (a quintet in the opera), "Orion" (this duet in the opera was composed in one day in "an amazing fit of inspiration," according to the composer), "Bless You Ruby," "I Feel Sorry for You" (Ada's aria), and music from the lovers' reunion after four years. The music at the end of Act One concludes the suite. Higdon says her audience does not need to be knowledgeable about classical music; her goal is to elicit an emotional response. [I'm interested in hearing your response. Email me at [rakers@fsu.edu](mailto:rakers@fsu.edu)]

One of America's best-known and most important composers in the classical genre, **Aaron Copland (1900-1990)** was born in Brooklyn, the last of five children born to Lithuanian Jewish immigrants. Since a musician in that era was not considered properly educated without European training, Copland studied composition in Paris with Nadia Boulanger from 1921 to 1924. It was his desire to create music that connected with the public and sounded "American." In his most popular works, he incorporated American folk music and juxtaposed classical and jazz elements. Since rhythm became the primary element that drove much of the music of the 1900s, it is not surprising that ballet played an important role in twentieth-century music, particularly in the careers of Copland and Stravinsky. Copland's Americana ballets include *Billy the Kid*, *Rodeo*, and *Appalachian Spring*. In 1939, the film *Of Mice and Men* earned Copland his first Academy Award nomination. He spoke of his foray into this genre: "I thought if I was to sell myself to the movies, I

ought to sell myself good." He negotiated his own contract and eventually earned up to \$15,000 per film, becoming one of Hollywood's most successful film composers at that time.

*Fanfare for the Common Man*, one of Copland's most popular works, resulted from a 1942 commission to honor Americans fighting in World War II. In similar fashion, the conductor André Kostelanetz commissioned Copland, Virgil Thompson, and Jerome Kern to each write a work to showcase "the magnificent spirit of our country" for the New York Philharmonic's 1942-3 season. Copland set excerpts of President Lincoln's words in the Gettysburg Address, a State of the Union speech, and the Lincoln-Douglass debates. The composer explains his own work: "The first sketches were made in February, and the portrait finished on 16 April 1942. I worked with musical materials of my own with the exception of two songs of the period: the famous 'Camptown Races' which, when used by Lincoln supporters during his Presidential campaign of 1860, was sung to the words, 'We're bound to work all night, bound to work all day. I'll bet my money on the Lincoln hoss...,' and a ballad that was first published in 1840 under the title 'The Pesky Serpent,' but it is better known today as 'Springfield Mountain.' In neither case is the treatment a literal one. The tunes are used freely in the manner of my use of cowboy songs in *Billy the Kid*. The composition is roughly divided into three main sections. In the opening section I wanted to suggest something of the mysterious sense of fatality that surrounds Lincoln's personality. Also, near the end of that section, something of his gentleness and simplicity of spirit. The quick middle section briefly sketches in the background of the times he lived. This merges into the concluding section where my sole purpose was to draw a simple but impressive frame about the words of Lincoln himself."

## DID YOU KNOW?

Copland's socialist leanings put him on Joseph McCarthy's blacklist and caused the cancellation of a performance of *A Lincoln Portrait* at President Eisenhower's January 1953 inauguration. Later that year the composer had to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee.

Born in Washington, D.C., **Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington (1899-1974)** was a pianist, composer, and band leader. He began piano lessons at age seven but he preferred baseball, and his first job was selling peanuts at the Washington Senators' games. At age fourteen, he sneaked into a pool hall and heard ragtime, and his musical interest was piqued. He learned how to read music at the Armstrong Manual Training School but dropped out just months before graduation so that he could concentrate on his music. In the 1920s his musical performances at the Cotton Club in Harlem helped establish his national reputation, and he became internationally famous when his band toured Europe in the 1930s. Ellington composed over 1000 pieces, including collaborations with composer/arranger Billy Strayhorn as well as the music he and Frank Sinatra co-wrote for the 1967 album *Francis A. and Edward K. Special awards and recognition include a star on the Walk of Fame (1960), fourteen Grammys, a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award (1966), the Presidential Medal of Freedom (1969), and a posthumous Pulitzer Prize Special Award in Music (1999).*

Different reports indicate that First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and musicians, Frank Sinatra, Marian Anderson, and Count Basie were in Carnegie Hall on 23 January 1943 for the premiere of Ellington's ***Black, Brown, and Beige***. The composer introduced the piece, "We would like to say that this is a parallel to

the history of the American Negro. And of course, it tells a long story." He wanted "to portray the experiences of the colored races in America in the syncopated idiom." The first section speaks of slavery; "Brown" refers to the years of emancipation and service in American wars; and the last section is a subtle "Beige" protest song of how things still need changing. Ellington wanted his music to help modify attitudes about race differences and bring Americans together. [See note below on William Grant Still.] He also hoped to legitimize jazz and blues and help people recognize their importance alongside European classical music in American music. It was an ambitious endeavor for 1943, one that was not as successful as Ellington had hoped. Reviews were mixed, not surprising seeing that the composer was black, and in 1943 even black servicemen serving in the war were not getting the appreciation they deserved. Also, critics who were expecting a classical composition might have been put off by the jazz and blues elements, and critics expecting Ellington band music similar to his popular hits may have disliked the marriage of jazz elements and classical style. For centuries "classical" music has recognized formal outlines, like "sonata form," "rondo," and "chaconne." Ellington explained that he wanted to tell the story of African-Americans "unhampered by any musical form." The original version of *Black, Brown, and Beige* lasted about forty-five minutes, quite a long composition to be devoid of specific outlines, other than the three movements. Over the years, the composer, and others, have made revisions, cuts, and reconfigurations, even as Darko has done for tonight's presentation of just *Black*. It is scored for two flutes (piccolo), two clarinets, two bass clarinets, alto and baritone saxophones, two bassoons, (contrabassoon), four horns, four trumpets, three trombones, tuba, harp, timpani, percussion and drum set. There are several recordings available, including a 1958 studio version that Elling-

ton made with his band and Mahalia Jackson, who sang a moving rendition of "Come Sunday," a civil rights anthem by that time.

**William Grant Still (1895-1978)** was born in Mississippi but moved to Little Rock, Arkansas after his father died when William was three months old. He began studying violin at 14 and taught himself to play several other instruments. At age 16, he entered Wilberforce University in Ohio where he conducted the band and began studying composition. He later studied theory and counterpoint at Oberlin, as well as with George Chadwick at New England Conservatory, and privately with Edgard Varèse. The latter became his advocate, programming his works for the International Composers Guild concerts. At times Still was criticized for not sounding more avant-garde, like his mentor Varèse; other critics complained that he did not sound "black enough." Throughout his life, Still did freelance arranging for various bands, theater orchestras, and early radio programs, as well as film scoring (*Pennies from Heaven*, uncredited). He achieved many "firsts" in his career: the first African-American whose symphony was performed by a professional orchestra (***Symphony No. 1, "Afro-American,"*** Rochester Philharmonic, 1931; NY Philharmonic at Carnegie Hall, 1935); first African-American to conduct a major orchestra (Los Angeles Philharmonic, 1936); first African-American to have an opera performed by a major opera company (*Troubled Island*, NY City Opera, 1949); and the first to have an opera (*Troubled Island*) nationally televised. Still was a prolific composer, completing five symphonies, four ballets, nine operas, and over thirty choral works plus some chamber compositions. His second wife Verna Arvey wrote all the librettos for her husband's operas. In 1984 she also published *In One Lifetime: A Biography of William Grant Still*. They had to go to Mexico to get married in 1939, because bi-racial marriages were illegal in California. Still said he felt that God had given him a

mission to use his music to bring the races together. He especially loved symphonic works and opera, and most of his works exhibit the influence of American jazz and rhythm and blues.

After an English horn offers a plaintive beginning to the Moderato Assai, muted trumpets present the primary theme and the oboe adds a secondary theme that is reminiscent of a Negro spiritual. Note the influence of “the blues” in the standard twelve-bar harmonic progression of this rather desultory opening movement of the Afro-American Symphony. Adagio incorporates some of the previous themes in a sparse texture, again showcasing different “voices” such as oboe, flute, and violin. Animato lives up to its tempo marking, with a lively and rhythmic presentation. There is even a banjo in this third movement. It is pure Americana. A chorale at the beginning of the fourth movement, Lento, leads to impassioned music and a transcendent conclusion. Each movement has an epigraph with an excerpt from a poem by the African-American writer Paul Laurence Dunbar: “Twell de Night is Pas,” “W’en I Gits Home,” “An Ante-Bellum Sermon,” and “Ode to Ethiopia.” Still’s sketchbook also includes subtitles for each of the movements—Longing, Sorrow, Humor, Aspiration; however, he did not add these to his manuscript, using only the Italian tempo markings in his score.

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Dr. Akers has a Master of Music degree in Piano Performance from Indiana University and a Ph.D. in Historical Musicology from Florida State University.



**Nicholas Bardonney** is a photographer, multimedia artist, and the Creative Director & CEO of Westwater Arts.

Since joining Westwater Arts in 2009, Nicholas has worked on more than 120 concerts with orchestras in cities across the U.S. as well as Scotland, England, Singapore, Canada, Poland, and Germany.

He has photographed, produced and performed over a dozen photochoreography pieces. His first concert piece, *Pacifica*, blends his photography from the atmospheric coastal Pacific Northwest with six music options by Mahler, Debussy, Górecki, Sibelius, Liadov and Satie. With Copland’s music in mind for his next piece, *Rodeo!*, he photographed a lively pickup rodeo under the vast skies of northern Arizona.

More recently, he used archival images to produce two companion pieces, *No Man’s Land* and *Citizen Soldier*, to commemorate the 100th anniversary of World War I and the 75th anniversary of World War II. He choreographed them to poignant music options by Copland, Vaughan Williams, Barber and Shostakovich, and both premiered in 2014. For another project, Nicholas spent two months camping across Iceland while photographing its sublime landscapes for *Sagaland*, which he set to four music options by Vaughan Williams, Sibelius, Pärt and Hovhanness. *Sagaland* premiered in 2016. Also in 2016, Nicholas premiered his

tribute to America’s national park legacy, *National Park Suite*, at Wolf Trap with the National Symphony Orchestra.

Nicholas has also produced a number of commissioned concert pieces. Highlights include *Grand Canyon Country*, a piece created for the Tucson Symphony Orchestra and The Phoenix Symphony to celebrate Arizona’s state centennial; a 50th anniversary tribute for the Britt Music Festival in Oregon; and extensive photography across the Czech Republic for *Czech Journeys*, which is set to selections from *Má vlast* and was commissioned by the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and the Toronto Symphony Orchestra.

The London Photographic Association as well as galleries in Los Angeles, Portland, Hong Kong and other cities have exhibited Nicholas’s photography. He has lived in the U.S., Canada and Mexico, and he has an interdisciplinary degree in Visual Arts and Social Sciences from The Evergreen State College. When Nicholas is not traveling for concerts or new productions, you can usually find him on the road in his vintage Airstream or planning his next big bike adventure.

One of Nicholas’s most life-changing projects to date was his year in Mexico photographing *Mágico* and *Pre~Columbia*. Both pieces premiered in September 2018 with the Dallas Symphony and have been widely programmed since. Nicholas’s latest concert piece is *Visions*, which honors the legacy of America’s First Peoples through the remarkable sepia-toned images of legendary photographer Edward Curtis.

For his collaborations, Nicholas uses multiple digital projectors to fill a 440-square-foot panoramic screen flown above the orchestra. He closely follows the conductor’s performance, live-cuing hundreds of image transitions from memory.

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
Interracial marriage was legal in some states prior to the Supreme Court’s decision, but it was the *Loving v. Virginia* decision on June 12, 1967, that declared all remaining state laws that banned marriage between people of different races unconstitutional.