



## SAMF String Quartet

Sunday, May 30, 2021 – 3:00 pm

Peña-Peck House, 143 St George Street, Saint Augustine, FL 32084

In Collaboration with The Women's Exchange

*Masks Required. Outdoor Socially-Distanced Seating*



### Program

- Florence Price (African-American Woman Composer): **Juba from String Quartet**  
 George Walker (African-American Composer): **Lyric for Strings from String Quartet No. 1**  
 Wu Man (Woman Composer): **Turpan Dance**  
 William Grant Still (African-American Composer): **Danzas de Panama (1948)**  
 Jessie Montgomery (African-American Woman Composer): **STRUM for St. Quartet**

### SAMF String Quartet:

Piotr Szewczyk, Ingang Han, Jorge Peña, Brian Magnus

### Program Notes



#### Florence Price (1887-1953)

As an African-American woman, Florence Price combined the traditions of classical music with the sound of spirituals and West African rhythms and dance from her own culture. In 1933, during the Harlem Renaissance, she overcame prejudice to become the first black female composer to have her work performed by a major orchestra.

Florence Price's mother was a music teacher and encouraged young Florence to learn the piano. After attending the New England Conservatory of Music, one of the few institutions at the time to admit African Americans, Price taught music in Atlanta. With racial tensions rising, Price and her family moved to Chicago where she found the music scene very stimulating. After getting divorced, Price played the organ for silent movies to support herself while she began composing in earnest. Winning a composing competition, Price had her first symphony played by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and her reputation began to grow. Although she wrote over 300 pieces of music, after her death Price's work was largely forgotten. Today her work is being rediscovered and performed by many more orchestras again.

Price fused two worlds, taking a part of her own musical heritage and reimagining it with a classical orchestra. The 'Juba Dance' originates in West Africa and was brought over to the United States by slaves who were forced to work on plantations. Slaves were banned from playing musical instruments, so they used their bodies to create music instead. They created repeating percussive rhythms by patting and slapping their arms, legs and chest and stamping with their feet. This kind of body percussion forms the basis of the Juba Dance that inspired the third movement of Florence Price's Symphony No.1 in E minor. African drums echo the patting, slapping rhythms as the strings play an upbeat melody.

#### George Walker (1922-2018)

Written in 1946, Lyric for Strings remains Walker's best known and most performed work. He received accolades throughout his long active life.

Walker may have said it best: *"Lyric was originally the second movement of my first string quartet. After a brief introduction, the principal theme that permeates the entire work is introduced by the first violins. A static interlude is followed by successive imitations of the theme that leads to an intense climax. The final section of the work presents a somewhat more animated statement of the same thematic material, Lament. The coda recalls the quiet interlude that appeared earlier. The Lyric for Strings is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother."*

Lyric is driven by separate linear melody and accompaniment lines in the strings that occasionally come together for climactic moments of harmony. Somewhat akin to the history of Samuel Barber's Adagio for Strings. Walker's Lyric was originally the middle movement of a string quartet that proved so popular that the composer repurposed it into a larger orchestral work.



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## Program Notes (cont.)



### **Wu Man** (b. 1963-)

Wu Man is a Chinese pipa player and composer. At the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, she trained in Pudong-style pipa performance. She is known for playing in a broad range of musical styles and introducing the pipa and its Chinese heritage into Western genres. She has performed and recorded extensively with Kronos Quartet and Silk Road Ensemble, and has premiered works by Philip Glass, Lou Harrison, Yoyo Ma, Terry Riley, Bright Sheng, Tan Dun, Zhao Jiping, and Zhou Long, among many others. She has recorded and appeared on over 40 albums, five of which have been nominated for Grammy Awards. In 2013, she was named Instrumentalist of the Year by Musical America, becoming the first performer of a non-Western instrument to receive this award. She is accomplished in not only Chinese music, but also in world music, and contemporary classical music. She plays the ruan and zheng in addition to the pipa.

### **William Grant Still** (1893-1978)

William Grant Still Jr. (1895-1978) composer of nearly 200 works, including five symphonies, four ballets, eight operas, over thirty choral works, art songs, chamber music and works for solo instruments.

He is referred to as the “Dean of Afro-American Composers”; Still was the first American composer to have an opera produced by the New York City Opera. He is known primarily for his first symphony, *Afro-American Symphony* (1930), which was, until 1950, the most widely performed symphony composed by an American.

He was born in Mississippi and grew up in Little Rock, Arkansas; he was the child of two teachers, though his father died when he was only three months old. He attended Wilberforce University and Oberlin Conservatory of Music. Still was the first African American to conduct a major American symphony orchestra, The LA Philharmonic, the first to have a symphony (his 1st Symphony) performed by a leading orchestra, the first to have an opera performed by a major opera company, and the first to have an opera performed on national television.

On February 8, 1939, he married, pianist Verna Arvey, they drove to Tijuana for the ceremony because interracial marriage was illegal in California. He was closely associated with and collaborated with prominent African-American literary and cultural figures, Still is considered to be part of the Harlem Renaissance movement.

William Grant Still’s *Danzas de Panama* date from 1948 and are based on a collection of Panamanian folk tunes. Although there are only four dances presented, each movement has at least two and sometimes three separate dances within it. Any one of the movements could serve as a very effective encore. Together, they form an impressive tour de force.



### **Jessie Montgomery** (b. 1981 -)

Jessie Montgomery is an American composer, chamber musician, and music educator. Her compositions focus on the vernacular, improvisation, language, and social justice. She was raised in Manhattan’s Lower East Side by parents working in music and theater and involved in neighborhood arts. She began her violin studies at the Third Street Music School Settlement. She holds a bachelor’s degree in violin performance from the Juilliard School, and completed a master’s degree in Composition for Film and Multimedia at New York University in 2012. She has increasingly focused on composing solo, chamber, vocal, and orchestral works. Montgomery has completed commissions for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, the Albany Symphony, the Sphinx Organization, the Joyce Foundation, the National Choral Society, and the Guild of Carillonners in North America. She has received additional grants and awards from the ASCAP Foundation, Chamber Music America, American Composers Orchestra, and the Sorel Organization. Her *Strum for String Quartet* received rave reviews. Her music has been performed by the Philharmonia Orchestra, Atlanta Symphony, Dallas Symphony, Minnesota Orchestra, and San Francisco Symphony, and choreographed by the Dance Theatre of Harlem. And by the Jacksonville Symphony, Jacksonville, Florida in 2021.