

GEORGE WALKER — Lyric for Strings

A string of firsts dominated George Walker's long life and career. He was the first African American graduate of the prestigious Curtis Institute of Music with a dual diploma in both piano and composition. In 1945, he was the first African American to debut with a solo recital at Manhattan's Town Hall and the first to perform with the Philadelphia Orchestra as the soloist for Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 3. In 1950, he became the first African American artist to sign with a major artist management company, and he spent the next several years playing a string of high-profile concerts in nearly every European capital. In 1956, Walker became the first African American to graduate with a doctoral degree from the Eastman School of Music. In 1961, he was hired by Smith College where he became the first tenured African American faculty member in any department. And finally, in 1996, Walker was the first African American to be awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Music in recognition of his composition *Lilacs* for voice and orchestra. At his death in August 2018, Walker was one of the most decorated and revered composers in American history.

Lyric for Strings was composed when Walker was only 24 years old, but it has remained one of his most enduring compositions. The sound, structure, and instrumentation of the piece are all clearly inspired by the famous *Adagio for Strings* composed by Walker's Curtis Institute classmate Samuel Barber in 1936. Walker first conceived the music that became *Lyric* as a middle movement for his first string quartet and originally titled it "Lament" in dedication to his grandmother who died the year prior. The piece fluidly and dramatically alternates between lush harmonies and stark solo passages which showcase the range of sounds possible in the string orchestra. In an interview not long before his death, Walker commented: "I never played a string instrument, but somehow strings have always fascinated me." In *Lyric*, we hear the beginning of this life-long fascination.

EDWARD HART — *Under an Indigo Sky* **Concerto for Violin and Orchestra** **Written for Yuriy Bekker**

Notes by the composer.

It is a privilege to have your music played by an exceptionally gifted musician. It is especially meaningful when that performer is your friend. That is why I am very thankful to have had the opportunity to write this violin concerto for my friend, Yuriy Bekker. Since first meeting some years ago, I wanted to write him a substantial work not only because we are friends, but because he plays the violin the way I would want to if I could play. In short, he makes all the right musical choices. I am also fortunate that we share much in common as it relates to musical taste and style.

In a way, *Under an Indigo Sky* is a love letter to my home state, South Carolina. I am continually amazed and thankful for the natural and cultural diversity of this relatively small place. I have attempted to musically capture three distinct yet related regions of our state with an eye not only to the landscapes, but the feel and “soul” of the places.

Movement I: *Fast Flowing Rivers* – Columbia and the Midlands

The Broad, Congaree, and Saluda Rivers are an important part of the greater Columbia landscape. At times, especially after heavy rain, these rivers move quickly creating an impressive natural display and an interesting metaphor for Columbia’s role in our state, a place of fast flowing and powerful political, educational, and economic currents. At other times, these rivers can flow gracefully and gently through the countryside reflecting the warm and genteel nature of the people of the Midlands.

Movement II: *Warm Salt Air* – Charleston and the Coast

With its coastal location and sub-tropical climate, Charleston’s weather can sometimes resemble a warm, wet, briny blanket. Though this might seem uncomfortable to some, these qualities in the right measurements can produce a lush and magical atmosphere. Imagine a May sunset overlooking the water with just the right temperature and a sea breeze moving softly through the Palmetto trees.

Movement III: *Misty Blue Horizon* – Greenville and the Upstate

The Blue Ridge Mountains, which dominate the Northern horizon, seem to give Greenville and the upstate a cool verdant freshness found in no other region of South Carolina. The early morning light offers dramatic vistas filled with broad strokes of blue, green and purple. This landscape elicits a sense of awe, wonder, and reverent reflection along with a sense of gratitude toward its Creator.

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART — Symphony No. 39

More than two years after he completed the so-called “Prague” Symphony No. 38, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart wrote his final three symphonies, Nos. 39, 40, and 41, at a breakneck pace even for a composer as prodigiously productive as Mozart. He appears to have completed all three pieces in a span of fewer than six weeks during the summer of 1788. That summer, Mozart and his family had moved from their cramped apartment in central Vienna to a much larger home in the Viennese suburb of Alsergrund. Following this prodigious period, he would not produce another symphony before his death three years later. These three symphonies do not simply mark the end of Mozart’s relationship with the genre. Rather, they seem to signal the end of the classical symphony as such.

From its 17th- and early 18th-century origins in the musical centers of Milan, Vienna, and Mannheim, the symphony was basically understood as a piece of light entertainment music. The diversity of formal components in the three or four movements and the diversity of performing forces available in the orchestra meant that composers could create colorful and engaging music for state dinners, aristocratic parties, or even as a kind of musical precursor to more serious works, usually opera. As late as the early nineteenth century, composers of the highest stature—including one of Mozart's mentors, Franz Joseph Haydn—were still employing a whole range of gimmicks to convince audiences to truly focus their attention on the music. Mozart's final three symphonies are larger, more ambitious, and more complex than any symphonies that had come before and they represent a changing relationship between composers and audiences. In the late works of Mozart, we see how nineteenth-century composers would start chasing the directives of their art rather than the whims of their audiences.

In preparing his 2014 recording of the three final symphonies (Nos. 39, 40, and 41), conductor Nikolaus Harnoncourt put forward the theory that Mozart may have conceived these three pieces as a kind of totality: an “instrumental oratorio” that employs the full gamut of emotion, formal structures, and techniques available to 18th-century orchestral composers. By this theory, Symphony No. 39 is a kind of overture to the full set which is designed to catch the audience's attention and give a foretaste of the complex musical ideas to come. One account from an early performance of Symphony No. 39 remarked: “The opening is so majestic that it so surprised even the coldest, most insensitive listener and non-expert, that even if he wanted to chat, it prevented him from being inattentive, and thus, so to speak, put him in a position to become all ears.” From the striking chromatic chords of the opening to the lively and surprisingly modest conclusion, you too will find yourself “all ears” for this one.