

EDMUND THORNTON JENKINS — Charleston

Born in April 1894, Edmund Thornton Jenkins was a native Charlestonian and his composition *Charlestonia* is one of the greatest musical tributes to his vibrant hometown. It is perhaps surprising that part of the piece premiered in 1919 in London and received its only complete performance in Jenkins's short lifetime in Brussels, Belgium. *Charlestonia* finally debuted here in the Holy City in October 1996 when the CSO, under the baton of the late David Stahl, presented the American premiere as part of the broader "Edmund Jenkins Homecoming Month" festivities proclaimed by former Charleston Mayor Joseph P. Riley Jr. By all accounts, Jenkins had a complicated relationship with his home city, which he visited infrequently after moving to Europe. Jenkins chose to commemorate Charleston in much of his music, but consistently found the freedom and opportunities to create outside of the Jim Crow South.

Jenkins was the son of a prominent Charlestonian, Reverend Daniel Jenkins, who ran the Jenkins Orphanage from 1892 until his death in 1937. At that time the orphanage occupied the Old Marine Hospital on Franklin Street and often had more than 500 young men and women in its care at any given time. From the founding, Reverend Jenkins saw music as a salvific force for good and encouraged local citizens to donate any unused instruments for children to play. That first year, the orphanage hired two local musicians to tutor a small band of 11 boys who would give impromptu performances on the street in hopes of soliciting small donations from passersby. Upon its founding, the Jenkins Orphanage Band became the only black instrumental group organized in South Carolina. By the turn of the 20th century, the Jenkins Orphanage Band was renowned up and down the East Coast. They played in inaugural parades for Presidents Theodore Roosevelt and William Taft. They appeared at the St. Louis World's Fair in 1914. They toured the country extensively throughout the 1910s and 1920s, playing hundreds of shows from coast to coast as well as international engagements in Paris, Berlin, Rome, London, and Vienna.

One of these overseas tours brought 20-year-old Edmund to London. By 1914, Jenkins had graduated from Morehouse College and was serving as Director of Bands for his father's orphanage when he received an offer to remain in London as a student at the prestigious Royal Academy of Music. In London and eventually in Paris, the young composer began to find his voice through musical opportunities organized by British composer of African descent Samuel Coleridge-Taylor and through the political activism of the African Progress Union. But he never forgot the music of his youth in Charleston. Will Marion Cook, an African American composer and student of Antonin Dvořák, ran into Jenkins during a trip to Paris and wrote back to his father in Charleston: "Want to congratulate you on your son... with whom I had a most wonderful association while in Paris. He is possibly the best musician in the colored race, the very best instrumentalist in any race, and one of the most perfect Gentlemen I have ever had the pleasure of knowing."

EDWARD HART — A Charleston Concerto

Notes by the composer.

A Charleston Concerto was written to commemorate the 350th Anniversary of the City of Charleston. I am very grateful for this opportunity to collaborate with the Charleston Symphony, maestro Ken Lam, and the world-renowned Shanghai Quartet. In this programmatic three-movement composition, I attempt to musically express Charleston's autochthonous splendor, the city's complex history, and its optimistic approach to the future.

Movement I – Discovery

In the first movement, I imagine the experience of the first people to gaze upon Charleston Harbor. This group of natives may have been traversing the dense subtropical forest, gradually noticing fleeting gusts of sea breeze and shards of sunlight, only to be awestruck when reaching the water's edge, revealing the magnificent wind-swept harbor, filling them with a sense of awe and optimism.

Movement II – Tragedy and Reconciliation

Old places have complicated histories, including tragedy. Charleston is no exception. Tragedy has come from natural disasters such as hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, and disease. We have also experienced man-made tragedy, including war and especially the enslavement of our fellow man with the subsequent ill treatment of their descendants. I have chosen to represent tragedy with a Gullah Spiritual entitled *Sinnuh W'ah Yuh Doin' Down Dere*.

To me, reconciliation, both with our natural world and with each other, seems to be more of an ongoing process rather than a one-time act. The process itself is what creates hope. To represent this, I have used the Gullah Spiritual *Silbuh Spade* (Silver Spade). The powerful first line, "You kin dig my grabe wid a silbuh spade, cus I ain't gwine lib here no more," is a statement of transcendent resilience, with the certainty of a better future.

A note about Gullah culture:

Gullah is a rich culture that developed among the descendants of West Africans brought to America as slaves in the 17th and 18th centuries and found primarily in the coastal regions of South Carolina and Georgia. Among its many important contributions are Gullah Spirituals, a musical genre combining elements of West African performance practice with text from or inspired by Biblical passages. In order to completely reflect Charleston's multifaceted culture, it would be impossible to ignore this significant and highly original musical tradition.

Movement III – Tomorrow

Optimism is a trait we all share in Charleston. It seems to be in our collective DNA. This optimism is the fervent belief that, despite past and present challenges, our best days are ahead. Informed by our history, we forge our future with the heartfelt expectation of a better tomorrow.

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK — Symphony No. 9 “New World”

In 1891, the newly created National Conservatory of Music in New York City named Czech composer Antonín Dvořák as director. The philanthropist Jeannette Thurber hoped to lure the European master to New York City to lend some much-needed credibility to the still nascent classical music scene in the United States. Though Dvořák accepted the job, he seems to have been skeptical about his prospects for success. Just before departing for America to take up his post, he expressed doubt to a London reporter that America could ever truly cultivate its own national style: “America will have to reflect the influence of the great German composers just as all countries do.” Upon arriving in New York, however, Dvořák was struck by the breadth and quality of musical creativity he found in the supposedly culture-starved “New World.” As a fervent supporter of his own Czech folk music traditions, Dvořák was thrilled by the richness and diversity of folk music that the American melting pot represented. He called specific attention to the African American folk music traditions that had developed among former slaves in the American South, saying “These can be the foundation of a serious and original school of composition, to be developed in the United States. These beautiful and varied themes are the product of the soil. They are the folk songs of America and your composers must turn to them.”

In 1893, Dvořák would be given the opportunity to practice what he preached when the New York Philharmonic commissioned him to write a symphony for their upcoming season. His so-called “New World” Symphony took as a jumping off point the myriad folk music traditions he encountered on his American sojourn. Despite the piece’s almost universally warm reception, listeners both then and now have had trouble identifying just what about Dvořák’s piece, if anything, is actually “American” in any meaningful sense. The most frequently cited example is the gorgeous “Largo” melody written for solo English horn. The song, now often known by the title “Goin’ Home,” is sometimes mistakenly identified as a traditional folk song or spiritual that Dvořák incorporated into his “New World” Symphony. That story, however, is backward. The melody is actually an original composition of Dvořák’s that one of his students, composer William Arms Fisher, supplemented with lyrics and adapted as a spiritual song nearly 30 years after the symphony’s premiere.

Regardless of the actual sources of Dvořák’s material, the enduring achievement of the “New World” Symphony was to call attention to the contributions that Native American and African American musicians were already making to the fabric of American music. The symphony even moved one of Dvořák’s African American students, Will Marion Cook, to wonder whether black composers might eventually become the voice of the nation that had enslaved them. For this reason, a statue of the Czech composer still stands in Stuyvesant Square, just blocks from his former house on 17th Street, in recognition of his contributions to American music.