

## Presenting AfroClassical Composers

### Summer Greetings!

As we start a brand-new calendar season of Summer, I celebrate that we're living in a time of exciting music possibilities and developments that seemed unfathomable just 2 years ago.

#### ENCOURAGING DEVELOPMENTS

In NYC in 2022, for example, there was a June 17th performance of an oratorio composed by Canadian composer **R. Nathaniel Dett** – *The Ordering of Moses*.

The performance was sponsored by The Harlem Chamber Players at the same venerable Riverside Church where Dr. Martin L King, Jr delivered his speech, not about having a dream, but about global involvement of the U.S. and its military, one year before he was assassinated in 1968.

For years I've read about Dett's choral work and never thought I'd hear a live performance of such a grand work in my life time at such a venerable venue. And since it was in NY, I didn't 😊. Who knows, maybe it will be performed in LA!?

#### OTHER DEVELOPMENTS AND HISTORY

I can also say that I never noticed (thus never saw) the acronym BIPOC before 2020. EDI is another relatively new acronym to me. For the record, BIPOC stands for Black, Indigenous and People of Color. EDI stands for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. So, when the U.S. became "aware" of gross injustices in 2020, we experienced ramped up use of these acronyms to describe non-Whites, as it pertains to grants from public funds, and from private organizations.

I don't remember where or when I first became aware of the acronym DWEM, but perhaps you'll see the connection to these acronyms, and a theme with regard to access to classical music and other matters involving use of public and private funding. Dead White European Males (DWEM) pretty much describes what we have been hearing in classical music in terms of composers whose works are performed by orchestras and other ensembles. Think Bach, Brahms, Bruckner, Bartok and even Beethoven, and there you have it – the masters. To be certain, there are many more recognizable composers in that group.

At the Hollywood Bowl, however, there was an all-Star show featuring an "All Black Orchestra" this past Juneteenth celebration, the second time this country has observed this federal holiday.

#### PERSISTENT CHALLENGES

That stood out in contrast to what we often see on stage at the Hollywood Bowl, at Disney Center and where countless other orchestras around the country perform. By figures provided by the League of American Orchestras, less than 2% of major orchestras employ musicians who are “Black.”

So, I wondered, will those All-Black Orchestra musicians enjoy the same union benefits that the usual cast of Hollywood Bowl Orchestra musicians receive? Is this a one off or can those players build a career on such performances? And will the same less than 2% Black orchestras – LA Phil – return the following week and go on with business as usual? I don’t know the answers, but it calls into consideration the state of affairs regarding labor practices of organizations that use public funds for public enjoyment, careers development and promotion of culture.

Imagine a less than 2% percentage of inclusion in the National Basketball League or in the National Football League. So, when friends sent me articles about an All-Black Orchestra at the Hollywood Bowl, I admit thinking, “oh wow, we’ve advanced so much that we’re starting a first ever ‘Negro Baseball League’ for orchestras in 2022. Please feel free to share your perspective and thoughts on this matter at our Contact button of the site (a link follows later in this e-mail).

Meanwhile, I’ve always believed that nature distributes its best talent without regard to boundaries and constructs like race. We see that in sports. Why should it be different in classical music? We even see a more equitable distribution of talent in popular music, where gifted people can enjoy successful livelihoods and careers. In the board rooms and executive positions, well...

## **YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN POSITIVE DEVELOPMENTS**

What started out in 2018 as **Sunday Salons** for hearing, enjoying and discussing music by AfroClassical Composers, became **Presenting AfroClassical Composers**, a non profit whose **mission is to increase knowledge and appreciation of living and legacy composers of the African Diaspora** – filling the void left by major orchestras, schools of music, performance venues and organizations for classical music. Inclusion of performers that reflect the culturally diverse demographics of SoCAL is built into our mission.

I’m pleased to announce the premier *Presenting...* event on 16 October in Los Angeles – a Sunday afternoon at 4pm, where piano works by composers **Dorothy Rudd-Moore, Maria Thompson Corley, George Walker** and **R. Nathaniel Dett** will be performed. Recording artist, pianist [Maria Corley](#) will be a guest performer. Expert panelists in History or Sociology, Visual Art... will help offer interdisciplinary context to the music we’re hearing, concluding with community discussion/talkback.

Please mark your calendar and share with other interested neighbors. The event is a welcoming one to all music lovers including traditionally underserved audiences, from neurodivergent neighbors (persons with disabilities and those on the autism spectrum), LGBTQ youth adults & seniors to recently de-carcerated

neighbors, foster families as well as university students and professors in all disciplines.

I invite you to donate! Your tax-deductible gift will support this important and timely mission:


<https://afroclassicalcomposers.org/donate/>

Enjoy the Summer!

... and see you in October. Please be alert for more details as October approaches.

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