



Topeka Symphony Orchestra

February 8, 2018
School Day Concerts
African American Heritage
Educational Resource Packet

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Welcome!

Welcome to the Topeka Symphony Orchestra's 2018 School Day Concert! February is a time when we honor the achievements and lives of African Americans. This year's School Day concerts feature music from the opera **Porgy and Bess**, which was one of the first pieces of theatre written specifically to feature black performers in the leading roles, and music from William Grant Still's **Afro-American Symphony**, which was the first symphony written by an African American to be performed by major orchestras in the United States. We will hear the influence of jazz, blues, spirituals, and folk music in these pieces that were intended to finally bring African American culture and arts to the concert hall, which had been dominated for decades by white performers, composers, and artists. We will also hear a very moving rendition of Martin Luther King's "I Have A Dream" speech, which will include elements of the songs "Precious Lord," which Mahalia Jackson sang at MLK's funeral, and the spiritual "We Shall Overcome." We're so pleased to have you join us!

Kyle Wiley Pickett
Music Director and Conductor



Maestro Kyle Wiley Pickett is the conductor of the Topeka Symphony Orchestra and the Springfield Symphony in Missouri. He was previously conductor of the Juneau Symphony in Juneau, Alaska, and the North State Symphony in California. He has conducted orchestras, ballet, musical theatre, and opera throughout the West Coast, the Midwest, Mexico, and the Czech Republic. He splits his time between Topeka and Springfield, and is married with two sons.

INTRODUCTION

The Topeka Symphony will perform its annual School Day Concerts on February 8, 2018, at the Topeka Performing Arts Center. Our 2018 School Day Concerts explore our country's African American heritage through music.

We are fortunate to have the generous support of Kaw Valley Bank, Cox Communications, Security Benefit, Westar Energy Foundation, the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation, and Federal Home Loan Bank. These sponsors allow the TSO to offer these concerts free of charge. Please let our sponsors know that you appreciate their support! You can reach them by mail at the following addresses:

Mr. Gerald Lauber
Kaw Valley Bank
PO Box 8009
Topeka, KS 66608

Ms. Coleen Jennison
Cox Communication
901 S. George Washington Blvd
Wichita, KS 67211

Zoe Gruber
Security Benefit Charitable Trust
One Security Benefit Place
Topeka, KS 66636-0001

Cynthia McCarvel
Westar Energy Foundation
PO Box 889
Topeka, KS 66601

Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation
Charitable Contributions
16281 Q Road
Mayetta, KS 66509

Julie DeVader
Federal Home Loan Bank
One Security Benefit Place, Suite 100
Topeka, KS 66606

Blanche Bryden Foundation
900 Massachusetts
Lawrence, KS 66044

Attending the Concert

About 20 minutes prior to the concert, the Topeka Symphony Orchestra members begin to come on stage. They come early for several reasons. Wind players need to make sure their instruments are warmed with air by blowing into it. String players need to let their wooden instruments adjust to the stage temperature and then tune the strings. Percussion players need to set up all their equipment.

At concert time, the Concertmaster (the 1st chair violinist) walks out and is greeted by audience applause. This is also the cue to stop all talking in the audience. She or he bows and then leads the tuning of the Orchestra. The principal oboist plays the tuning note 'A' for all the sections. The Orchestra then tunes by section: brass and woodwinds, lower strings, then upper strings.

When tuning is complete, the Conductor comes on stage as the audience, again, greets him/her with applause.

If a musical selection is in several movements, the audience traditionally sits silently when the orchestra stops between sections. The audience applauds when the last movement is finished.

Each time the Conductor returns to the stage, it is appropriate to applaud. It is never appropriate to talk, clap, rattle papers or disturb others in any way during a musical performance.

When the program ends, the Conductor will have orchestra members stand to acknowledge the applause of the audience.

Concert Etiquette for Audiences

- Listen carefully
- Smile and show appreciation.
- Clap at correct times (watch for cues from an adult if you're not sure).
- Respond when the performer asks you to respond
- If you come late or must leave early, do so between pieces or movements.
- Stay still. Remember, your feet should stay off the chair seats and backs.
- Keep papers quiet.

African American Heritage

What are we playing?

George Gershwin: **Porgy and Bess**

Porgy and Bess is an opera by American composer George Gershwin. **Gershwin** (September 26, 1898 – July 11, 1937), is one of the most significant and popular American composers. He wrote for the Broadway musical theatre, as well as significant works for orchestra and piano in which he combined classical music with jazz.

Porgy and Bess tells the story of Porgy, a disabled black street-beggar in the ghettos of Charleston, South Carolina, and his attempts to rescue Bess from the clutches of Crown, her abusive lover, and Sportin' Life, her drug dealer.

According to George Gershwin, "**Porgy and Bess** is a folk tale. Its people naturally would sing folk music. When I first began work in the music I decided against the use of original folk material because I wanted the music to be all of one piece. Therefore I wrote my own spirituals and folksongs. But they are still folk music – and therefore, being in operatic form, **Porgy and Bess** becomes a folk opera."

The songs that have become popular folk songs from **Porgy and Bess** are:

Summertime (and the Livin' is Easy)

Bess, You Is My Woman Now

It Ain't Necessarily So

I Got Plenty of Nuttin'

At its inception and during its early production history, the opera generated a lot of racial controversy. Many believed that, although it placed African Americans in leading roles on opera stages that had traditionally been dominated by white roles and white singers, it did more harm than good by reinforcing negative racist stereotypes. More recently, though, the opera has greater gained acceptance.

The music reflects Gershwin's New York jazz roots, as well as southern black traditions. You'll hear jubilees, [blues](#), praying songs, street cries, work songs, and spirituals, as well as opera's more traditional [arias](#) and [recitatives](#).

William Grant Still: **The Afro-American Symphony**

William Grant Still's Symphony No. 1, **The Afro-American Symphony**, is the first symphony composed by an African American composer that was performed by a major orchestra. Written in 1930, its first performance was given in Rochester, New York, in 1931, and then subsequently played by the New York Philharmonic at Carnegie Hall and more than thirty more orchestras during the 1930s.

William Grant Still (May 11, 1895 – December 3, 1978) was the first African-American to conduct a major American symphony [orchestra](#), the first to have a symphony performed by a national orchestra, the first to have an opera performed by a major opera company, and the first to have an opera performed on national television. He composed more than 150 works, including five [symphonies](#) and eight [operas](#).

Born in Mississippi, Still grew up in Little Rock, Arkansas, attended [Wilberforce University](#) and [Oberlin Conservatory of Music](#), and was a student of [George Whitefield Chadwick](#) and later [Edgard Varèse](#).

The Afro-American Symphony incorporates elements of jazz and the blues. Still wanted to demonstrate how the blues could be raised to the highest musical art form—the symphony—as the blues often were considered to be music of the lower class. The symphony is composed of four movements: “Longing,” “Sorrow,” “Humor” and “Aspiration.” The first movement is bluesy and full of song-like melodies. The second is calm and reflective. The third movement is light-hearted with fast rhythmic patterns. And the fourth opens with a somber melody and closes with a grandiose finale.

Martin Luther King, Jr.'s, I Have a Dream speech, underscored with music

On August 28, 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., addressed the crowd assembled for the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, in Washington, D.C. This speech became one of the most important speeches and transformative moments in American history, calling out for justice and freedom and equality for all Americans. We will hear the words of the speech with musical underscoring including “We Shall Overcome” and “Precious Lord,” which Mahalia Jackson sang at Martin Luther King’s funeral in 1968.

Below is the transcription of the speech and audience responses from the Martin Luther King, Jr., Research and Education Institute at Stanford University.

“I still have a dream. (*Yes*) It is a dream deeply rooted in the American dream. (*Yes*)

I have a dream (*Mhm*) that one day (*Yes*) this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed (*Hah*): “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.” (*Yeah, Uh-huh, Hear hear*) [*applause*]

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia (*Yes, Talk*), the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream (*Yes*) [*applause*] that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice (*Yeah*), sweltering with the heat of oppression (*Mhm*), will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream (*Yeah*) [*applause*] that my four little children (*Well*) will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. (*My Lord*) I have a dream today. [*enthusiastic applause*]

I have a dream that one day down in Alabama, with its vicious racists (*Yes, Yeah*), with its governor having his lips dripping with the words of “interposition” and “nullification” (*Yes*), one day right there in Alabama little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today. [*applause*] (*God help him, Preach*)

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted (*Yes*), every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain (*Yes*), and the

crooked places will be made straight (*Yes*), and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed [*cheering*], and all flesh shall see it together. (*Yes Lord*)

This is our hope. (*Yes, Yes*) This is the faith that I go back to the South with. (*Yes*) With this faith (*My Lord*) we will be able to hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope. (*Yes, All right*) With this faith (*Yes*) we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation (*Yes*) into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. (*Talk about it*) With this faith (*Yes, My Lord*) we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together (*Yes*), to stand up for freedom together (*Yeah*), knowing that we will be free one day. [*sustained applause*]

This will be the day, this will be the day when all of God's children (*Yes, Yeah*) will be able to sing with new meaning: "My country, 'tis of thee (*Yeah, Yes*), sweet land of liberty, of thee I sing. (*Oh yes*) Land where my fathers died, land of the pilgrim's pride (*Yeah*), from every mountainside, let freedom ring!" (*Yeah*)

And if America is to be a great nation (*Yes*), this must become true. So let freedom ring (*Yes, Amen*) from the prodigious hilltops of New Hampshire. (*Uh-huh*) Let freedom ring from the mighty mountains of New York. Let freedom ring from the heightening Alleghenies of Pennsylvania. (*Yes, all right*) Let freedom ring (*Yes*) from the snow-capped Rockies of Colorado. (*Well*) Let freedom ring from the curvaceous slopes of California. (*Yes*) But not only that: (*No*) Let freedom ring from Stone Mountain of Georgia. [*cheering*] (*Yeah, Oh yes, Lord*) Let freedom ring from Lookout Mountain of Tennessee. (*Yes*) Let freedom ring from every hill and molehill of Mississippi. (*Yes*) From every mountainside (*Yeah*) [*sustained applause*], let freedom ring.

And when this happens [*applause*] (*Let it ring, Let it ring*), and when we allow freedom ring (*Let it ring*), when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city (*Yes Lord*), we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children (*Yeah*), black men (*Yeah*) and white men (*Yeah*), Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics (*Yes*), will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual: "Free at last! (*Yes*) Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!" [*enthusiastic applause*]

Want to know more about the Topeka Symphony? Check us out
at:

Topeka Symphony Orchestra:
www.topekasymphony.org