

# FIDDLIN' AROUND

The Diverse Heritage of USA Strings Traditions

## Abstract

A study of the role played by Black strings players and composers in American folk, jazz and classical music.

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## Scottish Partnership for Arts and Education (SPAЕ)

### INTRODUCTION



While visiting historic Williamsburg, VA in 1989, I fortuitously picked up a replica manuscript entitled “The Tin Whistle Tune Book”, compiled and arranged by William E. White. Other replica manuscript books in this series are “A Little Keyboard Book” and “Colonial Keyboard Book.” Robert Burns and other poets and folklore loving Scots had begun collecting the poetry and song of their oral traditions and, by the late 17th century, these tunes were being published both in Scotland and England.



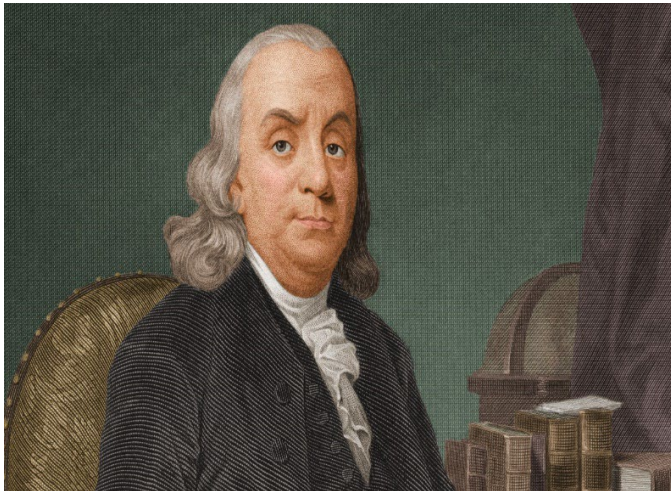
A Highland Wedding in Scotland. Dance musicians are Nathaniel Gow, fiddle, a man playing Cello, and a zither player. Back by the tree is a piper, taking a drink instead of playing the gig.

Many of these publications have been found in Old Williamsburg and are listed in the replica manuscripts. This was the music played for entertainment and for dances – even for formal balls for the governors.

**Also found in the replicas is the mention that many of the fiddlers at the dances were Black.** Black fiddlers were both enslaved people and freed people.

Some tune names in these replicas familiar today among old time, bluegrass, and country fiddlers such as “Money Musk”, “Soldiers Joy”, “Haste to the Wedding (or Rural Felicity)”, “Louden’s Bonnie Woods and Braes”, and “The Banks of Spey” could also be found at Thomas Jefferson’s plantation, Monticello.

Benjamin Franklin said this of Scottish tunes in one of his letters: “Having return’d home my daughter Sally endeavored to collect some of the music of this country’s production, to send to Miss Janet Dick in Scotland, in return for her most acceptable present of Scotch songs, music being a new art with us, Sally sang the songs to her harpsichord, and I played some of the softest tunes on my armonica, with which entertainment our people were quite charmed, and conceived the Scottish tunes to be the finest in the world. And indeed, there is so much simple beauty in many of them that it is my opinion they will never die...” (from *THE COMPLETED AUTOBIOGRAPHY* by Benjamin Franklin Compiled and edited by Mark Skousen, Ph.D. and Franklin descendent).



Benjamin Franklin



Sarah (Sally) Franklin

The French colonies in the Caribbean also play an important role in our diverse musical heritage, particularly when it comes to classical music. During the years leading up to the American Revolution and during the Revolution, France played a

major part in our independence story. At the same time, they were participating in the slave trade and being challenged in particular in Haiti.

We begin in France, before the American Revolution. Fencing master, Colonel in the French Revolution, conductor, virtuoso violinist and composer, **Joseph de Bologne, Chevalier de St. George** (1744-1799) was considered the finest violinist and conductor of his time among the nobles and royalty of 18<sup>th</sup> Century France.



Bologne was born on the French Caribbean Island of Guadeloupe, the son of a French plantation owner and Nanon, an enslaved woman of Senegalese origin who was 16 and Bologne's wife's maid. From the age of eight, he was educated in France. In 1752, his father had moved Joseph and his mother to France. In 1757, his father was named Gentleman of the King's chamber, serving as a personal assistant to King Louis XV.<sup>1</sup>

Joseph performed as a concert violinist and conducted several orchestras at the same time composing works for orchestra. In 1781, he became conductor of the newly formed orchestra *Le Concert Olympique* which commissioned and

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<sup>1</sup> Notes for the Los Angeles Opera production of *"The Anonymous Lover"* by Joseph de Boulogne. Performed virtually on November 14, 2020.

premiered Haydn's six *Paris Symphonies* in 1786, with Queen Marie Antoinette in attendance.<sup>2</sup>

Although he was renowned as a soloist, conductor and composer, he was met with barriers when trying to get his operas performed. When he applied for the directorship of the Paris Opera, three of the company's leading sopranos declared that they would not work under the direction of a mixed-race person.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, he wrote several operas, managing to get performances in smaller, private theatres.

**Bologne was seminal in developing a uniquely French genre for orchestra called the Symphony Concertante.** "A hybrid of the Baroque concerto grosso and the Classical concerto, a symphonic concertante usually featured two or more soloists in a virtuosic dialogue that emulated a musical duel. Bologne wrote eight such pieces between 1775 and '76, a testament to the demand for them among French audiences."

"In 1778, Mozart traveled to Paris, staying from March to September and briefly under the same roof as Bologne, hosted by Count Sickingen. It is implausible, to say the least, that Mozart did not hear Bologne's music during this period. Intriguingly, Mozart's first composition after his return to Austria was his *Symphonie Concertante* in E-flat (K.364). And in an article published in 1990 in the *Black Music Research Journal*, Gabriel Banat points to the remarkable similarities between an excerpt from a Bologne violin concerto (Op. 7, No. 1) from 1777 and a passage from Mozart's K. 364, from the following year, 1778. The gesture in question recurs in Bologne's solo string writing – a difficult sequence climbing to the highest register of the instrument, immediately followed by a dramatic dip – but had never appeared in Mozart's work until this Presto in K. 364."<sup>4</sup> So, if you ever hear Joseph Bologne referred to as "the Black Mozart", you need to correctly say that it was just the reverse. Bologne influenced Mozart, not the other way around. **Listen** to examples of his music on YouTube: for example - the Allegro in Bologne's "*Symphonie Concertante* in G" played by the Buskaid Orchestra of South Africa. There are also examples of his solo and chamber music on YouTube. **(links on page 18 of this study)**

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> *The New York Times* September 9, 2020; "His Name Is Joseph Boulogne, Not 'Black Mozart'" by Marcos Balter, first published July 22, 2020, updated July 24, 2020.

## Celtic and West African String Ensemble Traditions

Although it is not known whether Joseph Bologne's mother was a musician, the Senegalese have a long tradition of string music, both bowed instruments and plucked instruments. This is true of other West African cultures as well. In her book, *FIDDLELING IN WEST AFRICA*, Jacqueline Cogdell Djedje lists 89 different ethnic groups in 16 countries where a one-stringed, bowed instrument is played.<sup>5</sup> Instruments such as the Kora and the riti (this is the Wolof name for the instrument) correspond to the Celtic harp and the eventual use of the violin (fiddle) in traditional music of the Celts of Scotland, Ireland, Brittany and Gaul.



**Riti (bowed instrument)**



**Kora (lute harp)**

Players of the Kora and the Celtic harp were even used in similar ways. The players were the clan historians and they served the clan chiefs. In Mali and the Senegambia, Kora players are in guilds made up of families that specialize in learning the histories and playing and singing them. The apprenticeship is a seven-year process where, traditionally, the son would go to an uncle for his seven years of training. At the end of the seven years, he was required to go from town to town demonstrating that he knew all of the histories and the music.

**Listen to the African Classical Music Ensemble and Kasse Mady Diabate.** The English translation of the story he is telling is "There Was a Time". You can hear how "operatic" this music is in the way that he uses his voice in a full-throated way, without a microphone. **(link on page 18)**

Both the Kora and the Celtic harp are now played by both men and women and players are playing both traditional tunes as well as composing their own tunes. Kora players and the riti player, Juldeh Camara, have collaborated with European traditional musicians in recent decades. Watch **JULDEH CAMARA AND JUSTIN**

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<sup>5</sup> *FIDDLELING IN WEST AFRICA: Touching the Spirit in Fulbe, Hausa, and Dagbamba Cultures*; Jacqueline Cogdell Djedje, Indiana University Press, 2008.

ADAMS AT THE BBC PROMS, 2008 and Katell Boisneau and Yancouba Diabate – La Y Ka Duo. (links on page 18)



Kora orchestra with other plucked stringed instruments such as the n'goni



**Kasse Mady Diabate and the African Classical Music Ensemble**



## Musical Traditions Coming Together in the USA

It is not surprising that when enslaved West Africans were brought to the Americas, there were many musicians among them. At the same time, in Colonial America, there were fiddle players from Scotland and Ireland. As stated earlier, Old Williamsburg, VA. has documented the music being played there for dances and concerts, most of it was Scottish in the earliest days and many of the players were Black.<sup>6</sup>

Black fiddlers were both enslaved people and freed people. **Colonial Balls** were held regularly. Typical Instrumentation: Fiddle/violin, clarinet (based on the chalumeau), tambourine, triangle, bass drum (sometimes). Two of the Black musicians mentioned in the replica books, **Sy Gilliat, and London Briggs**, (Williamsburg, Virginia) played for all the State Balls. Williamsburg was the government center of the Virginia Colony.

**Beverly, Eston, and Madison Hemings** all professional level fiddlers and sons of Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings<sup>7</sup> – learned lots of Scottish songs and dance tunes growing up at Monticello, Jefferson’s plantation.

Being a musician was a skill that provided a bit of freedom to enslaved musicians and a bit of income to freed Black musicians. Enslaved musicians were “rented out” and most of the money they earned went to the white enslaver. There are many stories, however, of freedom being bought by these musicians after years of saving the small wages they may have received.

As people moved west, both black and white musicians carried the music via the Ohio River Valley and into Missouri and the Missouri River plantations.<sup>8</sup>

### Carrying the music west:

**Eston and Madison Hemings** in Ohio - Play “**Money Musk**” – Angus Waddle in the Chillicothe Leader, 26 Jan. 1887 wrote: “I wonder if the music is as good now as it used to be? I was at the great Charity Ball – as a looker on – given in this city a few weeks ago, where the music was furnished by the celebrated Barracks Band, but somehow or other it didn’t affect me at all like Heming’s used to at the balls

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<sup>6</sup> Music books at Old Williamsburg, VA.: The Tine Whistle Book, A Little Keyboard Book, and Colonial Keyboard Book.

<sup>7</sup> Gordon-Reed, Annette, ‘Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings an American Controversy’; University Press of Virginia, 1997.

<sup>8</sup> Johnson, Sara L., “*Popular Music of Cincinnati & The Ohio River Frontier from 1788 to 1825*” 1998

we are speaking of. When he with his violin, Graham Bell with his clarionet and Wambaw with the bass viol cut loose, there was only one thing to do, and that was – dance. When they struck up ‘Money Musk’, or ‘Wesson’s Slaughter House’, he was a chump indeed who could sit by and look on without clinching onto a pretty girl and joining the merry throng.....He was in demand in all the neighboring towns in the winter season, and Circleville, Lancaster, Portsmouth and Columbus frequently sought his services.....”<sup>9</sup> Eston and Madison Hemings had moved to Ohio in 1838 after their mother passed away. Eston moved to Wisconsin in 1858, so this article was written 29 years later and the memory of his music was still alive in Ohio.



**1866 – painting by  
Eastman Johnson**

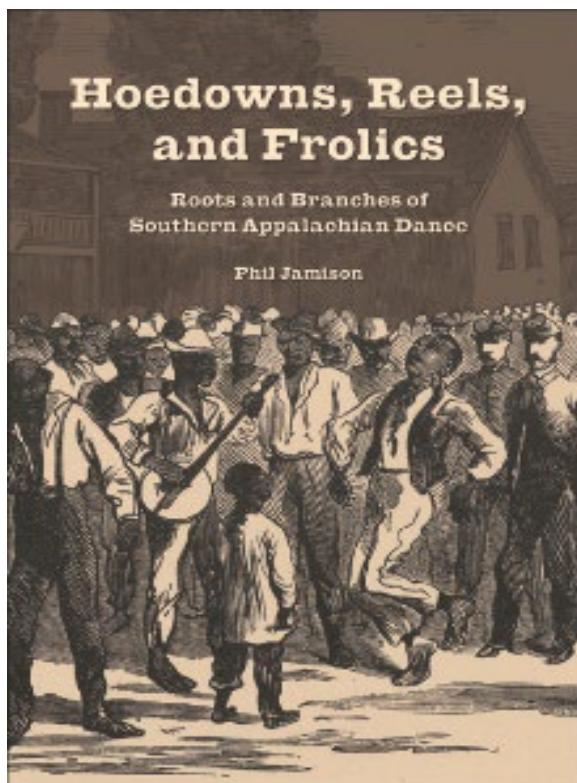


**The Barber Shop –  
Trenton, New York**

<sup>9</sup> Smithsonian Institute Online Archive of documents on the Hemings

This brings us to the question of the music of **Appalachia** which has been portrayed as a strictly Anglo and Scots-Irish phenomenon. This notion was introduced in the late 19th century by several early ethno-musicologists that visited Appalachia with the newly invented recording machines they brought to document their work. This was at the beginning of Jim Crow laws that codified racial segregation and these writers played right into that mentality.

Recent research is slowly disproving this monochromatic view. A terrific source of information can be found in Phil Jamison's book, "Hoedowns, Reels and Frolics: Roots and Branches of Southern Appalachian Dance."<sup>10</sup>



**"The Banjo Lesson"**  
by Henry Ossawa Tanner

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<sup>10</sup> Jamison, Phil, "Hoedowns, Reels, and Frolics – Roots and Branches of Southern Appalachian Dance" University of Illinois Press, 2015



1860s



1870s

Black fiddlers were still playing for both black and white dance parties all over Missouri as late as the 1940s and 50s.



Louis Southworth



Jim Perry



Bill Driver



Bill Katon

**Bill Driver** and **Bill Katon** are two examples whose music can be found on recordings.<sup>11</sup> Look into the CDs published by Rounder Records for more documentation and pure listening enjoyment. For Ozarks fiddle music see “Ozarks Fiddle Music” by Drew Beisswenger and Gordon McCann for Mel Bey. This collection includes histories for each of the 308 featured tunes and includes a CD of many of the selections. **To learn some of Bill Katon’s tunes see the link on page 18 of this study for a teaching video. You can find recordings of Bill Driver on the Jake Blount website listed on page 19.**

<sup>11</sup> Article from Missouri Traditional Fiddle & Dance Network, “African-American Fiddlers in Central Missouri” 2017

**It was the recording industry that greatly influenced our concepts of who played which music.** Marketing strategies separated “race music” from old-time and later Country and Bluegrass. Recording companies were willing to record Black musicians who played the blues but, increasingly less willing to present them playing other forms of popular music.

There is a renewed interest in the origins of Country, Bluegrass and old-time music and one of the groups doing a lot of the research and playing the music is **The Carolina Chocolate Drops**. Look for the names Rhiannon Giddens and Dom Lemons for their music.



Other traditional groups active today:

The Ebony Hillbillies – they have many albums.

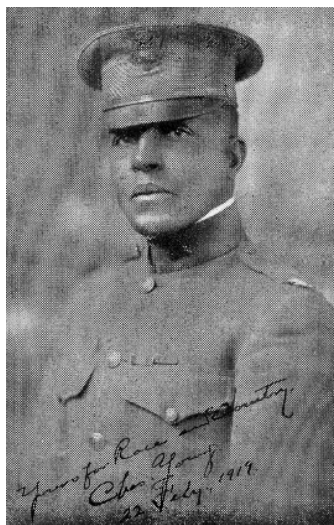
Jake Blount is another young fiddler who is learning about his African American and Indigenous fiddle music.

**Links for both of these groups are on page 19.**

**Why spend so much time on roots of our folk music?** Because, just like with baseball or basketball, the more home-made ball fields and hoops people are playing on, the more players prepare themselves for an opportunity to make that sport their life's work. You can say the same for music, the more skill you build and the greater the pool of players, the more likely it is that musicians will explore other forms of music. The other thing is, symphonic and operatic forms of classical music require string players and these string players were playing folk music.

Black musicians were hearing the classical music of their times and also learning to read music. Many references are made to the musicians connected with the Hemingses of Monticello and surrounding towns.<sup>12</sup>

Biographies of great Black Americans from abolitionists to military men<sup>13</sup>, to poets tell us that most played violin and many also played piano and could play popular, folk and classical music. Frederick Douglass is probably the most famous of these. His wife, Anna Murray Douglass, was a free woman and professional violin teacher in Baltimore. She read music and played both classical and fiddle styles. Douglass went to her for lessons while he was still enslaved and one of their grandsons, Joseph Douglass, became a concert violinist and taught at Howard University.<sup>14</sup>



**Colonel Charles Young**  
Violinist, pianist, composer



**Joseph & Frederick Douglass**



**Paul Laurence Dunbar**  
Poet, violinist, pianist

<sup>12</sup> Gordon-Reed, Annette, *"The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Epic"* W.W. Norton and Co., 2008

<sup>13</sup> Shellum, Brian G., *"Black Officer in a Buffalo Soldier Regiment- The Military Career of Charles Young"* University of Nebraska Press, 2010

<sup>14</sup> Stauffer, John, *"Giants: The Parallel Lives of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln"* Twelve, 2009

The musical milieu for 19<sup>th</sup> Century Black Americans was deep and rich. There were many instrumentalists: fiddlers, violinists, pianists, and much more. When musicians didn't have a violin, they would make one from any number of materials, including corn stalks. Classical music was studied and played in concert.



**The Summit Avenue Ensemble, Atlanta, Georgia**

The violin was the lead instrument even in very early New Orleans jazz groups.<sup>15</sup> This is an area waiting for more musicological research.



**Jimmy Palao's Original Creole Orchestra 1910**

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<sup>15</sup> Singleton, Joan, *Keep It Real: The Life Story of James "Jimmy" Palao, 'The King of Jazz'*; iUniverse, Inc. 2011

## William Grant Still



**Every student of music in the USA should know the name and music of the great American composer, William Grant Still.**

**William Grant Still** – 1895-1978 – composer of 150 works, including five ballets, five symphonies and eight operas. Still was the first African American composer to have an opera produced by the New York City Opera. Born in Mississippi, he grew up in Little Rock, Arkansas. Still started violin at age 15 and was self-taught on many other instruments before graduating high school at 16. He went to Wilberforce Un., Oberlin Conservatory of Music and was a student of George Whitefield Chadwick and Edgard Varese in composition. Still was the first African American to conduct a major American symphony orchestra, have a symphony (his 1<sup>st</sup> Symphony) performed by a leading orchestra, have an opera performed by a major opera company, and first to have an opera performed on national television. He had a close association with Alain Locke and Langston Hughes and is considered part of the Harlem Renaissance. He was a great admirer of the poet, Paul Laurence Dunbar, mentioned earlier, and set many of Dunbar’s poems to music.

Still is an excellent example of the career trajectory of most African American Classically trained musicians throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. He found work from 1919 on arranging music for popular bands, starting with Fletcher Henderson and moving on to Paul Whiteman in 1929. Meantime, he played in the pit orchestra for Eubie Blake’s musical, “Shuffle Along” and was the arranger of “Yamekraw”, a ‘Negro Rhapsody’ composed by the noted Harlem stride pianist, James P. Johnson. In the 1930s and 40s, he arranged for Willard Robison’s “Deep River Hour” and Paul Whiteman’s “Old Gold Show”, both popular CBS and NBC



Radio broadcasts as well as arranging for films starring Bing Crosby, Jane Wyath and Ronald Colman among others. In 1936 he conducted the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orch., becoming the first African American to conduct a major symphony orchestra in the USA. He went on to conduct other major orchestras and his works have been played by the Berlin Philharmonic Orch., the London Symphony Orch., the Tokyo Philharmonic, the BBC Orchestra, and the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra.

**Listen** to his Afro-American Symphony (1930). It opens with a blues theme which he develops. The second theme is more lyrical and feels like a spiritual. He develops this in a more dance-like style. His orchestration of the winds and his “billowing” effect – where the music seems to billow like clouds out of itself is characteristic of his sound. **(link found on page 18 of this study)**

Hearing of all of these successes, one would think that William Grant Still was one of the “lucky ones” who was “allowed” to find success, but the truth is, that Still had to face many instances of racist decisions about whether or not he would have success.

The most tragic incident, though, was surrounding his opera “Troubled Island”, a story about the Haitian Revolution, written in 1938, with libretto by Langston Hughes and Still’s wife, Verna Arvey, but not produced until 1949. The New York City Opera took on the project and expectations were extremely high because of the successes of Still’s symphonic works. Everyone connected with the production anticipated a huge success. The work was contracted for three performances over a six-week time-span. Before the first performance, John Briggs, music critic for *The New York Post*, told Still that all of the critics were going to pan his opera and, in fact, that is what happened. Even though there were twenty-two curtain calls for the composer at the end of the first performance, the critics were determined to scuttle the whole show.<sup>16</sup> After the third contracted performance, the opera has never been performed again.

**Listen** to the very short overture and the first aria. This was recorded live in 1949 at the first performance. It is a lullaby in which Celeste sings to her child that he will be free one day and shine as a leader. **(link on page 18, translation and synopsis of the opera on pp. 19-21)**

After this disappointment, Still continued to write symphonies, operas, ballets and chamber music. These works were performed in smaller venues and at colleges and universities where Still was also a frequent lecturer. In order to keep

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<sup>16</sup> Still, Judith Anne and Lisa M. Headlee, *Just Tell the Story – Troubled Island*, The Master-Player Library, 2006

his music available and keep his name known, his daughter, Judith Anne Still, formed a music company and has edited many collections of Still's writings. **Listen** to two versions of Still's "Mother and Child" (second movement of his Suite for Violin and Piano). **(link on page 19)**

Still's music fuses all of the music with which he was associated – big band jazz, classical forms, African American spirituals, complex chords. He developed a distinct sound. Once you listen to a lot of his music, you will begin to recognize the musical "palette" that he developed. He and other Black composers of his time such as W.C. Handy, Eubie Blake, and H.T. Burleigh influenced white composers such as George Gershwin, who became very famous as a result. This was during the years of Jim Crow and Black musicians did not have the support from publishers and promoters that the white musicians had.

Since the killing of George Floyd, in an effort to dismantle systemic racism, there is a new interest from arts organizations to seek out the work of Black musicians and performers, including interest in the music of William Grant Still. Opera Theatre of St. Louis presented his one act opera "Highway 1, USA" in its 2021 season. Look up the music of other composers such as Still's contemporary Florence Price (1887-1953).

Other composers of note are Francis Johnson (1792-1844), Margaret Bonds (1913-1972), George Walker (1922-2018), T.J. Anderson (b. 1928), Adolphus Hailstork (b. 1941), Tania Leon b. 1943, Robert A. Harris (b. 1938), Joseph Joubert (b. 1958), Rosephanye Powell (b. 1962), Anthony Davis (b. 1951), Terence Blanchard (b. 1962), Damien Sneed, Leslie Adams (b. 1932), Shawn Okpebholo (B. 1981), Joshua Brian Campbell (b. 1994), Fred Onovwerosuake (b.1960, lives in St. Louis), Wynton Marsalis (b. 1961) and Nkeiru Okoye (b. 1972). Two Afro-European composers of note are George Bridgetower (1778-1860) and Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875-1912).

### **Conclusion**

This study just scratches the surface of the contributions of Black musicians to the music of the USA. Use the names and musical links to do research on your own. As you develop your own musical taste, listen to the examples provided here and work to play as much as you can of this great music no matter what the style or genre.

**Play it all and know the stories.**

**.Suggested Listening Selections on YouTube:**

**Joseph de Boulogne, Chevalier de Saint Georges** – Symphony Concertante in G – Allegro – The Buskaid Orchestra of South Africa

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=Buskaid+Orchestra+on+youtube&&view=detail&mid=6AAA7F714146103AC4836AAA7F714146103AC483&&FORM=VDRVRV>

**Joseph de Boulogne, Chevalier de Saint Georges** – Sonata no. 2 in A – Quinton Morris, violinist, Li-Tan Hsu, pianist

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=Buskaid+Orchestra+on+youtube&&view=detail&mid=D66234915EC9A62EDD3DD66234915EC9A62EDD3D&&FORM=VDRVRV>

**Boulogne** – Adagio in F minor – Raymond Jackson, pianist

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=Buskaid+Orchestra+on+youtube&&view=detail&mid=8327972FA5D2883707578327972FA5D288370757&&FORM=VDRVRV>

**Juldeh Camara and Justin Adams at BBC PROMS 2008**

[Justin Adams and Juldeh Camara \(live on BBC Proms, july 2008\) - YouTube](#)

**Katell Boisneau & Yancouba Diabate** – La Y Ka Duo November 10, 2014 at L’eolienne, Marseille, FR.

[https://video.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search?ei=UTF-8&hsimp=yhs-att\\_001&hspart=att&p=Katell+Boisneau+%26+Yancouba+Diabate+on+youtube&type=att\\_pc\\_homerun\\_portal\\_bucket\\_anim\\_nog](https://video.search.yahoo.com/yhs/search?ei=UTF-8&hsimp=yhs-att_001&hspart=att&p=Katell+Boisneau+%26+Yancouba+Diabate+on+youtube&type=att_pc_homerun_portal_bucket_anim_nog)

**Bill Katon** – Missouri fiddler from Central Missouri – this is a workshop by Charlie Walden, old time fiddler from Missouri. He plays a few old recordings of Katon’s tunes – first 15 minutes of the film. Tunes are: “Fever in the South”, “Beef Steak”, “Walkin With the Yallow Gal” and “Black Sally Gooden.”

**Walden teaches the tunes by ear, so you can learn the tunes they are working on.**

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=Bill+Katon+music&docid=608038550540452436&mid=3D610AD58F8FD9F298013D610AD58F8FD9F29801&view=detail&FORM=VIRE>

**William Grant Still** – Afro-American Symphony (Symphony #1 in A flat Major) - 1930

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8hzFcm6HCeI>

**William Grant Still** – Troubled Island – opera – 1938 – Recording 1949 live at premiere – cast list and synopsis on next two pages

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k-JyCiN3Iwg>

**William Grant Still** – Summerland – violin and piano – Eileen M

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=William+Grant+Still+on+youtube&&view=detail&mid=B2198CD43151BC59CD1DB2198CD43151BC59CD1D&&FORM=VDRVRV>

**William Grant Still** – Mother and Child (Second Movement of Suite for Violin and Piano) – Duo Diorama, husband and wife duo – They dedicate their performance to and in honor of George Floyd and Floyd’s mother with pictures at the end of this beautiful performance.

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=William+Grant+Still+for+Children&ru=%2fvideos%2fsearch%3fq%3dWilliam%2bGrant%2bStill%2bfor%2bChildren%26FORM%3dVD>

**William Grant Still** - Mother and Child arranged for saxophone by Andy Peeks – gorgeous on saxophone performed by Robert Young.

<https://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=William+Grant+Still+for+Children&ru=%2fvideos%2fsearch%3fq%3dWilliam%2bGrant%2bStill%2bfor%2bChildren%26FORM>

### **George Walker**

[Remembering George Walker, the first Black composer to win the Pulitzer Prize for... - Classic FM](#) includes “Lilacs” for soprano and orchestra and “Lyric for Strings.” **Also imbedded in this article is a video by the young Black violinist, Randall Goosby, who plays portions of compositions by William Grant Still, Florence Price, Joseph Bologne, and Samuel Coleridge-Taylor. This is a must watch for young orchestra students and prospective orchestra students.**

**Fred Onovwerosuake - Born in Ghana of Nigerian parents, lives in St. Louis, MO.**

[Fred Onovwerosuoke, Official homepage \(fredomusic.com\)](#)

### **RESOURCES**

1. BLACK OFFICER IN A BUFFALO SOLDIER REGIMENT: THE MILITARY CAREER OF CHARLES YOUNG, Brian G. Shellum; University of Nebraska Press, 2010.
2. FIDDLING IN WEST AFRICA: TOUCHING THE SPIRIT IN FULBE, HAUSA, AND DAGBAMBA CULTURES: Jacqueline Cogdell Djedje, Indiana University Press, 2008.
3. Jake Blount – Music – This site includes valuable resources on Black Fiddlers. [Jake Blount](#)  
[Jake Blount - Black Stringband Resources](#)  
[▶ Whoa Mule | Teodar Jackson with T.J. Jackson | Field Recorders' Collective \(bandcamp.com\)](#)
4. Ebony Hillbillies – [THE EBONY HILLBILLIES/ EH music](#) website with multiple albums – SLAPPIN A RABBIT LIVE is a great example.  
[The Ebony Hillbillies "Shenandoah" - YouTube](#)  
[The Ebony Hillbillies perform at the 2012 Folklife Festival - YouTube](#)  
[The Ebony Hillbillies "Shenandoah" - YouTube](#)  
[The Ebony Hillbillies bring old timey music to Lincoln Center and everybody dances! 8/13/11 - YouTube](#)  
[The Ebony Hillbillies - Liza Jane - YouTube](#)
5. [From Africa to Appalachia - YouTube](#)
6. IT'S OUR MUSIC TOO: The Black Experience In Classical Music: Earl Ofari Hutchinson, Middle Passage Press 2016
7. KEEP IT REAL: THE LIFE STORY OF JAMES “JIMMY” PALAO, THE KING OF JAZZ, Joan Singleton; iUniverse, Inc. 2011.
8. Missouri Traditional Fiddle & Dance Network
9. Musical Ancestries – “Scotland”; “West Africa” - <https://classic1073.org/musical-ancestries-west-africa>, [Musical Ancestries™: Scotland – Classic 107.3 \(classic1073.org\)](#)

**RESOURCES FOR WILLIAM GRANT STILL can be found at [www.williamgrantstillmusic.com](http://www.williamgrantstillmusic.com)**

10. IN ONE LIFETIME Verna Arvey, University of Arkansas Press, 1984

11. The following information is from “Just Tell the Story – Troubled Island” edited by Judith Anne Still and Lisa M. Headlee, pages 23-27. The opera was composed in 1938 but not performed until 1949.

**“TROUBLED ISLAND”**

Music by William Grant Still

Libretto by Langston Hughes

With additional lyrics by Verna Arvey

Conducted by Laszlo Halasz (1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> performances)

And Julius Rudel (3<sup>rd</sup> performance)

Choreography by George Balanchine (minuet)

And Jean Leon Destine (voodoo dances)

Stage Direction by Eugene Bryden

Stage and Costume Design by H.A. Condell

Dedicated to Leopold Stokowski

Premiere performance on March 31, 1949, subsequent performances on April 10 and May 1, 1949.

**CAST**

Celeste, A Slave Mother	Muriel O’Malley (mezzo soprano)
Popo, Slave	Nathaniel Sprinzena (tenor)
Azelia, wife of Dessalines	Marie Powers (contralto)
Dessalines, Slave Leader	Robert Weede (baritone)
	Lawrence Winters
Martel, an Old Man	Oscar Natzka (bass)
Vuval, a Mulatto	Richard Charles, debut (tenor)
Stenio, Vuval’s Cousin	Arthur Newman (baritone)
Papaloi, Voodoo Priest	Robert McFerrin (tenor)
Mamaloi, Voodoo Priestess	Ruth Stewart (soprano)
Claire, the Mulatto Empress	Helena Bliss, debut (soprano)
	Margaret Piazza
1 <sup>st</sup> Servant	Dorothy MacNeil (soprano)
2 <sup>nd</sup> Servant	Frances Bible (mezzo soprano)
3 <sup>rd</sup> Servant	Rosalind Nadell (alto)
The Steward	Edwin Dunning (baritone)
The Chamberlain	Richard Wentworth (bass)
The Herald	unknown (tenor)
The Messenger	William Stanz (tenor)
The Fisherman	Edwin Dunning (baritone)
The Mango Vendor	Francis Bible (mezzo soprano)
The Melon Vendor	Mary Lesawyer (soprano)
Ragamuffin boys	Sam Weiss and others
Various choruses and dancers	

NOTE: Most of the solo roles were sung by White singers. Exceptions were Ruth Stewart and Robert McFerrin.

### SYNOPSIS

Time: 1791, Place: Haiti

#### **ACT ONE: In Front of an Abandoned Sugar Mill**

A Slave Mother, Celeste, sings her child to sleep with dreams of freedom. Dessalines' wife, Azelia, arrives with arms hidden in baskets as revolutionaries are heard in the background. Dessalines arrives and together they lament the hopelessness of slaves in love. Martel, Dessalines' old friend sings passionately about the Black man's fate. Dessalines, with great fanfare and, with the blessings of the Voodoo priests, leads the revolutionaries "to the hills of freedom".

#### **ACT TWO, Scene 1: The Palace of The Emperor – Several Years Later**

Dessalines, who is illiterate, is mocked by his secretary, Vuval, a Mulatto, who opposes the Black regime. Martel advises Dessalines that freedom must be found in Haiti and it should be for both Black and White Haitians. Dessalines has divorced Azelia and married Claire, a Mulatto who, in love with Vuval, agrees to aid him in revolting against Dessalines. They plan to flee to Paris afterward.

#### **ACT TWO, Scene 2: The Banquet Terrace**

In the midst of this luxurious entertainment, Azelia tries to warn Dessalines of the discontent of his subjects but is turned away first by a trio of female servants, then by the guards. A pompous minuet begins, is interrupted by a vigorous voodoo dance which is stopped by Claire. Drums of the revolutionaries are heard and Dessalines leaves to lead his troops against the rebels.

#### **ACT THREE: A Quay in a Fishing Village**

The market is alive with vendors and fisherman preparing to go to sea, Azelia enters and is ridiculed as a crazed old woman by the market women. Stenio and Vuval arrive and set a trap for Dessalines. When he arrives, he duels with Stenio but as he knocks Stenio's sword from his hand, Vuval steps out and shoots Dessalines in the back. His body is stripped of his regalia by a group of ragamuffins. They are run off by Azelia, who goes to Dessalines' body and mourns his death – alone.

### Links to Lesson Plans:

**Suzanne Palmer:** [Lesson Plans on SPAE Website](#)

**Blake Hernton:** [Josephe Bologne-Chevalier Saint Georges by Blake Hernton on Prezi Next](#)

[Fiddlers on the Map by Blake Hernton on Prezi Next](#)

[Her Story: Florence B. Price by Blake Hernton on Prezi Next](#)

## The Creative Team



### Suzanne Palmer

As a music educator for over thirty-five years, Mrs. Palmer is the Fine Arts Director in the Normandy Schools Collaborative. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Music Education from the University of Missouri-Columbia and a Master of Education Administration from the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Maestra Suzanne Palmer is the artistic director and conductor of the Community Gospel Choir of St. Louis and is the founder of The Fellowship of Souls Gospel Ensemble.

Mrs. Palmer has blazed a trail not only as a prolific music educator but also as a professional singer and music director.

Mrs. Palmer has put her talent to work to teach many people in her words- the transformative, life affirming, spiritual power of music to bind, cleanse and heal the soul.

She has received many awards and is the recipient of The St. Louis Arts and Education Council-Arts Educator of the Year-Legacy Award 2023.

Suzanne is a member of Tau Beta Sigma Music Sorority, The Missouri Music Educators Association, The Music Choral Directors Association and has been called to serve as an educational consultant focused on diversity, equity and inclusion for both The Bach Society of St. Louis, and Opera Theater of St. Louis. Suzanne Palmer is also a proud member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.



## Blake Hernton

Blake Hernton is a concert violinist/violist from Black Jack, Missouri (North County St. Louis). Hernton is a Truman State University graduate with a Bachelors in Music (2014) and a Masters of Arts in Education (2016). Practicing and performing string pedagogy since the age of 10, Hernton has a reputation in the St. Louis Area for his career as a musician and music educator throughout several local school districts and private studios. Currently, Hernton teaches orchestra at Ritenour High School in Overland, Missouri. Despite the fact that many students in the community come from low income families and access to arts education is limited, Hernton prides himself on providing exposure to music education to students that would not otherwise be able to participate in public school orchestra programs.

Hernton has featured and performed background string productions in the St. Louis music scene with local artists including The Holy Posers, NandoSTL, and Stringz EMB. As a member of the Ophelia String Quartet, Hernton performs for wedding ceremonies and in several local venues hosting concerts in the community to offer free classical and contemporary experiences to students and members of the St. Louis Area. Hernton is best known for the release of his 2020 EP, Concert Black also featured in the Chamber Project of St. Louis as part of their “Groove” Concert November 18, 2022 at Washington University.

Hernton’s greatest passion is for his local high school orchestra students who enjoy learning a multitude of genres including traditional Classical Music, Neo Soul, Gospel, and Hip-Hop. As an educator and recording artist, Blake is no stranger to sharing the joy and love of music whether with students or with an audience, passion is priority.





## Diane McCullough

Diane McCullough taught music at the Laboratory Schools University of Chicago for eleven years and in the St. Louis Public Schools for twenty years at Marquette and Carr Lane Visual and Performing Arts Middle Schools, retiring in June, 2007. Since earning her Masters in Voice from Washington University in 1963, her musical career has combined teaching with singing opera and playing ethnic music. She combined professional singing (art song, opera and 20<sup>th</sup> century chamber music) with teaching for 13 years in the Chicago area then spent 7 years in Germany (6 at the Nationaltheatre Mannheim) singing opera. She returned to teaching in St. Louis in 1987 and continued her relationship with opera as a cooperating teacher with the Opera Theatre of St. Louis Education Department. She guided her sixth and seventh grade students in writing their own operas for 7 years at Carr Lane. In 2000, Opera Theatre of St. Louis produced one of these operas, *Sukey and the Mermaid*, on their main stage. Diane has been a national trainer for the “MUSIC! WORDS! OPERA!” curriculum since 1996. She continues M!W!O! work for Opera Theatre of St. Louis as a music consultant, writing listening guides for the operas they present in schools. Missouri Music Educators Association St. Louis Metro District Eight awarded her the 2006 Merit Award and the 2008 Hall of Fame Award for Outstanding Service to Music Education and to Metro District Eight.

She has been a founding director for three nonprofit organizations – 1) Karumanta, an Andean flute band, 2) The St. Louis Scottish Games, and 3) Scottish Partnership for Arts and Education (SPAE). SPAE was her brainchild and she is their artistic director and grants administrator. SPAE, founded in 2006, provides free Artist in Residence workshops in Scottish traditional fiddle, Scots and Gaelic song, poetry and their connections to American music and poetry, and professional development workshops for teachers, including a STEAM lesson on felting.

She received an “Ageless Remarkable St. Louisan” award from the St. Andrew Charitable Foundation in 2022.

Besides doing work for SPAE and leading the band “Peat Fire Flame”, Ms. McCullough volunteers as:

- Co-chair of the Docents Committee for Opera Theatre of St. Louis’s Guild. 2008-2020
- Chair of the Entertainment and Sound Committee for the St. Louis Scottish Games. 2007-2017
- Chair of the Advocacy Committee for Opera Theatre of St. Louis’s Guild 2020-present
- Serves as an Elder at Webster Groves Presbyterian Church and is active on the Presbytery of Giddings-Lovejoy Dismantling Racism and White Privilege Committee (DRAWP). The DRAWP Committee successfully submitted “An Overture of Apology to African Americans for the Sin of Slavery and its Legacy” to the Presbyterian Church USA General Assembly in 2022. It is now an official statement of apology from the PCUSA.

[www.stlspae.org](http://www.stlspae.org)

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