

**NEWS RELEASE**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Jan. 27, 2022Contact: Allison King  
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## *Students give voice to relevant concerns of race, climate change through music*

**Portland, Ore.:** Symphony Orchestra musicians will open a conversation about social conscience Sunday, March 6, at the Newmark Theater. Under celebrated music director and conductor Dr. Raúl Gómez-Rojas, Metropolitan Youth Symphony students offer relevant commentary through the music of Black composer William Grant Still and contemporary American composer Andrea Reinkemeyer.

"MYS students know that playing music together is fun and exciting, but they also understand it is a powerful way of raising your voice for important issues. ... I've learned that their generation deeply cares about racial equity and climate activism as keys to a better future," says Dr. Gómez-Rojas, whose vision for music education and outreach has aligned with Metropolitan Youth Symphony's mission since taking over the baton for the nearly 50-year-old local nonprofit six years ago.

"While written in 1931, William Grant Still's *Symphony No. 1* is still relevant as we continue to grapple with issues of racism in America," says Dr. Gómez-Rojas. "*Smoulder*, by Oregon's own Andrea Reinkemeyer, is a powerful reminder of the devastating effects of the wildfires that continue to cause great destruction across the Western United States, exacerbated by climate change."

With music that lends itself toward meaningful, relevant discussion and contemplation, MYS has come to be known for its inclusive and forward-thinking programming, including establishing a partnership with FearNoMusic's Young Composer Project. Through the commissioning program *The Authentic Voice*, MYS features original pieces from young composers in every Downtown Series concert, partnering with some exciting up-and-coming voices in modern music.

To this end, Beaverton, Ore., Sunset High School graduate and current Juilliard student Rohan Srinivasan will see the world premiere of his original piece *Rhythms in Motion* by the very youth orchestra organization he once played in.

"We are so proud of the excellence and talent of all the young artists who have created music," says Dr. Gómez-Rojas. "Rohan's piece was intended to be performed in May of 2020, before the pandemic, while he was still in high school ... Close to two years later, Rohan is now a composition student at Juilliard, and we are thrilled to finally be able to perform his piece."

Srinivasan adds, “Opportunities to compose for orchestra are rare (especially for a young composer!), so I am especially thankful to Dr. Gómez and Jeff Payne and Ryan Francis from FearNoMusic for making sure this program exists. ... I’ve been exploring bigger questions that I think are more important, interesting, and personal to me as a composer. These days, things are fluid and unpredictable, and it’s a feeling I want to explore in my music.”

Srinivasan is a three-time participant in the Young Composers Project, a program cultivating musical creativity and curiosity since its inception in 1997.

MYS’ March Concert is the second to feature Symphony Orchestra live and in-person since pivoting back from online programming during the 2020-2021 season.

## **Spring Concert**

### ***In Characters of Fire: Music’s Relevance***

Symphony Orchestra

March 6, 7:30 pm, Newmark Theater

- **Symphony No. 1 in A flat Major, Afro-American Symphony**, by William Grant Still (b. 1895, d. 1978), is the first symphony written by an African American performed for an American audience by a leading orchestra. Since its 1931 debut, Still’s *Afro-American Symphony* has inspired and enthralled listeners with its blues-soaked melodic lines, hymn-like infusions, and slow modal sections. Calling for a banjo and a harp, Still created a jazz-influenced classical composition that extols four human states: longing, sorrow, humor, and aspiration. Each movement is underscored by accompanying epigraphic verse from poetry great Paul Laurence Dunbar. The fourth movement, *Aspiration*, or *Lento, con risoluzione*, from Dunbar’s “Ode to Ethiopia,” includes the inspiration for the concert’s name and theme:

*Be proud, my Race, in mind and soul.  
Thy name is writ on Glory’s scroll  
**In characters of fire.**  
High ‘mid the clouds of Fame’s bright sky  
Thy banner’s blazoned folds no fly,  
And truth shall lift them higher.*

- **Smoulder**, by Andrea Reinkemeyer (b. 1976), evokes the devastation of forest fires and other ominous signs of climate change. Dr. Reinkemeyer, an Oregon native whose commissioned piece for MYS has won several awards as a wind ensemble piece, says, “climate change is one of the top issues among America’s youth, and there is a growing discontent with inaction on this front. With this in mind, the piece unfolds through a brooding arch form. I wrote this piece to honor the young performers who will deal with these complex issues for the rest of their lives.” *Smoulder* employs unique instrumentation including crinkled paper meant to sound like kindling and brush smoldering in the forest. The tacit haunting percussion throughout the largo piece is bold, heavy, and virtuosic.
- **Rhythms in Motion**, by Rohan Srinivasan (b. 2003), is a percussive piece whose steady pulse is perhaps a rhythmic representation of life’s perpetuity – sometimes cacophonous, sometimes smooth, but always moving. Malleted percussion is overlaid with woodwinds, and then a dissonant harp compounds the musical tension rhythmically

and musically. “I wanted to ensure each section of the orchestra got to be a part of the pulse at some point,” says Srinivasan, who originally meant to reflect the “shadowy outline of a dance” with this piece. “If traditional Western classical concert culture is followed, it’s going to be pin-drop silent during my ‘dance. So am I really writing a dance? ... I concluded that without dancing, all I’ve got are rhythms constantly in motion.” This is the world premiere of *Rhythms in Motion*, made possible through The Authentic Voice.

Sinfonietta Orchestra and Interlude Orchestra join Symphony Orchestra for MYS’ second Downtown Series concert live and in-person. **Tickets: \$11 - \$43 at [www.playmys.org](http://www.playmys.org), or call 503.239.4566.**

## The Composers



**Andrea Reinkemeyer** (b. 1976) is an award-winning American composer whose musical explorations focus on intersectional social narratives. An Oregon native, Dr. Reinkemeyer “offers a luminous glimpse of the next world” (*Fanfare Magazine*) using “spare, melancholy passages to traverse a complex emotional landscape” (*Eugene Weekly*). Dr. Reinkemeyer has enjoyed commissions from Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra and League of American Orchestras with support from the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation, Albany (NY) Symphony Orchestra, H. Robert Reynolds and Detroit Chamber Winds and Strings, Rodney Dorsey, FearNoMusic, and Rhymes with Opera. Her music is distributed by Murphy Press and the

ADJ•ective Composers’ Collective and featured on recordings by: Idit Shner, In Mulieribus, Primary Colors Trio, A/B Duo, and Post-Haste Reed Duo. Beyond her compositions, Dr. Reinkemeyer is committed to music education, mentorship, and outreach. She is currently Associate Professor of Music Composition and Theory at Linfield University where she coordinates the Composers Studio and Lacroute Composer Readings. Learn more at [www.andreareinkemeyer.com](http://www.andreareinkemeyer.com)



**Rohan Srinivasan** (b. 2003) is celebrating his first commission by Metropolitan Youth Symphony as a three-time participant in FearNoMusic’s Young Composer Project. A 2021 Sunset High School graduate, Srinivasan first began composing at the age of 13. Complex polyrhythms heavily appealed to and inspired Srinivasan, and his innate understanding of dense music led him to jazz and drums. He put aside his cello to play in his high school jazz band, eventually working with the Portland Jazz Composer’s Ensemble. He developed an ear for dissonance and rhythmic tension. Keenly aware of the ebbing landscape of musical literacy and the dissipation of genres in the music industry, Srinivasan began to use music to explore the more existential queries in life. “Being a ‘21<sup>st</sup>-century

composer’ has a nice ring to it, but I’m still figuring out what exactly that means. How can my music reflect the changes in the way we relate to time and space caused by the digital age? The score is not a gatekeeper anymore, so what does it mean to be a composer in a ‘post-literate’ age? I don’t know the answer(s) to any of these questions, but I’m asking them anyway. I think that’s part of the fun of being a composer.” Srinivasan studied under Dr. Ryan Francis and now is a student at The Juilliard School in New York.

(con’t)



**William Grant Still** (b. 1895, d. 1978) was the first African-American to conduct a major symphony orchestra, the first African-American to have an orchestral composition performed by a leading symphony orchestra, the first African-American to have an opera performed by a major opera company, and the first to have an opera performed on national television. Born in Mississippi to an English teacher (mother) and a grocer and bandleader (father), Still taught himself to play various woodwinds and strings. He eventually started his own band and left his medical studies behind to pursue music. Still not only became a prominent composer but an influencer in the literary and cultural worlds in the Harlem Renaissance as well. With over 200 works attributed to him, Still was known as the Dean of Afro-American Composers. In his lifetime, he was the recipient of three Guggenheim Fellowships in music composition and at least one dozen other awards and fellowships. He was awarded honorary doctorates from nine universities, including Oberlin and the Peabody Conservatory. He continued to receive posthumous awards for his music through the 1980s.

## About MYS



**Raúl Gómez-Rojas** began his sixth season as Music Director of the Metropolitan Youth Symphony this fall. Lauded as a “visionary conductor” (Oregon ArtsWatch), Dr. Gómez-Rojas inspires audiences and artists of all ages and backgrounds to use music as a vehicle to connect, pursue excellence, and spread joy. Guided by this idea, he offers his time as an orchestral conductor, violinist/violist, clinician, public speaker, and the host for All Classical Portland’s “On Deck with Young Musicians.” Dr. Gómez-Rojas is a regular guest with the Oregon Symphony, both conducting and leading patrons through pre-concert talks. Other conducting highlights include appearances with the Louisiana Symphony, YOA Orchestra of the Americas, the Chamber Orchestra of San Antonio, Acadiana Symphony Orchestra, and multiple engagements in Mexico, Brazil, and his native Costa Rica. Since coming on board with MYS, Dr. Gómez-Rojas has augmented programming to include a partnership with The Authentic Voice, masterclasses with a veritable Who’s Who of current symphonic fame, YouTube conversations called “Virtual Hangouts” with artists from Portland and across the globe, and a conservatory-like stepped music theory curriculum, all while never losing his focus on music education, access, and outreach.



### Fear No Music’s Young Composer’s Project

Led by acclaimed composer and violist Kenji Bunch, the Portland-based ensemble FearNoMusic specializes in performing music by modern and contemporary composers. Answering a call to encourage and cultivate musical curiosity and creativity in the next generation, FNM founder Jeff Payne established the [Young Composers Project](#) in 1997 to provide training and mentorship in music composition to young people grades six to twelve. Past participants have won numerous local and national honors for their works, and many now pursue careers as composers of orchestra music, movie and television scores, musical theater works, and many other forms of music.

(con’t)

### **About the Metropolitan Youth Symphony**

With a foundational commitment to music education and access, [Metropolitan Youth Symphony](#) educates, develops, and promotes over 500 young musicians of all ages, levels, and backgrounds in a typical year. MYS is one of the nation's largest youth orchestra programs with students from 10 counties participating in 13 orchestral, string, band, percussion, and jazz ensembles. By providing theory classes, coaching, and collaboration opportunities with performers across myriad artistic disciplines, MYS seeks to develop the whole musician. With rehearsal sites in Portland and Hillsboro, MYS fulfills its commitment to make music accessible to all students through a tuition-free beginning strings program, scholarships, tuition assistance, an instrument lending library, in-school concerts at Title 1 schools, and thriving community partnerships. MYS ensembles reflect a broad diversity of cultures and life experiences while fostering a tight-knit community through music, collaboration, peer support, and self-expression. The MYS Symphony Orchestra tours internationally every three years. Over the past decade, students have learned and performed in Poland, the Czech Republic, China, Italy, and Austria.

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Pub notes:

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