



CLEVELAND
CHAMBER
MUSIC
SOCIETY

PROGRAM NOTES

Imani Winds with Michelle Cann, piano
October 15, 2024 – 7:30 p.m.
The Cultural Arts Center at Disciples Christian

A Little Cuban Jazz Waltz (2023)

Paquito D’Rivera

Born: Havana, Cuba, 1948

Composed: 2023

Jazz legend and sixteen-time Grammy winner Paquito D’Rivera, a virtuoso clarinet and saxophone player, band leader and composer, wrote his wind quintet *Kites* for Imani in 2005. For its 25th anniversary, the group commissioned D’Rivera to compose a new work, which became *A Little Cuban Jazz Waltz*. The composer commented:

In the days when my old friends of Imani Winds commissioned me to write a new composition for their

wonderful quintet, the *Down Beat* magazine had published a note-by-note transcription of the clarinet solo I recorded over my song “I Missed You Too!” on the CD of the same name with Cuban pianist Chucho Valdés. Said song is a Jazz waltz, and the present piece is a recreation of the totally improvised solo I played on that historic recording session.

La Nouvelle Orleans

Lalo Schifrin

Born: Buenos Aires, Argentina, 1932

Composed: 1987

Lalo Schifrin was born as Boris Claudio Schifrin in Buenos Aires. His father, Luis Schifrin, led the second violin section of the orchestra at the Teatro Colon for three decades. At the age of six Schifrin began a six-year course of study on piano with Enrique Barenboim, the father of the pianist and conductor Daniel Barenboim. At age 16, Schifrin

began studying piano with the Russian expatriate Andreas Karalis, former head of the Kyiv Conservatory, and harmony with Argentinean composer Juan-Carlos Paz. During this time, Schifrin also became interested in jazz. He is best known for his large body of film and TV scores since the 1950s, incorporating jazz and Latin American

musical elements alongside traditional orchestrations. He is a five-time GRAMMY® Award winner; he has been

nominated for six Academy Awards and four Emmy Awards.

Trio for Oboe, Bassoon and Piano

Francis Poulenc

Born: Paris, 1899

Died: Paris, 1963

Composed: 1926

After two recent works, we are taking a nostalgic look back a hundred years, from the 2020's to the 1920's, aka the "Roaring Twenties" or, in Paris, *les années folles* ("the crazy years"). One of the most prominent young composers in France in the post-WWI period, Francis Poulenc innovated by going back in time, making creative, sometimes irreverent use of music from the past. His trio for oboe, bassoon and piano, written at the age of 27, plays subtle games with Mozart and Gluck, adding some delicious harmonic "spices" that make us imagine those 18th-century classics taking a stroll down the Grands Boulevards (which already existed when they spent time in the French capital).

The three-movement work, which runs just over ten minutes in performance, opens with a solemn, or mock-solemn, slow introduction that soon gives way to a sparkling Presto. As a middle section, we hear a broad lyrical melody, after which the *Presto* returns.

The classical melody of the second-movement Andante undergoes some surprising transformations including some rather abrupt key changes. After a fleeting evocation of the "Dance of the Blessed Spirits" from Gluck's *Orpheus*, the movement concludes on a gentle note.

The final movement is a spirited Rondo according to classical models but with plenty of modern twists. For all its lightheartedness, this music is quite strictly constructed and speaks in an unmistakably original voice; it wasn't for nothing that it took the fastidious composer two years to complete this seemingly unassuming short work.

Poulenc dedicated this trio to Manuel de Falla, 23 years his senior, who was reportedly delighted by the work of his young colleague. It was Poulenc's first important piece of chamber music, and the herald of many more great things to come.

Portraits of Langston for Flute, Clarinet, Piano, and Narrator

Valerie Coleman

Born: Louisville, 1970

Composed: 2007

Flutist-composer Valerie Coleman, now teaching at the Mannes School of Music in New York City, was the founder of the Imani Wind Quintet in which she played for over twenty years. As a composer, she has

created a large body of symphonic and chamber music, for which she has won many prizes and awards.

The present suite is an homage to Langston Hughes (1901-1967), the great

American poet and a leading figure of the Harlem Renaissance, who spent some time in Paris as a young man, experiencing *les années folles* first-hand.

In the preface to her score, Valerie Coleman has written:

Portraits of Langston is a suite in six short movements, and is my take on Hughes' poetic memories of Harlem and Europe (mainly Paris). [...] I chose Langston not because of who he is literature, but because he was in fact an eye-witness to legends born. His poems are so descriptive of an era, with references to particular settings and individuals that influenced him: Josephine Baker, Helen Keller, the nightlife/music of Harlem jazz clubs and Parisian

cabarets. [...] Stylistically, this work incorporates many different elements that are translated into woodwind technique: the stride piano technique, big band swing, cabaret music, Mambo, African drumming, and even traditional spirituals.

Each movement is a musical sketch of selected (and lesser known) poems from Langston Hughes' vast library: "Helen Keller," "Danse africaine," "In Time of Silver Rain," "Jazz Band in a Parisian Cabaret," "Summer Night." "Le Grand Duc Mambo" [the third movement, not a poem but a narrative—P. L.] is [...] a musical sketch of the Jazz Club in the scandalous red-light district of Montmartre, where Langston worked as a busboy for 25 cents a night.

Sextet for Piano and Winds Poulenc

Born: Paris, 1899

Died: Paris, 1963

Composed: 1932 (revised, 1939)

In reviews of Poulenc's Sextet, one reads phrases like "bumptious and irreverent sauciness," "witty virtuosity," "dry, snappy, and tongue-in-cheek, reveling in its own fun," and even "positively transcendental schmaltz." When Poulenc, an excellent pianist, made his now-classic recording of the work with the principal wind players of the Philadelphia Orchestra, one critic described the music as "joyous, pungent, impudent at times, and a recommended antidote for sagging spirits."

Any composition that would elicit such extravagant language from reviewers cannot be an ordinary piece of music. And Poulenc's sextet is a monument to those times when innovative modern music could

be a lot of fun. In fact, the fun starts right at the beginning, with a series of playful wind solos over an *ostinato* ("obstinately" repeated) piano rhythm that sounds like a modernistic transformation of dance music from a cabaret. A long-held note on the bassoon introduces a pensive solo for that instrument that in turn develops into a slow and languid middle section in which all the instruments, starting with the piano, get to play beautiful lyrical melodies. After this dreamy intermezzo, the bouncy opening tempo returns.

The second movement, titled "Divertissement," does the exact opposite: it opens and closes with an expressive melody, with the fast "cabaret" style coming

as the (rather brief) middle section. The same duality continues in the finale, with the difference that the last word, surprisingly, belongs to the Romantic poet, not to the humorist. As in the first movement, it is the

bassoon that sets the tone with an unaccompanied melody in free rhythm, leading into a coda in which the lyrical theme from the first movement's middle section is heard again.

-Peter Laki

Mr. Laki is a musicologist and Visiting Associate Professor of Music at Bard College. He has been the annotator for the Society's program booklet since 2012, having previously served as annotator for the Cleveland Orchestra from 1990 to 2007. He is a native of Budapest and holds a Ph.D. in music from the University of Pennsylvania.