



QUEER URBAN ORCHESTRA

presents

QUOFEST

**PERPETUAL MOTION
THE DANCE FLOOR
SYMPHONIC DANCING!**

March 13-15 • 2026

St. Paul & St. Andrew
263 W 86th St

David Bloom Artistic Director

QueerUrbanOrchestra.org

NYC Cultural
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From the Artistic Director

Dear Friends,

Welcome to Queer Urban Orchestra's second annual **QUOfest!** While festivals are rare for community orchestras, this action-packed weekend of four events is a perfect expression of QUO's vitality — made possible by the energy, commitment, and imagination of our musicians and our audience alike.

Midway through our season, *A Place for Us*—a year of music celebrating queer space—this festival turns to the dance floor as a site of queer expression, gathering, and joy. Each event explores a different perspective on the special role dance has played in queer culture. From intimate chamber music to sweeping orchestral sounds, from a family concert to an old-school tea dance, we celebrate a simple truth: movement belongs to everyone. This season, we are thrilled to collaborate with QUOfest featured artist **Kebra-Seyoun Charles**, whom you'll encounter this weekend as both composer and performer. Their riveting bass playing is matched by their music, which draws inspiration from dance traditions spanning the Baroque era to today. Together, Kebra and the extraordinary musicians of QUO create something truly electric.

The past year has been difficult for many queer people in this country, and the challenges continue to grow. For more than sixteen years—and especially now—QUO has been committed to creating queer space not as an escape from the world, but as a vital source of connection and solidarity. We believe music gives us a powerful way to join together, to move, and to care for one another. Thank you for being here, and for helping create this space together.

With love,



David Bloom



Council on
the Arts

This program is made possible by the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the Office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature.



This program is also supported in part by public funds from the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.



Perpetual Motion

Friday, March 13, 2026 | 8 pm
Church of St. Paul & St. Andrew | New York, NY

Street Song III (1988) Michael Tilson Thomas

Sinfonietta, Op. 1 (1932) Benjamin Britten

Derek Weagle — conductor

**Sonata for Horn,
Trumpet, & Trombone (1922)** Francis Poulenc

— Intermission —

from **Brass Quintet No. 1 (1890)** Victor Ewald
II. Adagio — Allegro vivace — Adagio

from **Book of Brass (2021)** Jennifer Higdon
IV. Punch it Up

from **Enby (2024)** Kebra-Seyoun Charles
I. Vignette 1

Derek Weagle — conductor

Trois mouvements perpétuels (1918) Francis Poulenc
I. Assez modéré
II. Très modéré
III. Alerte

Derek Weagle — conductor

Dance Suite (1989) Leonard Bernstein

Please silence your phones, and recording is strictly prohibited—let's keep the spotlight on the music!

Violin

Arielle Lubin
Shang Young

Viola

Andrew Holland

Cello

Navin Manglani

Bass

Ian Fales

Flute

Scott Oaks

Oboe/ English Horn

Matthew Hadley

Clarinet

Jesse Langston

Bassoon

David Lohman

French Horn

Kyle Walker
Bryan Jacobowitz

Trumpet

Julia Cohen
Ryan Yacos

Trombone

Nick Denton

Tuba

Elihu Conant-Haque

Percussion

Álvaro Rodas

Tea Dance

Saturday, March 14, 2026 | 3 pm
Church of St. Paul & St. Andrew | New York, NY

QUO invites the whole community to a Saturday afternoon tea dance!

In 1960's New York City, it was illegal for bars to serve alcohol to people known to be queer, but no law could stifle queer creativity. Queer folk organized afternoon dance parties where they served tea instead of alcohol.

In these safe spaces, they could enjoy the solidarity of their community without the threat of police raids. At QUO's tea dance, you can move to current hits and longtime queer anthems, show your outfit on the runway, and (of course) sip tea!

Tea Dance, Fire Island Pines (1981). This iconic late-afternoon celebration traces its roots to 1966, when John Whyte—owner of the Pines' Blue Whale bar—began hosting what would become known as the Tea Dance, a daily social and dance gathering that helped define Fire Island's vibrant LGBTQ+ culture and later spread to gay resorts around the world.

Image courtesy of the Fire Island Pines Historical Preservation Society (pineshistory.org).

About the Music



Photo by Hans Wild, 1968

Benjamin Britten (1913–1976) *Sinfonietta, Op. 1* Sponsored by John O'Brien

Benjamin Britten, Baron Britten OM CH (1913–76) was the most respected British composer of the twentieth century. His operas *Peter Grimes*, *Billy Budd*, *The Turn of the Screw*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Death in Venice*, among others, are standard repertory in opera houses around the world, perhaps the last opera composer in history with such success. He was also openly gay in times and places where this was dangerous. On his death, the condolence note that Queen Elizabeth sent his longtime partner, tenor Sir Peter Pears, is a landmark in official acceptance of same-sex partnerships.

Sinfonietta is the work of an eighteen-year-old student at the Royal College of Music. It premiered January 31, 1933. Although Britten had already written hundreds of pieces, including remarkably mature and sensual songs, this piece was the first to which he gave an opus number. It is brimming with ideas and influences. The concept of a chamber symphony, in which themes pass from instrument to instrument but without a traditional symphonic structure, came from Schoenberg's first Chamber Symphony. Britten heard the Schoenberg on the BBC shortly before he started his *Sinfonietta*, although Britten's music sounds nothing like Schoenberg. Others have heard the influence of Stravinsky and Hindemith in the short, jagged themes.

Sinfonietta is in three movements, normally played without any break. The first and second make very heavy use of a rocking motif between two notes adjacent on the scale, what musicians call a major second. Major seconds

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were something of an obsession for Britten throughout his career. In his music, these two adjacent notes are so near, yet often so far.

The first movement, *Poco presto ed agitato*, starts with brief motives passed from instrument to instrument then quickly opens up with a brief majestic horn solo, ascending dramatically then descending more slowly. Britten shows an impressive understanding of the different colors of each instrument. The rocking major second heard in the first movement is central in the quiet second movement, *Variations. Andante lento*. The opening of the second



Photo of Benjamin Britten and Wylan Hugh ('W.H.') Auden, 1941. Photographer unknown. © National Portrait Gallery, London

movement may suggest the kind of English pastoral music that Britten heard from his teachers Frank Bridge and John Ireland. (Britten dedicated *Sinfonietta* to Bridge). But a haunting and melancholy duet between violin and viola soon takes the music to harmonic and emotional places that his teachers never reached.

A very skillful transition by the viola (Britten's second instrument, after piano) takes the music without break into the third movement, *Tarantella. Presto vivace*, a sort of perpetual motion dance. Is it a dance of death? That's how it sounded to Britten's friend W.H.

Auden. Four years after the premiere, as Auden prepared to leave England to fight fascism in Spain, he inscribed his poem *Danse Macabre* on the fly-leaf of Britten's score to *Sinfonietta*:

*It's farewell to the drawing-room's civilized cry,
The professor's sensible whereto and why,
The frock-coated diplomat's social aplomb,
Now matters are settled with gas and with bomb.*

*The works for two pianos, the brilliant stories
Of reasonable giants and remarkable fairies,
The pictures, the ointments, the frangible wares
And the branches of olive are stored upstairs.*

*For the Devil has broken parole and arisen,
He has dynamited his way out of prison,
Out of the well where his Papa throws
The rebel angel, the outcast rose.*

*Like influenza he walks abroad,
He stands by the bridge, he waits by the ford,*

*As a goose or a gull he flies overhead,
He hides in the cupboard and under the bed.*

*O were he to triumph, dear heart, you know
To what depths of shame he would drag you low;
He would steal you away from me, yes, my dear,
He would steal you and cut off your beautiful hair.*

*Millions already have come to their harm,
Succumbing like doves to his adder's charm;
Hundreds of trees in the wood are unsound:
I'm the axe that must cut them down to the ground.*

*For I, after all, am the Fortunate One,
The Happy-Go-Lucky, the spoilt Third Son;
For me it is written the Devil to chase
And to rid the earth of the human race....*

Britten soon set Auden's poem to music in his *Ballad of Heroes, Op. 14* (1939).

Sinfonietta was composed for ten instruments: flute, oboe, clarinet, horn, bassoon (wind quintet), two violins, viola, cello (string quartet), and double bass. In 1936 Britten revised the work for orchestra. We hear the original chamber version at this concert.

— Alan Hyde



Photo courtesy of Visconti Arts

Kebra-Seyoun Charles Enby: Vignette 1

Enby is the phonetic spelling of the acronym for non-binary, which happens to be the title of this ballet, and my gender identity. For me, this piece is a diary chronicling the many ways in which I move throughout the world: as a classical musician, an outcast, a romantic partner, and somehow a community member. Each vignette explores the way I feel I'm perceived in a myriad of settings, depicting anxiety (from which I suffer greatly), the complexities of modern romance, and finding one's place where there is none.

— Kebra-Seyoun Charles



Photo by unknown, c. 1958

Francis Poulenc (1899–1963) *Sonata for Horn, Trumpet & Trombone*

Like all sassy gay men, Francis Poulenc knew how to throw some shade.

"Believe me, polytonality is an *impasse* whose uselessness will be acknowledged five years from now," he once wrote in a letter. "I'm not talking about atonality, that's shit."

He wasn't alone in this opinion. He eventually fell in with a group of like-minded composers, including Darius Milhaud, who came to be known as "Les Six." Together, they wrote lighthearted, even insouciant music that pushed back against the lofty concepts introduced by Wagner in the previous century. It was during this time, in 1922, that Poulenc wrote his *Sonata for Horn, Trumpet, and Trombone*.

Despite having a traditional form—three movements, just like *Trois Mouvements Perpétuels*—the sonata is delightfully quirky with a little bit of edge to it. Like Mozart, or even Berlioz, Poulenc often wrote melodies inspired by the tunes of his childhood. We hear this especially in the moderate first movement. With the slower second movement, it almost takes the form of a lullaby. The upbeat third movement contains the "crunchier" harmonies, but the melody remains too repetitive and playful to be off-putting.

The cheerful but esoteric nature of the piece makes you feel as though you're listening to a group of friends arguing about something extremely geeky, but incredibly low-stakes.

Horn: I'm sorry, but the Director's Edition of *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* is far superior to the Theatrical Cut, to the point where it's arguably the best film in the whole franchise.

Trumpet: Actually that's an oversimplification considering the soundtrack is

the sole redeeming feature of what can only be described as a glacially-paced behemoth of a movie.

Trombone: Is no one going to address the fact that the director is the same person who directed The Sound of Music?!

I might be projecting, but that's what I hear when I listen to *Sonata for Horn, Trumpet, and Trombone*—Poulenc and some other "Les Six" members bitching about silly things, but still giving each other the time and space to lovingly toot their own horns.

— Spencer Robelen



Photo by Pierre Jahan, 1945—colorized

Francis Poulenc (1899–1963) *Trois Mouvements Perpétuels*

In Alfred Hitchcock's 1948 film *Rope*, a character sits down at a piano and plays *Trois Mouvements Perpétuels*. The delightfully demented piece ends up forming the foundation of the film's score, which is appropriate for a story about two college-aged gay men in New York City who throw a party right after committing murder.

Ironically, Francis Poulenc was also a college-aged gay metropolitan when he composed *Trois Mouvements Perpétuels*. In 1918, he was a conscript in the French Army, composing casually after hours during the end of World War I...a

— continued on next page

time when hundreds of people were throwing parties after committing murder.

This feeling of whimsy mixed with detachment is palpable in the piece with its catchy melodies dancing on top of dissonant, but inoffensive, harmonies. In the famous first movement, one gets the feeling that the piano *knows* something is wrong, but chooses to ignore it.

Likewise, the slower second movement specifically ends with a flourish that is charming yet totally unresolved; a threat that's actually just a joke. Or maybe it really is a threat? Nah, just kidding, it's a joke. Or is it?

Then again, perhaps it's all a little more flirty than that. As the exciting third movement races to an end, there isn't so much a sense of, "That was crazy, we shouldn't have done it," as there is a sense of, "That was crazy, let's do it again." The final cadence is a quick kiss on your mouth. Followed by a little nip on your lip. And then a party after committing murder.

— Spencer Robelen



Photo by Joe McNelly, 1988

Leonard Bernstein (1918–1990) *Dance Suite*
Sponsored by Navin Manglani

Dance Suite was Leonard Bernstein's final completed work, written in late 1989 for the 50th Anniversary Gala of American Ballet Theatre at the Metropolitan Opera House. Although originally intended for choreography, the dances were ultimately deemed too brief for staged development and

Bernstein



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were presented instead as a concert work before the curtain. Each of the five movements honors a choreographer friend and draws on music originally composed for personal occasions, often for family and close friends:

1. *Dancisca* (for Antony Tudor) originated as a piano piece written for the composer's granddaughter in November 1989.
2. *Waltz* (for Agnes de Mille) is an ironic, rhythmically playful movement derived from a satirical march connected to the composer's protest of federal arts censorship following the revocation of an NEA grant tied to an AIDS exhibition.
3. *Bi-Tango* (for Mikhail Baryshnikov) adapts a bitonal birthday serenade written for violinist Paul Woodiel.
4. *Two-Step* (for George Balanchine) began as a humorous song celebrating the birth of the composer's grandson.
5. *MTV* (for Jerome Robbins) reflects contemporary popular culture, incorporating material from an earlier song inspired by television—particularly an episode of *Miami Vice*.

More than an occasional work, *Dance Suite* blends private tributes, satire, and personal memories into a final, characteristically eclectic statement.

—David Bloom



Queer Urban Orchestra

David Bloom — Artistic Director and Conductor

Derek Weagle — Associate Conductor

The Dance Floor

Saturday, March 14, 2026 | 8 pm
Church of St. Paul & St. Andrew | New York, NY

Dances in the Canebrakes (1953)

Florence Price

orchestrated by William Grant Still

1. Nimble Feet
2. Tropical Noon
3. Silk Hat & Walking Cane

Buck McDaniel[★], David Bloom, Eli Parrish[★] — conductors

[★] QUO Conducting Fellows

Nightlife, Concerto for Double Bass (2024, rev. 2025)

Kebra-Seyoun Charles

- I. in the streets
- II. in the club

Kebra-Seyoun Charles — double bass

— Intermission —

Symphonic Dances from West Side Story (1957)

Leonard Bernstein

- | | |
|--------------|------------------|
| 1. Prologue | 6. Meeting Scene |
| 2. Somewhere | 7. Cool Fugue |
| 3. Scherzo | 8. Rumble |
| 4. Mambo! | 9. Finale |
| 5. Cha-cha | |

Please silence your phones, and recording is **strictly prohibited**—let's keep the spotlight on the music!



Queer Urban Orchestra

David Bloom — Artistic Director and Conductor

Derek Weagle — Associate Conductor

Family Concert Symphonic Dancing!

Sunday, March 15, 2026 | 4 pm
Church of St. Paul & St. Andrew | New York, NY

from Symphonic Dances

Leonard Bernstein

from West Side Story (1957)

Mambo!

from Dances in the Canebrakes (1953)

Florence Price

orchestrated by William Grant Still

1. Nimble Feet
3. Silk Hat & Walking Cane

Buck McDaniel[★], Eli Parrish[★] — conductors

[★] QUO Conducting Fellows

from Nightlife, Concerto for

Kebra-Seyoun Charles

Double Bass (2024, rev. 2025)

Kebra-Seyoun Charles — double bass

from Symphonic Dances

Leonard Bernstein

from West Side Story (1957)

Please silence your phones, and recording is **strictly prohibited**—let's keep the spotlight on the music!

Violin I

Phong Ta*✦
Belinda Bauer
Brian Harrington
Elaine Lee
Amanda Nguyen
Richard Nguyen
Nic Salas
Farzaneh Sarafranz
Dane Stalcup
Navida Stein
Liz Taub
Liann Wadewitz
Trevor Wadleigh

Violin II

Tank Tan*
Peter Fifield●
Jeanne Azzouni
Jonathan Balsano
alva bostick
Jocelyn Cheng
Carla Eilo
Andre Gillard
Eric Kim
Cameron Mirhossaini
Ligia Sakurai
Bob Wei

Viola

Noah Green*
James Di Meglio●
Marion Lederer
Hilton Marcus
JohnMark Ofrasio
Mark Peters
Genevieve Pool
Nicholas Singletary
Nathan Threlkeld
Dustin Zuelke

Cello

Bjorn Berkhout*
Claire Hébert
Alex Humesky
Lucie le Blanc
Maurice Lee
Steve McLure
Michael Richman
Nick Saunders
John Swartz

Bass

Jared Chamoff*●
Andrew Op't Hof
Barnaby Woods
Hirokazu Yokoyama

Flute

Yoshi Weinberg*
Thomas Lei

Piccolo

Craig Devereaux●

Oboe

Brian Shaw*
Jeanne Azzouni
Christian Smythe

English Horn

Christian Smythe

E♭ Clarinet

Alice Petre

Clarinet

Francis Novak*
Daniel Olson●

Bass Clarinet

Chris Burrow

Alto Saxophone

Steven Albanese

Bassoon

Brian Vogel
Cross Brandon

Contrabassoon

Jonathan Stark

French Horn

Lynn Caron*●
Noah Dopkins
Emma Reber
Wesley Richter

Trumpet

Ron Nahass*
Sukhbir Channa
Joseph De Rocco
Caleb Griffith

Trombone

Ryan Gochee*
Ryan McTernan

Bass Trombone

Alex Arellano●

Tuba

Adam Rosenberg

Piano

Mark Galinovsky

Harp

Stephanie Babirak

Percussion

Andrew Berman●
Meredith Butterworth
Billy Juang
Michaela Kiberstis
Heath Koch
Jay Nerger
Hannah Webster

✦ Concertmaster
* Principal
● Section Leader

QUO performing in 2023 at Symphony Space

Photo by David Lohman



About the Artists



Photo by Jiyong Chen

David Bloom QUO Artistic Director

David Bloom (he/him) is a conductor equally at home in orchestral repertoire, opera, and new music, noted for his "dazzling precision and grace" (*San Francisco Chronicle*), "intelligence, elegance, and passion" (*Opera News*), "ferocious and focused" (*The New York Times*) performances, and "breathhtaking and inspired programming" (*Shepherd Express*). He dedicates his work to collaborating with artists and communities to inspire creativity, empathy, and joy.

In such venues as Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, Walt Disney Concert Hall, Kennedy Center, and Park Avenue Armory, Bloom has guest conducted the Los Angeles Philharmonic, American Composers Orchestra, Washington National Opera, Opera Omaha, Central City Opera, Tri-Cities Opera, Bang on a Can All-Stars, The Crossing, Ensemble Connect, and Kronos Quartet and worked with such soloists and Dashon Burton, David Byrne, Anthony Roth Costanzo, Helga Davis, Isabel Leonard, Iarla Ó Lionáird, Courtney Love, Hila Plitmann, Dawn Upshaw, and Andrew Yee, and composers Clarice Assad, Courtney Bryan, John Corigliano, Donnacha Dennehy, Du Yun, inti figgis-vizueta, Michael Gordon, Nathalie Joachim, David Lang, Tania León, Andrew Norman, and Julia Wolfe. He conducted the opening of Lincoln Center's 2024 Summer for the City festival with a program of operatic standards and original songs with drag artists Sapphira Cristál, Monét X Change, and Thorgy Thor.

Since 2022, he has been Artistic Director of Queer Urban Orchestra, the only orchestra in the Northeast rooted in the LGBTQ+ community. He is also Principal Conductor of the orchestras at New York University, Co-Artistic Director of Contemporaneous, and Principal Conductor of Present Music. He has conducted over 500 world premieres, including the orchestral version of Philip Glass' *La Belle et la Bête* with Jean Cocteau's 1946 film, Dylan Mattingly's six-hour opera *Stranger Love*, and Raven Chacon's *Voiceless Mass*, which went on to win the 2022 Pulitzer Prize. He has recorded for the Nonesuch, Sony Masterworks, Cantaloupe, New Amsterdam, Innova, New Focus, Starkland, Kairos, and Navona labels.

Derek Weagle QUO Associate Conductor

Musician/Educator/Wearer-of-Many Hats **Derek J. Weagle** (they/them) is a Brooklyn-based artist and healer working in the medium of sound. Seeking the deepest joy in all things, they are invested in the disruption of cultural barriers around music-making, preserving it as a vital act of humanness. With a practice rooted in syncretism, Derek's musical and teaching styles draw from a wide breadth of experience, modality, and tradition. They are passionate about the fusion of these approaches as a means of authentic connection and collective healing.

Derek holds a M.M. with Academic Honors in Composition with a minor in Choral Conducting from the New England Conservatory and a B.M. in Music Education from the University of Massachusetts Lowell, certificates in Sound Healing from the Sage Academy of Sound in Woodstock, NY, and Biosonic Sound Repatterning with Dr. John Beaulieu. In 2025, they completed an Artist Diploma in Composition with a citation for Exceptional Achievement and a certificate in Contemporary Collaboration as a member of the Gabriela Ortiz Composing Studio at the OAcademy Music Conservatory.

Derek's current engagements include work as a Sound Practitioner at Official Ritual, Founding Artistic Director of Bloom Sound Collective, Faculty at Juilliard Extension, Associate Conductor of the Queer Urban Orchestra, Co-Director of the Khôra Consort, Core Member of The Why Collective, Resident Music Director and Composer with Lucada Mélange, and the Refugee Orchestra Project Board of Directors. Their work as a composer has received recognition both nationally and internationally, including the American Prize in Composition, the International Horn Society, and in the International Composition Competition Harelbeke.



Photo by Erik McGregor



Photo courtesy of Visconti Arts

Kebra-Seyoun Charles Double Bass & Composer

2022 Sphinx Competition winner **Kebra-Seyoun Charles** (they/them) is a double bassist and composer lauded for their innovative and integrated approach to musical expression, as both soloist and creator. As a modern virtuoso and composer of concerti, ballets, and pop ballads, Kebra's music has been praised for its "buoyancy and verve—pushing the far reaches of tonality while savoring hummable grooves" (*ICareIfYouListen*). A rising star and advocate for a more inclusive classical music community, *The Strad* confirms that "Versatility defines Charles's approach."

The 2024/2025 season opens with the world premiere of Kebra's new double bass concerto *Nightlife* conducted by Mei-Ann Chen at Carnegie Hall featuring the American Composers Orchestra. This season also features the premiere of a new ballet commissioned by Peter London Global Dance Company in Miami, plus chamber collaborations with NYC supergroups Bang On a Can, Alarm Will Sound, and International Contemporary Ensemble.

After being recognized with the Robert Frederick Smith Prize from the Sphinx Organization, Kebra has continued to receive honors including the American Composers Orchestra Van Lier Fellowship and perform recital events featured on Performance Today, YoungArts, and NPR's From The Top. They are also two-time winner of the Boston Philharmonic Youth Orchestra's concerto competition, winner of the American Music Talent Competition, and winner of the NAACP's ACT-SO concerto competition. Kebra has soloed with orchestras including the New World Symphony, Indianapolis Symphony, and Wilmington Symphony, and was the featured soloist on a national tour with

the Sphinx Virtuosi. Other notable performances include those at Jazz at Lincoln Center, the Kagoshima Jazz Festival, the Aspen Music Festival, and the Library of Congress.

Growing up the child of an African drummer and dancer, Kebra was exposed to music at a very early age. They grew up around jazz, gospel, and traditional African music, which led Kebra to develop an interest in a diversity of contrasting genres and a new fusion of styles they term "Counterclassical": a third wave of classicism blending stylistic influences from jazz, gospel, pop, and RnB with the formal and harmonic structures of the classical canon. This synthesis is exemplified in Kebra's ballet *Enby*, commissioned by Sphinx's MPower grant, which is centered around the life of a Black non-binary classical musician, and shared with new generations of musicians via groundbreaking educational initiatives such as the Counterclassical Treatise, which empowers young people to reimagine the concept of musical ornamentation updated for today's omnivorous ears.

In addition to their solo and compositional career, Kebra is a passionate chamber musician. Playing with groups like East Coast Chamber Orchestra, A Far Cry, and Palaver Strings affords Kebra the opportunity to showcase their musicianship and lead from within an ensemble (as in their role performing the 2019 Emmy Award-winning Broadway production "Hadestown"). Kebra has collaborated with esteemed improvisers and composers such as Jon Batiste at Carnegie Hall, 2024 Pulitzer Prize winner Tyshawn Sorey at the New England Conservatory, and jazz musician/composer Jason Moran via an interactive installation at Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art.



Photo courtesy of Visconti Arts



Photo courtesy of Visconti Arts

Originally from Miami, Florida, Kebra received their Bachelor's degree from the New England Conservatory of Music, where they studied with Todd Seeber and Lawrence Wolfe. In 2022, they graduated from the Juilliard School with a Master's degree under the tutelage of Joseph Conyers, receiving the Benzaquen Career Grant and Morse Teaching Artist Fellowship in recognition of their talents. Kebra's lifelong commitment to both the performance and creation of music ensures that they are always learning, experimenting, and building a more inclusive classical music community.

About the Music



Florence Price, 1941. Photographer unknown

Florence Price (1887–1953) *Dances in the Canebrakes*
Orch. by **William Grant Still**

Sponsored by **David Bloom & Michael Schmale**

Florence Beatrice Price was a 20th century American composer, organist, pianist, and teacher. The composer of over 300 works from symphonies to piano and violin concertos to songs, Price tirelessly marketed her music and nurtured musical networks, all while fighting systemic racism and sexism in the classical music world and beyond. As a composer, her music uniquely balanced Euro-American late 19th century Romanticism and traditional classical structures, church music, hymns, the 20th century use of chromatics, and elements of the African diaspora including polyrhythms — call and response, historical dance forms such as the Juba, and Spirituals.

Born into an upper-class black family in Little Rock, Arkansas, her father was a successful dentist with both black and white patients and her musician mother was Price's first piano teacher. Valedictorian of her class, she was accepted at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston in 1902, one of two black students. Graduating in 3 years with a double major in organ performance and piano pedagogy, she also studied composition. After serving as head of the music department at Clark University in Atlanta, she married in 1912 and moved back to her hometown to start a family.

As Jim Crow era violence and racial oppression increased in Little Rock, the

privileged Price family was not immune. Although Price had a thriving music studio, she was denied access to the Arkansas State Music Teachers Association because of her race. Her reaction was to create the Little Rock Club of Musicians, where Black musicians could be supported. With increased lynchings in Little Rock, the Price family decided to move out of the South, joining the Great Migration and moving to Chicago in 1927.

Residing in the heart of Chicago's Black Belt, Price's composing career flourished, and she became a part of a thriving arts community. She was connected with a network of Black women who used the motto "Uplift As We Climb," responding to racism and sexism by creating vibrant platforms to serve the needs of their community. Known as the Dean of Negro Composers of the Midwest, Price won composition prizes including the coveted Wanamaker Prize in 1932, which led to the Chicago Symphony Orchestra performing her *Symphony No. 1* at the Chicago World's Fair in 1933.

Meanwhile, her marriage was crumbling, there were domestic abuse and financial issues, and in 1931 she obtained a divorce and became a single mother. Price continued writing large-scale works, taught piano, played organ for silent films, wrote radio jingles and even popular Tin Pan Alley style songs under the pseudonym Vee Jay. Price was preparing a trip to Europe, where her works were garnering praise and attention, when she died unexpectedly of a stroke on June 3, 1953. She was 66 years old.



Dense canebrakes in Mobile, Alabama, 1894

Dances in the Canebrakes

Written for piano in 1953, *Dances in the Canebrakes* was one of Price's last compositions. It was orchestrated by composer William Grant Still after her death. Still was a childhood friend, also growing up in Little Rock, and they shared a music teacher. The term canebrakes refers to a field of bamboo-like wild grass that grows near rivers. For the cash crop of cotton to be grown, these canebrake fields needed clearing, which became the grueling job of enslaved people. Because of the denseness of the canebrakes, it was also a

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'The Cake Walk' Nos. 1–5, created as advertising signs for the Old Virginia Cheroots Company. This set of five chromolithographs (c. 1899) capture elegantly dressed couples in the height of the cakewalk craze.

hiding place for enslaved people escaping to freedom: a place of refuge and resistance.

Dances in the Canebrakes is in three movements, each section linked to a dance style originating in the Black American tradition. These dances quickly became popular, influencing the dance craze that swept the nation and Europe in the early 1900's. The ragtime feel of the first movement, *Nimble Feet*, comes from the punchy, syncopated melody. A contrasting middle section features glockenspiel and flutes, then the strings take back the melody, gathering speed to a quick, breathless finish.



"Young Dandy" photograph c. 1890
Unknown photographer

Tropical Noon is what the great Jelly Roll Morton would call a "slow drag," a popular, close slow dance of the day. Charlie Love, a Louisiana dance band musician in the 1900's recalls, "couples would hang onto each other and just grind back and forth in one spot all night." The sensual melody floats over a provocative tango or habanera rhythm evocating a warm embrace and perhaps a cool drink at the end!

Dances in the Canebrakes ends with *Silk Hat and Walking Cane*, using the music of a popular dance called the cakewalk, in which enslaved African

Americans would dress up in their finery—top hat, tails, canes, and gowns—and mock rich white people's "airs." Featured were exaggerated high-stepping, back-tilting prancing and strutting dance moves. It was a competitive dance, and the best couple would receive a cake as a prize. This is where the phrase "takes the cake" comes from. There is a joyful pride in the lilting repetitive melody of *Silk Hat and Walking Cane*; the saxophone adds to the jazzy mix. A short slower second section features the oboe playing a languid melody, then returns to the strutting step with a dignified tongue in cheek finale.

—Navida Stein

Cakewalk scene from the Broadway musical *In Dahomey*, c. 1903. The Cakewalk dance inspired the movement "Silk Hat and Walking Cane."



Leonard Bernstein, c. 1958. Photographer unknown

Leonard Bernstein (1918–1990)

Symphonic Dances from West Side Story

Sponsored by Cameron Smith

A child of the Jazz Age, Leonard Bernstein combined the immigrant energy of George Gershwin with the polish of an Ivy League education (Harvard, in his case). His career rose rapidly after his nationally broadcast emergency debut conducting the New York Philharmonic in 1943. Within a year came the premieres of his *Symphony No. 1*, the ballet *Fancy Free* (with choreographer Jerome Robbins), and the Broadway musical *On the Town*.

Between 1955 and 1957, Bernstein composed *West Side Story*, the work that secured his lasting fame. After the musical's successful Broadway run and national tour, he returned to the score in 1960, selecting nine sections to form the *Symphonic Dances from West Side Story*.

The music blends classical techniques with jazz rhythms and Latin dance styles. The recurring melody from "*Maria*" unifies the score and returns in the final, unresolved chord. Bernstein's vivid orchestration, including an expanded percussion section and moments requiring players to snap and shout, preserves the music's theatrical energy while shifting the focus toward the conflict between the rival gangs, the Jets and the Sharks. The movements trace the drama of the musical, from the rising tension between the gangs, a dream of reconciliation, Tony and Maria meeting, the fatal gang fight, and the tragic conclusion.

Bernstein's affairs with men are well documented in letters of genuine affection between him and several lovers, among them conductor Dimitri Mitropoulos, composer Aaron Copland, and others he met on his world travels as a conductor. His wife, actor Felicia Montealegre, knew of his sexuality and wrote to him in the year they wed, "I am willing to accept you as you are." He was not always as discreet as she asked, causing tension in their relationship, but Montealegre appears to have been the love of Lenny's life—he never truly recovered from her death in 1978.

—David Bloom

Kebra-Seyoun Charles *Nightlife*

Sponsored by Jared Chamoff

"As an artist I think it's my duty to be a part of this world. I like to go out at night and just observe people being a part of it."



Photo courtesy of Visconti Arts

This concerto, as much as a vehicle for double bass virtuosity, is an exploration of the individuality of the players within an orchestra. Through body percussion, vocalization, and some level of theatrics, the audience is reminded of the unique perspectives of each musician present. To create a more communal space within the concert hall, I reference key characteristics present in gospel and house music; namely, the deliberate repetition of key melodic materials and the space within the form for audience "call and response." While these influences are ever-present, the score also asks the player to switch seamlessly between familiar styles that do not traditionally occur alongside one another.

— Kebra-Seyoun Charles

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