PROGRAM

Imani Winds

Afro Blue

Mongo Santamaria
(1917-2003)
arr. Valerie Coleman

Catalyst Quartet

String Quartet No. 1
Cantilena
Brincadeira
Canto lirico
Canconeta
Melancolia
Saltando como um Saci

Heitor Villa-Lobos
(1887-1959)

Imani Winds and Catalyst Quartet

Sergeant McCauley*
Just Now
Makina
The Return
My Father, How Long
Lay Dis Body Downi

Jessie Montgomery
(b. 1982)

INTERMISSION

Imani Winds and Catalyst Quartet

Concierto de Camára**
Overture
Primer Interludio
Juegos
Segundo Interludio
Danza

Roberto Sierra
(b. 1953)


PROGRAM NOTES
RAMON “MONGO” SANTAMARIA
AFRO BLUE
ARR. BY VALERIE COLEMAN (NOTE BY ERIC BROMBERGER)

Mongo Santamaria began his musical studies on the violin in his native Cuba but soon switched to percussion and in the process found his true instrument. Having made a distinguished reputation as an Afro-Cuban drummer, Santamaria moved to New York in 1950, when he was in his late twenties, and there he performed with Tito Puente and Cal Tjader. Santamaria had his first hit in 1963 with his version of Herbie Hancock’s Watermelon Man. It has been said that “A Mongo Santamaria concert is a mesmerizing spectacle for both eyes and ears, creating an incantatory spell rooted in Cuban religious rituals.”

His Afro Blue, composed in 1959, has become one of the most popular jazz standards of our time and has been performed by Dizzie Gillespie, John Coltrane, and many others. Imani Winds offers Afro Blue in an arrangement by its own composer/arranger, flutist Valerie Coleman. This arrangement simulates an African call and response ritual, and aspires to continue the celebratory tradition that Mongo gave the world.

Eric Bromberger, 2019©

HEITOR VILLA-LOBOS
STRING QUARTET NO. 1

Heitor Villa-Lobos’ first of 17 string quartets was written in 1915, and premiered in the 28-year-old composer’s living room. In its collection of six short pieces, it is unlike the structure from any of the composer’s subsequent works in the genre. But its attitude and general technique offer an ideal portrait of the composer at the time: a confident young man who, having across his spacious and widely varied homeland, drew from an encyclopedic array of native musical idioms. The work unfolds in an almost Schuman-nian tableau of sharply etched character pieces. But where Schumann, as both a German and Romantic, sketched his music in nocturnal, fitful bursts of detail and complexity, Villa-Lobos’ suite of brief movements is sunlit into transparency, sweeping away, following a modernist impulse, the clutter of dark nineteenth century interiors. Indeed, this spontaneous transparency is a hallmark of the young composer’s exhilarating creative self-confidence. Even amidst one of the darkest years of the twentieth century, Villa-Lobos’ quartet offers a burst of facility, its nostalgia an unburdened evocation of idyll, its confidence matched only by its consoling eagerness to please. The opening “Cantilena,” for instance, offers an unbelievably intimate lyricism with no reservations whatsoever, a love letter completely unburdened by the anxiety of confession or the fear of vulnerability. The following “Brincadiera” (Joke) is an impish, skipping ditty, while the “Canto lirico” that comes next returns to the temperament of the first movement. The final “Saltando como um saci” translates as Jumping Like a Saci, referring to Saci Perere, a red-capped dwarf from Brazilian mythology who hopped on his one leg and startled people during his nocturnal romps through the swampland. But while the title looks toward storytelling traditions, the music itself nods to the true ancestor of Villa-Lobos’ quartet, at least in its unclouded tone and basic technique: Haydn. This witty finale is both a kind of folksy, high-spirited rondo and also a fugue; this unlikely pairing of the naïve and the learned, dance and counterpoint, was something Haydn cultivated like no one before him. Villa-Lobos surely intended a comparison, however modestly intoned; and it is clearly an intention of the quartet and of Villa-Lobos’ music of the next four decades to engage in a Haydnesque project, colorfully cultivating the spirit of folklore with a panoply of quite unfolkloric tools.

Seth Brodsky, 2019©

JESSIE MONTGOMERY
SERGEANT McCALLEY

“Music is my connection to the world,” says violinist and composer Jessie Montgomery, and her oeuvre
bears witness to the visceral truth of that claim. Her music, marked by a deeply personal compositional language that combines her classical training with vernacular and improvisatory styles, impresses for its narrative power—a quality for which the composer credits her family’s storytelling tradition. Montgomery’s mother is an actor and playwright who has created numerous theater pieces rooted in her family history, “So I’ve been witness to that all of my life,” she says. “That ethos has found its way into my music.” Montgomery’s tone poem Records from a Vanishing City (2016), composed for the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, recounts her childhood on Manhattan’s Lower East Side during an artistically vibrant time. More broadly probing her African-American heritage is Five Slave Songs (2018), commissioned for soprano Julia Bullock by the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Sergeant McCauley similarly draws from Montgomery’s personal history. Scored for wind quintet and string quartet, the work is inspired by the Great Migration, the movement of more than six million African-Americans over the early and mid-twentieth century from the rural south to urban centers across the United States. The work specifically tracks the journey of Montgomery’s great-grandfather, the Sergeant McCauley after whom the work is titled: a buffalo soldier who migrated northward before ultimately returning south to Mississippi. Montgomery’s reconstruction of his journey is based as much on research (military records documenting his travels, etc.) as on family lore, nurtured in conversation with her mother and aunt.

Like a sound map of Sergeant McCauley’s travels, Montgomery’s score makes use of African-American spirituals and work songs that would have been heard in the locales he likely passed. Sergeant McCauley’s five movements allude to these songs, each representing a stop along the way. The first movement is based on “Just Now,” a Methodist hymn thought to have originated in the northern seaboard slave states (Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina), which McCauley, a Virginian Methodist, may have known from his youth. The flute dreamily issues the tune over a quiet, whispered texture in the strings, before the full ensemble gradually joins in.

The second movement, “Makina,” depicts McCauley’s time in the military, working on the construction of the country’s young railroad system and the building of the Panama Canal. Unpitched air noises and key clicks in the wind instruments and percussive effects on the strings conjure a bustling construction scene.

Following a reprise of the opening hymn tune, the fourth movement features “My Father, How Long?,” a slave song whose words—“My father, how long, poor sinner suffer here? And it won’t be long, poor sinner suffer here”—at once express a yearning for spiritual salvation and for freedom from the oppression of slavery.

The work’s final movement, “Lay Dis Body Down,” cites a funeral song said to originate from the region surrounding South Carolina, and represents Sergeant McCauley’s final resting place. Montgomery sets the song as a slow, meditative procession.

Sergeant McCauley was commissioned for Imani Winds and the Catalyst Quartet by Music Accord and the Sphinx Organization.

Patrick Castillo, 2019©

ROBERTO SIERRA
CONCIERTO DE CÁMARA

In 2008, as a celebration of its tenth anniversary, Imani Winds began its Legacy Commissioning Project, with the intent of commissioning composers of color to create for the quintet works that would expand the language of contemporary classical music while representing various cultures through non-traditional voices. Imani Winds has premiered and toured the new works, including this one by Sierra and others by Stefon Harris, Simon Shaheen, Paquito D’Rivera, Wayne Shorter, and Mohammed Fairouz.

Concierto de Cámara, a nonet for wind quintet and string quartet, was jointly commissioned by Imani Winds with Stanford Lively Arts, the Santa Fe Chamber Music Festival, and Chamber Music Northwest. At
its 2008 premiere in Portland, Oregon, Concierto de Cámara was enthusiastically received. Throughout the spirited three-movement work, the string quartet and the wind quintet have a lively competition, beginning in the Overture and slow Primer Interludio (“First Interlude”). They have fun in Juegos (“Games”) and the expressive and more moderately paced Segundo Interludio (“Second Interlude”). The work culminates in the final Danza, characterized by its salsa rhythms. Critic David Stabler wrote, “Sierra’s exuberant nonet fairly danced off the stage … preserving the integrity of each ensemble while demanding intricate interplay among the individual players. The cross-court volleys amid the rushing scales were exhilarating to behold.” Throughout, Sierra highlights the distinctive sounds of each of the instruments as well as the qualities of the string quartet and the wind quintet, and their combined qualities as a group of nine.

Susan Halpern, 2019©