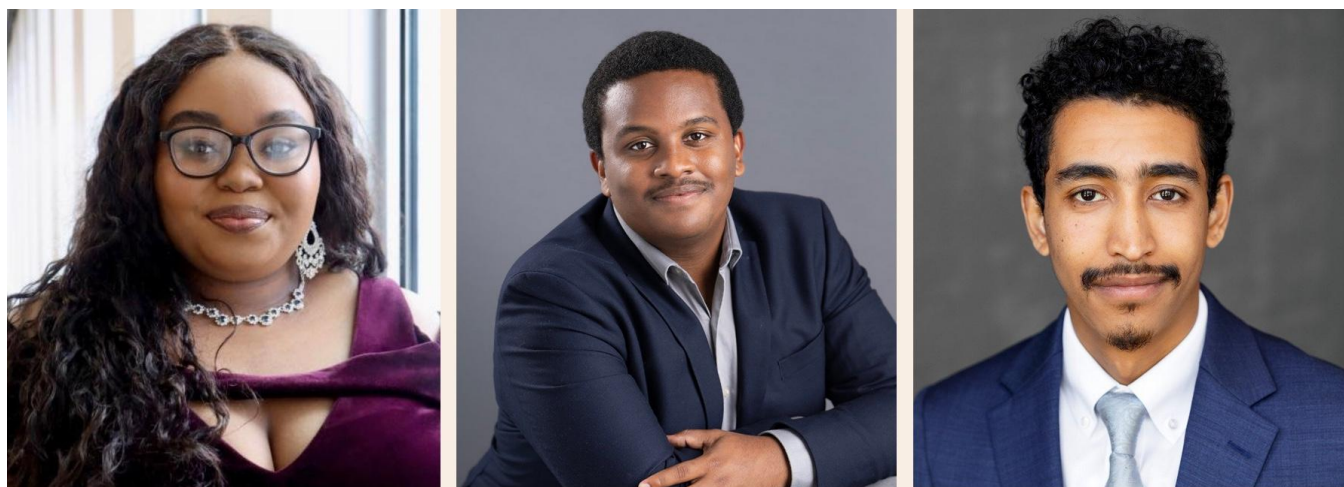


## CityMusic Cleveland celebrates Black Excellence (Oct. 19)

by Kevin McLaughlin



“Celebrating Black Excellence” was CityMusic’s organizing theme for the latest of their 2023-24 season presentations, held at the sound-absorbent East Zion Baptist Church on Thursday, October 19.

You can quibble about how “Black” the program was, with a lineup that included Artie Shaw’s *Clarinet Concerto*, selections from George Gershwin’s *Porgy and Bess*, and Manuel de Falla’s *Ritual Fire Dance*.

But as for “Black excellence,” there was an abundance. Works by Jessie Montgomery, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, and William Grant Still each sparkled in smart, moving, and inspiring ways. And the three vocal soloists, all current students at Oberlin Conservatory, shone.

Soprano Elizabeth Hanje (*above, left*) sang her arias and duet from *Porgy and Bess* (“Summertime,” “My Man’s Gone Now,” and a duet at the end with Benhur Mosazghi, “Bess, You Is My Woman Now”) with silken majesty. More resonant than loud, her sumptuous voice filled the large space and compelled undivided listening.

Travis Guillory (*middle*), a tenor with expressive flexibility and vocal color, acquitted himself well in Coleridge-Taylor's "Onaway! Awake, Beloved" from *Hiawatha's Wedding Feast*. Of his two *Porgy and Bess* selections, "It Ain't Necessarily So" rang out better in the hall than "There's a Boat That's Leaving Soon," which sometimes found him covered by the orchestra.

Bass-baritone Benhur Mosazghi (*right*) has a name and gift predictive of success. He showed a natural stage presence and self-assurance in Still's poignant "I Dream a World" from *Troubled Island* and in his *Porgy and Bess* aria "I Got Plenty of Nothing," when he suddenly went into a higher gear, spurred on by theatrical stimulus. He was even better in his duet with Hanje, which was the program's final work and highpoint.

Beginning the concert was clarinetist and Artie Shaw stand-in Daniel Gilbert, who charmed in Shaw's concerto. This was more quiet homage than rug-cutting. Gilbert stood at the back of the orchestra and delivered a solid, quietly swinging performance.

The orchestra — led by last-minute addition Lorenzo Lopez in all but Montgomery's *Strum*, which was performed without conductor — rose to their usual high standard, playing every work in quick succession, without an intermission.

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