

A peaceful afternoon at Classically Lake View (July 7)

by Stephanie Manning



Choosing a mausoleum as a concert venue might imply a more somber occasion, but the atmosphere was distinctly lighthearted at the Classically Lake View concert on July 7. Held in the Lake View Cemetery's Community Mausoleum on a sunny Sunday afternoon, a string quartet of Cleveland Orchestra members and an Oberlin student guitarist presented a spirited program of chamber music by Black composers.

First violinist Liyuan Xie confidently led the quartet as they kicked things off with two movements from Joseph Bologne, Chevalier de Saint-Georges' *String Quartet No. 3*, Op. 1. Despite the unconventional indoor space, the small stage helped with projection and the blend between the four musicians kept a balanced timbre. (Probably best not to add any wind instruments into the mix with that echo, though.)

As second violinist Isabel Trautwein explained, the afternoon's program was assembled "tapas-style," including a set of movements assembled from four different pieces. The bookenders of that provided the traditionally upbeat moments, from the familiar, jaunty tunes of Scott Joplin's *Maple Leaf Rag* (arr. William Zinn) to the playful percussiveness of "Tamborito" from William Grant Still's *Danzas de Panama*.

In the slower center movements, the "Lament" from George Walker's *String Quartet No. 1* felt straightforward in comparison to the richly Romantic "Andante cantabile" from Florence Price's *String Quartet No. 2*, which featured mournful melodies from both Trautwein and violist Eliesha Nelson.

Joining the event thanks to a partnership with the Cleveland Classical Guitar Society, Oberlin Conservatory student Damian Goggans provided the program's narrative centerpiece with a work by Justin Holland. A Black composer in the 1800s, Holland studied at Oberlin — like Goggans — before establishing himself in Cleveland, becoming a prolific composer, guitar virtuoso, educator, and activist. Goggans, a confident soloist, performed Holland's *An Andante*, a set of variations on "'Tis The Last

Rose Of Summer” that introduces complexity without straying too far from the original theme.

But the stirring rendition of three etudes by Thomas Flippin defined Goggans’ performance that afternoon. The arrangements of “Don’t Let Nobody Turn You Around,” “Wake Up, Jacob,” and “Don’t Be Weary, Traveler” all came from Flippin’s *14 Études of the Music of Black Americans* — Goggans preceded each one with a rendition of the spiritual in his deep, self-assured singing voice, contextualizing what he would go on to echo from his guitar. The emphasis on dissonant chords before their final resolutions in “Don’t Be Weary, Traveler” were especially striking.



Adding Mexican composer Manuel Ponce’s *Estrellita* as the program finale may have broken a bit with the theme, but its easy-to-follow melody paired very well with the etudes. Goggans, violinist Liyuan Xie, and cellist Tanya Ell channeled their inner vocalists in Stephen Aron’s arrangement — a lovely combination of the string and guitar sides of the program.

All told, the concert lasted a little over an hour, a great length for a casual afternoon. And especially appreciated since the glass ceiling — while beautiful — had only amplified the heat inside. But that should be no concern for Classically Lake View’s next entry in the series, “Bach Under The Trees” outdoors in the cool October weather.

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