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CHAMBER MUSIC REVIEW

THROUGH 1/7: Fine Chamber Music by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor and William Grant Still

By [Ted McIrvine](#)

January 5, 2018 - Asheville, NC:

It was windy and single-digits Fahrenheit in downtown Asheville on Friday evening, and the three dozen or so people who braved the weather and came to [First Presbyterian Church](#) fortunately all appeared to have good coats and scarves. But being bundled against the weather created no barriers between audience and the two performers, violinist [Tim Schwarz](#) and pianist [Daniel Weiser](#), the founder of [AmiciMusic](#).

AmiciMusic states that it "seeks to break down barriers between performers and audience through brief discussions of each composer." I usually fidget when a musician makes extended remarks from the stage. I came to hear the music. But an exception is when the musician is Weiser. Even when I think I know a work and its composer, his diligent research has produced additional salient and significant insight – not trivia.

Nor were there any barriers between the two performers. While talented musicians can collaborate with others that they have barely met, the best chamber music occurs when there is a history of making music together. In this case, there is more than twenty years of history. The two musicians formed their duo at Peabody Conservatory in the 1990's, and in 1996 were sponsored by the State Department on an eleven-country tour of Middle Eastern and Asian countries, where their programs stressed little-known American chamber music, including works by composers of the African diaspora. Friday's program harkened back to some of that same repertoire, and the musicians demonstrated a gratifyingly close collaboration. Weiser studied with Samuel Sanders, one of the finest collaborative pianists of the 20th century, and it shows.

The blues famously came up the river from the Mississippi Delta to Memphis then to St. Louis. W.C. Handy similarly came up the river in 1912 with his "Memphis Blues" followed in 1914 by his "St. Louis Blues." An arrangement for violin-piano by Joseph Cali-Livolsi entitled "St. Louis Blues Fantasy" began the program. Then came works by little-played composers Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875-1912) and William Grant Still (1895-1978). Schwarz and Weiser gave convincing performances that underscored the case for these works to take their place on more programs. These are two substantial pieces in the violin-piano repertoire, unjustly neglected.

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor was a mixed-race English composer. His mother was English while his father was a physician based in Sierra Leone whose ancestors had been freed from American slavery by the British at the time of the American Revolution. He had emigrated first to Nova Scotia, then back to Africa. Coleridge-Taylor had a distinguished musical career in England, where he studied violin and composition at the Royal Conservatory of Music. He was mentored by Charles Villiers Stanford there, and later by Edward Elgar. His Ballade in C minor, Op. 73, very much shows that he developed his own unique voice. Coleridge-Taylor's music defies national boundaries. There were harmonies that reminded me of Coleridge-Taylor's contemporary George Enescu and perhaps Antonín Dvořák. Elgar probably encouraged these influences. Despite his imperialism, Elgar favored European music rather than a dedication to prior English music.

William Grant Still was born in the segregated American South, took an undergraduate degree at Wilberforce University in Ohio (historically black) and then studied music at Oberlin Conservatory, where George Whitefield Chadwick was a major influence. He also studied with the avant-garde Edgard Varèse. Moving to New York, he participated in the Harlem Renaissance. His *Suite for Violin and Piano* has three movements, each titled after a painting or sculpture from that artistic initiative. "African Dancer" justified the frenetic tempo adopted by the musicians; they carried it off. The soloists caught the uplifting spirit of love in the slow second movement "Mother and Child." The bluesy carefree "Gamin" syncopated its way to a successful conclusion. This work is one of Still's

EVENT INFORMATION

Asheville -- (Fri., Jan. 5, 2018)

[AmiciMusic: "Music from the Underground"](#)

In Advance: Adults \$18, Church Members \$13.50; At the Door: Adults \$20, Church Members \$15; Under 18 Free -- First Presbyterian Church , (802) 269-0856; daniel@amicimusic.org , <https://amicimusic.org/concert/music-from-the-underground/> -- 7:30 PM

Asheville -- (Sat., Jan. 6, 2018)

[AmiciMusic: "Music from the Underground"](#)

At the Door \$20; In Advance \$18 -- Isis Restaurant and Music Hall , (802) 269-0856; daniel@amicimusic.org , <https://amicimusic.org/concert/music-from-the-underground/> -- 7:00 PM

Black Mountain -- (Sun., Jan. 7, 2018)

[AmiciMusic: "Music from the Underground"](#)

At the Door \$20; In Advance \$18 -- White Horse Black Mountain , (802) 269-0856; daniel@amicimusic.org , <https://amicimusic.org/concert/music-from-the-underground/> -- 2:00 PM

best. If you missed the concert, and can't get to the repeat concerts Saturday and Sunday, you still can catch Schwarz and Weiser in an earlier house concert available [here](#).

The second half of the program consisted of arrangements by virtuoso violinists of works from spirituals and the operatic repertoire. George Gershwin approved Jascha Heifetz's plans, but died before Heifetz completed his arrangements of "Tempo di Blues" and "It Ain't Necessarily So," from *Porgy and Bess*. The arrangements fully exploit the capabilities of the violin, while contrapuntally involving the piano. This is not to be attempted by players without the requisite technique, and Schwarz excelled here. Three spirituals, one arranged by Mischa Elman and the other two arranged by George Morrison, followed.

The concert concluded with one more arrangement by a virtuoso violinist. Pablo de Sarasate arranged the Carmen Fantasy, Op. 25, of Georges Bizet and he didn't hold back. This was a spectacular demonstration of ardor on the violin, and excited the listener with its confident rapid scales and stratospheric high notes.

Brave the continued cold if you are in the area. This performance repeats Saturday, January 6 at Isis Restaurant and Sunday, January 7 at White Horse Black Mountain. See our sidebar for details.



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