



AMERICAN CLASSICS



WILLIAM GRANT STILL

Summerland

Violin Suite • Pastorela • American Suite

Zina Schiff, Violin

Royal Scottish National Orchestra • Avlana Eisenberg



William Grant
STILL
(1895–1978)

| | |
|---|--------------|
| 1 Can't You Line 'Em (1940) | 4:01 |
| 2 3 Visions – No. 2. Summerland (1936) | 4:40 |
| 3 Quit Dat Fool'nish (1935) | 1:40 |
| 4 Pastorela (1946) | 11:56 |
| American Suite (c. 1918) | 7:45 |
| 5 I. Indian Love Song | 2:30 |
| 6 II. Danse | 1:40 |
| 7 III. Lament | 3:35 |
| 8 Fanfare for the 99th Fighter Squadron (1945) | 0:51 |
| 9 Serenade (1957) | 5:58 |
| Violin Suite (1943) | 16:58 |
| 10 I. African Dancer | 5:42 |
| 11 II. Mother and Child | 8:41 |
| 12 III. Gamin | 2:35 |
| 13 Threnody: In Memory of Jean Sibelius (1965) | 6:13 |

William Grant Still (1895–1978)

Summerland

Our album is the joyful culmination of a journey seeded in Zina's childhood, when she first met William Grant Still at rehearsals of the Peter Meremblum California Junior Symphony in Los Angeles. This sampler of his music, recorded as a mother-daughter collaboration, seems appropriate as Still cherished family and his music is, above all, personal and infused with love. These 13 tracks are lined with love of God, country, heritage, family, friends, and even his dog! Still hoped "that my music may serve a purpose larger than mere music. If it will help in some way to bring about better interracial understanding in America and in other countries, then I will feel that the work is justified." We fervently believe it is.

Born in Mississippi on May 11, Still grew up in Little Rock, Arkansas, where his mother Carrie moved to be with her family after the tragic death of her husband when their baby was only six months old. There, Still's doting grandmother serenaded him with hymns and spirituals while his mother taught high school English. An impish boy with a mother "constantly molding my character," Still came to value her discipline and firm belief that he "must amount to something in the world." When, after a decade of widowhood, his mother married Charles B. Shepperson, a railway postal clerk, Still gained a nurturing stepfather who filled his home with Red Seal opera recordings and introduced him to professional theater. Next came violin lessons, and Still taught himself to play cello, oboe, and clarinet. Graduating from high school as class valedictorian, Still enrolled at Wilberforce, the first private historically black university in the United States, with hope of becoming a professional musician.

Still composed nearly 200 works, including nine operas, five symphonies, and four ballets. He studied with such diverse voices as George Whitefield Chadwick and Edgard Varèse, and worked as performer and arranger with W.C. Handy, "Father of the Blues." He played oboe in the orchestra of *Shuffle Along*, the blockbuster Broadway show with music by Eubie Blake, featuring Josephine Baker. Still worked with such luminaries as Sophie Tucker and Paul Whiteman. He arranged the music for *Deep River Radio Hour*, and his arrangement of Artie Shaw's *Frenesi* was one of the best-selling records of all time. He composed the score for the 1936 Bing Crosby movie *Pennies From Heaven* and for many other films and TV shows in Hollywood.

Famed conductors, such as Sir John Barbirolli, Pierre Monteux, Leopold Stokowski, Howard Hanson, and Arthur Fiedler, showcased his music. Among his awards, Still received eight honorary doctorates, Guggenheim Fellowships, a Julius Rosenwald Fellowship, and the Mu Phi Epsilon Citation of Merit. He won the National Federation of Music Clubs and Aeolian Music Foundation Prize for the best composition dedicated to the United Nations and was commissioned to write the theme music for New York's 1939 World's Fair. Despite the widespread racial discrimination he encountered, Still maintained his commitment to composing music "with heart ... for the people." Still's hope and faith sustained him and are expressed in the inscription written in the composer's hand at the conclusion of each of his manuscripts: "With humble thanks to God, the Source of inspiration."

❶ Can't You Line 'Em (1940)

Based on a folk ballad collected and compiled by the Lomax Brothers and published in 1939, *Can't You Line 'Em* (*Cantcha Line 'Em*) captures the rhythm and spirit of the construction gangs "tie-shuffling" or lining up railroad tracks. Still was a train enthusiast since boyhood and in later life delighted in handcrafting elaborate wooden toy train sets for his children. A CBS commission, *Can't You Line 'Em* premiered on February 17, 1940, with the CBS Radio Orchestra on their network program, *American School of the Air*.

❷ 3 Visions – No. 2. Summerland (1936)

Originally composed as the second movement of *3 Visions* for solo piano, *Summerland* is Still's delicate depiction of the serenity and purity of Heaven.

❸ Quit Dat Fool'nish (1935)

Another work originally composed for solo piano, *Quit Dat* conjures up a jazzy romp with Still's mischievous dog, Shep. Still also wrote a version for solo saxophone and orchestra, which was transposed for this recording by Dana Paul Perna.

4 Pastorela (1946)

In the composer's words, *Pastorela* is "a tone picture of a California landscape, peaceful but exciting, arousing feelings of languor in some of its aspects and of animation in others, presenting an overall effect of unity in its variety." Responding to a request from his friend, Louis Kaufman, for a "poem" for violin, Still wrote this work honoring his adopted state. Kaufman premiered *Pastorela* at Town Hall, New York City, in 1947. It is heard here in its version for violin and orchestra.

5–7 American Suite (c. 1918)

Still's first symphonic work was composed while he was attending Wilberforce University in Ohio. Before leaving for Memphis to work with W.C. Handy, Still boldly sent the parts of *American Suite* to Frederick Stock, conductor of the Chicago Symphony. In 1998, Still's daughter Judith Anne shared the orchestral parts for the *Suite* with Dana Paul Perna, who created the score.

8 Fanfare for the 99th Fighter Squadron (1945)

Fanfare resonates with the pride, courage, and patriotic resolve of the Tuskegee Airmen, the 992 pilots who served in the Second World War. On April 3, 1939, spurred by Senator Harry Schwartz, Appropriations Bill Public Law 18 passed, containing an amendment designating money to train African American airmen. This successful program, which included financing by the Julius Rosenwald Fund to help build Moton Field in Tuskegee, Alabama, produced award-winning pilots and units. Leopold Stokowski and the Los Angeles Philharmonic premiered *Fanfare for the 99th Fighter Squadron* at the Hollywood Bowl on July 22, 1945, in commemoration of the end of the war and the valiant service of the Tuskegee Airmen.

9 Serenade (1957)

Serenade was originally intended as material for a cello concerto proposed by Still's friend and fellow Los Angeles resident, Gregor Piatigorsky. Instead, it became a commission by the Great Falls, Montana, High School Orchestra, with its lush cello writing hinting at its conception.

10–12 Violin Suite (1943)

The *Violin Suite*, dedicated to Louis and Annette Kaufman, is a musical impression of three works of art. *African Dancer* is a stunning bronze statue by Richmond Barthé (1901–1989) displayed at the Whitney Museum in New York. *Mother and Child* is a poignant colored lithograph by Sargent Johnson (1888–1967) housed at San Francisco's Museum of Modern Art. *Gamin* is a sassy bronze bust by Augusta Savage (1892–1962) at the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C. These works were featured in *The Negro in Art*, a book published in 1940 by Alain Locke (1885–1954), philosopher and leader of the Harlem Renaissance, who was Still's friend and champion. This book so impressed Edith Halpert (1900–1970), a Russian-Jewish refugee, visionary, and art promoter, that she contacted Locke, proposing to host an exhibit in her Downtown Gallery in New York. On December 8, 1941, the day after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, the exhibit opened, the first major commercial showing of African American art in New York, which included works of Barthé, Johnson, and Savage. Halpert's keen eyes, enthusiasm, and negotiating skills led to the purchase and presence of these works in prestigious collections and museums. Inspired by the artwork of his contemporaries, Still translated them into music with verve, tenderness, and charm.

13 Threnody: In Memory of Jean Sibelius (1965)

Threnody was commissioned by Maestro Fabien Sevitzky for a concert in memory of Finland's national hero, composer Jean Sibelius (1865–1957), on the 100th anniversary of his birth. It premiered on March 14, 1965, in a performance by the University of Miami Symphony Orchestra. The following year, *Threnody* was featured in a broadcast by the Finnish National Radio. Still's tribute is a haunting farewell, channeling the spirit of Sibelius.

Our greatest appreciation to Dana Paul Perna, Judith Anne Still, Daniel Headlee, Jerry Schwarz, Chris Whittaker, Ron Eisenberg, Cherina Eisenberg, and Eileen Wingard.

Zina Schiff, Avlana Eisenberg

Zina Schiff



California-born violinist Zina Schiff, a Heifetz protégée, has performed, recorded, and given masterclasses on five continents. In the US, she has given solo performances with the orchestras of Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, Rochester, Brooklyn, San Antonio, Nashville, San Diego, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and Seattle. Her first recording was the solo violin score for MGM's *The Fixer*, composed by Academy Award winner Maurice Jarre. Her debut albums, *Bach & Vivaldi* and *The Lark Ascending*, both released on Stradivari Classics, were as soloist with the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra. Four MSR Classics recordings include a critically acclaimed release featuring works by Sibelius, Barber and Ben-Haim conducted by her daughter, Avlana Eisenberg. Four 4-Tay recordings include *Here's One*, featuring William Grant Still. Previous Naxos releases are award-winning albums *Cecil Burleigh* (8.559061) produced by her daughter, Cherina Carmel, and Ernest Bloch's *Concerto* and *Suites* (8.557757) with the Royal Scottish National Orchestra. Schiff's honors include the Young Musicians Foundation Debut Award, the San Francisco Symphony Foundation Award, and a grant from the Martha Baird Rockefeller Fund for Music. While at the Curtis Institute, she won both the Junior and Senior Auditions of the Philadelphia Orchestra. A *Glamour Magazine* Top Ten College Winner while at the University of California, Berkeley, she was selected as an Outstanding Young Artist by *Musical America*. Schiff lectured on William Grant Still at the 2021 and 2022 American String Teachers Association National Conventions.

Royal Scottish National Orchestra



Formed in 1891, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra (RSNO) is one of Europe's leading symphony orchestras. Many renowned conductors have contributed to its success, including Sir John Barbirolli, Sir Alexander Gibson and Neeme Järvi. Thomas Søndergård has been the orchestra's music director since 2018. The RSNO performs across Scotland and appears regularly at the Edinburgh International Festival and the BBC Proms in addition to international tours. With a widely acclaimed discography, the RSNO has previously appeared on BIS in a cycle of Rachmaninov's symphonies as well as in programmes of music by James MacMillan, Ge Gan-ru and Sally Beamish.

Avlana Eisenberg



Avlana Eisenberg, music director of the Boston Chamber Symphony, has conducted orchestras throughout the US, Europe, and the UK. Her discography includes recordings with the Budapest Symphony Orchestra MÁV, Royal Scottish National Orchestra, and the Salzburg Chamber Soloists. She has led ensembles at noted summer festivals including Edinburgh Festival, Aspen Music Festival, Eastern Music Festival, and The Festival at Sandpoint, and at such venues as the Mozarteum, Salzburg; Hungarian Radio Marble Hall, Budapest; Hill Auditorium, Ann Arbor; and Granada Theater, Santa Barbara. The recipient of a Fulbright Fellowship to work at the Paris National Opera, Eisenberg graduated from Yale University, where she received the V. Browne Irish Award for Excellence in the Performing Arts and was named a Top Ten College Winner by *Glamour Magazine*. She earned graduate degrees in orchestral conducting from the University of Michigan and the Peabody Institute. In 2021, Eisenberg and the Boston Chamber Symphony released the debut video of their *Sounds of America* series – a multimedia performance of *Can't You Line 'Em* by William Grant Still.



William Grant STILL

(1895–1978)

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Zina Schiff, Violin **2–4** **10–12**

Royal Scottish National Orchestra

Avlana Eisenberg

WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS

A detailed track list can be found inside the booklet.

Recorded: 16–17 August 2018 at the RSNO Centre, Glasgow, UK

Producer: Michael Ponder • Engineer: Phil Hardman

Editors: Richard Scott, Adaq Khan, Bill Siegmund
(Digital Island Studios)

Booklet notes: Zina Schiff, Avlana Eisenberg

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AMERICAN CLASSICS

William Grant Still, the “Dean of Afro-American Composers,” was part of the Harlem Renaissance and wrote nearly 200 works including nine operas and five symphonies. Still’s many awards included three Guggenheim Fellowships and eight honorary doctorates. His work combines Classical forms with jazz and blues idioms and was inspired by the rich tradition of African American spirituals. Still hoped that his music would serve a larger purpose of interracial understanding, and this joyous, moving and hauntingly beautiful program – featuring all world premiere recordings – is infused with Still’s love of God, country, heritage, and even his mischievous dog Shep.

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Playing
Time:
60:03