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WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING

Coleridge-Taylor
Perkinson

A C E L E B R A T I O N

Chicago Sinfonietta / Paul Freeman, conductor
New Black Music Repertory Ensemble Quartet
Sanford Allen, violin • Joseph Joubert, piano • other soloists

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Producers

①–⑦, ⑩ James Ginsburg / ⑧–⑬, ⑯ Judith Sherman

Engineers

①–⑦, ⑩ Bill Maylone / ⑧–⑬, ⑯ Judith Sherman

Recorded

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recording sessions for Sinfonietta No. 1 and Grass



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COLERIDGE-TAYLOR PERKINSON (1932–2004) A CELEBRATION

Sinfonietta No. 1 for Strings (1954–55) (15:17)

Chicago Sinfonietta / Paul Freeman, conductor

- ① I. Sonata Allegro (3:45)
- ② II. Song Form: Largo (5:08)
- ③ III. Rondo: Allegro furioso (6:17)

④ Grass: Poem for Piano, Strings & Percussion (1956) (16:08)

Joseph Joubert, piano

Chicago Sinfonietta / Paul Freeman, conductor

⑤ Quartet No. 1 based on “Calvary” (Negro spiritual) (1956) (17:04)

New Black Music Repertory Ensemble Quartet

- ⑤ I. Allegro (5:57)
- ⑥ II. \downarrow = 54 (5:01)
- ⑦ III. Rondo: Allegro vivace (5:57)

⑧ Blue/s Forms for Solo Violin (1972) (7:26)

Sanford Allen, violin

- ⑧ I. Plain Blue/s: \downarrow = 88–96 (1:46)
- ⑨ II. Just Blue/s: Very free (2:50)
- ⑩ III. Jettin’ Blue/s: Fast (2:42)

⑪ Lamentations: Black/Folk Song Suite for Solo Cello (1973) (15:38)

Tahirah Whittington, cello

- ⑪ I. Fuguing Tune: resolute (4:24)
- ⑫ II. Song Form: plaintive (2:32)
- ⑬ III. Calvary Ostinato (\downarrow = 80–88) (3:08)
- ⑭ IV. Perpetual Motion (\downarrow = 76) (5:26)

⑮ Louisiana Blues Strut (A Cakewalk) (2001) (2:49)

Ashley Horne, violin

⑯ Movement for String Trio (2004) (3:56)

Sanford Allen, violin / Jesse Levine, viola / Carter Brey, cello

Total Time: (79:00)

COLERIDGE-TAYLOR PERKINSON (1932–2004) A CELEBRATION

notes by Gregory Weinstein

In an interview for the 1978 book *The Black Composer Speaks*, Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson was asked to define black music. He responded

I cannot define black music. I could say that it is a music that has its genesis in the black psyche or the black social life, but it is very difficult to say what black music really is. There are kinds of black music, just as there are kinds of other musics. . . .

In this response, Perkinson has identified a principle issue confronting scholars and critics of African-American music: how to define it, if indeed there is a unified “it” to define. Many writers have presented perspectives on this problem, perhaps most notably Samuel A. Floyd, who speaks of “Call-Response,” an inclusive process of African-American musical troping. Perkinson’s views were far more pragmatic and personal. He said the only uniquely black aspect of his music was “inspiration... Only *you* can decide if the life you live is significantly black; no one can decide that for you, and I don’t think that it’s right for anyone to pass judgment on the nature of your involvement.”

Perkinson came of age as a composer in the 1950s, a time of stark division in the American classical music world. On one side was a group of composers committed to increasingly arcane experiments. Milton Babbitt famously noted his desire to move composition into the academic sphere, rejecting the listening public and wondering “Who cares if you listen?” At the same time, the canon of old and new Romantic composers became increasingly entrenched in the concert world. Mainstays of the concert hall, such as Beethoven, Brahms, and Mahler, were being joined by twentieth-century counterparts such as Sergei Rachmaninov and Samuel Barber.

The “high art” canon of classical composers has traditionally been inhospitable to black composers. Not one has truly entered into the classical mainstream. (Perhaps the most prominent twentieth-century African-American composer, William Grant Still, found his *métier* nearly untenable: critics condemned his early “ultramodern” work as too complex, then dismissed his later “racial” works as overly simplistic.) Thus, Perkinson’s pragmatic approach to the

notion of a “black composer” could be seen, at least in part, as a tactical move: a desire to be judged solely on the merits of his music.

Perkinson’s diverse career must be positioned against the racially restricted world of classical music. He received an academic training in composition, studying with Vittorio Gianini at the Manhattan School of Music and Earl Kim at Princeton University. Yet he refused to enter the isolated world of academia, preferring instead a diverse array of musical jobs. He produced a great deal of “high art” music, but he was equally well-versed in jazz and popular forms: he briefly served as pianist for drummer Max Roach’s quartet and wrote arrangements for Roach, Marvin Gaye, and Harry Belafonte.

In light of Perkinson’s musical catholicity, one must resist the temptation to impose constricting artistic visions on his compositional output, since he clearly imposed no boundaries on his models. Perkinson wrote the earliest work on this disc, the *Sinfonietta* No. 1 for Strings, in 1954 when he was 22, although it was not premiered until 1966. Stylistically, the *Sinfonietta* reveals the influence

of several composers, particularly the counterpoint of his “teachers,” J.S. Bach and Vittorio Gianini, and the idiom of the day’s “Romantic” American composers. The slow movement, for example, seems reminiscent of the Adagio from Samuel Barber’s String Quartet, composed nearly twenty years earlier (better known in its later configuration as Barber’s Adagio for Strings), while the last movement resembles somewhat the style of Aaron Copland with its expansive melodic fourths, particularly in the lyrical middle section. Despite its tangible connections with other composers, the *Sinfonietta* reveals many characteristics that Perkinson would develop throughout his career, including pointed and controlled dissonance and metrical ambiguity (particularly in the third movement, where he changes meters frequently and disrupts the rhythmic flow by altering the relative positions of the themes).

Grass, a work for piano, strings and percussion, dates from approximately the same period as the *Sinfonietta* and its compositional style is quite close to the *Sinfonietta*’s first movement. While the *Sinfonietta* was nominally an autonomous composition, *Grass* is based on an eponymous poem by Carl Sandburg.

Perkinson explained, “It was written during a time when I imagined that I was going to be involved in the Korean conflict and was written from the perspective of a *black* person being involved in the Korean conflict.” Although he declined to elaborate further or describe how the music relates to the poem, leaving such connections to the listener’s imagination, the repeated opening motive is obviously based on the rhythm of the poem’s refrain: “I am the grass, I cover all.” The piano and percussion effectively contrast against the strings. Perkinson employs rhythmic devices similar to those in the Sinfonietta, but to greater extremes: displacements are more abrupt, meter changes and metrical ambiguity more common, and repetition is frequently employed. The work is in a ternary form, with a placid middle section bracketed by two active outer passages. Like the Sinfonietta, *Grass* is a tonal composition, though it employs a high degree of dissonance, often more exposed than in the earlier work (e.g., the piano chords before the middle section).

Perkinson composed his Quartet No. 1 during the same period as the Sinfonietta and *Grass*, and its use of dissonance and counterpoint is often similar. The quartet,

however, marks one of the first times Perkinson presents an explicit trope on an African-American tradition: the composer acknowledges in the title that the quartet is “based on ‘Calvary’ (Negro spiritual).” Perkinson was familiar with the spiritual from church services but cautioned, “When I sat down to write this string quartet, I was not trying to write something black; I was just writing out of my experience.” The spiritual provided the basis for the melody of the first movement, although it is transformed to the syncopated and angular style characteristic of Perkinson’s compositions from this period. The movement is generated through the development and transformation of the Calvary melody, providing a rich source of motives and intervals for Perkinson’s counterpoint. If the spiritual tune is present in the second and third movements, it is heavily disguised. Both movements — the second is slow and expressive while the third (a rondo) is more agitated — feature striking alternations of homophonic passages with precise counterpoint and voice transfers.

Although Perkinson expressed his supreme enjoyment for writing for large ensembles, he often seemed most at home when composing with a specific player in mind. Perkinson wrote *Lamentations*,

a suite for solo cello, in 1973 for cellist Ronald Lipscomb, who gave the premier performance at New York’s Alice Tully Hall. The piece is subtitled “Black/Folk Song Suite;” the composer explained, “the common denominator of these tunes is the reflection and statement of a *people’s crying out*.” The first movement, labeled “Fuguing Tune,” draws on both the traditional fugue, as developed by J.S. Bach (one of Perkinson’s favorite composers and primary influences), and a type of composition called “Fuging Tunes,” popularized by 18th-century American composer William Billings. Perkinson composed the second movement, “Song Form,” in an AABA format, a parallel to the similarly titled movement of his Sinfonietta (if not to the earlier work’s tone and texture). The third movement features another trope of the Calvary spiritual. Titled “Calvary Ostinato,” the movement features a repeating pizzicato bass line over which Perkinson composed another form of the Calvary melody. In the virtuosic final movement, Perkinson has the cello maintain a constant pulsing pedal note (alternately D and C) while creating intricate melodies around the repeated note, including a brief quotation of Stravinsky’s *Le Sacre du Printemps*.

Blue/s Forms, a 1972 work for solo violin, takes much the same format as *Lamentations*. Like the cello piece, it is intimately connected to its dedicatee, violinist Sanford Allen, who premiered the work at Carnegie Hall. Based on traditional blues schemes, the work is in three movements and is based in the key of G — the lowest open string on the instrument. Perkinson exploits the ambiguity between major and minor modes created by the so-called “blue notes,” the lowered third and seventh degrees of the scale. This ambiguity is present from the opening chord, where the blue third melts into the major. The first movement is in AABA form with the A sections 8 bars in length and the B extended to 12 measures. There is a great deal of repetition between sections — the A’s are nearly identical — but the harmonic plan seems more in line with song form than with traditional blues. The second movement is to be played muted and freely, employing slippery diminished seventh chords and syncopation. As with the opening movement, it ends on a half-cadence, leading into the finale. The third and final movement is a dizzyingly rapid perpetual motion. The meter varies, using different multiples of sixteenth notes, but the end result is one of continuity with

disorienting syncopations and slight variations in meter.

Composed nearly thirty years after *Blue/s Forms*, Perkinson initially conceived of *Louisiana Blues Strut* as a fourth movement for the earlier work, but he ultimately left it separate, remarking, “I just couldn’t get my head in the same place.” Subtitled “A Cakewalk” (a dance form reputedly with origins in the musical practices of slaves but with many modern descendents), this movement takes the form of a rondo with a laid-back groove.

On one level, *Blue/s Forms* and *Louisiana Blues Strut* are sophisticated works for solo violin that both visually and aurally remind one of virtuosic compositions dating back to Bach’s Sonatas and Partitas. The pieces also draw attention to the correspondence between the repetitive harmonic scheme of the blues and that of Baroque forms such as the chaconne and passacaglia. However, *Blue/s Forms* (and its successor) is also a subtle commentary on the blues, invoking that genre’s varied origins and formal components while blending it with the traditions of classical solo composition.

The string trio movement presented on this disc is Perkinson’s final composition, written quite literally on his deathbed in February and March of 2004. This movement is unique among the works presented on this memorial: its utter simplicity stands apart from the complex musical designs of the Sinfonietta and “Calvary” Quartet (for example). The cello presents a repeated chromatic descent, so characteristic of operatic lament basses, while the violin and viola trade and embellish a minor-mode theme. Yet even here, in this most poignant movement, Perkinson’s rhythmic games are afoot, as he occasionally adds and subtracts a single sixteenth note from a measure. It seems appropriate that Perkinson would compose at the end a work whose deliberate counterpoint so clearly evokes Bach, one of the earliest and most enduring influences on his unique compositional style.

Gregory Weinstein is a Ph.D. student in ethnomusicology at the University of Chicago. His research interests include African-American music, including hip-hop and popular music.

ABOUT COLERIDGE-TAYLOR PERKINSON

Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson was born in New York City in 1932. After graduating from New York’s High School for Music and Art, he studied composition at the Manhattan School of Music, receiving his bachelor’s degree in music in 1953 and a master’s degree in composition in 1954. He later studied conducting at the Berkshire Music Center, at the Salzburg Mozarteum, and with Franco Ferrara and Dean Dixon. From 1965 to 1970, he was co-founder and associate conductor for the Symphony of the New World and served as its acting music director during the 1972–73 season. At various times in his career he also served as music director or composer-in-residence for the Negro Ensemble Company, the Alvin Ailey Dance Company, the Dance Theatre of Harlem, and for productions at the American Theatre Lab, the Denver Center for the Performing Arts, and the Goodman Theatre in Chicago. At the time of his death, he was also composer-in-residence for the Ritz Chamber Players of Jacksonville, Florida.

Perkinson’s composing career began in high school, when his composition “And Behold” won the High School for Music and Art choral competition in 1948. His career demonstrates his versatility as a composer of classical music, popular music, theater and film music, and jazz. He composed and arranged for a variety of jazz and popular artists including Harry Belafonte, Donald Byrd, and Marvin Gaye (for whom he arranged Gaye’s first platinum album, *I Want You*, issued in 1976 on the Motown label). He served as pianist for the Max Roach Jazz Quartet in 1964–65. He composed and conducted scores for a number of award-winning theatrical, television, and documentary and feature films, including *A Warm December*, starring Sidney Poitier (1972). He also served as guest conductor for numerous orchestras around the world. Prior to this album, his classical compositions have been recorded by the Chicago Sinfonietta, the Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra, flutist Harold Jones, pianists John Cheek and Karen Walwyn, and cellist Anthony Elliott.

At the Center for Black Music Research at Chicago’s Columbia College, Perkinson was artistic advisor to Ensemble Stop-Time, the Center’s grant-funded ensemble formed to explore the commonalities between the various black vernacular music forms, including jazz and gospel. In 1999, he founded and began his tenure as conductor and music director of

the New Black Music Repertory Ensemble, a group of musicians dedicated to performing a spectrum of music by black composers, from popular music and jazz to concert music. The Ensemble staged a successful series of thirty-four concerts in Chicago, at the South Shore Cultural Center, Buntrock Hall of Symphony Center, and other venues. The Ensemble also performed for members of congress in Washington, D.C., and in New York City. In 2001, he conducted the Ensemble's world-premiere concert performance of *Doxology: The Doxy Canticles*, an opera with libretto by Paul Carter Harrison and music by Wendell Logan.

Coleridge Taylor Perkinson died from cancer on March 9, 2004 in Chicago.

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ABOUT PAUL FREEMAN, CONDUCTOR



One of America's leading conductors, Maestro Paul Freeman became the Founding Music Director of the Chicago Sinfonietta in 1987. He was appointed Music Director and chief conductor of the Czech National Symphony Orchestra in Prague in January 1996. From 1979 to 1989, Maestro Freeman served as Music Director of the Victoria Symphony in Canada. Prior to that post, he served as Principal Guest Conductor of the Helsinki Philharmonic and as Associate Conductor of the Dallas and Detroit Symphonies. He also served for six years as Music Director of the Opera Theatre of Rochester, New York.

Maestro Freeman has led more than 100 orchestras in over 30 countries, including the National Symphony, New York Philharmonic, Cleveland Orchestra, Chicago Symphony, London Philhar-

monic, Royal Philharmonic, Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, St. Petersburg Philharmonic, Moscow Philharmonic, Warsaw Philharmonic, Berlin Symphony, Tonkünstler Orchester (Vienna), National Orchestra of Mexico, and Israel Sinfonietta.

Dr. Freeman received his Ph.D. from the Eastman School of Music and studied on a U.S. Fulbright Grant at the Hochschule für Musik in Berlin. He also studied with the renowned conductor Pierre Monteux and has received numerous awards including a top prize in the Mitropoulos International Conducting Competition, and, most recently, the Mahler Award from the European Union of Arts. With over 200 recordings to his credit, Maestro Freeman has won widespread acclaim for his interpretations of classical, romantic, and modern repertoire. Recently, he was awarded Doctor of Humane Letters degrees from both Dominican and Loyola Universities in Chicago. This is Dr. Freeman's thirteenth recording for Cedille.

ABOUT THE CHICAGO SINFONIETTA

Now in its nineteenth season, the Chicago Sinfonietta has gained national and international recognition through its tours and recordings. A mid-sized professional orchestra, the Sinfonietta is dedicated to the authentic performance of Classical, Romantic, and contemporary repertoire as originally conceived by the composer. Under Maestro Paul Freeman, its founding music director, the Chicago Sinfonietta has achieved a reputation for high-quality and unique programming, combining the traditional with the intriguing. Woven into its programs are works by ethnic composers and soloists. Its personnel truly represents the cultural diversity of the city of Chicago, thus its motto: "Excellence Through Diversity."

The Sinfonietta has enjoyed numerous successful U.S. and overseas tours, including concerts in Germany, Austria, and the Canary Islands, and at the Kennedy Center. The Chicago Sinfonietta's CDs have garnered outstanding reviews. The Sinfonietta has twice been featured on CBS-TV, and selected performances are broadcast nationwide on National Public Radio's Performance Today. In 1992, the Sinfonietta was nominated for three Emmy awards. This is the Chicago Sinfonietta's sixth recording for Cedille.

ABOUT THE NEW BLACK MUSIC REPERTORY ENSEMBLE

Founded in 1999, the New Black Music Repertory Ensemble (New BMRE) is the performance organization of the Center for Black Music Research at Chicago's Columbia College. An ensemble of up to eighty professional musicians, the New BMRE's mission is as ambitious as it is unique, drawing from the repertoire the Center's three earlier ensembles: the nationally acclaimed Black Music Repertory Ensemble (1987–1996), which presented black music in the written tradition from the eighteenth century to the present; Ensemble Kalinda Chicago (1994–1998), which demonstrated the common origins and shared musical traits of Afro-Caribbean and Afro-Latin American musics; and Ensemble Stop-Time (1998–2001), which demonstrated the gamut of twentieth-century Black American popular music, ranging from Negro spirituals to ragtime, gospel song, R&B, soul, rap, and all styles and periods of jazz from Jelly Roll Morton to the avant-garde stylings of the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM).

The New Black Music Repertory Ensemble presents musical performances and lecture-demonstrations that illustrate the vast range of musics from the African diaspora. The varied talents of its musicians provide authentic performances in many different styles, periods, and genres, and in groupings of instrumentalists and singers ranging from solos and duets to string quartets, woodwind quintets, and jazz ensembles of various sizes. This flexibility has resulted in concerts dedicated to the string quartet, solo vocal songs, compositions based on Negro spirituals, instrumental solos, and compositions based on jazz and blues.

From 1998 until his death in March 2004, the New BMRE was under the artistic and musical direction of Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson. Heard on this recording is the New BMRE String Quartet consisting of Ashley Horne and Rachel Handlin, violins; Reneé Baker, viola; and Edward Moore, cello.

ABOUT JOSEPH JOUBERT, PIANO

Joseph Joubert was born in New York City, where, at the age of sixteen, he made his Town Hall debut with full orchestra. After graduating from the Manhattan School of Music, with Bachelor and Master of Music degrees, Mr. Joubert won the nationwide piano competition of the National Association of Negro Musicians. Success in other competitions resulted in recitals and concerto performances, and also master classes with such virtuosos as André Watts, John Browning, and Eugene Istomin.

As a solo performer and ensemble player, Mr. Joubert has appeared in New York City's major concert venues, including Avery Fisher, Alice Tully, and Carnegie Halls. Abroad, he has performed in Nice, France; at the International Festival of Two Worlds in Spoleto, Italy; and at the Pushkin Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow. He has also performed at the White House with Kathleen Battle for Presidents Bill Clinton and Boris Yeltsin. Mr. Joubert served as staff pianist for the Metropolitan Opera's revival of Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* in 1985–86 and 1989–1990, and as Musical Director for the 1994 Gala of the New York Shakespeare Festival, where he worked with Kathleen Battle, Kevin Kline, Wynton Marsalis, Melba Moore, Mandy Patinkin, Ben Vereen, and Christopher Walken. A Grammy-nominated orchestrator, Mr. Joubert was for five years Musical Director for Judy Collins, in which capacity he performed with the London Symphony and the symphony orchestras of Atlanta, Charleston, Chicago, Dallas, Dayton, Houston, Kansas City, Louisville, Milwaukee, Pittsburgh, and Portland (Oregon). Mr. Joubert was also conductor, arranger, and pianist for the 2001 PBS special (and subsequent BMG CD) "Three Mo' Tenors."

ABOUT SANFORD ALLEN, VIOLIN

Sanford Allen began his study of the violin at the age of seven, entered the Juilliard School of Music at age ten, and completed his education at the Mannes College of Music, studying with Mme. Vera Fonaroff. The first black musician to become a regular member of the New York Philharmonic, he joined the orchestra in 1962 and remained with the Philharmonic until 1977. Mr. Allen has played recitals and participated in chamber music concerts around the world. He has soloed with top orchestras including the Symphony of the New World; the Quebec, Baltimore, and Detroit Symphonies; and the New York Philharmonic. He served as concertmaster for the Center for Black Music Research's Black Music Repertory Ensemble from 1991 to 1996. Since 1997, he has been the Music Director of the Leaf Peeper Chamber Music Series in Chatham, New York. He has performed the premieres of works by numerous contemporary composers, black composers in particular. In 1974, Mr. Allen performed the Violin Concerto by Roque Cordero with the Detroit Symphony, and later recorded the piece for Columbia Records' acclaimed *Black Composers Series*.

Performing Perkinson's Movement for String Trio with Sanford Allen are **Jesse Levine**, who has served as principal violist of the Buffalo, Dallas, Baltimore, and New Jersey Symphony Orchestras, and New York Philharmonic principal cellist, **Carter Brey**.

ABOUT TAHIRAH WHITTINGTON, CELLO

A native of Houston, Texas, cellist Tahirah Whittington has performed for audiences in the U.S., Chile, France, Italy, and Japan. Her solo engagements have included performances at Merkin Hall in New York City, with the National Symphony Orchestra at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, with the New England Conservatory Symphony in Boston, and with the Ann Arbor Symphony in Michigan, as a result of winning first prize at the 1999 Sphinx Competition. An avid chamber musician, Ms. Whittington is a member of the acclaimed Core Ensemble (piano, cello, percussion) that tours with an actor and performs Chamber Music Theater. She is also a member of the Ritz Chamber Players based in Jacksonville, Florida, and a former member of the Acacia String Quartet, winners of the 1999 Artists International Competition. A recipient of the Irene Diamond and C.V. Starr Scholarships, she holds a Master of Music Degree from the Juilliard School, where she studied cello and chamber music with Joel Krosnick and Joel Smirnoff of the Juilliard Quartet. She received her Bachelor of Music Degree from the New England Conservatory, under the tutelage of Lawrence Lesser.

ABOUT ASHLEY HORNE, VIOLIN

A native of Los Angeles and graduate of the Juilliard School of Music, violinist Ashley Horne has appeared as a soloist and chamber musician throughout the world. He has performed as a recitalist at Lincoln Center's Alice Tully Hall and has been the featured soloist and concertmaster of numerous ensembles, including the Center for Black Music Research's New Black Music Repertory Ensemble, The Antara Ensemble of New York, Cascade Festival Orchestra, and Aspen Young Artists Orchestra. Mr. Horne performs regularly with the American Symphony Orchestra, Bard Festival Orchestra, Westchester Symphony, West-Park Chamber Society, Gateways Music Festival, Dance Theater of Harlem Orchestra, and New York City Opera. He also performs with top Broadway shows including *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, *Carousel*, and the current smash hit, *The Producers*. Mr. Horne has previously recorded Henry Cowell's *Fiddler's Jig* with the Manhattan Chamber Orchestra for Koch International.

