



Black Being

Flutronic

Chicago Sinfonietta • Mei-Ann Chen





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Black Being (40:13)

- 1 Angels (11:32)
- 2 Water Babies (9:07)
- 3 Moonpies and Stardust (11:34)
- 4 Black Lights (7:59)

WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING

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We Keep Coming

PROGRAM NOTE
BY HANNAH EDGAR



*Nathalie Joachim
and Allison
Loggins-Hull
[compose and]
perform together
as Flutronic*

The 2021 premiere of *Black Being*, in its first version for flutes and electronics, began the moment audiences stepped into the Arts Club of Chicago, but it couldn't continue until they actually started listening.

As attendees filled in for that performance, they were greeted by the same low, pulsing flute loop that begins the orchestral version. It crescendoed, imperceptibly at first, until all pre-concert chitchat was eventually drowned out by its lapping waves.

That moment encapsulates exactly what Nathalie Joachim and Allison Loggins-Hull, who perform together as Flutronic, aim to do in *Black Being*: reclaim the time, respect, and agency so frequently denied Black women. Through a thrumming electroacoustic soundscape and an epic, evocative text by North Carolina poet laureate Jaki Shelton Green, Joachim and Loggins-Hull share facets of their lives they would have otherwise never imagined sharing in a classical concert setting. They run their fingers through bowls of beans and rice, reminiscent of Joachim's long afternoons spent washing rice on the porch with her family in Haiti. They allow their bodies to slacken and rest in chairs onstage, popping paper fans like the Baptist church ladies from Loggins-Hull's

youth. They command a roomful of people to transport themselves to the bloodstained hull of a slave ship.

“The imagery is just so vivid,” Loggins-Hull says of Green’s poem. “Reading it, I see the Middle Passage immediately, or I see those warm summer days. That’s my absolute favorite thing about this work: It’s just so true to, like, everything. It connects us all in this way that can’t even really be explained.”

In April 2022, the Cincinnati Symphony, *Black Being’s* co-commissioner, premiered the chamber orchestra version under the baton of Mei-Ann Chen. Chen reprised the work in 2025 with the Chicago Sinfonietta for the orchestra’s annual Martin Luther King Day concerts — which, that year, coincided with Donald Trump’s second inauguration. The work took on special resonance those evenings, particularly as realized by an orchestra with a steadfast, and rare, commitment to racial diversity.

“For us to be able to really claim [an orchestral] space means something very different,” Joachim says of *Black Being’s* chamber orchestra arrangement.

Black Being’s existence can be traced back to 2018, when Flutronix began a two-year residency at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. The duo’s stint in North Carolina introduced them to Green’s poetry, which Joachim later set to music in *Blood Sister* (2019) for treble choir and viola. The poem Joachim set, “Revelations,” from Green’s 1983 collection *Dead on Arrival*, taps into themes that course through the poet’s entire body of work: sisterhood, living history, slippages of time and place.

Even so, when Flutronix tapped Green to write a poem specifically about Black women for *Black Being*, the state poet laureate admitted she felt daunted by the task.

“I dare not try to define what Black womanhood is. I don’t think there’s any such thing — tomorrow, it’s different for me than today,” Green says. “But I told them what I did not want it to be: I did not want it to be the ‘oh-woe,’ Black woman syndrome. I just did not want it to be about that weight. It’s more about how we’ve carried that weight, and we’ve thrown that weight off. We’re lighter, and we are light.”



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After receiving Green’s text — and absorbing it, which was quite another task altogether (“I opened up the email, then I had to sit at my desk in silence for a while,” Joachim remembers) — Flutronix outlined the poem’s narrative arc by segmenting it into four chapters. The first, “Angels,” groans with the weight Green describes: The opening flute loop and vocoder (a type of voice synthesizer) recitations evoke an uneasy atmosphere before launching listeners headlong into the terror of human bondage. Brass snarl, percussion pound, and strings and clarinet shriek.

That pivots to “Water Babies.” Meditative, then stormy, then reflective again, Green’s text doesn’t sugarcoat the harrowing reality of people being thrown from slave ships. But she reimagines those souls as fantastical sirens, liberated, at last, from their earthly forms.

“Up to that point, [Jaki is] laying out all the activity that got us to that point, but then you move into this beautiful space. It’s another way of thinking about birth: We keep emerging from these beautiful nothings,” Joachim says.



*As Black Being
attests, there
are many ways to be
a Black woman.*



“Water Babies” lays the foundation for “Moon Pies and Stardust,” teeming and glowing gold-green with nostalgia. (In Loggins-Hull’s words, “it’s leisure, it’s ease, it’s some sweet hammock lifestyle.”) By the time we reach “Black Lights,” *Black Being’s* propulsive, iterative final section, the weight from the exposition is less shrugged off than defiantly hurled. Its unspooling enumeration of people, places, and things — both by inclusion and by negation — affirms the richness of Black womanhood across continents, class, appearance, eras, and experience.

“So often, we get stuck into tropes of only being allowed to be this or that kind of Black person. What’s radical about this piece is that it acknowledges our universality without making us this monolith,” Joachim says.

The title “Black Being” is similarly multivalent. “Being” could be interpreted as a noun, a verb, or a gerund. Joachim and Loggins-Hull say this ambiguity was intentional. As *Black Being* attests, there are many ways to be a Black woman.



And it’s enough — revelatory, even — to simply be, like that quietly radical moment of rest in “Moon Pies and Stardust.”

“The fact that we exist is a revolution,” Green says. “When young people started talking about Black joy as resistance, I thought, ‘Yeah.’ Every day that I see a Black child laugh, smile, or ride down the street eating ice cream is a declaration of nowness — of being here, now. I know that we are all our ancestors’ wildest dreams.”

Hannah Edgar is a Chicago-based freelance writer who writes about classical music and jazz for the Chicago Tribune, WBEZ, The New York Times, Musical America, Downbeat, and other outlets.

This writing was adapted from an [article](#) originally published in [Fanfare Magazine](#), the official program book magazine of the [Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra](#) and [Cincinnati Pops](#).

BLACK BEING

BY JAKI SHELTON GREEN

(Movement 1)

If they could have
they would have
strangled us
inside the bellies of our mamas
angels were watching
angels were counting
angels were whispering
keep on coming
so we swam towards the light
because that's what black women do
like Angelo a Negar
one of the first African slaves
to set foot on virginia shores
she carried the dna of survival
in her eyes sewn
inside her palms
we are all the seeds
gathering inside untamed winds
tangled in between
cornrows
afro puffs
box braids
havana twists
keep on coming

catching babies tossed back into the atlantic
seductress mermaids staring down sharks
following middle passage cargo
riding hailstorms
inside lynching parties
riding shotgun with nat turner
steering the oars for denmark vesey
counting gold ribbons gold coins gold fingers
with madam marie laveau
keep on coming
feasting on cornbread
rice beans
cassava
and the hearts of fresh pigeons
we are these ones who keep on coming
we are song
poem
color
story of a life large enough to hold
large enough to carry such a large life
keep on coming

(Movement 2)

the water babies are singing
the water babies are singing
still dancing us home in the backwoods
where black mothers go to the woods
to study war no more
we keep on coming
clenching black misery
between our teeth
poems fly from beneath our skirts
our lips sweat love self-worth self-preservation
we keep on coming
black mothers
trying to un-bleed the red of the bullet hole
trying to un-become ancestral grief
we keep on coming
black lace
black nectar
black womb of whispered prayers
we are the *who art in heaven*
holding up black universes
we are the hum
inside the wasp's nest
we are the light

streaming through cracked mornings
we remember
all the stories about us
some hiding in corners
some covering themselves
under hawk feathers
rusty coins
but we keep coming

(Movement 3)

from white lightning
moon pies and stardust

we keep coming

from bloody Sundays
muddy roads and tin roofs
we keep sprouting wings

we keep coming

from pine trees
kudzu
wisteria

weeping willows
sweet gum balls

we keep coming

from prickly roses
honey suckle vines
potato patches

hand me down blues
from chi-town wind
baltimore brownstones

finger sucking good georgia peaches
friday night salsa in spanish harlem
crenshaw bump and grind

we keep coming

(Movement 4)

great grandmothers
grandmothers
mothers
daughters
granddaughters
great granddaughters

we keep coming

lifting
swaying
shifting

a new way of being in the world
a new language for
woman black(ness)

black woman (ness)

we keep coming

rearranging the alphabet
reordering traffic signals
respelling our codes
weareweareweareweareweareweare
weareweare

comingcomingcomingcomingcoming
wearecoming

we were here 1619
we were here 1719
we were here 1819
we were here 1919
we were here 2019
we are here 2020

we keep coming

no woe
no burden
no mule
no broken back
no muzzled scream
no hidden bloody skirts
no rape
no black eye
no bruised joy
no murder
no stolen daughter
no slaughtered baby
no welfare mama
no side chick
no beatdown wife
no lied-on sister
no neck-popping jealousy
no riff raff hoodoo
no strange fruit

we black women

liberia
congo
belize
madagascar
selma
tulsa
galveston

durham
virginia
gulfport
johannesburg
charleston

miami
havanna
detroit
cleveland
ferguson
dorchester
montreal
greensboro
birmingham

kiss the hems of our skirts
wash the soles of our feet
wipe the tears of our torn flesh
catch the blood of our sacrifices
paint a rainbow above our scars
count the hands
count the hands
count the hands
so many hands
bringing so much light
so many hands
bringing so much light
black lights
black lights

black lights
black lights
black lights
black lights
we black women
keep coming





Photo courtesy of the artist

Nathalie Joachim

Nathalie Joachim is a Grammy-nominated performer and composer. The Haitian-American artist has been hailed as “powerful and unpretentious” (*The New York Times*) and “a fresh and invigorating cross-cultural voice” (*The Nation*). Her creative practice centers on an authentic commitment to storytelling and human connectivity, while advocating for social change and cultural awareness.

Joachim’s 2025–2026 season includes several appearances at Opera Philadelphia as its Composer-in-Residence, including her contribution to the company’s world premiere opera, *Complications in Sue*. She presents material from her upcoming opera, *Le présent éternel*, at New York’s Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in November 2025 and joins the New York Philharmonic for an expanded version of the work in May 2026 as the featured artist in the orchestra’s Sound On series. Joachim also appears at Carnegie Hall and The Juilliard School as an Arnhold Creative Associate, premieres her new multimedia

work, *Solitude + S P A C E* at Princeton Sound Kitchen and the Philadelphia Chamber Music Society, and joins DeCoda for performances of *Fanm d’Ayiti* in San Francisco and at Stanford University. Further 2025–2026 world premieres include works written for the London Sinfonietta/Holland Festival and Jacksonville Symphony.

Ms. Joachim is Assistant Professor of Composition at Princeton University. She is regularly commissioned to write for orchestra, instrumental and vocal ensembles, dance, and interdisciplinary theater. Her landmark project, *Fanm d’Ayiti*, an evening-length work for flute, voice, string quartet, and electronics, celebrates and explores her personal Haitian heritage and received a Grammy nomination for Best World Music Album. Joachim’s sophomore album, *Ki moun ou ye* — an intimate examination of ancestral connection and self — was co-released by Nonesuch and New Amsterdam Records in 2024 and deemed “one of the year’s most creatively

and personally ambitious albums” (*SPIN Magazine*). Joachim is a recent Scholar-in-Residence at MoMA and a United States Artist Fellow. She is an alumnus of The Juilliard School and The New School.

nathaliejoachim.com



Photo: Roger Mastroianni

Allison Loggins-Hull

Celebrated as a musical “powerhouse” (*The Washington Post*), Allison Loggins-Hull is a composer, flutist, and producer whose work defies genre, ranging from symphonic music to film scores, chamber music, and electronic music.

Her signature style of composing for orchestra is characterized by unique sonic effects that echo contemporary music production techniques. Her works are profoundly influenced by Black American music, creating a vibrant and kaleidoscopic sonic palette. Thematically, her compositions are deeply rooted in the experiences of community, culture, and life, offering a rich and evocative musical narrative. Her artistic reflections on Black stories, music, and experience have led to works aligned with Afrofuturism, a movement that imagines alternate realities and a liberated future viewed through the lens of Black cultures.

Her recent and upcoming highlights include premieres performed by the New York Philharmonic, Boston Symphony, The

Cleveland Orchestra, Seattle Symphony, Toronto Symphony, The Knights, Third Coast Percussion, Apollo Chamber Players, and the National Orchestral Institute.

Loggins-Hull has served as Resident Artistic Partner to the New Jersey Symphony since September 2024. The 2024–2025 season marked the last of her three years as the Lewis Composer Fellow with The Cleveland Orchestra, an engagement that focused on the narratives and history of Cleveland through the prism of one of the world’s great orchestras, culminating in three world premieres and two portrait albums due in 2026. She also received a 2025 Fellowship from the New Jersey State Council on the Arts.

Loggins-Hull has performed as an accompanist to major pop acts, including Lizzo and Frank Ocean. She has performed on multiple blockbuster film scores and composed the score for *Bring Them Back*, an award-winning documentary executive-produced by Debbie Allen about the legendary dancer Maurice Hines.

Loggins-Hull lives in Montclair, NJ with her family. She is represented by Pink Noise Agency, a BIG Arts Group company.

allisonloggins.com





Photo courtesy of the artist

Jaki Shelton Green

Jaki Shelton Green, appointed in 2018 as the ninth Poet Laureate of North Carolina, is the first African American and third woman to hold this post. Her recognitions include *Forbes Magazine* 50 Over 50 Lifestyle List, 2021 UNC Chapel Hill Frank B. Hanes Writer in Residence, 2021 George School Outstanding Alumni Award, 2019 Academy of American Poets Laureate Fellow, 2019 North Carolina Humanities Council Caldwell Award, 2014 Induction into the North Carolina Literary Hall of Fame, 2009 North Carolina Piedmont Laureate appointment, and the 2003 North Carolina Award for Literature.

Ms. Green recently retired as Professor of Documentary Poetry at Duke University's Center for Documentary Studies. Her publications include *Dead on Arrival*, *Masks*, *Dead on Arrival and New Poems*, *Conjure Blues*, *singing a tree into dance*, and *breath of the song*, published by Blair Publishers; *Feeding the Light*, *i want to undie you*, and *The Communion of White Dresses* published by Jacar Press; and *i want to undie you English/Italian bilingual*

edition published by Lebeg Publishers, Rome (Italy). On Juneteenth 2020, she released her first LP poetry album, *The River Speaks of Thirst*, produced by Soul City Sounds and Clearly Records. In 2021, she released *i want to undie you* on CD.

Jaki Shelton Green is the owner of *SistaWRITE*, which provides writing retreats for women authors in Sedona (AZ), Martha's Vineyard (MA), Ocracoke (NC), Northern Morocco, the Loire Valley (France), and Ireland. She has been involved with numerous public art collaborations and projects including with the Dix Park Conservancy, City of Asheville Nasty Branch Riverwalk Project, visual artist Monique Luck, and North Carolina African American Heritage Commission Africa to Carolina Art Installation.

Her poetry has been commissioned, performed, choreographed, and translated into symphonies, film, and paintings by a plethora of visual artists, dance companies, and musical soloists and ensembles

including Flutronix, the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra, and the Art Project of Chicago. She has also served as Poet Laureate in Residence at the North Carolina Museum of Art (2021–2024), History Museum of Charlotte, and Blowing Rock Arts and History Museum and serves as the poetry editor for *WALTER Magazine*.

jakisheltongreen.com



Photo: Pauly Simon

Mei-Ann Chen

Taiwanese American conductor Mei-Ann Chen is renowned as one of the most versatile, compelling, and dynamic international conductors today. Music Director of the MacArthur Award-winning Chicago Sinfonietta since 2011, her contract has been unanimously extended through the end of the 2028–2029 season. Chief Conductor of Austria's Recreation – Grosses Orchester Graz at Styriarte (the first female Asian conductor to hold this position with an Austrian orchestra) since fall 2021, she also serves as Artistic Advisor of the Springfield Symphony Orchestra (MA) since 2024, the first-ever Artistic Partner of Houston's ROCO since 2019, and Artistic Partner with the Northwest Sinfonietta (WA) since 2022. Former posts include Artistic Director of the National Taiwan Symphony Orchestra Summer Festival (2016–2021) and Music Director of Portland Youth Philharmonic (OR, 2002–2007). Ms. Chen was named Conductor Laureate of the Memphis Symphony after serving as Music Director (2010–2016). She

has made recordings for Cedille Records, Innova Recordings, and Naxos.

With the Chicago Sinfonietta on Cedille, she has released *Delights and Dances* (2013) and *Project W – Works by Diverse Women Composers* (2019), featuring world premiere recordings of music by Florence Price, Clarice Assad, Jessie Montgomery, and Reena Esmail. *Black Being* is her third album for Cedille. A passionate advocate for music education, Maestra Chen is a Visiting Scholar at the National Taiwan Normal University. She dedicates significant time mentoring young conductors through various programs, including the Chicago Sinfonietta Freeman Conducting Fellowship program (helping to launch professional careers for more than a dozen young conductors) and the Taki Alsop Fellowship, and conducts ensembles at important educational institutions, both nationally and abroad. An acclaimed communicator praised for her energy and enthusiasm, Ms. Chen is a sought-after guest

conductor who has appeared with more than 160 distinguished orchestras throughout the Americas, Europe, the United Kingdom, Scandinavia, and Asia.

meiannchen.com

Chicago Sinfonietta

For over 30 seasons, the Chicago Sinfonietta has enriched the cultural, educational, and social quality of life in Chicago while gaining recognition on the national and international stage. Under the guidance first of Founding Music Director Paul Freeman, and now of Mei-Ann Chen, the orchestra performs at the highest artistic level and has achieved an outstanding reputation for its innovative programs. The Sinfonietta is dedicated to the authentic performance of Classical, Romantic, and Contemporary repertoire and excels at presenting imaginative works — old and new — featuring composers and soloists of color.

The Sinfonietta has toured to great acclaim in the U.S. and Europe, including concerts in Germany, Austria, the Canary Islands, and at the Kennedy Center, and mounted equally successful seasons at home. Artists presented during the orchestra's first decade included the Vienna Boys Choir, Ben Vereen, and Marian McPartland, among many others. Subsequent collaborations have taken place with an incredible cross-section of artists

including Poi Dog Pondering, the Congo Square Theater Company, Howard Levy, Rachel Barton Pine, Orbert Davis, R. Carlos Nakai, and the Apostolic Church of God Choir, to name just a few.

To help develop tomorrow's musicians and audience members, the Chicago Sinfonietta has created several innovative outreach programs. In collaboration with the Chicago Public Schools, Audience Matters provides in-depth music programming and subsidized concert tickets for students in underserved areas of Chicago. Student Ensembles with Excellence and Diversity (SEED) provides mentoring for young musicians, identifying talented high school musicians and offering them a series of workshops and masterclasses taught by Chicago Sinfonietta teacher-musicians in small ensemble settings. Project Inclusion provides early-career diverse musicians two-year fellowships with the orchestra.

chicagosinfonietta.org

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