

WIGMORE HALL

Saturday 17 February 2024
11.30am

The African Concert Series Piano Music from Africa and the African Diaspora

William Chapman Nyaho piano
Richard Olatunde Baker percussion

Joshua Uzoigwe (1946-2005)	Ukom from <i>Talking Drums</i> (1990)
Fred Onovwerosuoke (b.1960)	From <i>24 Studies in African Rhythms</i> (1986-2007) <i>Study No. 3 'Udje'</i> • <i>Study No. 1 'Okoye'</i> • <i>Study No. 6 'Iroro'</i> • <i>Study No. 12 'Agbadza'</i>
Robert Kwami (1954-2004)	January Dance (1973)
Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875-1912)	Andante from <i>Three-Fours (Valse Suite)</i> Op. 71 (pub. 1909) Deep River from <i>24 Negro Melodies</i> Op. 59 No. 1 (pub. 1905)
Oswald Russell (1933-2012)	3 Jamaican Dances (1970) <i>Jamaican Dance No. 1</i> • <i>Jamaican Dance No. 2</i> • <i>Jamaican Dance No. 3</i>
Hale Smith (1925-2009)	Breaking Bread with Egbert (1997)
Margaret Bonds (1913-1972)	Spiritual Suite (pub. 2021) <i>The Valley of the Bones</i> • <i>The Bells</i> • <i>Troubled Water</i>

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Joshua Uzoigwe Ukom from *Talking Drums*

Joshua Uzoigwe was a significant Nigerian composer, ethnomusicologist and poet, his compositions often inspired by music from the Igbo ethnic grouping. Uzoigwe completed his studies at London's Guildhall School of Music and Queen's University Belfast, his subsequent book on the composer Akim Euba proving a notable breakthrough in African Art Music studies. From Uzoigwe's own piano music, this recital begins with the compelling movement *Ukom*, from the suite *Talking Drums* – studies of master drumming in African ethnic styles.

Fred Onovwerosuoke *24 Studies in African Rhythms* – No. 3 'Udje'; No. 1 'Okoye'; No. 6 'Iroro'; No. 12 'Agbadza'

Senior amongst contemporary African composers, Fred Onovwerosuoke, born in 1960 in Ghana to Nigerian parents, studied theory and composition at Principia College in Elmhurst, Illinois. Now an American citizen, his music exhibiting influences from Africa, Cuba, the Caribbean and southern USA, he has concentrated upon solo piano and chamber music although equally embraced widely differing strands from across the African and North American continents. He is best known for his haunting chant 'Bolingo' in the 2006 Robert De Niro film *The Good Shepherd*, and his solo piano music is headed by the greatly-significant series of *24 Studies in African Rhythms*.

Onovwerosuoke has written, 'I began to sketch some of these studies in 1984 when I gave piano lessons to pay my way through university. No. 3, *Udje*, based on an Urhobo (Nigeria) dance with the same name, provided sketches for a later composition, *Ayevwiomo* (Birth), for flute and piano. The "events" of that "first night" often call for communal dance and more celebration! Study 1, *Okoye*, fuses a commonality I found in some Edo (Nigeria) and Baganda (Uganda) polyrhythms. Study 6, *Iroro*, draws from the "trance-like" dances of the "River-goddess" cults observed across the West African coast; the Twelfth Study, *Agbadza*, draws upon royal and funeral dances of the Ghana and Dahomey regions of West Africa.'

Robert Kwami January Dance

Robert Mawuena Kwami, widely admired as Professor in Music at the University of Pretoria in South Africa, previously taught in schools, colleges and universities in Ghana, Nigeria and across Britain. It is only since his death aged 49 that his original compositions have become known. Kwami was a pioneer in introducing non-western resources within British music education, and his *January Dance* for solo piano (1973) is notably rich in Ghanaian idiomatic traits; it has enjoyed much posthumous success for this distinguished composer.

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor Andante from *Three-Fours (Waltz Suite)* Op. 71; Deep River from *24 Negro Melodies* Op. 59 No. 1

At the distance of over a century since his untimely death at the age of 37 in South London, no dispassionate musician can fail to appreciate the qualities of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's music. A pupil of Stanford, he enjoyed unparalleled success in the early 1900s, visiting America three times. He was one of the first black people to have been received by an American President at the White

House, and his cantata trilogy *Hiawatha* enjoyed unparalleled transatlantic success. Three years younger than Ralph Vaughan Williams, Coleridge-Taylor could well have survived into the 1960s, a profound Afro-Anglo exemplar of musical art; his creative life would doubtless have proved hugely significant.

The two pieces reveal the duality of his notable creativity; the *Andante* from his *Waltz Suite* muses gently, and is contrasted with a haunting setting of the spiritual *Deep River* – which music was used 30 years later as the final chorus of Michael Tippett's great war-time pacifist oratorio *A Child of Our Time* (1941).

Oswald Russell 3 Jamaican Dances

The brilliant and versatile composer-pianist Oswald Russell began playing the piano at three years of age, his musical gifts being strongly encouraged by his mother. As a recitalist and composer, Russell's own programmes embraced classical repertoire alongside his own works, becoming a highly significant figure in Jamaican art music. William Chapman Nyaho has written of Russell's *3 Jamaican Dances*, 'The first dance, replete with strong rhythmic gestures, is based on typical Jamaica rhythms. It is also infused with alternating major and minor harmonies and sudden tonal shifts. The second dance, according to Russell, is the product of his improvisation on the folksong *Sammy Dead*'

The joyful final dance is based on the tune 'Rookoombine' – a 'market-place' song – utilised here in chiaroscuro fashion before the amusing 'wrong note' ending.

Hale Smith Breaking Bread with Egbert

This remarkable piece, composed in 1997, demonstrates the wide and profound art of Hale Smith. Written in a style uniting 20th-century European classical and later Americana, at heart the manner may well strike listeners as Messiaen-like: untempered, each passage organically right and subtle. The music's contemplative yet natural pulse draws the listener into a world both rare and deeply moving.

Margaret Bonds Spiritual Suite

Margaret Bonds was one of the most significant black composers of the 20th Century, but it is really only since the dawn of the 21st Century that her work has come to be recognised as such. Her *Spiritual Suite* mines the heritage of spirituals for its melodic inspiration – with the deep emotional implications such material engenders – equally demonstrating her compositional power and originality alongside her command of the instrument. In 1933, Bonds was the first African-American pianist to appear as soloist with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra; among her pupils was Ned Rorem.

Spiritual Suite, first published in full in 2021, reveals a masterly original composition; based on settings of traditional spirituals ('Dry Bones', 'Peter, Go Ring Dem Bells' and 'Wade in the Water'), the brilliant finale, *Troubled Water*, was the only movement to be published during her lifetime.

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