

**Carlos Simon** (born 1986)

*AMEN!* (originally composed for symphonic band in 2017, arranged for orchestra in 2019)

Instrumentation: piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, three percussion (marimba, xylophone, vibraphone, whip, chimes, tambourine, bass drum, tom-toms, cymbals, triangle, shaker, tam-tam), timpani, piano, and strings.

The orchestral arrangement of AMEN! was commissioned by the Reno Philharmonic (Laura Jackson, conductor), Gateways Music Festival (Michael Morgan, conductor) and the American Composers Orchestra. The original commission was by the University of Michigan Symphony Band. AMEN! is a homage to my family's four generational affiliation with the Pentecostal church. My intent is to re-create the musical experience of an African American Pentecostal church service that I enjoyed being apart of while growing up in this denomination. Pentecostal denominations, such as: Church of God in Christ (C.O.G.I.C.), Pentecostal Assemblies of God, Apostolic, Holiness Church, among many others, are known for their exuberant outward expressions of worship. The worship services in these churches will often have joyous dancing, spontaneous shouting, and soulful singing. The music in these worship services is a vital vehicle in fostering a genuine spiritual experience for the congregation. The three movements in AMEN! are performed without break to depict how the different parts of a worship service flows into the next. In the first movement, I've imagined the sound of an exuberant choir and congregation singing harmoniously together in a call and response fashion. The soulful second movement quotes a gospel song, "I'll Take Jesus For Mine" that I frequently heard in many services. The title, AMEN!, refers to the plagal cadence or "Amen" cadence (IV-I), which is the focal point of the climax in the final movement. Along with heavily syncopated rhythms and interjecting contrapuntal lines, this cadence modulates up by half step until we reach a frenzied state, emulating a spiritually heightened state of worship.

-Carlos Simon, 2019

**Keiko Abe** (born April 18, 1937)

*Prism Rhapsody for Marimba and Orchestra* (original work *Prism* for solo marimba, composed in 1986; arranged for wind ensemble and marimba solo in 1995, and for orchestra in 1996; premiered in 1996 at Umea [Sweden] Symphony Orchestra, Arvo Volmer, conductor and the composer as soloist)

Instrumentation: three flutes (one doubles alto flute, one doubles piccolo), two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, three percussion (bass drum, triangle, tom-toms, cymbal, mokusho (Japanese woodblocks), tam-tam, snare drum, timbales), timpani, harp, strings, and marimba soloist.

The marimba is likely one of the oldest instruments invented by mankind. According to some oral traditions, it originated when someone placed wooden slats over holes in the ground, then

struck the wood with a stick to produce sound that resonated in the holes. These holes were eventually replaced by gourds to serve as resonators. The actual origin of the marimba and similar instruments is unknown, but it either originated in Africa or Asia in ancient times, later spreading to other continents via migration and trade. Various cultures around the world have rich folk music traditions involving the marimba and other similar instruments (such as the xylophone).

Though the xylophone began appearing in Europe in the mid 19th century, the marimba, with its larger resonators and deeper tone, didn't really emerge as a concert instrument in western ensembles until the 20th century. For the Chicago World's Fair in 1933, percussionist and instrument builder Clair Omar Musser assembled a 100-piece marimba orchestra to perform at the event, primarily playing arrangements from the standard repertoire of classical music. Musser worked with the mallet instrument building company Deagan to manufacture marimbas specifically for the event. These efforts led to a certain standardization of the marimba as an instrument, though even to this day, there are a variety of different designs and sizes for the instruments.

In 1940, the first major work for the concert hall emerged for the marimba, the Concertino by Paul Creston. Darius Milhaud also composed a Concerto for Marimba and Vibraphone in 1947, followed by another concerto by Robert Kurka in 1956. These three works established the marimba as a legitimate solo instrument within the context of the western classical music tradition. This more classical approach to the instrument made its way to other countries, thanks to the efforts of Musser, who toured his large marimba ensembles to Europe, and other soloists such as Vida Chenoweth and Lawrence Lacour.

Lacour, who was stationed in Japan during World War 2, embarked on a combination musical and evangelical tour of Japan in 1950. He had also studied and toured with Musser in the 1930s, so was an adept marimba player himself. The marimba began gaining popularity in Japan as both a concert and folk instrument thanks to Lacour's efforts, as thousands of people would attend his sermons that were aided by his marimba playing. One of those thousands of people was Keiko Abe.

Abe's exposure to Lacour's performances inspired her to pursue studies in music, including piano, voice, percussion, and composition, at the Tokyo Gakugei University. In 1959, she organized the Xebec Trio, which focused on light classical and popular music. This group was highly successful commercially, but Abe wanted to focus on different styles of music, so disbanded the group in 1966. Her focus then turned toward both commissioning and composing new works for marimba, both in a solo and ensemble context. These efforts led to widespread adoption of the marimba as a serious concert instrument in Japan and beyond. Her continued probing of the capabilities of the instrument led her to work with the Japanese instrument maker, Yamaha, to develop what has become the standard 4- and 5-octave marimbas used in concert halls and universities world-wide today.

Between 1964 and 1986, Keiko Abe received and premiered 54 compositions from 32 different composers. She has also composed nearly 100 works for marimba in a variety of configurations,

from marimba alone to concertos with orchestra and other large ensembles. The work you're about to hear began as a solo marimba composition, titled Prism. For this work, Abe focused on two-mallet technique for the instrument, where the performer holds one mallet in each hand. Other works by Abe employed four (two in each hand) or even six (three in each hand) mallet techniques. When she expanded Prism to be a full-blown concerto, initially for marimba and wind ensemble, Abe added sections to the music that included the multi-mallet techniques, as well as adding new musical materials for the larger ensembles to perform.

As the name suggests, the Prism Rhapsody doesn't follow a particular traditional form. Abe's music often builds organically from the materials, rather than ascribing to pre-set formal organizational principles like the sonata or rondo forms of western classical music. This likely has much to do with her skill for and interest in improvisation, as many of her solo marimba works are essentially transcriptions of something she improvised. Another feature of Abe's music is the sheer virtuosity required to perform her works, and Prism Rhapsody is no different. Watch the soloist move their way up and down the keyboard, striking the keys faster than you probably thought possible, and you'll fall just as much in love with the marimba as we have!

**William Levi Dawson** (September 26, 1899 - May 2, 1990)

*Negro Folk Symphony* (composed in 1934, revised in 1952; premiered November 14, 1934 by the Philadelphia Orchestra under Leopold Stokowski)

Instrumentation: piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, three clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, four percussion (tam-tam, chimes, adawura (African clave), triangle, tenor drum, side drum, xylophone, cymbals, bass drum), timpani, harp, and strings.

- I. *The Bond of Africa*
- II. *Hope in the Night*
- III. *O Le' Me Shine, Shine Like a Morning Star!*

When we think about popular music in America, from jazz to blues to rock 'n' roll to hip hop to country and beyond, we can draw a straight line to the cultural contributions of Black Americans. The roots of virtually every music genre of American music grew thanks to Black musicians, yet when we think about American classical music, Black voices are almost nonexistent. The American classical sound we're all familiar with - Copland, Bernstein, Gershwin, and so on - appropriated music that originated in primarily Black communities. Yet there were a number of Black composers writing distinctively American music in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, whose voices were sidelined and marginalized in the classical music world. Florence Price, Nathaniel Dett, Harry Burleigh, and William Levi Dawson all made significant contributions to American classical music that most have never heard about. We hope to begin to change that with tonight's performance of Dawson's *Negro Folk Symphony*, a masterful orchestral work that deserves a place in the canon.

Dawson was born and raised in Alabama, the first of seven siblings. At the ripe age of 13, he began attending the Tuskegee Institute as a pre-college music student, paying his tuition by serving as a music librarian and farm worker. He continued his musical education in Kansas and later in Chicago, where he earned a master's degree from the American Conservatory of Music and played trombone in the Chicago Civic Orchestra. Dawson later returned to Tuskegee to direct their music department and conduct their choral program, which he led to new heights that blossomed after a famed performance at the opening of Radio City Music Hall in New York in 1932. Though much of his career was devoted to work as an educator, he also composed chamber music and choral works, and made numerous choral arrangements of Black spirituals.

While touring with the Tuskegee Choir for the opening of Radio City Music Hall, Dawson encountered a who's-who of classical music luminaries, including the famed conductor Leopold Stokowski. Dawson showed Stokowski a draft of a symphony he had been working on. Stokowski championed numerous new works by composers while he led the Philadelphia Orchestra, including works by Copland, Stravinsky, Schoenberg, and many others, so he was immediately interested in Dawson's new symphony. It would be another two years before the piece would actually receive its premiere in Philadelphia, and it appears that Dawson didn't know the premiere would happen until mere weeks prior to the performance. Stokowski sent Dawson a telegram on November 2, 1934, expressing his enthusiasm for the piece as rehearsals had begun. But the symphony did not yet have a title, so Stokowski urged Dawson to wire him the name of the work. Dawson obliged on November 4, with the title you see above.

The Negro Folk Symphony was performed three times in Philadelphia, then a fourth time at Carnegie Hall for its premiere performance run. The performance at Carnegie drew rave reviews from New York critics:

"Mr. Dawson's "Negro Folk Symphony" took the house by storm. The custom of no applause during a symphony gave way after the second movement to a spontaneous outburst that brought the orchestra to its feet, and at the end the enthusiasm was so great that Mr. Dawson was called to the stage repeatedly to bow his acknowledgements." - Pitts Sanborn

"The whole production impresses me as the most distinctive and promising American symphonic proclamation which has so far been achieved." - Leonard Lieblich

Despite the enormous success of the first performances, and Dawson's ambition to become an orchestral composer full time, the masterwork fell into obscurity. The recent cultural reckoning with America's racist past has seen Dawson's lone orchestral piece make something of a comeback, and we're all better off for it, as this wonderful work deserves a place next to the rest of the American orchestral canon.

Dawson supplied program notes for the work at the premiere performances, which you can read below:

“This Symphony is based entirely upon Negro folk-music. The themes are taken from what are popularly known as Negro spirituals, and the practiced ear will recognize the recurrence of characteristic themes throughout the composition.

“This folk-music springs spontaneously from the life of the Negro people as freely today as at any time in the past, though the modes and forms of the present day are sometimes vastly different from the older creations.

“In this composition the composer has employed three themes taken from typical melodies over which he has brooded since childhood, having learned them at his mother’s knee.

#### FIRST MOVEMENT—“THE BOND OF AFRICA”

“The introduction (Adagio, E-flat major, 4–4 time) opens with a ‘Leading Motive’ played by the first horn, which is symbolic of the link uniting Africa and her rich heritage with her descendants in America. It is pentatonic, and shows itself in numerous guises, forms, and circumstances throughout the entire composition.

“The chief theme of the main movement (Allegro con brio, E-flat major, 2–2 time) is given to the first horn, first B-flat clarinet, and E-flat clarinet, with a tremolo on the higher strings. After a few measures of contrasting material, this theme is sung by the full orchestra. A transitional passage based on the ‘Leading Motive’ leads to the second theme, presented by the first oboe, and based on the Negro melody:

*Oh, m’ litt’l’ soul gwine-a shine, shine,  
Oh, m’ litt’l’ soul gwine-a shine lik’ a star.*

After the woodwinds have sung this theme, a new idea appears in the strings. It suggests the rhythmical clapping of the hands and patting of the feet, and is immediately taken up by the full orchestra.

“The development begins (Adagio, 4–4 time) with the ‘Leading Motive’ in the trombones (in A-flat minor), and a working-out of the principal theme. This is followed by further elaboration of the principal theme. A section is now devoted to a working-out of the second theme, after which another section is devoted to the principal theme. Finally, the full orchestra gives out a new version of the ‘Leading Motive,’ and gradually leads into the Recapitulation. Except for changes in the instrumentation, and a few abbreviations, this division is the same as before. A short coda brings the movement to a close.

#### SECOND MOVEMENT—“HOPE IN THE NIGHT”

“This movement opens (Andante, 4–4) with three strokes from the gong, intended to suggest the Trinity, who guides forever the destiny of man. The strings, playing pizzicato, provide a monotonous background, creating the atmosphere of the humdrum life of a people whose bodies were baked by the sun and lashed with the whip for two hundred and fifty years; whose lives were proscribed before they were born. The English horn sings a melody that describes

the characteristics, hopes, and longings of a Folk held in darkness. After a climax, this division is followed by one conceived in a happier mood. The children, unmindful of the heavy cadences of despair, sing and play; but even in their world of innocence, there is a little wail, a brief note of sorrow. After much development of the theme of the children, and a cry from the strings, muted brasses, and trilling woodwinds, there is a return of the previous material. This in turn is succeeded by another outburst, in which the 'Leading Motive' is given out by the full orchestra. The movement closes with slow crescendoes and decrescendoes after each of three mysterious sounds from the gong and other percussion instruments."

### THIRD MOVEMENT—"O LEM-ME SHINE"

"The third movement begins (Allegro con brio, E-flat major, 2-2) with four introductory measures in the strings, which precede the entrance of the principal theme. This movement is based on two Negro melodies. For the first time the composer has used the melody:

*O lem-me shine, O lem-me shine,  
O lem-me shine, shine lik' a mornin' star!*

This theme, after being given out by the woodwinds, is followed by related material, which in turn is succeeded by a return of the principal theme. A short episode leads to the second theme in G major, which is stated by the first oboe, and immediately taken up by the full orchestra. This is the second of the two Negro melodies used in this movement—"Hallelujah, Lord, I been down into the sea." The development begins with the principal theme of the movement in the first clarinet, above a tremolo on the lower strings, and is taken up respectively by the first oboe, first flute, and first horn. A new picture of the second theme, combined with the principal theme of the first movement, is now presented, and fragments of ideas from the codetta of the third movement are made use of. The principal theme is now given out by the brasses and woodwinds in augmentation. This section, after rising to a great climax, descends slowly to the Recapitulation. A coda is built on the two themes of the movement, and is brought to a close as the brasses exhibit in bold relief the principal theme, 'O lem-me shine lik' a mornin' star.'"