

program notes

BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

***Ennanga* for Harp and Orchestra (1956)**

WILLIAM GRANT STILL ■ 1895-1978

William Grant Still was born in Woodville, Mississippi, where his father was town bandmaster. At sixteen, Still matriculated as a medical student at Wilberforce University in Ohio, but soon switched to music and graduated in 1915; two years he later entered Oberlin College. In 1921, he moved to New York as oboist with the orchestra of the Noble Sissle–Eubie Blake revue *Shuffle Along*. There he studied with Edgard Varèse, ran Black Swan Records, and in 1928 received the Harmon Award for that year's most significant contribution to Black culture in America. While continuing to compose large-scale classical pieces, Still also wrote and arranged for radio, Broadway shows and Paul Whiteman, Artie Shaw and other popular bandleaders. After moving to Los Angeles in 1934, he arranged for films (*Lost Horizon*) and television (*Gunsmoke*, *Perry Mason*). Still continued to hold an important place in American music until his death in 1978.

The *ennanga* is an “arched harp” — a harp with a curved neck that arches above the resonating body of the instrument, held in the player's lap — associated with the music of East Africa; its origins apparently stretch back to ancient Egypt. In his 1956 *Ennanga* for Harp and Orchestra, Still evoked both the traditional African instrument and its culture with original music accented with his distinctive American voice. The first and third movements, dance-like and

buoyant, call to mind not so much a distant continent as Still's vibrant African-American musical heritage. The second movement is touching and nostalgic, a song of remembrance or, perhaps, of a lost love.

Flute Concerto (2022)

ZHOU TIAN ■ BORN IN 1981

Chinese-American composer Zhou Tian (JOH TEE-en; Zhou is his surname) was born in 1981 in the city of Hangzhou, China, 100 miles southwest of Shanghai, and did his undergraduate work in composition and piano at the Shanghai Conservatory. In 2001 Zhou came to the United States to attend the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, where he studied composition with Richard Danielpour and Jennifer Higdon and piano with Meng-Chieh Liu. Zhou subsequently earned a master's degree at the Juilliard School as a student of Christopher Rouse and a doctorate at the University of Southern California, where he studied composition with Stephen Hartke and Donald Crockett and piano with Antoinette Perry. Zhou taught at Colgate University from 2011 until 2016, when he was appointed Associate Professor of Composition at the Michigan State University College of Music. He has also served as Composer-in-Residence for the Green Bay Symphony and the Chicago chamber series Music in the Loft. Zhou's music has been performed by the orchestras of Cincinnati, Minnesota, Pittsburgh, Indianapolis, Spokane, Hawaii and Houston, Irish Radio National Symphony, Hong Kong Philharmonic,

American Composers Orchestra, and by such leading soloists and ensembles as pianist Yuja Wang, violist Roberto Diaz, guitarist Jason Vieaux, violinist Caroline Goulding, flutist Jeffrey Khaner, Eroica Trio, Arditti and Dover string quartets, Empire Brass and Tanglewood Festival Chorus. His distinctions include a 2018 Grammy Award nomination for Best Contemporary Classical Composition for his Concerto for Orchestra (the first Chinese-born composer honored in that category), First Prize in the Washington International Competition for Composers, First Prize in the Kathryn Thomas International Composition Competition, Julius Hemphill International Composers Award, Presser Foundation Music Award, three ASCAP/Morton Gould Awards, an Excellence Award in the 16th Musical Composition Award by the Ministry of Culture of China (given only every five years), and composition fellowships from the Aspen, Tanglewood and Fontainebleau music festivals; in 2019, the Beijing Music Festival named him “Artist of the Year.”

Zhou Tian’s Flute Concerto was commissioned for flutist Mimi Stillman by Dolce Suono Ensemble, Marine Chamber Orchestra of “The President’s Own” United States Marine Band, Chamber Orchestra of the Triangle, Annapolis Chamber Orchestra, Allentown Symphony Orchestra, Cincinnati Chamber Orchestra, Portland Symphony Orchestra, and Youth Orchestra of San Antonio, with generous support from Carolyn and James Barnshaw and Jonathan S. Tobin. Of it, Zhou wrote, “*Irisés. Capriccio. Arioso. Toccata*. These are the four movements that infuse my Flute Concerto, written for long-time musical partner Mimi Stillman and commissioned by a national consortium of orchestras. From tranquil meditations

to wild rituals of rugged harmony and rhythms, the Concerto is empowered by tradition while exploring a diversity of musical styles through reflection on the flute’s long and rich heritage (hence the Baroque-inspired subtitles). There are hints of my musical lineage from Barber to Piston to traditional Chinese music as I sought a coexistence of clarity of form with passionate expression, exploring the richness of orchestral timbre yet always embracing purity of line.

“The work begins with *Irisés*, a movement of mixed moods of long, singing lines and airy dances. The flower makes me think about the flute — sensuous and yet strong. *Capriccio* is a scherzo in perpetual motion. The rapid, repeated notes and concise form drew their inspiration from Baroque dance pieces. *Arioso* is a meditation. As the soloist joins the plush strings, dashing harp and woodwinds, the sonic color is altered frequently, masking the hinted atonality in the melody with romanticism. *Toccata*, the finale, is a virtuosic dance. An accumulation of materials sends the piece to a climax at the end.”

Symphony No. 9 in E minor, Op. 95, “From the New World” (1892-1893)

ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK ■ 1841-1904

When Antonín Dvořák, aged 51, arrived in New York on September 27, 1892 to direct the new National Conservatory of Music, both he and the institution’s founder, Mrs. Jeanette Thurber, expected that he would help to foster an American school of composition. He was clear and specific in his assessment: “I am convinced that the future music of this country must be founded on what are called Negro melodies. They can be the foundation of a serious and original

school of composition to be developed in the United States.... There is nothing in the whole range of composition that cannot find a thematic source here.”

The “New World” Symphony was not only Dvořák’s way of pointing toward a truly American musical idiom but also a reflection of his own feelings about the country. “I should never have written the Symphony as I have,” he said, “if I hadn’t seen America.”

The “New World” Symphony is unified by the use of a motto theme that occurs in all four movements. This bold, striding phrase, with its arching contour, is played by the horns as the main theme of the opening movement, having been foreshadowed in the slow introduction. Two other themes are used in the first movement: a sad melody for flute and oboe that exhibits folk characteristics, and a brighter tune with a striking resemblance to the spiritual *Swing Low, Sweet Chariot* for the solo flute.

The second movement was inspired by the forest funeral of Minnehaha in Longfellow’s epic poem *The Song of Hiawatha*, the third by the dance of the Indians at the feast. The second movement is a three-part form, with a haunting English horn melody (fitted with words by William Arms Fisher to become the folksong-spiritual *Goin’ Home*) heard in the first and last sections. The third movement is a tempestuous scherzo with two gentle, intervening trios.

The finale employs a sturdy motive introduced by the horns and trumpets after a few introductory measures in the strings. In the Symphony’s closing pages, the motto theme, *Goin’ Home* and the scherzo melody are all gathered up and combined with the principal subject of the finale to produce a marvelous synthesis of the entire work.

ALLENTOWN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

FEBRUARY 11-12, 2023
8:00 P.M., SYMPHONY HALL

P R O G R A M

DIANE M. WITTRY MUSIC DIRECTOR/CONDUCTOR

Ennanga for Harp and Orchestra WILLIAM GRANT STILL
Moderately fast
Moderately slow
Majestically, moderately fast
Frances Duffy, Harp

Flute Concerto ZHOU TIAN
Irises
Capriccio
Arioso
Toccatà
Frances Duffy, Flute

I N T E R M I S S I O N

Symphony No. 9 in E minor, Op. 95, ANTONÍN DVOŘÁK
“From the New World”
Adagio — Allegro molto
Largo
Scherzo: Molto vivace
Allegro con fuoco