Sunday, July 24, 2:30pm

Koussevitzky Music Shed

BOSTON SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
ANDRIS NELSONS conducting

STILL	***In Memoriam: The Colored Soldiers Who Died for Democracy***
WALKER	***Lilacs*, for voice and orchestra** Words by Walt Whitman I. When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd II. O powerful western fallen star! III. In the dooryard fronting an old farm-house IV. Sing on, sing on you gray-brown bird **LATONIA MOORE**, soprano
	{Intermission}
BRAHMS	**Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-flat, Opus 83** Allegro non troppo Allegro appassionato Andante Allegretto grazioso **SEONG-JIN CHO**, piano

Notes on the program

William Grant Still (1895-1978)

In Memoriam: The Colored Soldiers Who Died for Democracy

Composition and premiere: Still composed *In Memoriam: The Colored Soldiers Who Died for Democracy* in 1943; he was one of seventeen composers asked by the League of Composers to write short orchestral works commemorative of World War II. The New York Philharmonic gave the first performance, on January 6, 1944. George Szell conducted the first Boston Symphony performances, on January 19 and 20, 1945. The only other BSO performances were led by Seiji Ozawa as part of concert in tribute to the tenor Roland Hayes in February 1996. This is the first Tanglewood performance.

At the height of the Second World War, the New York-based League of Composers embarked upon an ambitious, government-financed commissioning program for brief orchestral works "on patriotic themes." Slated to be premiered by the New York Philharmonic during its 1943-44 concert season, the commissioned scores would subsequently be transmitted, via record as well as the airwaves, to both the troops and civilian listeners in Allied and neutral countries. Among the composers commissioned was the man who by that point had begun to be referred to as "the Dean of African American composers," William Grant Still. However well-meaning, it was a label about which Still was to become deeply ambivalent. Although some of the key figures of the Harlem Renaissance had cast him earlier in his career as a torchbearer for the "great black art" that was to be that movement's keystone, by the time hostilities broke out in Europe, Still had started to grow disenchanted with the kneejerk expectation that his music would reflect a distinctively African American ethos, and in particular, that it would invariably do so using style features stereotypically associated with Black vernacular traditions. He simply wanted recognition as a freethinking "American original," without undue reference to skin color.

It is noteworthy, then, that the gravity of the circumstances surrounding the League of Composers commission prompted Still to reflect directly on race relations, in a way that was less customary for him by that point in his career. Ahead of the first performance of his contribution, *In Memoriam: The Colored Soldiers Who Died for Democracy*, Still described his initial reaction to the request:

When it was suggested to me that I compose something patriotic, there immediately flashed through my mind the press release which announced that the first American soldier to be killed in World War II was a Negro soldier. Then my thoughts turned to the colored soldiers all over the world, fighting under our flag and under the flags of the countries allied with us. Our civilization has known no greater patriotism, no greater loyalty than that shown by the colored men who fight and die for democracy. Those who return will, I hope, come back to a better world.

Still's comments echo sentiments that had widespread currency in the wartime Black press, particularly what was known as the "Double V campaign," which popularized the idea that it was the cruelest hypocrisy to expect African Americans to risk their lives for the sake of "victory" over foreign fascism if "victory" over domestic racism did not also become an immediate reality. Still's subtitle, "The Colored Soldiers Who Died for Democracy," thus made for a direct political statement: at a time when white leaders were discouraging the Double V campaign's slogan of "victory at home and abroad" as divisive and counter to the national interest, he forcefully centered the memory of fallen Black servicemen, while also implicitly tying their sacrifice to this country's longer freedom struggle.

In Memoriam translates something of this sensibility into musical terms, mixing subdued military tropes like muted fanfares, tolling bells, and drum tattoos with lyrical passages imbued with the hard-won, bittersweet spirit of Black spirituals. Particularly suggestive in this respect is the score's ending: refusing the consolation of a major-key peroration, it closes on a note of resoluteness but not resolution, combining obstinate brass avowals with defiant, ascending string gestures, as if to indicate that the struggle was only just beginning.

MATTHEW MENDEZ

Matthew Mendez is a New Haven-based musicologist, critic, and annotator who was the 2014 Tanglewood Music Center Publications Fellow. He was the recipient of a 2016 ASCAP Foundation Deems Taylor/Virgil Thomson Award for outstanding music journalism.

George Walker (1922-2018)

Lilacs, for voice and orchestra (words by Walt Whitman) (1995)

Composition and premiere: George Walker composed *Lilacs* for voice and orchestra on commission from the Boston Symphony Orchestra for a concert honoring the legacy of the tenor Roland Hayes. Soprano Faye Robinson was soloist with the BSO and Seiji Ozawa in the premiere performances, February 1-3, 1996, in Symphony Hall, Boston. The piece won the 1996 Pulitzer Prize in music; it has not been played by the BSO since its premiere.

George Walker's winning the 1996 Pulitzer Prize for *Lilacs* was, indeed, a pivotal event in the ongoing and under-appreciated legacy of Black composers in the United States. It marked the first time that a Black composer won the coveted award, which was first given in 1943, to William Schuman. Such celebrations of "firsts" may unintentionally detract from the wide range of expressive voices and craftsmanship that constitutes the vast Black compositional tradition in the U.S. Furthermore, such celebrations may narrow our perspective of Walker's oeuvre and accomplishment to *Lilacs*. A formidable and critically acclaimed pianist, Walker broke ground with his accomplishments on the concert stage before he seriously pursued composition: his performance of Rachmaninoff's Third Piano Concerto with the Philadelphia Orchestra in 1945 was the first time that that ensemble featured a Black instrumental soloist. His interests in composition took root in the mid-1940s and flowered through the 1950s, a period highlighted by two years of study with Nadia Boulanger at the American Conservatory in Fontainebleau. Walker composed sonatas for piano, violin, and cello during this period as well as the enduring *Lyric for Strings*, transcribed from the second movement of his String Quartet No. 1. His compositional aesthetic and technique developed during these years of artistic growth, as conventional Western models and genres merged with his growing proclivity for dissonant chordal complexes and challenging, but affecting, linear constructs. Whereas these and other attributes of his style burgeoned through the next three decades, one also notes both traces of and departures from traditional titles/designations such as "sonata" or "concerto."

Walker's *Lilacs* blossomed from fertile grounds of opportunity, ingenuity, and artistic vision. Commissioned by the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the work and its programming paid tribute to a trailblazing Boston-based Black tenor, Roland Hayes (1877-1977), who was the first Black artist to appear with the BSO, in 1923. The commission opportunity notwithstanding, Walker's work on *Lilacs* seems to align with a period of expansion in his expressive voice. In an interview with Mickey Thomas Terry published in 2000, he likened some works leading up to *Lilacs* as fusions of conventional idioms and techniques (such as sonatas and fugue) with contemporary ideas and pitch structures, but contextualized *Lilacs* in his output as a departure from the "traditional." In this musical pursuit of the

non-traditional, we encounter Walker's rare song cycle for soprano and orchestra that only utilizes a single text, Walt Whitman's "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd." Walker also noted that there were not many such works and that his, though somewhat inspired by settings by Paul Hindemith and Roger Sessions, sought to "convey more effectively the mood or the atmosphere of the poem." It is in this context, one of the composer's addressing skillful pursuit of creative vision, that we find and (re)visit Walker's evocative *Lilacs*.

Eloquence and nuance characterize Walker's setting of select verses of Whitman's elegy on the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. Whereas themes associated with such monumental loss might invoke stagey musical gestures and expansive statements, Walker engages subtlety and inference, inviting the listener to a more intimate setting and reflection on themes of loss, fragility, and resilience. Many simultaneities in the atonal setting are complex and unsettling, but all are not jarring; at times, they provide opulent soundscapes for the probing text and vocal lines. Four movements are all propelled by motivic figures and shifting textures created by terraced layers of attacks and sustained pitches that yield a sonic backrop of linear figures being interspersed within and across instrument families.

Walker's notes from the work's premiere mention the ascending half-step in the horn as being a recurring element in the piece; this is followed by "a decorative flourish that has floral implications." Indeed, the flourish is comprised of larger pitch intervals that suggest a blooming of sorts. Furthermore, the first apex for the voice spans a range larger than an octave on the text "bloom'd." The composer's setting of "in the night" is also compelling because of the large leaps within the voice and smaller leaps within the orchestral accompaniment. The second section offers more suggestions of consonance, as Walker freely explores modal collections in the orchestra and the vocal line droops to mourn and rises with melismas and florid gestures that signal an "ever-returning spring."

Intense punctuations in the brass constructed of smaller pitch intervals (steps and small leaps) characterize the beginning of the second movement. Walker's favoring of brass timbres and varied articulations in tightly voiced harmonic clusters suggests both the frustration of loss and the murkiness and uncertainty of night. From brilliant, terraced attacks to occasional moments of bronzed haze (sometimes augmented through agitated gestures in the strings), we move to episodes depicting the star's luminous light as well as the distress felt at attempts to obscure its radiance.

In a memoir from 2009, Walker attaches the third movement to a recollection of a family visit to a cousin's home on a plot of land in Virginia—hence, the connection to the "farmhouse" in the opening lines of the verse. Even more vivid to the composer's memory "were the delicious hot buttered biscuits, corn pudding, and fried chicken that she served that surpassed any similar dishes I have experienced." The winding contrapuntal lines between the woodwinds and strings that open and impel the opening of the third movement do not explicitly suggest a pastoral setting, but might be suggestive of restless, youthful play (in anticipation of the meal) amid the buzzing of insects and other sounds of nature. It is in this unassuming, delicate setting that visual details of the "lilac-bush" are presented by the voice, and a lush episode of relatively consonant chords accompanies statements about the strength of the bush's perfume. The sustained dissonant sonorities in the strings and sporadic utterances in the winds and percussion at the end of the movement suggest both the enchantment and fragility of the bush's sprig.

Walker's memoir also sheds light on why he chose a melodic fragment from Roland Hayes's "Lil' Boy, How Old Are You?" for the opening vocal phrase in the fourth movement of *Lilacs*. The next line of text in the Hayes spiritual arrangement is "I'm only twelve years old"—roughly Walker's age when he met Hayes at a concert in Washington, D.C. Chirping and warbles are depicted in fleeting wind and string statements at the beginning of the movement, as the voice enters with "Sing on!" Vestiges of tutti brass and blooming flourishes from the second and first movements, respectively, intersect with the darting figurations associated with the bird as the final movement unfolds. Whereas such a culmination offers formal clarity, the resulting harmonies and concluding episodes shimmer with intricacy, dexterity, ambiguity, and wonder. The composer's notes aptly summarize: "transformations and restatements of motives associated with their literary counterparts recreate the redolence of the penultimate line of Whitman's elegy, 'Lilac and star and bird twined with a chant my soul.'"

HORACE MAXILE

Dr. Horace J. Maxile, Jr., is an associate professor of music theory at Baylor University's School of Music. He has served as editor of the *Black Music Research Journal*, as a member of the Board of Trustees for the Society for American Music, and chair of the Society for Music Theory Committee on Diversity. His primary interests include concert music by Black American composers, musical semiotics, and gospel music.

WALKER Lilacs, for voice and orchestra

1

When lilacs last in the dooryard bloom'd,
And the great star early droop'd in the western sky in the night,
I mourn'd, and yet shall mourn with ever-returning spring.

Ever-returning spring, trinity sure to me you bring,
Lilac blooming perennial and drooping star in the west,
And thought of him I love. powerful western fallen star!

2

O shades of night—O moody, tearful night!
O great star disappear'd—O the black murk that hides the star!
O cruel hands that hold me powerless—O helpless soul of me!
O harsh surrounding cloud that will not free my soul.

3

In the dooryard fronting an old farm-house near the white-wash'd palings,
Stands the lilac-bush tall-growing with heart-shaped leaves of rich green,
With many a pointed blossom rising delicate, with the perfume strong I love,
With every leaf a miracle—and from this bush in the dooryard,
With delicate-color'd blossoms and heart-shaped leaves of rich green,
A sprig with its flower I break.

13

Sing on, sing on you gray-brown bird,
Sing from the swamps, the recesses, pour your chant from the bushes,
Limitless out of the dusk, out of the cedars and pines.
Sing on dearest brother, warble your reedy song,
Loud human song, with voice of uttermost woe. liquid and free and tender!
O wild and loose to my soul—O wondrous singer!
You only I hear—yet the star holds me, (but will soon depart,)
Yet the lilac with mastering odor holds me.

—Walt Whitman

Johannes Brahms (1833-1897)

Piano Concerto No. 2 in B-flat, Opus 83

Composition and premiere: Brahms began sketching the Concerto No. 2 in 1878 and completed it on July 7, 1881. The composer was soloist in the first public performance, which took place November 9, 1881, with the Budapest National Theater Orchestra, Alexander Erkel conducting. The first BSO performance was March 15, 1884; Georg Henschel conducted and B.J. Lang was soloist. Serge Koussevitzky led the BSO and soloist Leonard Shure in the first Tanglewood performance on August 9, 1941; the most recent Tanglewood performance featured soloist Kirill Gerstein with the BSO led by François-Xavier Roth on August 17, 2019.

In April 1878, Brahms made what was to be the first of nine journeys to Italy and Sicily. His companion was another bearded and overweight North German who had settled in Vienna, Theodor Billroth, an accomplished and knowledgeable amateur musician, and by profession a surgeon, a field in which he was even more unambiguously "princeps" than Brahms in his. Brahms returned elated and full of energy. His chief task for that summer was to complete his Violin Concerto for Joseph Joachim. He planned to include a scherzo, but dropped the idea at Joachim's suggestion. He had, however, made sketches for such a movement after his return from the South, and he retrieved them three years later when they became the basis of the Second Piano Concerto's second movement.

The year 1881 began with the first performances of the *Academic Festival* and *Tragic* overtures, and there were professional trips to Holland and Hungary as well as another Italian vacation. In memory of his friend, the painter Anselm Feuerbach, he made a setting of Schiller's *Nänie*, and then set to work on the sketches that had been accumulating for the piano concerto. On July 7 he reported to his friend Elisabet von Herzogenberg, perhaps his closest musical confidante of those years, that he had finished a "tiny, tiny piano concerto with a tiny, tiny wisp of a scherzo;" Billroth was sent his copy with a remark about "a bunch of little piano pieces."

The measure of Brahms's sureness about the work is to be found in his singling it out for dedication "to his dear friend and teacher Eduard Marxsen." Marxsen, to whom Brahms had been sent by his first teacher, Otto Cossel, as a boy of seven, was born in 1806 and had studied with Carl Maria von Bocklet, the pianist who had played in the first performance of Schubert's E-flat trio, and his orchestral version of Beethoven's *Kreutzer* Sonata was widely performed in the 19th century. Brahms's devotion lasted until the end of Marxsen's life in 1887. The choice of the B-flat concerto as occasion for the long-delayed formal tribute to his master is surely significant: Brahms must have felt that he had at last achieved what had eluded him in the wonderful D minor concerto, No. 1, some twenty-five years earlier—namely the perfect fusion of inspirational fire with that encompassing technique whose foundations were laid in those long-ago lessons in Hamburg.

It was the last work Brahms added to his repertory as a pianist, and for someone who had long given up regular practicing to get through it at all is amazing. After the premiere, Brahms took the work on an extensive tour of Germany with Hans von Bülow and the superb Meiningen Orchestra: Leipzig resisted once again, but elsewhere the reception was triumphant. People tended to find the first movement harder to grasp than the rest, and almost universally a new relationship between piano and orchestra was noted, phrases like "symphony with piano obbligato" being much bandied about. With respect to the latter question, it is mainly that Brahms knew the concertos of Mozart and Beethoven better than his critics and was prepared to draw more imaginative and far-reaching conclusions from the subtle solo-tutti relationship propounded in those masterpieces of the classical style.

Brahms begins by establishing the whole range of the solo's capabilities. The piano enters with rhythmically cunning comment on the theme sung by the horn. This is poetic and reticent, though there is also something quietly assertive in the way the piano at once takes possession of five-and-a-half octaves from the lowest B-flat on the keyboard to the F above the treble staff. When, however, the woodwinds and then the strings continue in this lyric vein, the piano responds with a cadenza that silences the orchestra altogether. But this cadenza, massive and almost violent though it is, settles on a long dominant pedal and demonstrates that its "real" function is to introduce, as dramatically as possible, an expansive and absolutely formal orchestral exposition.

Perhaps the greatest moment, certainly the most mysterious and original, of this magisterial movement is the soft dawning of the recapitulation, the horn call and its extensions in the piano being now gently embedded in a continuous and flowing texture, an effect that suggests that the opening of the movement should be played not as an introduction in a slower tempo, but as the real and organic beginning. When all this occurs, you remember the piano's earlier eruption into the cadenza, and the contrast now of the entirely lyrical continuation is the more poignant for that memory. One tends to think of this concerto as essentially declamatory and as the quintessential blockbuster, but the expression mark that occurs more often than any other is "dolce" [sweetly] (followed in frequency by "leggiero" [lightly]!).

Brahms was constantly asked to explain the presence of his "extra" Scherzerl. He told Billroth that the first movement appeared to him "too simple [and that] he required something strongly passionate before the equally simple Andante." The answer half convinces: simplicity is not the issue as much as urgency and speed. Long-range harmonic strategy, particularly with respect to the Andante to come, must have had a lot to do with Brahms's decision. The contrast, in any event, is welcome, and the movement goes brilliantly.

The first and second movements end in ways meant to produce the ovations they got at their early performances. From here on, Brahms reduces the scale of his utterance, trumpets and drums falling silent for the remainder of the concerto. The Andante begins with a long and famous cello solo, which, like its oboe counterpart in the Adagio of the Violin Concerto, becomes increasingly and ever more subtly enmeshed in its surroundings. The piano does not undertake to compete with the cello as a singer of that kind of song. Its own melodies stand on either side of that style, being more embellished or more skeletal. The key is B-flat, the home key of the concerto and thus an uncommon choice for a slow movement, the most famous precedent being Brahms's own earlier piano concerto, but the excursions within the piece are bold and remarkable in their effect. For an example, it is its placement in the distant key of F-sharp that gives the return of the cello solo its wonderfully soft radiance.

The finale moves gently in that not-quite-fast gait that is so characteristic of Brahms. A touch of gypsy music passes now and again, and just before the end, which occurs without much ado, Brahms spikes the texture with triplets.

MICHAEL STEINBERG

Michael Steinberg was program annotator of the Boston Symphony Orchestra from 1976 to 1979, and after that of the San Francisco Symphony and New York Philharmonic. Oxford University Press has published three compilations of his program notes, devoted to symphonies, concertos, and the great works for chorus and orchestra.

Artists

Latonia Moore

Soprano Latonia Moore makes her BSO and Tanglewood debuts this afternoon. A frequent performer with the Metropolitan Opera, she appeared on the Met stage this season as Billie in Terence Blanchard and Kasi Lemmons's *Fire Shut Up in My Bones* under Yannick Nézet-Séguin and as Serena in Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* under David Robertson, a production that featured her also in the 2019-20 season. Other recent season highlights include *Tosca* in her Austin Opera debut and with Opéra de Rouen Normandie Théâtre des Arts; a special outdoor community concert in Serenbe, Georgia, with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, and an appearance as a featured soloist in the Metropolitan Opera's memorial service for Jessye Norman. She appeared in recital with the George London Foundation at the Morgan Library. Moore is acclaimed globally for her interpretation of Verdi's Aida, which she has sung with the Metropolitan Opera, Royal Opera–Covent Garden, Opernhaus Zürich, Opera Australia, Teatro Colón, English National Opera, New National Theatre Tokyo, Dubai Opera, Dallas Opera, and many others. Her Puccini roles have included Cio-Cio-San in *Madama Butterfly* at the Metropolitan Opera, Hamburg State Opera, and Semperoper Dresden, Liù in *Turandot* at Royal Opera–Covent Garden and Bilbao, Mimì in *La bohème* with Semperoper Dresden, and Tosca with Opera Australia and Washington National Opera. She sang Elisabeth in Verdi's *Don Carlo* with Opera Australia, Micaëla in Bizet's *Carmen* and Elvira in Verdi's *Ernani* and Lucrezia in his *I due Foscari* in Bilbao, Desdemona in Verdi's *Otello* at Bergen National Opera, and Serena in *Porgy and Bess* at both English National Opera and De Nationale Opera Amsterdam. She sang the role of Bess in *Porgy and Bess* in a concert performance of the opera with the Berlin Philharmonic and Simon Rattle. Moore has recorded the role of Lady Macbeth in Verdi's *Macbeth* with Edward Gardner for Chandos and Mahler's Symphony No. 2 with the Vienna Philharmonic and Gilbert Kaplan for Deutsche Grammophon. Honors and awards include the Maria Callas Award from Dallas Opera, a Richard Tucker Foundation grant, first prize in the Marseilles Competition, and first prize in the International Competition dell'Opera in Dresden. Ms. Moore is a native of Houston, Texas.

Seong-Jin Cho

With an overwhelming talent and innate musicality, Seong-Jin Cho has become known for his thoughtful and poetic, assertive and tender, virtuosic and colorful playing. Seong-Jin Cho came to the world's attention in 2015 when he won the First Prize at the Chopin International Competition in Warsaw. In January 2016, he signed an exclusive contract with Deutsche Grammophon. Cho works with the world's most prestigious orchestras and conductors. Highlights of his 2021-22 season include debuts with the Gewandhausorchester Leipzig with Alain Altinoglu, Bamberger Symphoniker with Andrew Manze, and Mozarteumorchester with Jörg Widmann. He performed with the LA Philharmonic and Gustavo Dudamel, New York Philharmonic and Jaap van Zweden, Orchestre National de France with Cristian Măcelaru, and Konzerthausorchester Berlin with Christoph Eschenbach. International tours include those with the Czech Philharmonic Orchestra and Semyon Bychkov and the Philharmonia and Santtu-Matias Rouvali. An active recitalist, Seong-Jin Cho performs in many of the world's most prestigious concert halls, including the main stage of Carnegie Hall, Concertgebouw Amsterdam, Berliner Philharmonie Kammermusiksaal, and Konzerthaus Vienna, among many others. Recent highlights include debut solo recitals at London's Wigmore Hall, Stuttgart's Liederhalle, Auditorium Rainier Monte-Carlo, and Konserthuset Stockholm. His acclaimed recordings with Deutsche Grammophon include Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 1 with the London Symphony Orchestra and Gianandrea Noseda; a solo Debussy recital disc; a Mozart album with the Chamber Orchestra of Europe and Yannick Nézet-Séguin; and most recently *Wanderer*, featuring Schubert's *Wanderer* Fantasy, Berg's Piano Sonata, and Liszt's Sonata in B minor. His recording of Chopin's Piano Concerto No. 2 will be released next month. Born in 1994 in Seoul, Seong-Jin Cho began piano studies at age 6 and gave his first public recital at 11. In 2009, he became the youngest-ever winner of Japan's Hamamatsu International Piano Competition, and in 2011, he

won Third Prize at the International Tchaikovsky Competition in Moscow at the age of 17. From 2012 to 2015 he studied with Michel Béroff at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Paris. Based in Berlin, Seong-Jin Cho makes his Tanglewood debut this afternoon. His BSO debut was in March 2020 performing Prokofiev's Third Concerto.