Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875-1912) - Novelletten I

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor was born in England in 1875. He was the son of a white English woman and a black father originally from Sierra Leone, whose family history spanned the Atlantic ocean: his lineage was that of a group of American slaves who remained loyal to the British crown throughout the
American revolutionary war, and who were returned to West Africa after the United States gained its independence. When Coleridge-Taylor was young, his father abandoned him and his mother and left for Africa after trying to become a physician and continually being met with imposed professional limitations due to his race. Not long after, the young Samuel began playing violin and started to write and compose music.
Coleridge-Taylor would go on to develop a refined, lyrical and engaging style throughout a number of compositions that were very well received in Britain and overseas. His most well known works are a trilogy of pieces: *Hiawatha’s Wedding Feast*, *The Death of Mimmehaha*, and *Hiawatha’s Departure*. Written in the last two years of the 19th century, these cantatas were programmatic works based on
the epic poem of the same name by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. These works brought the composer international fame, to the extent that the commission for the second work of the trilogy was given before the premiere of the first, solely due to the popularity of the printed score that had been available for sale. Coleridge-Taylor, educated and practiced in England at the Royal College,
was also deeply interested in what black musicians in America were playing and composing at the turn of the century. (His interest in American stories and themes, of course, is also present in the Hiawatha trilogy and its Native American story; Coleridge-Taylor would eventually name his own son Hiawatha.) He resonated with the music being written in black communities in America, a radical, political, and
experimental component of American artistic culture that would give us such visionaries as Duke Ellington, Scott Joplin, Robert Johnson, and countless others. Coleridge-Taylor’s interest in American music, combined with his own orchestral style, is perhaps one reason he was assigned the racist title of the “black Dvorak”, which fails to assess his musical skill on any terms other than the color of his skin.
But as his teachers, peers, and fans were keenly aware, Coleridge-Taylor possessed a unique skill for orchestral writing, harmony, and melody. He toured at least three times in the United States at the beginning of the 20th Century, met with President Teddy Roosevelt due to his active role in politics and social justice issues, and was honored in the states with the formation of the Coleridge-Taylor society, a
group of musicians dedicated to performing and promoting his music in America. He would later go on to teach at the Trinity College of Music and conduct leading choirs in England. Coleridge-Taylor’s music, equally inspired by his traditional musical education in England and his love for black spirituals and the music of black American artists, is full of surprising and exciting uses of color, harmony, and melody.
He was an extremely talented orchestrator - as can be heard in the Hiawatha trilogy - using all the available sonic possibilities of the symphony and the voice to express his musical ideas. In his smaller scale works, such as the *Novelletten*, the same skill is evident and clearly heard even in the more homogenous timbral context of only strings. The *4 Novelletten* (a term first used my Schumann to describe
a collection of small works for the piano), the first of which is played on this program, was written midway through his career in 1902 and is a wonderful example of his skill writing for the traditional group of string instruments in a European style. The music is dance-like, quickly and elegantly moving through a compound 3/8 meter. The opening harmonies are clearly tonal, yet are made measurably
more exciting with the addition of chromatic pitches and borrowed chords. The melodic phrases that soon follow are lyrical and singing, but have a slightly disjunct quality in their intervalic content. This combination of effortless tonal music-making combined with surprising and unexpected details permeates Coleridge-Taylor’s work. The first movement continues with impressive orchestration,
moving the material throughout the registers of the ensemble in continually captivating ways. Counterpoint and rhythm are used to highlight and direct our focus throughout the straightforward formal structure of the piece, and like all great musical works we find ourselves lost within the sound of his score, outside of time. Tragically, Coleridge-Taylor died at the age of 37 without having seen essentially
any of the large sums of money he should have received from the popularity of his printed music. We can only imagine, as is the case with so many great artists that leave us too early, what Coleridge Taylor would continue to create and accomplish had he lived a longer life. This doesn’t, however, diminish the importance of his existing work, and perhaps makes it even more rare and valuable. As a
composer who loved and appreciated the music of marginalized people, and who gained notoriety by engaging with that love and social awareness, Coleridge-Taylor’s legacy is a fundamentally important part of our musical history.

Eugene Bozza (1905-1991) - Trois pièces pour une musique de nuit
Trois pièces pour une musique de nuit is a prime example of what the composer Eugene Bozza is most well known for: engaging, exciting, and masterfully written chamber music, especially for wind instruments. A French composer who studied both in Paris and for a time in Italy, Bozza was an accomplished conductor and educator as well. Along with hundreds of published scores, he wrote...
many etudes and books on music. He had a gift for composing idiomatically for each instrument used in any given score, so that the music is not only enjoyable for musicians to perform but also rehearse. His style of melody and harmony is accessible to a wide variety of audiences without being simplistic. All of these qualities make him a mainstay in chamber music performances and on chamber
music recordings. Bozza, born in 1905, wrote much of his music in the interwar years in France. The Neoclassical sounds of the day can be heard in his music, both in the pitch and harmonic content as well as the formal structures. While contemporaries such as Milhaud and Stravinsky are more well known for their large symphonic orchestrations in this style, Bozza remains a well known master of its application
in chamber music. We can hear the impact of turn-of-the-century French compositional styles as well, with colorful chromaticism and impressionistic chord progressions used in captivating and playful ways. The quartet *Trois pièces pour une musique de nuit*, a small but demanding trio of movements for flute, oboe, clarinet, and bassoon, gives us a wonderful
window into much of what makes Bozza’s chamber music so memorable. The *andantino* begins with a flute melody that weaves up and down across its register, with surprising chromaticism thrown in to keep us guessing. The other three winds establish a somewhat mysterious harmonic setting that would be at home with Ravel and early Debussy. As the movement progresses, melodic ideas a
traded throughout the ensemble until we arrive at a comfortable, unambiguous G-major chord - the parallel major key of the g-minor tonality in which we began. As soon as we arrive at the final cadence of the first movement, we’re quickly off again with the second movement, an allegro vivo in 3/8 time. Staccato repetitions and dancelike phrases, anchored by a well-written bass line in the
bassoon, move quickly around the four instruments in a minor mode, with chromatic interjections and unexpected harmonic shifts that keep us guessing as to where this playful and somewhat mischievous music is headed. A major key middle section that introduces us to a new character of the music uses syncopated accents to upend the rhythmic feel of the meter, before returning to the opening
motives once again in the final third of the movement. The final movement, a *moderato*, opens with bassoon and clarinet in octaves playing a solemn modal melody. This is quickly harmonized in minor key music with exquisitely written counterpoint throughout the quartet. This movement is a clear example of the Neoclassical influence of the time on Bozza’s work: familiar
harmonic cadences and contrapuntal writing are intertwined with engaging chromatic pitch content and unexpected voice-leading. Soon the modal melodic motives are played in higher registers by the flute and oboe over a drone on the pitch A supplied by clarinet and bassoon, taking us further back before the new classical and into a new renaissance sound. The movement culminates with
each instrument arriving at a final a-minor cadence together.

Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990) - West Side Story, arr. for brass quintet by Jack Gale West Side Story, and the music written for it, has become one of the most well known pieces to come out of Broadway in the history of American musical theatre.
Speaking from a strictly musical standpoint, this is actually quite a remarkable thing, given Bernstein’s compositional approach. The combination of his score, however, with Sondheim’s lyrics, Jerome Robbins’ choreography, and the retelling of Shakespeare make for a wildly engaging work of art that continually speaks to a wide and varied audience. Leonard Bernstein was, and posthumously still is, one of the
most famous conductors in America. He was iconoclastic, passionate, intimidating, and artistically adventurous in his work on the podium. His work as a composer has these same characteristics as well. He was a long-time fan of the theatre, and in his earlier days envisioned a kind of artistic synthesis that would include all aspects of American culture expressed in music, dance, and imagery. *West Side Story* is not
only the most popular realization of this idea, but it is also the most musically successful. Throughout the piece, Bernstein makes use of latin rhythms, jazz, popular styles, and classical idioms in continually impressive combinations. The cultural aspects of the stage play are reflected in these musical choices - a score that is emblematic of the diverse and complex society that Bernstein
knew in New York. It was important to Bernstein that all of these parts of American music were present in the work, as he considered each to be equally valid. But Bernstein also employs complex harmonic and melodic ideas that would be home in the music of Wagner or Schoenberg. Thorny dissonances and disjunct melodic moves outline tritones and pitch class sets measurably
removed from the standard harmonic structures of popular music styles. Melodically, motivic ideas become tied to characters and their motivations, and compositional tricks of restatement and reinterpretation are used to propel the musical content forward through its narrative structure. One of the most memorable melodies of the work, the theme from “Somewhere,” is a
reinterpretation itself of the slow movement from Beethoven’s *Emperor* Concerto. This eclectic melting pot of musical ideas became an exciting characteristic of the work as a whole, but also reflects a social and cultural view of America that was important to the composer. *West Side Story* is a thoroughly modern affair, full of challenging and exciting musical ideas that still sound
fresh today. While Bernstein would later direct his professional focus mostly to his conducting work (perhaps leaving an unfulfilled compositional legacy behind), his contribution to American musical theatre is monumental. The arrangement played on this program contains much of the most popular music from the score, which is also present in Bernstein’s suite for orchestra. While most listeners will surely
recognize and be familiar with at least some of this music, give yourself the opportunity to listen for the challenging and groundbreaking musical ideas that are woven into this score. While you may know the melodies and the words, here’s a change to revel in the complex harmonies, the risky rhythmic structures, and the musical adventurousness that Bernstein achieved in this
important piece of American art.

Scott Joplin (1868-1917) - Ragtime Dance, arr. for wind quartet by Adam Lesnick

There are a handful of musicians that, without question, represent the founding of what would become the eclectic and groundbreaking sound of American music in the 20th
century. Scott Joplin is one of those musicians, and in his ragtime music we can find evidence of nearly everything that would later become fundamental characteristics of popular music in the United States. That these musical ideas would go on to help define the artistic soul of a nation while the musicians that created them remained the victims of
racism and institutionalized sidelining is a history with which we are still reckoning as a country; we can find some solace and hope in the music itself, as we celebrate innovators like Joplin with continued performances of this vital and important music. Scott Joplin, born in 1868, grew up actively participating in music in the south, learning about much
of the folk traditions that were performed where he lived in Arkansas and Texas when he was young. He became an accomplished composer and performer, writing over 100 ragtime works. He also composed operas, although much of that work has unfortunately been lost. His major professional break came with a performance in Chicago
that introduced his ragtime music to a larger audience. The ragtime sound of Joplin’s music is so ubiquitous now that even listeners who don’t know it by genre can likely identify it by sound. If listeners of a certain generation don’t know the piece on today’s program by name, they very well may know it from its use in the movie *The Sting*. The bass line
is one main identifying factor of how Joplin’s ragtime music operates, as well as the way syncopated rhythms are used throughout. Specific compositional decisions about chromaticism are used within the voice-leading of the melodic material; these chromatic inflections - the “blue notes” of a blues scale - are still a fundamental aspect of how American popular music uses ambiguous tonal
implications to help create a unique and engaging sound. In the second half of the *Ragtime Dance*, a stop-time feel is added, where specific stomping actions of the piano player are called for in the score. That this music is so inexorably tied to dance is itself an important aspect of its place in the history of American popular music - music for dancing is still one of the most popular ways many listeners experience music in
American culture. The arrangement on this program for flute, oboe, clarinet, and bassoon, was written by Adam Lesnick.

Lew Pollack (1895-1946)—That’s a Plenty, arr.
For brass quintet by Jim Parcel
Lew Pollack - That’s a Plenty
While ragtime music is perhaps most often associated with the composer Scott Joplin, there
were many who wrote in this popular style at the beginning of the 20th century. Among them was Lew Pollack. Pollack was born in New York and developed his songwriting skills among the vaudeville scene so prominent in that city. He wrote a number of well known songs for the stage, including At the Codfish Ball, which was used in the Shirley
Temple film “Captain January.” That’s a Plenty is a showcase of many of the stylistic characteristics that are used throughout ragtime music. There is, of course, the classic bass line figure of skipping octaves in eighth notes to outline the roots of chords and the accompanying harmony. The counterpoint in the melodic lines is at times highly
chromatic, and uses bouncing rhythmic figures to move the musical content along. The piece begins in a minor tonality, and as is often the case in this style, the next section of the form is played in a major tonality to establish contrast. Repetition is used throughout, which gives the listener a clear roadmap as the music progresses, an
important component of popular songwriting and dance music styles. The original song was written with lyrics by Ray Gilbert, but the piece has been arranged into many different forms over the years. Early recordings of the work make it into a foxtrot for jazz orchestra, while others present it in the style of Dixieland jazz. This amount
of stylistic versatility speaks to the popularity of the song itself. The arrangement on this program was done by Jim Parcel for brass ensemble. Parcel, a trombonist with experience playing Dixieland jazz, uses that style to inform his arrangement, including sections for solos in the middle of the piece. As is common in Dixieland music,
the melodic lines being played simultaneously by instruments in the ensemble vie for dominance within the counterpoint, but also, when heard together, create a more robust expression of the harmonic content of the music.

Aaron Copland (1900-1990) - Appalachian Spring The music of Aaron Copland holds a
special place in the collective sense memory of the American listening public. Perhaps no other composer of the 20th century is more closely associated with the mythic and romanticized idea of the West, of social and cultural hope, and of an American identity tied to landscape. Copland strived to create a music that expressed a sense of place
and belonging - a harmonic, melodic, and rhythmic vocabulary that would bring listeners together. However the path Copland took in arriving at this compositional destination is often minimized in favor of the idealized notions his music evokes. The man himself might have seemed an unlikely candidate for becoming the composer who would create this aural landscape of America.
Copland was a New Yorker, through and through, being born and raised in Brooklyn. He was a gay Jewish man, the son of Russian immigrants, and at a relatively young age he also became active in leftist politics, even speaking at a communist rally in Minnesota in 1934. His political and social views were evident in much of his early music: the ballet *Hear Ye! Hear Ye!* comments on corruption in the courts and legal system.
His *Fanfare for the Common Man*, regularly used in very political and patriotic settings, took its title from a speech by Vice President Henry Wallace in which that politician celebrated the possibility of a people’s revolution in order to carry forward FDR’s New Deal with ideas modeled after the Soviet Union. *A Lincoln Portrait* used the words of that president in a narrative setting to evoke his contributions to
our country’s history. While politics is an important aspect of Copland’s musical output, what most people remember is his approach to harmony and melody. But even this component of his work is sometimes misunderstood. Copland, like so many of the successful composers of the early 20th century, studied in Paris with the composer, theorist, and educator Nadia Boulanger. Her rigorous and
detailed instruction informs all of Copland’s music to some extent. But living in Paris in the 1920’s also meant there was no escaping the influence of Igor Stravinsky. Even in parts of *Appalachian Spring* Stravinsky’s rhythmic and metric ideas can be heard, and certainly in Copland’s early modernist and non-tonal works the mark of both Boulanger and Stravinsky are prominent. It wasn’t until his return to
America that Copland truly moved away from the modernist music that so many of his peers were writing. But it wasn’t a trip to Colorado, the Dakotas, or California that sparked the flame of ideas that would eventually become his trademark musical sound. It was, in fact, a visit to Mexico that began this journey. Here, while also meeting with composers Carlos Chavez, Diego Rivera, and
Silvestre Revueltas, Copland began sketching ideas for his piece *El Sálón México*. In this work you can begin to hear many of the musical idioms that would later be crystalized in pieces such as *Rodeo* and *Billy the Kid*. Copland most certainly has a roster of “hits” that many American composers might envy, and *Appalachian Spring*, written in 1943-44, ranks among the most well known.
The choreographer Martha Graham - another American artistic treasure herself - came to Copland with the idea. She hoped to evoke a mythic frontier story, and Copland’s established track record by that time made him a natural choice. The score provides some of the clearest examples of how Copland used harmony to establish a sonic landscape related to the idealized, romanticized American West.
Quartal and quintal harmonies - those made up of notes that are spaced perfect fourths and fifths apart - have a broad, open sound that simultaneously speaks to stillness and potential energy, as well as the horizon lines of topographies advancing outward beyond our reach as audience members. (These intervals are also the sounds of open strings on violins, violas, cellos, and basses, the sounds
of which are often heard in traditional folk music styles of the American west and south.) the entire opening section of the piece focuses on these harmonies, only rarely moving away from the chord of A major. When quicker, more melodically-driven music arrives, open space is still a fundamental characteristic of the score, with instrumental lines jumping in octaves to outline thematic phrases. A
turbulent middle section - music that shows its Stravinskian influence - hops and dances across mixed meter and complex rhythmic structures. Later we hear the mid-tempo gait of musical themes so often used in Copland’s music to represent the West, farm life, and romanticized cultural simplicity. Perhaps the most well-known part of the entire work arrives in the last third of the score.
Here, a setting of the song Simple Gifts, a Shaker tune from the Pennsylvanian countryside where Graham envisioned her ballet, is the main musical idea that propels the work forward. The melody itself is stated as-is without change or manipulation, and Copland uses masterful compositional technique to harmonize and develop the material over a long period of time. We hear the melody in
the form of a canon, with many instruments taking up the tune at a variety of speeds. This music culminates in a slow, grand, and moving statement of the melody harmonized over a descending scale. This combination of simple compositional ideas and nuanced, clear, and masterful technique is a calling card of the composer, and likely may be one reason his music resonates across such a wide
variety of audiences. Like the history of our country itself, Copland’s music is often idealized. It is often taken out of context from the actual views and beliefs that helped bring it into existence in the first place. The reality is invariably more complex and nuanced than the myth, and sometimes the idealism we hear in these scores can obscure the difficult truths and histories that are built into the
real story of America’s romance with the West. But Copland himself was, in the end, more pragmatic than radical, regardless of the radicalism that is such a core component of much of his work. He envisioned American ideals and placed them into his music, perhaps as way for us to see forward as much as look back. In our current time, while we reckon with so many misunderstood stories and
rewritten histories, Copland’s music may offer a way of envisioning that landscape of possibility and community, however mythical and idealistic it may seem.