

**Before the concert: Turner Sims Foyer
The Vibe Lounge | SUSO Strings**

Tonight, the Vibe and SUSO Strings shine a light on the incredible works for string orchestra composed by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor. Talented musicians from SUSO, the University's Youth Symphony Orchestra, perform in the Turner Sims Foyer ahead of the evening's recital. SUSO is one of the leading student orchestras in the UK.

What's The Vibe?

We are a team of passionate 18 - 25 year olds from all over Southampton. Our exciting projects aim to reach young people, highlighting the amazing music scene in our city! We are excited to support this cause in recognising the works of African descended artists. The Vibe Lounge is a new series of pre-concert performances in the foyer programmed by the Vibe Collective.

Samantha Ege & Castle of Our Skins

African Tales

Sunday 26 May 2024



Samantha Ege piano, narrator

Castle of our Skins

Gabriela Díaz violin

Matthew Vera violin

Ashleigh Gordon viola

Francesca McNeeley cello

Undine Smith Moore *Soweto* for piano trio

Undine Smith Moore (1904–1989) was born in Jarratt, Virginia. As the progeny of working-class parents and enslaved

Undine Smith Moore *Soweto* for piano trio

Bongani Ndodana Breen Safika: *Three*

Tales of African Migration for piano quintet

Lavell Blackwell *On the Impulse to Move* for string quartet

Interval

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor Piano Quintet

grandparents, she grew up under Jim Crow laws, fully aware of the discriminations around her and the hardships her ancestors endured. Her experiences generated great empathy for the international plight of Black people under

similarly oppressive systems. Through music and the unconditional support of her parents, Moore found her sense of place in the world as a music educator, activist, and composer. Nicknamed the 'Dean of Black Women Composers', she used her craft to articulate her connections to the Continent and Diaspora. *Before I'd Be a Slave* (1953) for solo piano is one of her best-known pieces and reflects her predilection for dissonance and emotional intensity.

Soweto for piano trio (1987) reacts to the horrors of apartheid. Moore recalled hearing 'Soweto' resound in her mind as a rhythmic motif amid overtones of conflict. 'I felt I did not choose the word. The word chose me', she remarked. As a Black woman born in the Jim Crow South, Moore's language does not encompass indigenous South African idioms. Her reaction is more visceral than narrational, more emotive than appropriative. The first movement opens chaotically with an angular piano line that clashes against the cello's walking bass. An ever-active violin line adds to its raucous energy. The second movement begins with a quasi-cadenza on the violin, followed by a cello fragment built on the 'So-we-to' rhythmic motif, which defines the subsequent piano part. In Moore's words, the piano is 'bold, aggressive, angry, fast, accented', while the violin and cello offer contrasting moments of pensive lyricism. The third movement – a heart-rending lament – was added after *Soweto*'s 1987 premiere. Slow paced, melodically driven, harmonically grounded, and homophonically textured, it unfolds like a hymn. It references the Black spirituality of Moore's Southern upbringing and that of her South African brothers and sisters. If the first two movements are about rage and chaos, the third is about remembrance and catharsis.

Bongani Ndodana Breen *Safika: Three Tales of African Migration* for piano quintet

Bongani Ndodana-Breen (b. 1975) is a South African composer from the Xhosa ethnic group.

Although his formative years were shaped under apartheid, his musical gifts were nurtured early on. He studied piano, French horn, viola, composition, and orchestration. He even enjoyed premiere performances of his works under the school orchestra and chapel choir. Ndodana-Breen has since emerged as one of the most important composers in post-liberation South Africa, defying that which the agents of apartheid sought to preclude: the harmonious union of African and Western traditions. *Winnie: The Opera* (2011), based on the life of Winnie Mandela, forms one of Ndodana-Breen's most significant compositions and inspires the subject of a chapter in *Black Opera: History, Power, Engagement* by Naomi André.

Safika: Three Tales of African Migration for piano quintet (2011) depicts Black South Africans' dispossession, migration, and translocation – 'Safika' means 'we arrived' in Xhosa and Zulu. 'Safika I' opens with a dispirited descending *tutti* theme. The quintet then splinters into relentlessly rhythmic lines. The influence of African cyclic music is reinforced in a middle section that channels interlocking *mbira* patterns. 'Safika II' begins with a call and response between wandering strings in the higher registers and a descending melody in the piano based on Xhosa modes. Violin passages comprising parallel 4ths and 5ths (and inspired by *timbila* and *amadinda* xylophone music) signal the second half of 'Safika II.' *Barsawa* dance steps and polyrhythmic layers that evoke African communal singing characterise this dramatic section. 'Safika III' starts with solo cello. Its *glissandi* dips mirror the falling tones of Zulu syllables. The subsequent cello and piano unison pattern echoes the drumming in traditional Zulu war dances. Interlocking patterns abound thereafter. Ndodana-Breen says, 'By quoting and paraphrasing aspects of African music and dance, *Safika* alludes to memories of lives left behind, the people, the songs, the dances, and the connection to the land.'

Lavell Blackwell *On the Impulse to Move* for string quartet

Lavell Blackwell is a composer whose work is performed all over the United States, combining diverse musical influences and techniques to create a singularly piquant and energizing sound. In addition to composing, he currently serves on the faculty of the Berklee College of Music in Boston, MA, having previously taught at the University of New Hampshire. His dissertation, *The Long Walk* for orchestra with found objects, received the Graduate Music Award from the Presser Foundation for the purposes of a professional recording. Recent works include the piano trio *Prelude and Counterpoint*, premiered at the Curtis Institute of Music, Philadelphia in 2022, the suite for saxophone duet *Biosongs* for the Jamaica Plain Saxophone Quartet which received a world premiere as part of the Boston New Music Festival in November 2020, and the solo oboe work *Locrian Ambulations*, which was commissioned by Nicholas Tisherman, Assistant Principal Oboist in the Colorado Symphony in Denver.

On the Impulse to Move was commissioned by a consortium of 9 organisations in the United States comprising oboists, bass clarinetists and chamber ensembles. Led by Boston-based Winsor Music, the commissioners included today's quartet Castle of our Skins. Premiered on 30 September 2023 by Winsor Music, the work is scored for oboe, violin, viola and bass clarinet, but can also be performed by other ensembles: oboe and string trio, bass clarinet and strings or, as is the case this evening, string quartet.

On the Impulse to Move takes inspiration from John Adams and Stevie Wonder, and draws from Blackwell's experience as a musician, composer and lyricist.

Blackwell writes: 'This piece is about how hard it is for me to remain physically or mentally still, that struggle, those tensions that happened in my body and brain during meditation. So, I'd say the relationship to stillness and meditation is...adversarial? Adversarial, but not mocking

- at least I think. A lot of the work is this interplay between stasis and volatility, the pulsing rhythms combined with the suddenly changing harmonies and dynamics, for example.

The piece has a quirky humour to it. I hope that comes through for listeners and that they enjoy that aspect of it.'

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor

Piano Quintet in G minor, Op 1

- 1 Allegro con moto
- 2 Larghetto
- 3 Scherzo
- 4 Allegro molto – Vivace – Tempo I

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875–1912) was the son of a Sierra Leonean father and English mother, and the face of a changing Britain. Coleridge-Taylor was born in Holborn, raised in Croydon, and exhibited a prodigious musical talent early on. He studied at the Royal College of Music, counting Gustav Holst and Ralph Vaughan Williams among his classmates. While his style invoked Brahms and Grieg and led the American press to praise him as an 'African Mahler', Coleridge-Taylor's voice simultaneously held a prescient multiculturalism. Many of his works embraced African continental and diasporic cultures, such as *African Dances* (1904) for violin and *24 Negro Melodies* (1905) for solo piano, all of which inspired generations of African-descended classical practitioners to come.

Coleridge-Taylor's Piano Quintet was premiered on 9 October 1893 in Croydon in a concert of works by the then 18-year-old composer, who also played the piano part. However, whilst the critic of the Croydon Advertiser described the concert as 'astonishing' in his review, the Quintet subsequently disappeared. Coleridge-Taylor did re-purpose two themes elsewhere - the second subject of the first movement forms an episode of the African Dance Op 58 No 3, for violin and piano (1904); and the trio of the

Scherzo reappears in the 'Valse de la Reine', the third in the sequence of Characteristic Waltzes Op 22 for orchestra (1898) – but the complete work probably remained unheard in its entirety for more than a century. Its re-discovery was due to the work of Tony Burrage, a violinist and member of the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra, who reassembled / 'realised' as five separate playable parts the hand-written full score found in the archive of the Royal College of Music in London. The first performance of the work in over a century took place in Liverpool on

7 November 2001.

Whilst the four-movement work shows the influence of other composers – notably Dvořák and Schubert – it also offers an early indication of Coleridge-Taylor's mature style. Writer Lionel Harrison describes this in his note on the work: '...attractive and original melodies, strong rhythms and irregular phrase-lengths, and an ear sensitive to variety in tone-colour and dynamics are all in evidence, as are a gift for piquant harmony and bold key-changes allied to a sure grasp of structure'.

About Dr. Samantha Ege

Samantha is a musicologist and pianist. Her research and repertoire tightly entwine and largely concern 20th-century composers of African descent and women in music. She has published extensively in these areas. As a concert artist, she made her London debut at the London Festival of American Music in September 2021 and her Barbican debut soon after in November that year.

Samantha has since proved a sought-after recitalist and concerto soloist with engagements across the UK, Ireland, US, and Canada. In 2022, she collaborated with Castle of our Skins to release *Homage: Chamber Music from the African Continent & Diaspora*, her first significant project as a chamber musician and her third album (the previous two were *Fantasi Negre*; *The Piano Music of Florence Price* and *Black Renaissance Woman: Piano Music by Florence Price, Margaret Bonds, Nora Holt,*

Betty Jackson King and Helen Hagan).

SamanthaEge.com

About Castle of Our Skins

Castle of our Skins (COOS) is a Boston-based educational series dedicated to celebrating Black artistry through music. From classrooms to concert halls, COOS invites explorations into Black heritage and culture, spotlighting both unsung and celebrated figures of the past and present.

Violist Ashleigh Gordon and composer Anthony R. Green founded COOS in 2013 to address the lack of equity in composer representation on concert stages and the omission of important stories and figures in Black history. A decade on, the organisation still shines as a beacon for diversity in the arts.

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Supported using public funding by
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Turner Sims is part of the University of Southampton and gratefully acknowledges the support of Arts Council England