WILLIAM GRANT STILL

Mother and Child
Orchestra Roster

MICHAEL STERN, Music Director
JASON SEBER, David T. Beals III Associate Conductor

FIRST VIOLINS
Sunho Kim, Acting Concertmaster
Miller Nichols Chair
Stirling Trent, Acting Associate Concertmaster
Chiafei Lin, Acting Assistant Concertmaster
Gregory Sandomirsky ‡, Associate Concertmaster Emeritus
Anne-Marie Brown
Betty Chen
Anthony DeMarco
Susan Goldenberg* 
Tomoko Iguchi
Dorris Dai Janssen
Vladimir Rykov
Alex Shum*

SECOND VIOLINS
Tamamo Someya Gibbs, Principal
Kristin Velicer, Acting Associate Principal
Minhye Helena Choi, Acting Assistant Principal
Nancy Beckmann
Mary Garcia Grant
Kevin Hao ‡
Kazato Inouye
Rena Ishii
Stephanie Larsen
Francesca Manheim

VIOLAS
Matthew Sinno, Acting Principal
Jessica Nance, Acting Associate Principal
Duke Lee, Acting Assistant Principal
Kent Brauning
Sean Brumble
Marvin Gruenbaum
Jennifer Houck
Jesse Yukimura

CELLOS
Mark Gibbs, Principal
Robert A. Kipp Chair
Susie Yang, Associate Principal
Richard Hill Chair
Alexander East, Assistant Principal
Maria Crosby

HORNS
Alberto Suarez, Principal
Landon and Sarah Rowland Chair
David Sullivan, Associate Principal
Elizabeth Gray
David Gamble
Stephen Muller, Associate Principal Emeritus

TRUMPETS
Julian Kaplan, Principal
James B. and Annabel Nutter Chair
Steven Franklin, Associate Principal
Brian Rood ‡

TROMBONES
Roger Oyster, Principal
Porter Wyatt Henderson, Associate Principal
Adam Rainey

BASS TROMBONE
Adam Rainey

TUBA
Joe LeFevre, Principal
Frank Byrne Chair

TIMPANI
Timothy Jepson, Principal
Michael and Susan Newburger Chair

PERCUSSION
Josh Jones*, Principal
David Yoon, Associate Principal

HARP
Katherine Siochi, Principal

LIBRARIANS
Elena Lence Talley, Principal
Fabrice Curtis

* Non-Rotating Musician
^ New Member
‡ On Leave of Absence
WILLIAM GRANT STILL

Mother and Child (1943)
7 minutes

Mother and Child is one of William Grant Still’s most popular works and, according to his daughter, one of his favorite compositions of his own. The piece was written in 1943 during a challenging period in his life. Still had turned down the most lucrative film commission he had ever received, for “Stormy Weather,” because he thought the movie depicted Black people badly and the studio’s actions were degrading. This principled stand was costly but indicative of Still’s belief in human rights and the value of Black lives. Among the works he composed at this time was his Suite for Violin and Piano. He later described the creative impetus for his suite:

[W]hen I was asked to compose a suite for violin and piano, I thought of three contemporary Negro [sic] artists whom I admire and resolve to try to catch in music my feeling for an outstanding work by each of them.

The second movement of the suite was inspired by a chalk drawing by Sargent Claude Johnson, a Black artist based in San Francisco. The warm tones of the drawing depict a young Black woman gently cradling the head of her child seeking refuge in her embrace as she rests her head in her other arm with a pensive stare. Spare of detail, the artwork’s rounded lines convey a complex message that resonated with Still. Perhaps the image reminded Still of his beloved mother, who dispensed discipline and encouragement in equal measure. As he noted, “I rarely missed passing through a day without a licking. But I needed them.”

The suite premiered in early 1944 and Still wasted no time in arranging the second movement for several different instrumentations, including string orchestra. Much like the artwork that inspired it, Mother and Child’s deceptive simplicity is the perfect way to express the multifaceted emotions that inhabit the relationship between a mother and her child. With gentle alternation between major and minor, the strings murmur softly and then soar, always singing. More than a lullaby, Mother and Child offers a compact musical portrait of maternal love. ETW
WILLIAM GRANT STILL  
(1895-1978)

William Grant Still was born in Woodinville, Mississippi, in 1895. His father died a few months later and Still’s mother moved to Little Rock, Arkansas, where she raised the youth and taught high school English. Still began violin studies at age 14 and learned how to play several other instruments, including cello and oboe. Still’s stepfather encouraged his musical interests by taking him to concerts and buying recordings of classical music. Still entered Wilberforce University in Ohio in 1911 and split his time between science courses and music, beginning to compose and learn orchestration. He left Wilberforce in 1915 and started work as a freelance performer and arranger for bands led by W.C. Handy, Paul Whiteman and Artie Shaw, among others.

Still continued his studies intermittently, working with composer George Chadwick at the New England Conservatory, attending classes at Oberlin Conservatory of Music and taking private lessons with experimental composer Edgard Varèse. He received various scholarships as well as Guggenheim and Rosenwald fellowships that helped further his burgeoning career. Commissions were forthcoming from the Cleveland Orchestra, Columbia Broadcasting System and 1939 New York World’s Fair, plus many others. He eventually moved to Los Angeles and worked extensively scoring music for films and writing arrangements for radio broadcasts.

Noted for so many “firsts” with respect to race and classical music, Still was the first Black composer to have a symphony performed by a professional orchestra for a U.S. audience when the Rochester Philharmonic premiered his Symphony No. 1, “Afro-American,” in 1931. He conducted the Los Angeles Philharmonic in 1936, as the first Black conductor to lead a major U.S. orchestra, and his opera, Troubled Island, was the first by a Black composer to be nationally televised.

Still was a prolific composer, writing more than 150 compositions, including operas, ballets, symphonies, choral works, solo vocal works and chamber music. He was familiar with Harlem Renaissance writers such as Paul Laurence Dunbar and Langston Hughes, and set many of their poems to music. He was also comfortable with his unique musical voice, blending European heritage and training with the jazz, blues and spirituals that invigorate American music. This duality was mirrored by his success in both commercial music and the concert hall. Still’s many pioneering achievements were recognized by the award of honorary doctorates from Howard University, Oberlin College, University of Arkansas, Pepperdine University, New England Conservatory, Peabody Conservatory and the University of Southern California. ETW

Program notes written by AJ Harbison (AJH) and Eric T. Williams (ETW).
To learn more about the talented musicians of the Kansas City Symphony, please visit:

https://www.kcsymphony.org/about-us/musicians/