William Grant Still (1895-1978)

Suggested Recordings, Resources, and Topics for Classroom Discussion

Recordings

**Symphony No.1 in A-flat Major, *Afro-American***
Cincinnati Philharmonia Orchestra; Jindong Cai, conductor
[https://open.spotify.com/album/6rdwANPRPpqL1GqBFqOOk23?si=r72wp_O5SGOtgCdfD8KE_w&dl_branch=1](https://open.spotify.com/album/6rdwANPRPpqL1GqBFqOOk23?si=r72wp_O5SGOtgCdfD8KE_w&dl_branch=1)

**Symphony No.1 in A-flat Major, *Afro-American***
Royal Philharmonic Orchestra; Karl Krueger, conductor

**Africa (Symphonic Poem)**
American Symphony Orchestra; Leon Botstein, conductor
[https://open.spotify.com/album/2spqCgw0JSPX2dxrWowFKW?si=MM9b4gr0QFudK2KTjO5FHA&dl_branch=1](https://open.spotify.com/album/2spqCgw0JSPX2dxrWowFKW?si=MM9b4gr0QFudK2KTjO5FHA&dl_branch=1)

**Symphony No. 2 in G minor, *Song of a New Race***
American Symphony Orchestra; Leon Botstein, conductor
[https://open.spotify.com/album/4dI2MPw883cdwnfyURvaXN?si=EX8jPADFRu2QDulpRGg9g&dl_branch=1](https://open.spotify.com/album/4dI2MPw883cdwnfyURvaXN?si=EX8jPADFRu2QDulpRGg9g&dl_branch=1)

**Symphony No. 2 in G minor, *Song of a New Race***
Detroit Symphony Orchestra; Neeme Jarvi, conductor
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8pNM7nWuc5U](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8pNM7nWuc5U) (Note: YouTube clips often contain ads.)

Additional Resources

**Book:** [In One Lifetime: A Biography of William Grant Still](http://www.williamgrantstillmusic.com)

**Website:** [http://www.williamgrantstillmusic.com/](http://www.williamgrantstillmusic.com/)
Upcoming San Francisco Symphony performances:

**William Grant Still**  Suite for Violin and Piano  
Wednesday, April 13, 2022 at 7:30pm  
Randall Goosby, violin; Zhu Wang, piano  

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**Topics for classroom discussion, further research, and discovery**

- African-American folk traditions: Spirituals
- Harlem Renaissance
- Operas by African-American composers

**African-American folk traditions: Spirituals**

- What are Spirituals? What are the origins of the African-American spiritual? Why were they created and sung?
- Study the lyrics (words) of a well-known spiritual such “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot.” What do the lyrics mean? Examine the lyrics for metaphors which may be coded messages about hope and freedom; research the double meanings of the words and phrases.
- How would you describe the musical style of spirituals?

**Harlem Renaissance**

- What was the Harlem Renaissance? What factors led to the creation of this African-American cultural movement? What was its historical and cultural significance?
- Research and summarize the achievements of some Harlem Renaissance luminaries:  
  - writers Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston
  - visual artists Romare Bearden, Sargent Johnson
  - musicians Bessie Smith, Louis Armstrong

**Operas by African-American composers**

Select an opera from the list below for further exploration.

- Scott Joplin - *Treemonisha* (1911)
- Shirley Graham DuBois - *Tom-Tom* (1932)
- William Grant Still - *Highway I, USA* (1963)
- Anthony Davis - *X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X* (1985)

- What is the storyline of the opera? What cultural, historical, or social elements are reflected in the opera? What might have made the story attractive to an African-American composer?
- Identify universal themes (such as hope, fear, love, mourning, joy, etc.) in the opera. What message might the opera convey to today’s audiences?
- How would you describe the musical style of the opera?