

Over the course of time there have been many overlooked artists in classical music, because of their race and/or gender. It is important to acknowledge that we have not yet heard the whole story due to this sidelining of voices. Composers Joseph Boulogne Chevalier de Saint-Georges, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, William Grant Still, Florence B. Price, Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson, and George Walker, have all contributed beautifully crafted works to the repertoire, but are not widely celebrated. Another contributing factor to this unfortunate reality is access to their manuscripts and recordings of their work which we believe would lead to greater awareness and programming of their incredible music.

UNCOVERED, conceived in 2018, is an ongoing performance and multi-volume anthology recorded on the Azica label. Vol. 1, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor with guest collaborators Stewart Goodyear (piano) and Anthony McGill (clarinet), releases on February 5th, 2021. Vol. 2 is devoted to Florence B. Price and future volumes will include Joseph Boulogne Chevalier de Saint-Georges, Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson, William Grant Still, and George Walker.
—Catalyst Quartet

“No one realises more than I that the coloured people have not yet taken their place in the scheme of things, but to say that they never will is arrogant rubbish, and an insult to the God in Whom they profess to believe.”
—Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, 1912

When the composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor was born in London in 1875, the child of a white British mother and a Sierra Leonean doctor, slavery had yet to be abolished in Cuba and Brazil. Though the United Kingdom had officially outlawed slavery in 1834, it continued to profit considerably from the labor of enslaved people in the Americas. Meanwhile, in the United States, Reconstruction—the nation’s attempt at racial democracy—was on the brink of collapse, about to be dealt its fatal blow by compromises made to settle the contested presidential election of 1876. If the time period sounds familiar at all, it ought to remind us that the legacies of the end of the 19th century are very much with us today, that this is timely music. This was the world into which Coleridge-Taylor was born, a composer who was consistently curious, passionate, and optimistic about the lives of Black people in Africa, Europe, and the Americas.

The three works on this album come from a time when Coleridge-Taylor was a student at the recently founded Royal College of Music in London. Coleridge-Taylor entered the school as a violin student in 1890 at the age of fifteen. After two years of study, he switched emphases, focusing on piano and, primarily, composition. The young Coleridge-Taylor admired the work of Brahms and Dvorak—influences evident in the pieces here—and he had tremendous respect for his composition teacher, the Irish composer Charles Villiers Stanford, professor also to Ralph Vaughan Williams, Rebecca Clarke, Frank Bridge, and Arthur Bliss.

In October 1893, Coleridge-Taylor was given permission by the college to give a public recital in a hall in Croydon, where he had grown up. There, having just turned eighteen, he and a handful of his peers performed Mozart’s Clarinet Quintet, a short work by the violinist and composer Hans Sitt, and three pieces by Coleridge-Taylor. The last selection on the program was Coleridge-Taylor’s Piano Quintet, with the composer himself at the piano. Contemporary and posthumous critics alike have pointed out that calling Coleridge-Taylor’s early chamber music “student compositions” does a disservice to their quality and maturity, and the final movement that audience would have heard in 1893 underscores this point. The movement begins with an

exuberant ensemble flourish before the violin launches into the rhapsodic first theme. Though, like much of the composer's early chamber music, the Piano Quintet centers around a minor mode, it ends with an energetic coda in G Major.

The *Fantasiestücke* and the Clarinet Quintet both come from 1895, composed just before Coleridge-Taylor turned twenty years old. The *Fantasiestücke* were premiered at the Royal College of Music in March of that year and were received, like most of Coleridge-Taylor's chamber music, with enthusiasm. The Humoresque in the middle of the piece has a beguiling and virtuosic danceability, and the lilting, longing Minuet—with its prominent use of trills and suspensions—melts into the more athletic Dance that ends the set of five movements. The Clarinet Quintet is perhaps the best-known piece on this album, and it deserves even more attention. In her book about her father, Coleridge-Taylor's daughter Avril recounts that at a student concert in 1894 the director of the college George Grove said that Coleridge-Taylor would not be able to write a successful slow movement until he had been in love. He must have fallen in love, then, before writing the impactful *Larghetto affettuoso* of the Clarinet Quintet, with its twinkling and hopeful final chords.

After his student years, Coleridge-Taylor's works demonstrated an increasing investment in understanding and supporting Black people throughout the African diaspora. Coleridge-Taylor was always curious about the Americas, particularly the United States, and perhaps his most famous piece is the trilogy of cantatas known as *The Song of Hiawatha* (1900), based on the epic poem of the same name by US American writer Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. He met the Black US American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar in London in 1896, setting some of his poems to music and later collaborating on the operetta *Dream Lovers* (1898). In 1901, he wrote the symphonic poem *Toussaint Louverture* in honor of the Haitian revolutionary leader. Before his first trip to the United States, in 1904, he prepared himself by reading *The Souls of Black Folk* by preeminent sociologist and Black intellectual W. E. B. Du Bois, calling it “the best book he had ever read.” During that trip, he met and had a lengthy conversation with US President Theodore Roosevelt at the White House.

Back in the UK, Coleridge-Taylor made a living as a prominent and successful composer, teacher, and conductor. He taught composition at the Guildhall School of Music and the Trinity College of Music and became the conductor of the Handel Society of London in 1904. He married the pianist Jessie Sarah Fleetwood Walmisley in 1899 and had two children, Hiawatha and Avril. He visited the United States twice more, in 1906 and 1910, traveling to Detroit, Boston, and New York and performing with famed Black US American singer and composer Harry Burleigh. Coleridge-Taylor died suddenly of pneumonia in 1912, just after turning thirty-seven.

Like Coleridge-Taylor himself, this recording should be placed in its own historical moment, too, one in which concert music institutions are grappling with how to reckon with their own relationships to white supremacy. This process intensified in the wake of the murder of George Floyd by a white police officer in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in May 2020. In their conception of this “Uncovered” series, the Catalyst Quartet rightly notes that concert works by Black people and women have suffered from a dearth of live and recorded performances. As composer and musicologist George Lewis put it recently, there has been a “cone of silence” over the works of Black composers, and our current moment has generated a lot of ink and concert programs to discussing and attempting to lift that cone. Music critic Joshua Barone rightly asks, however, whether that rush will last, and indeed a quick search through old music periodicals and concert programs shows that related trends have arisen at various moments over the past

several decades without being able to undo classical music's investments in works by white men from Western Europe.

Nevertheless, there have always been and hopefully will always be artists who seek to use their performance capabilities and platforms to ask critical questions of the canon and the institutions that prop it up. The Catalyst Quartet is among those artists, as are their collaborators on this album, the clarinetist Anthony McGill and pianist Stewart Goodyear. The Catalyst Quartet has long been a champion of living composers, especially women, Black and Indigenous people, and other people of color. Stewart Goodyear has written thoughtfully about being Black in the classical music art world and performed his suite *Callaloo*, which explores his own Trinidadian roots. Anthony McGill memorably took to Facebook two days after the murder of George Floyd to perform a version of "America the Beautiful" that shifts to the minor mode halfway through and ends on the penultimate note of the tune before McGill takes two knees in front of the camera. Regardless of the future of classical music, we have in these artists interpreters and keepers of the vast trove of music by marginalized composers that is ready to be uncovered.

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