



American Spirituals & American Jazz

Saturday, February 11, 2023

William Grant Still

May 11, 1895 – December 3, 1978

- First African-American composer to have a symphony performed by a professional orchestra in the U.S., the Symphony No. 1 "Afro-American" (1930)
- The first African-American to conduct a major symphony orchestra in the United States
- In the world of opera, Still's *Troubled Island* was the first by an African-American to be performed by a major opera company (New York City Opera, 1949)
 - *Troubled Island* was the first by an African-American to be nationally televised

***Symphony No. 2 in G minor* "Song of a New Race"**

- Premiered by the Philadelphia Orchestra with conductor Leopold Stokowski on December 10, 1937
- It is believed to be an extension or evolution of his Symphony No. 1 ("Afro-American Symphony")
- Still saw the Symphony No. 2 as representative of "the American colored man of today, in so many instances a totally new individual produced through the fusion of White, Indian and Negro bloods."

Listening Guide

MUSIC: <https://www.naxoslicensing.com/playlist/MzE3NzQwNC01YmlzNzU>

Recording; Fort Smith Symphony, conductor John Jeter

1: Slowly

Time Stamp	Musical Elements	Instrument or Family
0:00	Lyrical & bluesy opening material; English horn, flute & muted trumpets prominent. Winds pass melodic fragments back and forth. Short rhythmic ideas. Innovative harmonies show jazz influence for a distinct and fresh orchestral sound.	Full orchestra
0:35	Short wind solos (clarinet, flute) lead into the Principal theme. This melody is played by the woodwinds and supported by the strings in a smooth yet accented manner. Flute plays the countermelody	Woodwinds, Strings

	against the strings and reed instruments. Long-short-long rhythms in brass reference jazz influence.	
1:04	Principal theme returns with the lush, lyrical melody in the strings at an increased dynamic level, more intensely.	Strings, Brass
1:31	Development of the Principal theme material; call-and-response motives between the various instrument sections with brass taking the lead and strings answering. Instruments build to a full texture & strong volume. Jazz harmonies prominent.	Strings, Brass, Woodwinds
2:07	Color change as instrumental texture shifts from full orchestra to woodwind feature. Short, driving rhythmic variety offered by flutes.	Strings, Woodwinds
2:30	Principal theme returns with the melody in the strings, supported by the brass in a smooth yet accented manner. Flute continues with countermelodies against principal theme. Development of the theme through rhythmic, harmonic, and timbre (tone color) changes.	Strings, Brass
3:27	Developmental material on the Principal theme, with solos from various woodwind instruments, beginning with English horn and clarinet. Contemplative mood.	Woodwinds
3:43	Secondary theme presented by strings, more "classical" in style (warm, major key). Woodwinds interject brief comments. Jazz harmonies present.	Strings, woodwinds
4:14	Secondary theme explored. A call-and-response motive between strings and woodwinds. Building in intensity and tension, later released.	Strings, Woodwinds
5:20	Brass fanfare material that builds intensity, announcing the Development. Winds answer brass calls. Bright tone colors alternate with lyrical strings. Clashing/dissonant harmonies heighten emotion.	Brass
6:03	Mood change in a lighter texture and dynamic level, featuring the solo flute; abrupt interruption by brass at 6:15, as if interrupting a conversation.	Strings and Woodwinds
6:42	Return to principal theme material, loudly, agitated, angular, and dissonant (notes grating against each other) with strong articulations (note beginnings	Full Orchestra
6:59	Winds and strings return to earlier lyrical material, as if in a dialogue. Warm major key.	Woodwinds, Strings

7:32	First theme material with a thicker texture, brass prominent	Full Orchestra
8:19	Intensity builds with a steady crescendo (volume increase) until the final chord; many dissonances resolve.	Full Orchestra

II: Slowly and deeply expressive

Time Stamp	Musical Elements	Instrument or Family
0:00	The movement opens with the main theme	Strings
0:31	Color change with the melody in the woodwinds and support from the strings	Stings and Woodwinds
1:36	Violin solo of the main theme	Strings
2:04	Color change with the addition of the brass instruments	Brass
2:21	Transition I material with woodwinds and strings, with a sweet, song-like melody	Woodwind and Strings
3:01	Transition II material with the woodwinds, strings, and the xylophone	Woodwinds, Strings, and Percussion
3:26	Transition I material returns with woodwinds and more strings, with lush harmonic language	Woodwind and Strings
4:00	Color change, with a faster tempo and turbulent rhythmic content	Full Orchestra
4:50	Short interlude with a smoother, moving texture	Brass and Strings
5:18	Transition II material returns, led by the woodwinds	Woodwinds, Strings, and Percussion
5:46	Transition I material returns, with light flute and piccolo accents	Woodwind and Strings
6:25	Return of the main theme	Strings
6:54	Closing material for the main theme	Woodwind and Strings
7:09	The ending, more frantic than the rest of the movement leads	Woodwinds

directly into the third movement

and Brass

III: Moderately fast

Time Stamp	Musical Elements	Instrument or Family
0:00	Opening theme, with the flutes on the melody	Strings and Woodwinds
0:24	Opening then returns with strings on the melody	Strings and Brass
0:43	Transition material	Full orchestra
1:06	Return and development of the opening theme	Strings and Woodwinds
1:37	Color change with a heavy, moving tempo	Strings and Woodwinds
2:19	Flute solo with responses from the Brass, and supported by the stringb	Woodwinds, Brass, and Percussion
2:57	Opening theme, with strings on the melody	Full Orchestra
3:17	Development of opening theme material to the ending	Full Orchestra

IV: Moderately slow

Time Stamp	Musical Elements	Instrument or Family
0:00	Opening material, with the brass (muted) and woodwinds descending into the first theme, volume decreasing.	Full Orchestra

0:17	First theme, lyrical and undulating. Flutes prominent against string accompaniment.	Strings and Woodwinds
0:42	Restatement of the first theme by strings, with the brass on the melody	Strings and Woodwinds
1:09	Another restatement of the first theme, with a thicker instrumental texture	Full Orchestra
1:33	Oboe solo	Woodwinds and Strings
1:41	Transitional material	Strings and Woodwinds
2:23	Color change and key change to a more melancholy feel	Strings
2:43	Descending, chromatic motive in the brass	Full orchestra
3:00	Transitional material returns	Strings
3:14	Color change that pushes the tempo along	Strings and Woodwinds
4:28	New transitional material	Strings
4:49	Descending, chromatic motive returns	Strings and Brass
5:03	Transitional material returns	Strings
5:35	Harmonic language reminiscent of Spirituals	Full Orchestra
6:31	Brass fanfare and orchestral response ending material	Full Orchestra
7:03	Final chord crash, soft strings fading away	