

Clarice Assad

Born: February 9, 1978, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

Clarice Assad is a significant artistic voice in the classical, world music, pop, and jazz genres. The Grammy Award-nominated composer, pianist, vocalist, and educator is acclaimed for her evocative colors, rich textures, and diverse stylistic range. She has more than seventy compositions to her credit, including commissions from prestigious organizations including Carnegie Hall, Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center, Orquestra Sinfônica de São Paulo, Oregon Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic, and more. Her works have been recorded by some of the most prominent names in classical music, including Dame Evelyn Glennie, Yo-Yo Ma, and Nadja Salerno-Sonnenberg. Assad is the recipient of numerous honors and awards, including an Aaron Copland Award, several ASCAP awards in composition, and a Morton Gould Young Composer Award. Part of a musical family that includes her father, guitarist Sergio Assad, her uncle, guitarist Odair Assad, and her aunt, singer-songwriter Badi Assad, Clarice Assad holds a Bachelor of Music degree from Chicago's Roosevelt University, and a Master of Music degree from The University of Michigan School of Music.

Suite for Lower Strings

Composed: 2009

Duration: 16 minutes

Instrumentation: strings

Clarice Assad has written the following on her work: "Suite for Lower Strings (2009) is a five-movement fantasy on well-known themes by J.S. Bach. The work emphasizes the string section's lower voices, such as the viola, cello, and bass. Typically in Baroque music, the melody was given to the higher instruments – but the suite, commissioned by the New Century Chamber Orchestra, was specifically tasked to showcase the often under-used lower instruments. Each of the suite's short movements presents Bach's popular and recognizable melodies, often varying and combining them with elements from twentieth-century styles."

The melodic lead is indeed largely taken by the lower strings throughout this work. Colorful accompaniments to Bach's themes range from pizzicati and spicy harmonies to more extended playing techniques. In the first movement, the listener is plunged into Bach's world almost immediately with snippets of his famous Toccata and Fugue in D minor, with percussive interjections including foot-stomping. Subsequent movements include quotations of many well-known Bach pieces, including – in an incomplete list! – "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring" from the Cantata No. 147 in the second movement, "Sheep May Safely Graze" from the Cantata No. 208 and the Bach/Gounod "Ave Maria" in the third, and the opening of the Cello Suite No. 1 and the "Air on the G String" from the Orchestral Suite No. 3 in the fourth, all culminating in a propulsive final movement.

Johann Sebastian Bach

Born: March 21, 1685, Eisenach, Germany

Died: July 28, 1750, Leipzig, Germany

Acknowledged along with Beethoven and Brahms as one of the "three Bs" of classical music, Johann Sebastian Bach was the culminating figure of music's Baroque era. His over one thousand works – ranging from religious cantatas and masses to orchestral, chamber, and solo compositions – are loved

and respected for their depth, contrapuntal invention, and combination of intellectual rigor and great beauty. Born into a family of musicians, Bach was taught the rudiments of music by his father. He held several posts in his teens and early twenties as a singer, violinist and organist, during which time he also started to compose his first organ works and cantatas. The main body of his musical life is usually divided up into three periods. From 1708 to 1717 he served as court organist and composer for the Duke of Sachsen-Weimar. He then assumed the position of Kapellmeister in the city of Cöthen, where he worked until 1723 and where he wrote the famous Brandenburg Concertos and many other instrumental works. In 1723 Bach became the Kantor of the Thomas School in Leipzig, holding that post until his death. In Leipzig he taught, directed the city's Collegium musicum orchestra, and composed hundreds of cantatas for the city's churches.

Brandenburg Concerto No. 6 in B-flat major, BWV 1051

Composed: 1717-20?

Duration: 16 minutes

Instrumentation: strings, harpsichord

In 1721 Bach sent his beautifully handwritten manuscript of the six "Concertos for various instruments" (they were dubbed the Brandenburg Concertos many years later by Bach biographer Philipp Spitta) to the Berlin home of Margrave Christian Ludwig of Brandenburg, brother of King Friedrich Wilhelm I of Prussia. The Margrave had met Bach a couple of years earlier, and asked him to compose something for the Margrave's small orchestra. Unfortunately for Bach, who had seen in the Margrave a potential employment opportunity and responded enthusiastically with the now-famous Concertos, the scores lay untouched in the Margrave's library until his death thirteen years later, when they were sold off for mere pennies.

The concertos Bach sent to the Margrave were not, however, specially written for him. Most of them had been written for Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen, Bach's employer between 1717 and 1723. Concertos Nos. 3 and 6, because of their relatively conservative style and strings-only scoring, were perhaps written even earlier, during Bach's time in Weimar (1708-17). It is thought by some that No. 6 may have originated in a cantata; the unusual combination of instruments – two violas, two viole da gamba (six-stringed relatives of the cello, replaced by cellos in this performance), cello, violone (a larger gamba, replaced here by double bass), and harpsichord – only otherwise appears in Bach's output in some of his Weimar church cantatas. In any case, Bach's favorite instrument was the viola (he enjoyed playing, as he put it, "in the middle of the harmony"), and he likely played the Concerto No. 6 at some point with Prince Leopold's orchestra in Cöthen, with the Prince himself playing one of the satisfying, but not too difficult, gamba parts.

The moderately fast, stately first movement, with its tightly-woven polyphony, features much imitative interplay between the violas that later moves to the other instruments. Some of that polyphonic play extends into the plaintive second movement, in which the gambas are silent and the violas are highlighted. Bach picks up the pace with the final movement, in a swinging gigue (or jig)-like rhythm, whose main theme is related to that of the first movement.

Caroline Shaw

Born: August 1, 1982, Greenville, North Carolina

An acclaimed composer, singer, violinist, and producer, Caroline Shaw was the youngest-ever winner

of the Pulitzer Prize for Music, having received the award in 2013, at the age of thirty, for her Partita for 8 Voices. She has also won multiple Grammy Awards, and received an honorary doctorate from Yale University. Shaw received her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in violin performance from Rice and Yale, respectively. Along with her busy composing schedule, she still performs regularly with the vocal ensemble Roomful of Teeth, the American Contemporary Music Ensemble, and a variety of other groups. Her compositions, numbering over one hundred in the last decade, have been commissioned and performed by, among many others, Yo Yo Ma, Renée Fleming, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, So Percussion, the Brentano and Aizuri String Quartets, Brooklyn Rider, Ars Nova Copenhagen, and the Brooklyn Youth Chorus. Her music has been featured in a number of films, television programs, and stage productions. She has collaborated with artists like Kanye West and Beyoncé, and also appeared in the series Mozart in the Jungle.

Stucco & Brocatelle

Composed: 2017

Duration: 10 minutes

Instrumentation: strings, harpsichord

Stucco & Brocatelle received its first performance on February 17, 2017, performed by Ensemble Connect, joined by Shaw herself on violin. At a performance a few days later, Shaw delivered some spoken remarks on the work, saying that her composition "is really all about the different colors and textures in a typical luxurious seventeenth century Venetian palazzo interior. So if you can, imagine the sort of decorative filigree of the stucco work and the rich colors, the deep blues, the gold embroidery, the deep crimson of maybe the brocade on the walls, all of these different dyes and fabrics and textures that were coming in from all over the world to this incredible merchant city." She went on to say that she "played with different colors and textures, all the things that we can do as string players, ornamentation that might be sort of Vivaldi-esque, but something a little bit different."

The work's halting slow introduction quickly introduces a note of tension, with tremolos and fast arpeggios. A figure is passed around the strings in counterpoint, propelled by the bass. The string textures become more lush, as high and low strings trade ideas. Repeating notes and phrases from the other strings erupt as the bass once again pushes the music forward. After a time, the mood becomes hushed with long sustained notes. Quiet arpeggios emerge and gain strength. The work's opening music is briefly recalled before further arpeggios appear, and fade to silence.

Johann Sebastian Bach: Orchestral Suite No. 1 in C major, BWV 1066

Composed: 1720-25?

Duration: 22 minutes

Instrumentation: 2 oboes, bassoon, strings, continuo

Bach wrote some of his four Suites for orchestra (and possibly others now lost) during his years in Cöthen serving as Kapellmeister to Prince Leopold. Others perhaps date from his time in Leipzig as Kantor of the city's Thomas School. The Suites were almost certainly performed at the weekly concerts, at Zimmermann's Coffee House in Leipzig, of the Collegium musicum – a semi-professional group of students, amateur musicians, and music fans that was formed by Bach's contemporary and friend Georg Philipp Telemann and later led by Bach. Although it's uncertain when Bach composed his Orchestral Suite No. 1 (the manuscript score is apparently lost), a set of instrumental parts exist that were likely copied in 1724, making this Suite one of the first, if not the first, of Bach's orchestral works

to be heard in Leipzig.

The suite, also sometimes called an overture, evolved into a collection of stylized dance movements. The form was quite popular during Bach's time: see the 130-plus surviving suites for orchestra by Telemann, or the 100 or so by Johann Friedrich Fasch. But Bach was seldom called on to compose music for orchestra, hence the small number he wrote.

In a typical suite, the first movement (which is also referred to as an Overture) begins with a stately, often regal opening, followed by a faster fugal section, and a concluding return of the opening music. Such is the case in Bach's Suite No. 1, with the dotted rhythms of the grand opening giving way to the bustling central contrapuntal section and its virtuoso solo writing, with strings and winds interacting.

Most of the following dances are French in origin and style. The Courante was a dance form popular in both France and Italy, here graceful and courtly in Bach's hands. Most of the succeeding dances in this Suite are in pairs, like the two Gavottes of the third movement. The fourth movement takes the form of a Forlane, a lively sort of street dance that originated in Italy (it was especially popular in Venice) but which also became familiar at European courts.

The fifth movement is a pair of Menuets, the first featuring the entire ensemble and the second the strings only. A similar sonic contrast characterizes the two lively Bourrées – the first is for full orchestra, with the oboes and first violins playing in unison, and the second features just the two oboes and bassoon with continuo. The Suite concludes with two Passepieds with flowing melodic lines from the oboes and violins.

Program notes by Chris Morrison