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The Orchestral Music of George Walker

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The year 2022 provides an opportunity for the world to celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of composer and pianist George Walker. We are fortunate that Dr. Walker left a substantial body of orchestral music. This article provides a comprehensive list of pieces for orchestra, hopeful that this may make it possible for Walker's works to be performed by CODA member ensembles in celebration of his achievements and of his milestone birthday.

George Walker was Born in Washington, DC on June 27, 1922 to parents of West Indian heritage. Walker's father was a physician. His mother supervised his first piano lessons at age five. At the age of 14 he graduated from Dunbar High School and matriculated at the Oberlin Conservatory on a full scholarship. At eighteen Oberlin conferred upon him the Bachelor of Music degree in piano and organ. He graduated with the highest honors in his class. He then was accepted to the Curtis Institute where he would study piano with Rudolf Serkin, also studying chamber music and composition. In 1945 he graduated with artist diplomas in both piano and composition.

In the same year, Walker became the first Black instrumentalist to perform at New York's Town Hall in a recital sponsored by Mrs. Efrem Zimbalist, wife of the longtime director of the Curtis Institute. Winning the Philadelphia Youth Auditions provided Walker the opportunity to be the first Black instrumentalist to appear with the Philadelphia Orchestra, performing Rachmaninoff's Third Concerto, Ormandy conducting. He became the first Black instrumentalist to be signed by a major management company when National Concert Artists added him to its roster in 1950. In 1954 Walker gave acclaimed recitals in seven European countries. Returning to the United States, he entered the Doctor of Musical Arts program at the Eastman Conservatory, where he became the first Black doctoral recipient, receiving also an Artist Diploma in piano, in 1956.

In 1957 he received a Fulbright Fellowship and was the first composer to receive a fellowship from the John Hay Whitney Foundation. Walker spent the next two years in Paris studying composition with Nadia Boulanger. Returning again to the United States he began a long and distinguished career in academia with notable posts at Smith College, where he became the first Black tenured member of the faculty, Peabody, and Rutgers, where he taught for more than twenty years and served as Chair of the Music Department.

His compositional output began in earnest in the early 1940s with settings of traditional spirituals for voice and piano, which he dedicated to his grandmother, solo piano works, and his first string quartet, written in 1946. The second movement of this quartet became known as his *Lyric for Strings*. Similar to Samuel Barber's *Adagio*, an arrangement of one of his own movements from a string quartet, *Lyric* became Walker's most often performed composition. In fact, at one time *Lyric for Strings* was considered to be the most often performed piece by a living American composer. (footnote - conversation with Gregory T.S. Walker). Similarities may certainly be drawn, Walker insisted that his quartet was inspired by Beethoven, not Barber. Barber's *Adagio* expresses anguish and deep despair. Although Walker wrote the quartet shortly after the death of his maternal grandmother, originally using the title *Lament for Strings*, in this movement, from a quilt of sadness, joy emerges as an optimistic send off to a better place. Certainly *Lyric for Strings* is his most popular and enduring youthful work.

Walker was the recipient of numerous awards and fellowships, most notably from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Macdowell colony, Yaddo, the Guggenheim and Rockefeller Foundations, the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the Koussevitzky Foundation. Walker received commissions from the New York Philharmonic, the Boston Symphony, the Cleveland Orchestra, and the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, among others.

Clearly, Walker was well recognized and lauded, but a composer of Walker's stature certainly should have received more commissions from major American orchestras. Although one could argue that Walker suffered this fate as a result of his deep involvement in academia, it cannot be discounted that the neglect of Walker's music resulted from the systemic racism built into the American orchestral landscape, which was so heavily dominated by European maestros in the twentieth century.

After his retirement from academia, Walker received perhaps the most coveted recognition for a composer, the Pulitzer Prize, which he won in 1996 for *Lilacs*, a setting of Walt Whitman poetry for soprano and orchestra, becoming the first Black composer to receive this honor. In the post Pulitzer years of his life, Walker revised many of his earlier works and produced more than twenty new compositions, including his Violin Concerto and Symphonies three, four and five. Walker died on August 23rd, 2018 at the age of ninety-six.

In Walker's compositions, one easily finds many common characteristics of the second half of the twentieth century. His music is highly evocative and picturesque. He uses modes as well as diatonicism and atonality, but none of these is used pedantically. The combination of diverse streams of influence allows the music to stay fresh and to express emotional content from different musical angles. Unexpected lush lyricism often blooms from thornier textures, especially in his earliest and later works. Similar to many composers of his generation, Walker's music from time to time can be heard as influenced by those who came before and those concurrent, but it would be incorrect to suggest that Walker's music is in any way derivative. Walker is Walker, always. As one would expect from a composer trained at the highest level at three of the country's most iconic institutions, Walker's music is consistently sophisticated, meticulously crafted, highly colorful, and deeply emotional. Further study and more performances will allow Dr. Walker's music to find a more regular place in the world's concert halls.

The following list includes all of Walker's orchestral compositions, divided into four categories: works for strings, full orchestra, chamber orchestra, and works for soloist(s) and/or choir with full or chamber orchestra. Each entry includes the following information: title, date of original composition and any revisions, instrumentation, approximate length of performance, publisher's catalog number, recording information (if available), brief description (from publisher website), first page of score. With the exception of Sinfonia #4 and #5, scores and parts can be secured from keisersouthernmusic.com. Score examples of Sinfonia #4 and #5 used by permission of Subito Music Corporation, sole distributor. All other examples used by permission of Keiser Southern Music, distributed by Keiser Southern Music and Hal Leonard, inc.

Gregory Walker - three greatest hits from his perspective: Lyric for Strings. Not influenced by Barber. Father was not amused when this comparison was made. Related more to a Beethoven SQ. Was called Lament for String Orchestra. Sinfonia #5, Prom in London next year possibly. Took inspiration from Charleston Massacre, includes video by Frank Schramm. Was a real ordeal to write in his 90s. He would say composing came easily to him, but this piece did not come easily. As much a personal autobiographical statement as a commentary on Charleston. Violin Concerto. Poeme. Notorious for deciding things needed to be changed even after the published version was complete. GTSW premiered the Concerto with Philadelphia. Revisions came even until the days preceding the premiere, dedicated to him. Three performances each sounded different.

Strings

Antifonys, 1998 (see below, arrangement of original version for chamber orchestra)

7 minutes

Full Score LKMP X077362

Score and Parts Rental LKMP R01483

Albany Records - TROY1430. Sinfonia Varsovia, Ian Hobson, conductor

Incorporates kaleidoscopic harmonic patterns alternating and combining with pulsating rhythms

Lyric for Strings, 1946

Arrangement for young musicians, 2007, by Gregory T.S. Walker

7 minutes

Albany Records - TROY270. Recording of original version by Cleveland Chamber Symphony, Edwin London, conductor, Gregory T.S. Walker, violin

Based on the second movement of George Walker's first string quartet. Adapted especially for youth orchestras by George Walker's son, Gregory T.S. Walker

Full Orchestra

Address for Orchestra, 1959, rev. 1991

3+Picc.3+EH.3+BCI.2+Cbsn: 4.2.3.1: Timp.Perc(3).Hp: Str

19 minutes

Full Score LKMP X077010

Score and Parts Rental LKMP R00908

Albany Records - TROY1061. Sinfonia Varsovia, Ian Hobson, conductor

An Eastman Overture, 1983

2+Picc.2+EH.2+BCl.2+Cbsn: 4.4.3.1: Timp.Perc(4).Hp: Str
8 minutes

Albany Records - TROY1061. Eastman Philharmonia, David Effron, conductor
Incorporates quotes from Bach, Beethoven, and Brahms. Bach is represented by an excerpt from the "Fantasia and Fugue in A minor." A fragment from the first movement of Beethoven's "String Quartet, Op. 135 appears in augmentation, and finally a section from Brahms' "Intermezzo in B-flat minor, Op. 117. Commissioned by the Eastman School of Music

Foils for Orchestra: Homage a Saint George, 2005

2+Picc.2+EH.2+BCl.2+Cbsn: 4.4.3.1: Timp.Perc.Pno.Hp: Str
12 minutes

Albany Records - TROY1178. Recorded by Sinfonia Varsovia, Ian Hobson, conductor
Commissioned by the Hanson Institute for American Music of the Eastman School of Music at the University of Rochester

Folksongs for Orchestra, 1990 (originally titled Spirituals for Orchestra)

2+Picc.2+EH.2.2: 2.2.2.1: Timp.Perc(6). Pno(d Hpscd).Hp: Str
15 minutes

Albany Records - TROY270. Cleveland Chamber Symphony, Edwin London, conductor

Hoopla: A Touch of Glee, 2005, rev. 2007

2.2+EH.2+BCl.2+Cbsn:4.4.3.1: Timp.Perc.Hp: Str
9 minutes

Albany Records - TROY1061. Sinfonia Varsovia, Ian Hobson, conductor
Commissioned by the Las Vegas Philharmonic for the Centennial of the City of Las Vegas

Icarus in Orbit, 2003

2+Picc.2.2.2: 3.3.2.1: Timp.Perc(4).Hp.Clst: Str
7 minutes

Albany Records - TROY1334. Sinfonia da Camera, Ian Hobson, conductor
Commissioned by the New Jersey Youth Symphony to celebrate its 25th anniversary

Overture: In Praise of Folly, 1981

2(+Picc).2(+EH).2(+BCl).2(+CBn): 4.4.3.1: Timp.Perc(5): Piano(+celeste).Harp: Str
8 minutes

Albany Records - TROY1061. Sinfonia Varsovia, Ian Hobson, conductor
Written as a portrayal of Erasmus's character named Folly, the Overture begins with much seriousness, though becomes increasingly playful and teasing, with satire and the sardonic to the fore. Hints of American tunes come and go, tunes from different origins, for example "Joshua Fit De Battle of Jericho" and "America the Beautiful." Premiered by the New York Philharmonic under the baton of Zubin Mehta

Pageant and Proclamation, 1997

2+Picc.2+EH.2+BCl.2+Cbsn: 4.4.3.1: Timp.Perc(4).Pno(d Clst).Hp: Str

11 minutes

Albany Records - TROY1178. Sinfonia Varsovia, Ian Hobson, conductor
Commissioned for the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra's 75th Anniversary Celebration in the New Jersey Performing Arts Center, October 1997. "Leisurely and pastoral in tone (after the initial "proclamation"), it gradually picks up momentum, exuding optimism...It's a fine piece of its type."--Robert Schulslaper, Fanfare Magazine Jun/July 2010.

Sinfonia No. 1, 1984, rev. 1996

2+Picc.2+EH.2+BCl.2+Cbsn: 4.4.3.1: Timp.Perc(6).Pno(d Hpscd).Hp: Str

13 minutes

Albany Records - TROY1061. Sinfonia Varsovia, Ian Hobson, conductor
Commissioned by the Fromm Foundation and dedicated to Paul Kapp.

Sinfonia No. 2, 1990

2+Picc.2+EH.2+BCl.2+Cbsn: 4.4.3.1: Timp.Perc(3).Guitar.Pno.Hp: Str

16 minutes

Albany Records - TROY1178. Sinfonia Varsovia, Ian Hobson, conductor
Commissioned by the Koussevitsky Foundation

Sinfonia No. 3, 2002, rev. 2007

2+Picc.2+EH.2+BCl.2+Cbsn: 4.4.3.1: Timp.Perc(4).Clst.Hp: Str

17 minutes

Albany Records - TROY1061. Sinfonia Varsovia, Ian Hobson, conductor

Sinfonia No. 4 "Strands", 2011

2+picc.2(2dblEH).2(2dblBCl).2+1: 4.3.3.1: Timp.Vibr.Pno.Hp: Str

11 minutes

Albany Records - TROY1430. Sinfonia Varsovia, Ian Hobson, conductor
Commissioned by the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, with the Cincinnati, the National, and Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestras

Sinfonia No. 5 "Visions" version for orchestra, 2016

(also see below, version for voices and orchestra)

2+1.2+1.2+1.2+1: 4.4.3.1: Timp.Perc(5).Pno.Hp.Hpscd (amplified): Str

15 minutes

Albany Records - TROY1707. Sinfonia Varsovia, Ian Hobson, conductor
Written in response to the 2015 Charleston church shooting

Variations for Orchestra, 1972

2+AFI+Picc.2+EH.2+BCl.2+Cbsn: 4.3.3.1: Timp.Perc(5).Pno(d Clst).Hp: Str

14 minutes

Albany Records - TROY136. New Philharmonia Orchestra, Paul Freeman, conductor

Chamber Orchestra

Antifonys, 1968

1(d Picc).1.1.0: 1.1.1.0: Timp.Perc(2).Clst: Str

7 minutes

Full Score LKMP X077303

Score and Parts Rental LKMP R00909

Albany Records - TROY136. Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Paul Freeman, conductor

Incorporates kaleidoscopic harmonic patterns alternating and combining with pulsating rhythms

Da Camera, 2008

Violin, Cello, Piano, String Orchestra, Harp, Celesta (amplified), Timpani, Percussion (2) and
Optional String Ensemble (approx. 6.5.4.4.2)

15 minutes

Albany Records - TROY1334. Sinfonia da Camera, Ian Hobson, conductor

Commissioned by Musica Reginae. Premiered February 20, 2010 by the Queens Symphony
Orchestra

Serenata, 1983

2(1d Picc).2.2.2: 2.2.1.0: Timp.Perc(3).Pno: Str

14 minutes

Albany Records - TROY270. Cleveland Chamber Symphony, Edwin London, conductor

Tangents, 1999

2.2.2 (1d BCI).2.: 2.2.1.0: Timp.Perc(2).Pno(d Clsta).Harp: Str

8 minutes

Summit Records - 274. ProMusica Chamber Orchestra of Columbus, Ohio, Timothy Russell,
conductor

Commissioned by the Pro Musica Chamber Orchestra of Columbus, Ohio to commemorate the
new Millennium

Works with Soloist(s) and/or Choir and Full or Chamber Orchestra

Cantata for Soprano, Tenor, Boys Choir and Chamber Orchestra, 1982

Soprano, Tenor Soli: SATB or Boys Chorus: 1(d AFI).2.0.0: 0.3.0.0: Timp.Perc(2).Organ: Str

11 minutes

Full Score LKMP

Score and Parts Rental LKMP

Albany Records - TROY136. Joyce Mathis, soprano, Walter Turnbull, tenor, Boys Choir of
Harlem, Orchestra of St. Luke's, Warren Wilson, conductor

Two movements consisting of a setting of Psalm 23 and Psalm 24: 7-10 from the King James
version of The Bible

Commissioned the Boys Choir of Harlem, Joyce Mathis, Walter J. Turnbull, Orchestra of St. Lukes, Warren Wilson. Movements: 1. Psalm XXIII 2. Psalm XXIV (Verses 7-10)

Concerto for Piano and Orchestra, 1976, rev. 1996

Piano Solo: 2+Picc.2.2+BCl.2+Cbsn: 4.3.3.1: Timp.Perc(4).Celesta.Hp: Str

24 minutes

Sony Classical - 886447262863. Natalie Hinderas, piano, Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Paul Freeman, conductor

Commissioned by the National Endowment for the Arts

Concerto for Trombone and Orchestra, 1978

Trombone Solo: 2+Picc.2.2.2+Cbsn: 4.2.2.1: Timp.Perc(3).Clst.Hp: Str

Sony Classical - 886447262726. Denis Wick, trombone, London Symphony Orchestra, Paul Freeman, conductor

One of the most frequently performed 20th-century works for solo trombone

Concerto for Violin and Orchestra, 2007, rev. 2009

Violin Solo: 2+Picc(2dAFI).2+EH.2+BCl.2: 4.4.3.1: Timp.Perc(4).Hps(amplified).Clst.Hp.Gtr: Str

Albany Records - TROY1178. Gregory T.S. Walker, violin and Sinfonia Varsovia, Ian Hobson Conductor

Dialogus for Cello and Orchestra, 1976, rev. 1996

NEEDS LENGTH

Cello Solo: 2+Picc+AFI.2+EH.2+BCl.2+Cbsn: 4.4.3.1: Timp.Perc(5).Pno.Clst.Hp: Str

Albany Records - TROY1334. Dmitri Kouzov, cello, Sinfonia Varsovia, Ian Hobson, conductor

Commissioned by The Cleveland Orchestra. "A technically brilliant showcase for a virtuoso cellist" --Cleveland Plain Dealer

Lilacs, for Voice and Orchestra, 1995

Soprano or Tenor Solo: 2+Picc+AFI.2+EH.2+BCl.2: 4.4.4.1: Timp.Perc(4).Harpichord.Hp: Str

16 minutes

Summit Records - 274. Faye Robinson, soprano, Arizona State University Symphony Orchestra, Timothy Russell, conductor

Albany Records - TROY1430. Albert Lee, tenor, Sinfonia da Camera, Ian Hobson, conductor

Commissioned and premiered by the Boston Symphony Orchestra with Faye Robinson, soprano and Seiji Ozawa conducting. "A dense, dark work that penetrates deeply into the soul of Whitman's response to the assassination of a great leader." --Atlanta Constitution

Movements for Cello and Orchestra, 2012 (revision of Cello Concerto, 1982)

Cello Solo: 2+Picc+Afl.2+EH.2+BCl.2+Cbsn: 4.4.3.1: Timp.Perc(4).Clst(dHpchd).Hp: Str

20 minutes

<https://youtu.be/5MoNVgcdDXs> Recording of Premiere by Lorne Monroe, cello, New York Philharmonic, Zubin Mehta, conductor

Commissioned in 1982 by the New York Philharmonic for Cellist Lorne Monroe

Orpheus, 1994

Narrator (Bar.), 3 speakers (Tenor, Bass, Soprano) 1.1.1.1: 2.2.1.0: Timp.Perc(2).Pno.Hp: Str
18 minutes

Albany Records - TROY270. William Dempsey, narrator, Eileen Moore, soprano, Cleveland Chamber Symphony, Edwin London, conductor

This is the myth of Orpheus, whose magical playing of the ancient lyre charmed beasts and moved stones and trees to follow him. Commissioned by the Cleveland Chamber Symphony, 1994.

Poeme for Violin and Orchestra, 1991

Violin Solo: 1(d Picc).2.1(d BCl).1: 2.1.1.1: Timp.Perc(3).Pno.Hp: Str
19 minutes

Albany Records - TROY270. Gregory T.S. Walker, violin, Cleveland Chamber Symphony, Edwin London, conductor

Sinfonia No. 5 "Visions" version for voices and orchestra (also see above, version for orchestra), 2016

2+1.2+1.2+1.2+1: 4.4.3.1: Timp.Perc(5).Pno.Hp.Hpschd (amplified): Voices (speaking): Str
15 minutes

Seattle Symphony Media - SSM1026. Vocalists Clayton Braynerd, Ed Morris, Stephen Newby, Shaina Shepherd, Seattle Symphony Orchestra, Thomas Dausgaard, conductor

Includes video by Frank Schramm

Written in reaction to the 2015 Charleston church shooting