

Odaline de la Martinez champions African-American composers in her Seventh London Festival of American Music

Including the first Afro-Cuban opera on the topic of slavery



Sunday 24 February – Saturday 2 March
London Festival of American Music
The Warehouse, London



Wednesday 27 February, Friday 1 and Saturday 2 March
'Imoinda': A Story of Love and Slavery ^{WORLD PREMIERE}
Odaline de la Martinez composer
Joan Anim Addo libretto

Pioneering Cuban-American conductor-composer **Odaline de la Martinez** Puts African-American composers centre-stage at her seventh biennial Festival of American Music. The Festival showcases the unjustly neglected music of ten African-American composers past and present in a song recital on **28 February**. Martinez also celebrates her **70th birthday** with the **World Premiere** of her complete opera trilogy: **'Imoinda': A Story of Love and Slavery** on **27 February**, with librettist **Joan Anim Addo**. This is the first modern Afro-Cuban opera addressing this topic, taking inspiration from a novel by the first published female writer, the Renaissance figure **Aphra Behn**.

"Energy crackles around the Cuban-born conductor and composer like an electric field"

– Sunday Times Magazine

The week-long Festival aims to promote the work of outstanding American composers who are well established in America but less well-known to UK audiences. Composers featured in this year's concerts include **Augusta Read Thomas, George Crumb, Arlene Sierra, and Ruth Crawford Seeger**. 8 premieres will be given as part of the Festival, including world premieres by **Sarah Rimkus, Barbara Jazwinski, Elena Ruehr, and James Lee**, and UK premieres by **John Harbinson and Jorge Sosa**. Besides Martinez's birthday, a number of further anniversaries are celebrated, including **John Harbinson's 80th birthday** and **Daniel Asia's 65th birthday**.



Continuing its long-standing commitment to equality, of the 40 works performed over the festival, 50% are by female composers, and a third of the composers both past and present featured are African-American.



On **28 February**, soprano **Alison Buchanan** and accompanist **Eugene Asti** cultivate a programme celebrating the songs of African-American composers past and present. The programme includes three songs by **Florence Price, *Out of the South blew a wind, Night, and Song to the Dark Virgin***. Price was the first African-American woman to be recognised as a symphonic composer and to have her work performed by major orchestras. Her writing brought together

the European classical tradition with the melodies of African-American spirituals and folk tunes that she knew. Her housemate Margaret Bonds is also featured in the programme, with ***Three Dream Portraits*** and as the arranger of ***You can tell the world***.

Celebrating the work of African-American composers not just past but present, Buchanan and Asti present three songs by composer **Fred Onovwerosuoke: *Ngulu (Moving Along), Duniya (Mystic Universe), and Ne Nkansu (Healing Chant)***. In the aftermath to Hurricane Katrina, Onovwerosuoke's manuscripts were salvaged and discovered before being published in quick succession. The programme also features a world premiere by **James Lee**, whose works have been championed by Leonard Slatkin and the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra.

"I want to compose music to reach to the inner soul of the listener that elevates them regardless of race and religious affiliation."

– James Lee

On **27 February** and **1-2 March**, the London Festival of American Music will give the first complete performance of **Odaline de la Martinez's** Opera Trilogy: '**Imoinda: A Story of Love and Slavery**'. The Trilogy deals with slavery and the beginnings of Afro-Caribbean culture. This includes the World Premiere of Parts I and III of the Trilogy. This opera trilogy is the first Afro-Cuban opera, and the first modern opera about slavery.



Odaline de la Martinez has composed her operas to a libretto by Grenada-born **Joan Anim Addo**, the first libretto to be written by an African-Caribbean woman. Anim Addo is a Professor of Caribbean Literature at Goldsmiths University, London. Martinez has incorporated Afro-Cuban influences into her writing, including four percussionists using drums, guiro, claves, maracas, bongos and ago-go bells.

The trilogy is loosely based on an original short novel by **Aphra Behn**, entitled **Oroonoko, or The Royal Slave, A True History**. It tells the story of Oroonoko and Imoinda, two people who fell in love in Guinea and remarkably find each other again at a plantation in the West Indies, when they are both slaves. Aphra Behn lived a remarkable life as the first female writer to earn a living through her work, besides also working as a spy for King Charles II. Oroonoko has long been seen as her finest work. It is unknown whether Oroonoko and Imoinda were fictional or real, however, Behn did likely travel through Surinam in the 1660s.



Imoinda – part I of the trilogy – was originally completed in 2008, after being commissioned by the Caribbean Women Writers' Alliance (CWWA) using funds from Heritage Lottery. Selected scenes from Part I were shown as part of the 2016 Festival, produced in collaboration with Opera Ebony New York City, where the work was filmed in 2015. The work won an Opera America Grant for Female Composers in 2015, which is funded by the Virginia B. Toulmin Foundation. Part II – **The Crossing** – was commissioned by The Sophie Newcomb Institute of Tulane University in New Orleans and premiered by Tulane and Xavier Universities, The Louisiana Philharmonic and soloists in April 2013. *The Crossing* was first performed in London at the 2014 Festival. The writing of Part III – **Plantation** – was made possible by two awards: a Fellowship from the Cintas Foundation in the States and a PRS Foundation Women Make Music Grant in the UK. *Plantation* begins after Oko and Imoinda arrive in Cuba and find each other, bringing a dramatic end to the story.

The World Premiere of '*Imoinda: A Story of Love and Slavery*' coincides with the composer's 70th birthday celebrations. The Festival also

celebrates significant milestones for two other American composers. **John Harbison** celebrates his **80th birthday**, and **Daniel Asia** celebrates his **65th birthday**.

John Harbison is highly renowned in America, where he has been commissioned by the Met (*The Great Gatsby*, 1999) and won a Pulitzer Prize (*The Flight into Egypt*, 1987) amongst numerous awards and honours. His writing has encompassed three operas, six symphonies and a large body of sacred music besides other compositions.



The UK premiere of Harbison's ***Samuel Chapter*** opens the third concert of the festival on **26 February**. Written in 1978 and now heard for the first time in the UK, the composition sets the third chapter of the book of Samuel, about the moment when the young man chooses adult responsibilities over the security of childhood for the first time.



Composer Daniel Asia's eclectic output includes four symphonies and two concertos besides a number of shorter works. He has received numerous commissions and his work has been performed by the BBC Singers, and outside of America at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, St. John's Smith Square, Wigmore Hall. He has benefitted from awards such as the Fulbright Arts Award (1986) and the Guggenheim Fellowship. His ***Your Cry Will Be a Whisper***, originally commissioned for Benjamin Verdery, opens the second concert of the Festival on **25 February**.

Listings

Sunday 24 February, 7:30pm

The Warehouse, London

Augusta Read Thomas *Chi*

Wadada Leo Smith *String Quartet No. 3, 'Black Church'*

Sarah Rimkus *Le Dian* **WORLD PREMIERE**

Gloria Coates *String Quartet No. 1, 'Protestation Quartet'*

George Crumb *Black Angels*

Ligeti Quartet

Mandhira de Saram violin I

Patrick Dawkins violin II

Richard Jones viola

Val Welbanks cello

Monday 25 February, 7:30pm

The Warehouse, London

Daniel Asia *Your Cry Will Be a Whisper*

Elizabeth Ogonek *To Sea in a Sieve*

Michael Poll *Variations on the theme Vltava/Hatikva*

Barbara Jazwinski *New Work* **WORLD PREMIERE**

Martin Bresnick *Joaquin is Dreaming*

Melinda Wagner *Arabesque*

Philip Lasser *Movements from Childhood Suite*

David Conte *Of a Summer Evening*

Michael Poll guitar

Tuesday 26 February, 7:30pm

The Warehouse, London

John Harbison *Samuel*
Chapter **UK PREMIERE**

Ruth Crawford Seeger

Diaphonic Suite No.4

Alfred Lerdahl *Duo for Cello and*
Piano

Arlene Sierra *Avian Mirrors*
LONDON PREMIERE

Rebecca Clarke *Viola Sonata*

Ruth Crawford Seeger

Diaphonic Suite no.1

Jorge Sosa *'Punto y Linea' from*
Plastic Time **UK PREMIERE**

Elena Ruehr *Clarinet Quintet*
WORLD PREMIERE

Odaline de la Martinez

conductor

Lontano Ensemble

Wednesday 27 February,
7:30pm

Friday 1 March, 7:30pm

Saturday 2 March, 7:30pm

The Warehouse, London

Odaline de la Martinez & Joan

Anim Addo *Imoinda: A Story of*
Love and Slavery **TRILOGY WORLD**
PREMIERE

Donna Bateman soprano

Alison Crookendale mezzo-
soprano

Sandeep Gurrupadi tenor

Byron Jackson bass baritone

Odaline de la Martinez

Conductor and composer

Barbara Poll stage director

Odaline de la Martinez

conductor

Lontano

Thursday 28 February,
7:30pm

The Warehouse, London

Florence B. Price *Out of the*
South blew a wind

Florence B. Price *Night*

Florence B. Price *Song to the*
Dark Virgin

Robert Owens *Genius Child*

John W. Work, Jr. *Dancing in*
the Sun

Margaret Bonds *Three Dream*
Portraits

James Lee *New Work* **WORLD**
PREMIERE

Fred Onovwerosuoke *Ngulu*
(Moving Along)

Fred Onovwerosuoke *Duniya*
(Mystic Universe)

Fred Onovwerosuoke *Ne*
Nkansu (Healing Chant)

Gian Carlo Menotti *Steal me*
Sweet Thief

Lee Hoiby *The Serpent*

Aaron Copland *I Bought me a*
cat

Arr. Undine Smith Moore *Come*
Down Angels

Arr. J. Rosamond Johnson
Nobody Knows the Trouble I see

Arr. Lena McLin *Glory, Glory*

Arr. Margaret Bonds *You can*
tell the world

Alison Buchanan soprano

Eugene Asti piano



The award-winning Cuban American composer-conductor Odaline de la Martinez is one of Britain's most dynamic and gifted musicians. Through the years she has established an international reputation as one of the most exciting and versatile pioneers of 20th and 21st century music. In 1984 Martinez became the first woman in history to conduct a BBC Promenade Concert at the Royal Albert Hall, and 1987 she was awarded the Villa Lobos medal from the Brazilian government in recognition of her outstanding work promoting and conducting his music. Martinez was made a fellow of the Royal Academy of Music in 1990, and to this day she is in demand throughout the world both as an orchestra and opera conductor, and with her ensemble Lontano.

Her conducting repertoire ranges from Mozart symphonies to the latest contemporary music. Since the late 1990s, Martinez has focused more on her composing work, with much success in writing opera. *'Imoinda': A Story of Love and Slavery* is her second opera, after her first opera *Sister Aimée*, which she wrote after winning a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1980. In 2014 she was composer in residence at Tulane University, New Orleans, and composer/artist in residence at the University of Arizona in Tucson. In 2015, together with Lontano, Martinez completed residences at MIT and SUNY at Binghamton.

Martinez founded **Lontano**, her chamber ensemble, in 1976 whilst studying composition at the Royal Academy of Music, and the ensemble's impact on the perception of new music has been profound and enduring. With Lontano she commissions, produces, performs and records with the primary aim of bringing to the fore the work of living contemporary composers, female composers from all periods, and Latin American classical music. The ensemble's sphere of activity includes contemporary opera, music theatre, concerts, workshops, education projects, tours, broadcasts and recordings.

Always at the front of music innovation, Martinez' ensemble was one of the first ensembles to form its own record company when in 1992 it established the LORELT label. Now with a catalogue of 39 recordings, LORELT features soloists as well as other ensembles and is noted for its archive of important and often neglected compositions. Odaline de la Martinez is also trustee of The Mornington Trust, who together with Lontano has been responsible community and educational work in Waltham Forest and other London boroughs since 2000. Presently the charity is involved in an eight-year project working with Roma, Gypsy and Traveller communities in the East of London.

For more information on any of the above, please contact:

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