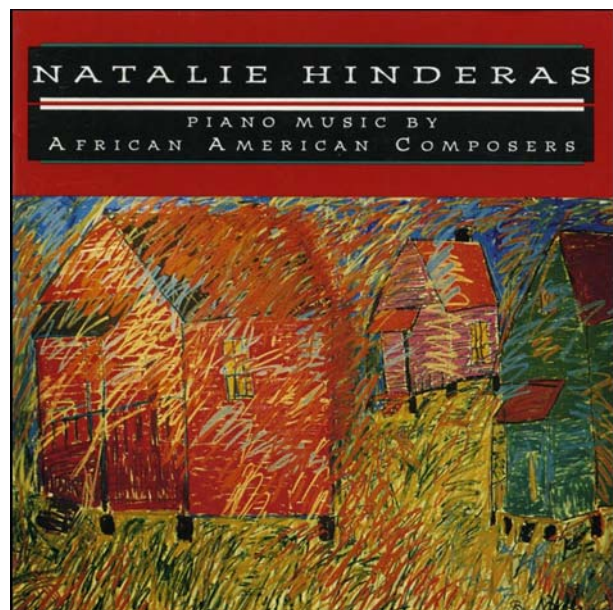


NWCR629

Natalie Hinderas

Piano Music by African American Composers



R. Nathaniel Dett
In the bottoms (1913) (20:23)

1. I. *Prelude* (5:19)
2. II. *His Song* (3:43)
3. III. *Honey* (1:21)
4. IV. *Barcarolle* (5:50)
5. V. *Dance* (2:01)

Thomas Kerr
6. *Easter Monday Swagger, Scherzino* (1970)

William Grant Still
Three Visions (1936) (9:50)

7. I. *Dark Horseman* (1:17)
8. II. *Summerland* (4:34)
9. III. *Radiant Pinnacle* (3:55)

John Wesley Work III
Scuppernong (1951) (7:40)

10. I. *At a Certain Church* (2:52)
11. II. *Ring Game* (1:06)
12. III. *Visitor from Town* (3:41)

George Walker
Sonata No. 1 (1953) (15:31)

13. I. *Allegro Energico* (7:04)
14. II. *Theme & Variations* (4:57)
15. III. *Allegro Con Brio* (3:21)

Arthur Cunningham
16. *Engrams'* (1969) (5:48)

Talib Rasul Hakim
17. *Sound-Gone* (1967) (10:45)

Hale Smith
18. *Evocation* (1965) (3:16)

Olly Wilson
19. *Piano Piece* for piano and electronic sound (1969).... (10:49)
Natalie Hinderas, piano

Total playing time: 86:35

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Notes

Not long before the U.S. bicentennial, American musicians without foreign names were suspect, evidencing a national cultural insecurity. When Natalie Leota Henderson was a piano student of Olga Samaroff, she was advised to assume a more exotic name for her impending career. The one selected for her was Natalie Hinderas. Mms. Samaroff, who had been married to Leopold Stokowski [*sic*, not Stokes], understood this well. She had been born in Texas as Olga Hickenlooper.

Today, the value of an American identity in one's person and one's art is no longer questionable. But as the lives and careers of Natalie Hinderas and the nine composers in this collection demonstrate, the struggle for mainstream recognition of African-American musicians and composers, based on the merits of their work, is an on-going effort nearly a century old.

Natalie Hinderas was born in 1927 in Oberlin, Ohio. Though her great-grandparents were slaves, her grandparents were successful entrepreneurs, in the hotel and restaurant business. Their daughter Leota Palmer, Natalie's mother, received the finest education a middle-class Black woman could at the time and went on to serve on the piano faculties of the Cleveland Institute of Music and the Oberlin Conservatory. Musicians who came to Oberlin were frequent guests in the

family home. It was there that Natalie began piano studies at age six with her mother and also first met composer R. Nathaniel Dett. At age eight, she entered Oberlin as a special student and that same year appeared in her first solo piano recital. She made her debut with orchestra, at age twelve, with the Cleveland Women's Symphony in the Grieg Piano Concerto. Composer George Walker, whose music Natalie would later champion, was a teenage member of that audience. Following her graduation at Oberlin in 1945, she continued her studies at the Juilliard School of Music with Samaroff and at the Philadelphia Conservatory with Edward Steuermann. Also while at Juilliard, she studied composition with Vincent Perschetti.

After completing her education, Hinderas gave concerts in Europe and made her New York debut at Town Hall in 1954. In the early 1960s, she toured Sweden, Poland, Yugoslavia, and Africa for the U.S. State Department and under other auspices. Following the birth of her daughter, Michele Monagas, in 1969, Hinderas concentrated on touring in the United States.

It was through concerts at American colleges and universities beginning in 1968 that Hinderas became widely associated with music of African-American composers. Artist manager

Joanne Rile, a long-time friend of the late pianist, states that Hinderas gave these types of programs: all traditional repertoire; a combination of traditional repertoire in the first half with music by Americans including works by Black composers after intermission; and all music by Black composers. Hinderas, with her mother, who also advised her on programming, and Rile gave considerable attention to what terminology should be used in billing the concerts. They settled finally on using the term "Black," though as Rile recalls, "Black was beautiful but it was still revolutionary to say so."

The program that featured repertoire by Black composers would always conclude with lively commentary by Hinderas about the works and the composers. She wanted audiences to know that she chose the repertoire because it was unknown, of high quality and, in large part, by composers with whom she was personally associated. Hinderas's recitals originally were only at black colleges but as she gained recognition, she received invitations to perform on campuses that were primarily white.

The recitals and these recording helped propel Hinderas's career. She was approached by Eugene Ormandy in 1972 to perform a Mozart concerto with the Philadelphia Orchestra. At Hinderas's insistence, she was allowed to play a new concerto by Alberto Ginastera. The unqualified success of this concert led to a re-engagement with the Orchestra and subsequent performances of the Ginastera Concerto with the New York Philharmonic, the Chicago and Cleveland symphony orchestras in the 1970's; and with Robert Shaw and the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra in 1980.

Hinderas premiered George Walker's Piano Concerto in Minneapolis in 1975 and recorded the work in 1978 for inclusion in the CBS Record's Black Composers Series (a nine-LP set now available from the College Music Society). In 1977, she recorded more traditional repertoire for the Orion label on a disc entitled *Natalie Hinderas Plays Sensuous Piano Music*.

Hinderas also led an active teaching career and counted among her students Judith Willoughby, Horatio Miller, Leon Bates, and John Young. She was a faculty member at Temple University in Philadelphia until her death in 1987.

This recording of 1970 draws on the repertoire of Hinderas's ground-breaking recitals. Its release in 1971 caused a storm of publicity and controversy with feature articles in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Star*, *High Fidelity* and *The Saturday Review*. However, Hinderas certainly did not intend to cause controversy but to present outstanding musician of a handful of American composers, each of whom was an African-American.

R. Nathaniel Dett (1882-1943) is the only composer in this collection who was not born in the United States. His family's underground railroad ended in Canada just across the border from Niagara Falls where Dett was born and spent his earliest years. He moved into New York State for the first phase of his musical education, and then to Oberlin to complete his undergraduate studies in 1908. He already had begun composing salon and ragtime pieces but did not find his own voice until hearing Dvořák's "American" Quartet at an Oberlin recital. Reminded of the spirituals he had learned at home, he followed the advice Dvořák had given his American students only a decade earlier, reaching into Black-American folklore as the stimulus for his composition.

He had just completed *In The Bottoms* when he accepted a position with Virginia's Hampton Institute in 1913, where he would mold a major choral ensemble during an eighteen-year

tenure. He remained principally in Rochester after he completed his master's degree at the Eastman School of Music in 1931, excepting for six years at Bennett College in South Carolina. He died in Battle Creek, Michigan, in 1943, while touring as musical advisor to the United Service Organization.

In The Bottoms, a set of character pieces, is one of the most enduring piano works by Black composers and was the first of six suites for piano by Dett. This quintet of Southeastern ritual portraits opens like a morning dawn with the delicate "Prelude," followed by a sad monologue, "His song." Third is "Honey," a delightful miniature suggestive of warm social contact. "Barcarolle," inevitably reminiscent of a scene by the water, is the longest movement of the group. The popular finale "Juba" idealizes the body percussion which accompanied folk songs and dances. It is the most often recorded work of Dett (starting with a piano roll by Percy Grainger), distinctively presented here by Hinderas with a twinkle in her eye and her tongue in her cheek, relating the movement's inherent humor.

Thomas Kerr (1915-1988) also was a graduate of the Eastman School of Music, which he attended after study in his native Baltimore with W. Llewellyn Wilson (whose students also included Eubie Blake, Cab and Blanche Calloway, and Veronica Tylor). His father, T. Henderson Kerr, was a local pharmacist whose evenings in the 1910s were occupied leading a pre-jazz "society" orchestra of seminal importance on the Eastern Seaboard, and contemporary with Eubie Blake's Marcato Orchestra in the same city. Thomas Kerr's life centered around Howard University in Washington, whose music faculty he joined in 1943. Admitted for his profound musicality, he was no less beloved for his distinctive dry wit, evidenced by the *Scherzino, Easter Monday Swagger*, written for Hinderas over the Easter holiday in 1970. It is a sly, almost taunting, folksy joke, which the composer shares with his pianist and her audience. A note in the margin of the score reads "A small file of soul."

The first African-American composer to achieve national success was **William Grant Still** (1895-1978). Although he had grown up enjoying his family's collection of opera recordings of Caruso and Galli-Curci, his mother assumed he would follow medical studies when he moved to Ohio for his college study of Wilberforce College, and then Oberlin. But it was at the latter school that he first heard an orchestra, and thereafter his musical interests demanded priority. Black musicians could then aspire for activities in ragtime, parlor songs, and the "chittlin" circuits of minstrelsy and vaudeville. Still opted for the music industry's growing blues scene, working with W. C. Handy in Memphis and later in New York, but he was alert to the horizons which began to expand during the Harlem Renaissance.

Still played the oboe in the pit with Hall Johnson and Eubie Blake in the latter's highly successful Broadway musical *Shuffle Along* of 1921. While touring with the show in Boston, he was befriended by George Chadwick, who provided for lessons in composition. Similar guidance was given later in New York from Varèse. When opportunities as a jazz arranger opened for him, he began contributing to the radio programs of Paul Whiteman, Artie Shaw, Sophie Tucker, and Donald Vorhees. All through the 1920s, however, he developed an intensifying interest in original composition. Aware of the stimulus from Dvořák and inspired by the example of the Afro-British Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Still looked to folklore for his point of departure. That orientation

resulted in the *Afro-American Symphony* (1930), the first such work by a Black American.

Still moved to Los Angeles in 1934 soon after sound came to films and, with his own orchestral pallet, was influential in developing the “Hollywood sound” as shown in *Lost Horizon* (1935), *Pennies from Heaven* (1936), and *Stormy Weather* (1943), and with later work in television (*Gunsmoke*, *The Perry Mason Show*). But his heart lay less in incidental music and arrangements, and more in composing; he remained most proud of his operas, symphonies, ballets, and chamber works. In her notes to the original release, Hinderas wrote that Still “is one of the most remarkable and loved composers...and fully deserves the title so often bestowed upon him as “Dean of Negro Composers.”

Three Visions (1936) came from an early period in the composer’s life after he had abandoned the influence of Varèse for that of the Impressionists. Hinderas described the work’s middle movement as “the Still we know best.” Indeed, “Summerland,” has proven the most popular of the three movements, having been adapted and recorded for the organ, and for violin and piano.

Like Dett, **John Wesley Work III** (1901-1967) was critical figure in gaining for the spiritual the dignity more associated with a motet or anthem, by fixing it within a written tradition. The spiritual had been regarded as a sacred heritage at Fisk University in Nashville, where the Work family has been a virtual dynasty, and where the school’s choral tours, begun in 1871, had introduced the work to this dignified legacy from slavery times. Work’s education at Fisk, Columbia, and Yale, did not lessen his dedication to this idiom, but did stimulate him to consider instrumental music as well.

Scuppernong, both a variety of grape and the name of a South Carolina river, is the title of Work’s three-movement suite from 1951. “At A Certain Church” includes a full quotation of the hymn, “I Am Bound for the Promised Land.” “Ring Game” refers to a circular, shuffling movement which, not properly defined as a dance, was allowed in the church. “Visitor from Town” portrays a gentleman obviously of secular persuasions.

George Walker (b 1922) was born of Caribbean heritage in Washington, and began his musical studies in the junior division of Howard University. In 1941, he received a bachelor of music degree from the Oberlin Conservatory and also debuted with the Philadelphia Orchestra in Rachmaninoff’s Third Piano Concerto conducted by Eugene Ormandy. He also studied at the Curtis Institute of Music with Rudolf Serkin, William Primrose, and Gregor Piatigorsky; in France, with Nadia Boulanger, Clifford Curzon, and Robert Casadesus; and he earned his doctorate in 1957 from the Eastman School of Music. His piano recital debut was in Town Hall in 1945, the year of his Curtis graduation, after which he toured the U.S. and abroad. Beginning in 1953, he was active both as a performer and teacher and after a series of positions he settled at Rutgers University in Newark in 1969, where he was Distinguished Professor from 1976 to 1992.

Walker’s best known work from his early period is the *Lyric for Strings*, a string orchestra arrangement of the slow movement from his String Quartet No. 1, which exhibits a characteristic youthful Romanticism that is ever present, even in his later works. But Walker’s style is subjected to constantly different approaches. For example, the middle movement of his Piano Concerto is a reflection on the death of Duke Ellington, while his Mass is characterized by individual pointillistic writing which strongly contrasts with

his more populist orchestral works, such as *Spirituals* (1974) and *In Praise of Folly* (1980) which was written for the New York Philharmonic.

Formal logic and intervallic relationships are very much a part of Walker’s music, as shown in the Piano Sonata No. 1, which deals with melodic and harmonic uses of the perfect fourth, while the Piano Sonata No. 2 focuses on the interval of the third and its extended harmonic use. The opening movement of the Piano Sonata No. 1 is in the traditional sonata form. Its second theme is borrowed from “Liza in the Summer Time,” which caught the composer’s attention in Carl Sandburg’s folksong anthology, *The American Songbag* (1927). Similarly the middle movement is a set of variations on “Oh Bury Me Beneath the Willow,” found in the same source, but the rhythmic rondo-finale returns to the assertive spirit of the opening movement. The composer’s own performance of the Sonata was documented on the Serenus label in 1977.

Arthur Cunningham (b 1928) studied with John Work at Fisk and subsequently with Wallingford Riegger, Teddy Wilson, Henry Brant, Peter Mennin, and Margaret Hills at Columbia and Juilliard. His compositions embrace a wide variety of idioms, indicative of a career as jazz musician, army bandsman, double bassist, conductor, and percussionist. *Harlem Suite* (1971), whose choral contents are strongly flavored by gospel music, includes one of his most popular works, *Lullabye for a Jazz Baby* (1970), a trumpet solo with orchestra which was commissioned by André Kostelanetz.

In dramatic contrast to Cunningham’s popular-inspired works is his piano piece *Engrams*’ (1969), which is freely based on three versions of a tone row. The title is a biological term (referring to the evidence of a stimulus on a protoplasm) and suggests gentle meditations on the past, despite the scherzo-like middle section. Cunningham has written: “I titled this piece *Engrams*’ because the sounds are memory tracings...It progresses from the dark of my mind to the light of reality.”

Talib Rasul Hakim (1940-1988) came under the influence of Sufi philosophy in the late 1960s, partly due to his friendship with Ornette Coleman. Although he never formally subscribed to the Moslem faith, he discarded his birth name of Stephen A. Chambers (his brother, Joseph, is a well-known percussionist). Hakim believed that the mystic revelation of music could be acquired by meditation and inner peace and in his work he sought to create music which communicates a spirit and style so securely that the performers are able to improvise in the same style when requested. Although also influenced by Margaret Bonds, Hall Overton, Chou Wen-Chung, and Robert Starer, early on he found his own distinctive voice as a result more of native talent than of formal study.

During his relatively short life, Hakim secured particular success with his first orchestral essay, *Visions of Ishwara* (1970), a variety of chamber works, and music for the Dance Theater of Baltimore which was composed while in graduate study at Morgan State University. He initially attracted attention with *Sound-Gone* (1967), subtitled “a poetic-philosophical sketch,” which was often featured by Hinderas in her recital tours. The following verses were included in Hinderas’s notes to the original recording of *Sound-Gone*.

Hale Smith (b 1925) was accorded patriarchal status in mid-career, by which time he had significant achievements as an educator at the University of Connecticut at Storrs; as a music editor for publishers C.F. Peters, E.B. Marks, Sam Fox, and Frank Music; as an arranger or consultant for artists as diverse as Quincy Jones, Chico Hamilton, Oliver Nelson, Jessye Norman, Eric Dolphy, Abbey Lincoln, Issac Hayes,

and Ahmad Jamal; and as principal arranger for the Black Music Repertory Ensemble of Chicago's Center for Black Music Research at Columbia College. Frequently engaged as panelist, lecturer, and adjudicator, his compositional output is wide and varied, from didactic works for piano and school bands to commissions by major orchestras and performers. Among his orchestral works are *Contours* (1961), a commission from BMI (from whom he won the student composer Award ten years earlier), and *Innerflexions* (1977) which was premiered by the New York Philharmonic and recorded by CRI in 1991.

Smith's piano piece *Evocation* (1965) is one of several of his works created within a dodecaphonic framework which, like many of his compositions, is best approached by one alert to the subtle jazz influences. The composer states: "The entire piece derives from the row exposed in the first stave, and in several places has faint but definite rhythmic affinities to jazz phrasing. This doesn't mean that it's supposed to swing—it isn't, but the affinities are there."

Olly Wilson (b 1937) worked his way through his undergraduate years playing double bass in St. Louis jazz ensembles, completing his graduate study at the University of Illinois and University of Iowa. His teaching career began at Florida A & M University, and was followed by an appointment to the Oberlin Conservatory; in 1970 he was

appointed to the University of California at Berkeley. No less gifted as an administrator or scholar, he has made several research trips to Ghana. One of the first African-American composers to work with electronic media, in 1968 his electronic composition *Cetus* won a prize at the first International Electronic Music Competition. His affinity for combinations of electronic and acoustic forces is shown in *Echoes* (1974-5) for clarinet and tape and *Sometimes* (1976) for tenor and tape. *Piano Piece for Piano and Electronic Sound* (1969) also makes use of prepared piano (metal and wooden devices are placed directly on the strings) and requires the pianist at times to pluck the strings.

As we approach the centennial of Dvořák's admonishment of 1893 for Americans to write American music, his advice seems prophetic, for American music has been able to achieve its own identity principally by responding to the stimulus of indigenous Black music. As these performances by Natalie Hinderas display, the contributions of African-American composers are primary evidence of our strides toward that goal.

—*Dominique-Rene de Lerma*, Director
Center for Black Music Research
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