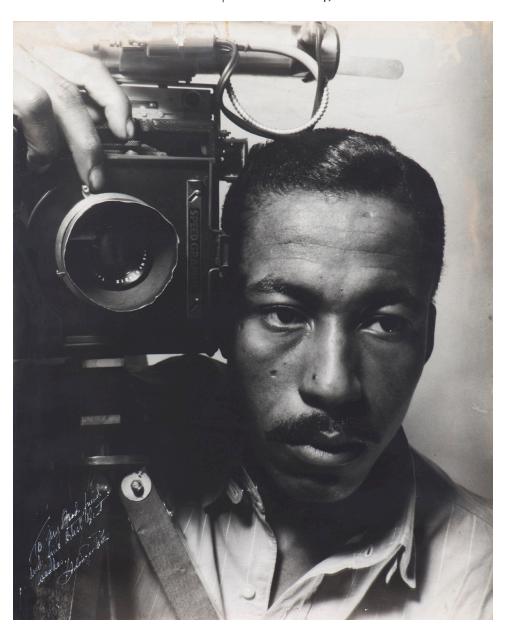
## 77TH SEASON OF

# CONCERTS

NATIONAL GALLERY OF ART | NOVEMBER 4, 2018



## **PROGRAM**

## Flophouse Crew Nolan Williams, Jr., conductor

Celebrating Gordon Parks: The New Tide, Early Work 1940–1950 Music by Gordon Roger Alexander Buchanan Parks (1912–2006)

November 4, 2018 | 4:00 East Building Auditorium

Musical excerpts from the film Solomon Northup's Odyssey (1984)\*†

Selected movements from Concerto for Piano and Orchestra (1953) ‡†

Announcement

Episode

Nocturne

Prelude and fugue

The Learning Tree†§

Selected movements from the ballet Martin (1989)\*†

Allegro Maestoso

Letter to the World

Entr'acte

Letter from Birmingham Jail

From the film Shaft

"Don't Misunderstand" (1972)§†

- \* Transcribed and orchestrated by Kermit Moore
- † Arranged by Scott Silbert
- ‡ Orchestrated by Henry Brant
- § Transcribed by Scott Silbert

# MUSICIANS | COMPOSERS

## Flophouse Crew | Ensemble

Flophouse Crew is an assembly of local freelance musicians whose mission is to research, cultivate, and preserve the historical, cultural, and ethnic diversity in music. Our goal is to foster an audience of concert attendants who hunger for the unusual and the unknown, eclectic, and academic. We are pleased to showcase some of the works of the modern Renaissance man, Gordon Parks. We want to thank the Gordon Parks Foundation, the Library of Congress, Philip Brookman, curator of the National Gallery of Art's exhibition *Gordon Parks: The New Tide, Early Work 1940–1950*, and the Wichita State University Special Collections in aiding in the accrual and permission to perform and project on a screen these timeless and valuable works of art.

## Scott Silbert | Arranger

Scott Silbert arranged all of Gordon Parks's works in today's concert. As an arranger, Silbert adapts musical scores for specific ensembles. Born in Philadelphia, he is also a woodwind player and served as the United States Navy Band's chief arranger until his retirement in 2017. He is currently an active musician and arranger with the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra and has performed and arranged music for James Taylor, Stevie Wonder, Tony Bennett, Michael Buble, Gloria Estefan, and Josh Groban, among others.

## Gordon Parks | Composer

Gordon Parks was an American photographer, musician, composer, writer, poet, and film director, who gained prominence in documentary photojournalism from the 1940s through the 1970s, particularly in the areas of civil rights, poverty, and African American life. He also worked in glamour photography.

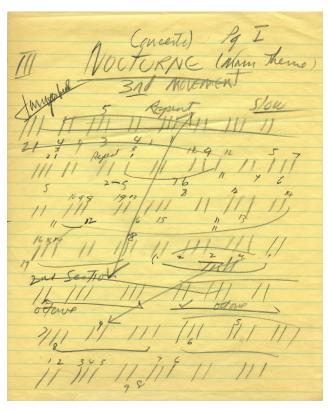
As the first famous pioneer among African American filmmakers, Parks produced and directed major motion pictures that shared the experience of America's enslaved people and the continuing struggle of African Americans. He pioneered the "blaxploitation" genre and is best remembered for his photos of poor Americans taken during a fellowship with the Farm Security Administration in the 1940s, as well as for his *Life* magazine photographic essays and his directing of television and film productions that include *Shaft* (1972).

Parks was born in Fort Scott, Kansas, the son of Sarah (née Ross) and Jackson Parks, a farmer. When he was fourteen, Gordon's mother died, and soon after he was sent to St. Paul, Minnesota, to live with a sister and her husband. Disagreement ensued and at age fifteen Parks was turned out on the street to fend for himself. Struggling to survive, he worked in brothels and also as a singer, piano player, busboy, traveling waiter,

and semipro basketball player. Later, he jumped a train to Chicago where he landed a job in a flophouse, an extremely sparse and inexpensive hostel.

Similar to Brahms and Debussy, Parks's first job as a teenager was as a piano player in a brothel. He quickly learned the popular jazz medium of the day. In 1929, he briefly worked in the Minnesota Club, where he met and performed with band leader Larry Funk. Although the Depression brought an end to the club, Parks's song "No Love" was performed during a national radio broadcast by Funk and his orchestra in the early 1930s.

Parks learned piano by rote and could not read or write music in conventional musical notation. He created his own tablature to capture his musical works on paper. He relied on the help of composers and arrangers—who transcribed from his personal taped recordings on the piano and his tablature—to orchestrate and arrange his music for professional musicians to perform and record.



Gordon Parks, composition notes from *Nocturne (Main Theme)*. Courtesy Gordon Parks Foundation

## PROGRAM NOTES

The PBS television film *Solomon Northup's Odyssey* aired in 1984 and was both directed and musically scored by Parks. Based on the autobiography *Twelve Years a Slave* by Solomon Northup, the film featured the story of a free black man who in 1841 was kidnapped and sold into slavery. The impact of Parks's musical score was skillfully developed by Kermit Moore, an outstanding African American cellist, conductor, composer, teacher, and mentor. Through his broad talents in music, Moore succeeded in breaking down the racial barriers of his generation. His early studies were at the Cleveland Institute of Music, and at age nineteen he became a member of the Cleveland Orchestra. He continued his studies at the Paris Conservatory with the legendary composer and pedagogue Nadia Boulanger. Living and performing in Europe, he soloed with and conducted major orchestras. In 1961, Moore returned to the States to teach, compose, conduct, and perform with the New York Philharmonic, Jazz legend Dizzy Gillespie, and violin virtuoso Ruggiero Ricci. He founded the Symphony of the New World, which actively fosters minority artists.

The excerpts featured on today's program are cues from the film's soundtrack and include original music written to accompany specific scenes. These musical cues aimed to enhance the dramatic narrative and actively underscore the intended emotional impact. To fuse the music with the video, the music was first recorded by an ensemble of musicians, and then "burned" (synchronized) onto a time code with the previously filmed material.

Parks composed *Concerto for Piano and Orchestra* at the encouragement of African American conductor Charles Dean Dixon and his wife Vivian Rivkin, a pianist. Dixon was of West Indian descent and attended the Juilliard School in 1932 and Columbia University in 1939. He was the first person to establish a racially integrated orchestra in New York City. His career as an accomplished conductor began with concerts for the New York City Orchestra, the NBC Symphony, and the New York Philharmonic. Later he directed various French and German radio orchestras.

Parks composed his piano concerto with the help of the composer and orchestrator. Henry Brant, who was America's foremost composer of acoustic spatial music. Born to American parents living in Montreal, Brant is widely recognized as a master orchestrator. He moved to New York in 1929, where he worked commercially in radio, film, ballet, and jazz. He completed orchestration projects for George Antheil, Aaron Copland, Virgil Thomson, Douglas Moore, and Gordon Parks. In 2002, Brant was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in Music.

The Learning Tree is a film adaptation of Parks's semi-autobiographical novel of the same name. It is set in the 1920s in the fictional town of Cherokee Flats, Kansas. Gifted in many artistic mediums, Parks helps his audience understand the feelings of

others. The work shares the hardships of poverty and discrimination that aren't limited to a single group. The honesty and nuance of Parks's work not only instills compassion for victims of racism, but also shows how people in general allow irrational fears and personal vulnerabilities to affect their racial attitudes. The theme song to *The Learning* Tree is presented in binary song form in a pop jazz medium and was premiered and popularized by song stylist O.C. Smith.

The Learning Tree

Where grows the learning tree

By rivers that flow

When the night...winds that blow...after sundown

That's what a boy should know

Fireflies and restless stars

In tall fields of corn

Where all June bugs are born

In the dew time

That's what a boy should know

Broad skies...round as pie

Clouds puffed...white as snow

With two dogs...by his side

And a nice girl to know

Out where the sparrow flies

Where blue birds can sing

Overhead.....in the spring after moon down...

There grows the learning tree

In 1989, Parks composed and directed Martin, a ballet dedicated to Martin Luther King, Jr. It was broadcast in 1990 on public television. Parks served as executive producer, director, documentary photographer, and composer for Martin, in itself a remarkably multifaceted feat. Though the film's main body is the ballet, it is preceded by a documentary introduction that is the most highly charged, impassioned, and impressive part of the program. Similar to his photographic themes, it bears witness to the pain, suffering, and squalor of the mean streets for persons of color. The ensuing ballet, a cinema-dance fusion more than a conventional film record of a dance work, has an arrestingly individual, somewhat surreal look. It proceeds in five acts, corresponding to episodes in King's life and introduces the trio of principal characters: Rosa Parks, King, and the Assassin. Choreography was by Rael Lamb, with Parks's music transcribed and orchestrated by Kermit Moore.

The question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists will we be. Will we be extremists for hate or will we be extremists for love. Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice or will we be extremists for the cause of justice. I am here because injustice is here, and injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of 'neutral-allity,' tied in a single garment of destiny, that whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. — Excerpt from Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Letter from Birmingham Jail

Gordan Parks composed "Don't Misunderstand" for the blaxploitation crime film Shaft, which Parks also directed. The film is about a private detective, John Shaft, who is hired by a Harlem mobster to rescue his daughter from Italian kidnappers. The film's major themes are race, masculinity, sexuality, and the Black Power movement. The Shaft soundtrack album, recorded by Isaac Hayes, won a Grammy for Best Score. Parks composed "Don't Misunderstand" in binary form and it was popularized by song stylist O.C. Smith. Later the song was covered by such great crooners as Etta James and Nancy Wilson.

Don't Misunderstand

Don't misunderstand

We are only strangers

On our way to somewhere else

To some place we forgot

Don't mistake my smile

It just means I am lonely

So love me till this day has passed

And then forget we met

We're just spending time

In some secret place

Yielding to a softened day

To love, blow the pain away

Don't misunderstand

You are no concern of mine

But in case you're free sometime

And you need some time with me

sometime

To hold my hand, then I

will understand

We're just spending time

In some secret place

Yielding to a softened day

To love, blow the pain away

Don't misunderstand

You are no concern of mine

But in case you're free sometime

And you need some time with me

sometime

To hold my hand, then I will wonder,

I will understand

Program notes by Bruno Nasta

Upcoming Events of the Seventy-Seventh Season of The William Nelson Cromwell and F. Lammot Belin Concerts

Unless otherwise noted, concerts are held in the West Building, West Garden Court.

## **Tapestry**

Lessons of Darkness: Armistice Day 1918 November 11, 3:30

#### Nobuntu

Featuring traditional Zimbabwean songs, Afro jazz, and gospel November 18, 3:30

## Carolina Eyck + American Contemporary Music Ensemble

Fantasias December 2, 3:30

## Caroling in the Rotunda

U.S. Army Chorus MSG Jason Gottshall, conductor West Building Rotunda December 8, 1:30 and 2:30

#### Caroling in the Rotunda

Encore Chorale
Jeanne Kelly, director
West Building Rotunda
December 9, 1:30 and 2:30

## **Mettis String Quartet**

With Gabrielius Alekna, piano Presented in collaboration with the Embassy of the Republic of Lithuania December 9, 3:30

#### **General Information**

Admission to the National Gallery of Art and all of its programs is free of charge, except as noted.

The use of cameras or recording equipment during the performance is not allowed.

Please be sure that all portable electronic devices are turned off.

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Concerts are made possible in part through the generosity of donors to the National Gallery of Art through The Circle. Reserved seating is available in recognition of their support. Please contact the development office at (202) 842-6450 or circle@nga.gov for more information.

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Cover Gordon Parks, Self-Portrait, 1941, Private Collection, Courtesy of and copyright The Gordon Parks Foundation

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