

Lorelt will release *Homage: Chamber Music from the African Continent and Diaspora* with Samantha Ege and Castle of our Skins



Bongani Ndodana-Breen-Safika * world premiere recording
Zenobia Powell Perry- Homage
Undine Smith Moore- Soweto * world premiere recording
Samuel Coleridge Taylor- Moorish Dance
Frederick C. Tillis- Spiritual Fantasy

Dr Samantha Ege piano
Castle of our Skins string quartet

As part of their ongoing commitment to promoting music of women and ethnically diverse composers, **LORELT** will release a revelatory, new album **Homage: Chamber Music from the African Continent and Diaspora** of chamber music from the African continent and diaspora in **November 2022**. Following her first two albums on *Florence Price* and *Black Chicago Renaissance Women*, pianist **Samantha Ege** returns to the studio with the Boston-based **Castle of our Skins** string quartet to champion music of their cultural heritage. Together they capture a snapshot of more than a century of classical music by composers of African descent.

Their album pays tribute to an array of lives and histories, from Black migrant labourers in apartheid South Africa to the nomadic Moors of North Africa.

The three cornerstones of the album are *Safika: Three Tales of African Migration* for piano quintet (2011) by the South African composer **Bongani Ndodana-Breen**; *Soweto* for piano trio (1986) by the African American composer **Undine Smith Moore**; and *Spiritual Fantasy* for string quartet (1988) by the African American composer **Frederick C. Tillis**. Interspersed between the chamber works are two solo pieces: *Homage* (1990) by the African American composer **Zenobia Powell Perry** and *Moorish Dance*, op. 55 (1904) by the British composer **Samuel Coleridge-Taylor**.

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the British composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, which Ege will record at the University of Surrey on 15 August.

Samantha Ege states:

"We remember those from the past from the stories we tell in our present, and, at its heart, **Homage** is about storytelling. I have been playing the piano since I was three and for most of my time at the instrument, I had been oblivious to the history of classical musicians of African descent. Now as a professional musician, I am drawn to the African continent and diaspora in order to make sense of the histories that were suppressed during my education."

Safika by Bongani Ndodana-Breen



Dr Ndodana-Breen is one of South Africa's most important composers today. His compositions have been performed around the world to great acclaim. His works span vocal, symphonic, and chamber music. His opera *Winnie*, based on the life of Winnie Mandela, was a critical success on its premiere in Pretoria. *Safika* (a word in Zulu and Xhosa meaning "we arrived" conveys Ndodana-Breen's commentary on Black South Africans' dispossession, migration, and translocation. He says that:

"The unifying factor in all those who were touched by these journeys is memory. By quoting and paraphrasing aspects of African music and dance, **Safika** alludes to memories of lives left behind, the people, the songs, the dances and the connection to the land."

Abundant with references to indigenous polyrhythms, speech patterns, instruments, and dance motifs, *Safika* is a work that honours a harrowing history, while also foregrounding the richness of the composer's heritage.

Soweto by Undine Smith Moore



Moore's *Soweto* is another world premiere recording. Moved by the plight of Black South Africans under apartheid, Moore (1904–1989) composed her trio. Speaking about the impetus behind it, she said:

"I awakened suddenly. I hear the single word, **Soweto**. I sat upright astonished—and I knew that my new piece would use the rhythmic motive 'So-we-to' and it would inevitably have other overtones, some of conflict. There must have been deep internal turmoil to bring that word to me. I felt I did not choose the word. The word chose me."

Spiritual Fantasy by Frederick C. Tillis



Tillis (1930–2020) was a kaleidoscopic composer who was at home in a range of genres, from classical to jazz. He applied the *Spiritual Fantasy* genre to large- and small-scale vocal and instrumental works, exploring extended techniques in some and a more accessible sound in others. His *Spiritual Fantasy* for string quartet captures the vastness of his influences and compositional prowess in microcosm. Each movement is based on a spiritual: I. "Nobody Knows the Trouble I See," II. "Wade in the Water," III. "Crucifixion – He Never Said a Mumblin' Word," and IV. "I'm-A-Rollin'." And in a moment of structural brilliance, all of the themes from the first, second, and third movements return in the fourth movement making for a climactic finale. In Tillis' own words:

"The composition of the of the 'Spiritual Fantasy' for string quartet pays tribute to the essence of the musical expressions of pathos and triumph over worldly obstacles encountered by a people who found hope and strength through faith in God."

Homage by Zenobia Powell Perry & Moorish Dance by Samuel Coleridge Taylor



Ege's choice of piano interludes ties in with the themes of the chamber items. For example, postmodern composer and civil rights activist Perry (1908–2004) composed *Homage* as a birthday gift to Harlem Renaissance giant William Dawson. The piece derives its melodic ideas from Dawson's favourite spiritual, "I've Been 'Buked and I've Been Scorned." *Moorish Dance* by Coleridge-Taylor (1875–1912) restores pride and power to a term (i.e. Moor) that took on derogatory connotations in relation to people

from North Africa. As Ege says,

"When I play this piece, I can imagine North Africans from the Middle Ages, clothed in billowing fabrics and riding horses. Coleridge-Taylor brings out these galloping rhythms in his writing. His use of decorative arabesque patterns imitates the intricacies of Arabic calligraphy. The musical style is so regal and grand. It differs hugely from composers like Debussy who referenced Black cultural influences, but without the desire to honour the traditions behind them. 'Golliwog's Cakewalk' was written around 1906, but two years ahead of Debussy we have one of England's greatest composers truly playing tribute to the diversity of Black cultures."

Here is a video of Samantha Ege performing *Homage* on 3 April 2022 at Mills College in Oakland, California (time stamp: 28:27- 32:09):



This recording received funding from the Knowledge Exchange Innovation Fund (2021-2022) from The Oxford Research Centre in the Humanities, University of Oxford.

Samantha Ege



Samantha Ege is a musicologist and pianist. Her research and repertoire tightly entwine and largely concern 20th century composers of African descent and women in music. She has published extensively in these areas. As a concert artist, she made her London debut at the London Festival of American Music in September 2021 and her Barbican debut soon after in November that year. Samantha has since proved a sought-after recitalist and concerto soloist with engagements across the UK, Ireland, US, and Canada. This collaboration with Castle of our Skins represents her first significant project as a chamber musician.

samanthaege.com

Upcoming Concerts

Thursday 29 September 2022, Time tbc

Rozsa Center for the Performing Arts,
Michigan Technological University USA

Friday 21 October 2022: Time tbc
Yale University, USA

Samantha Ege & the Philharmonia
Orchestra of Yale

Tuesday 29 November 2022, 7:30pm
Barbican Centre, London UK

Wednesday 8 March 2023, 5:00pm

Holywell Music Room, Oxford UK

Monday 20 March 2023, time tbc
University of Toronto, Canada

Tuesday 28 March 2023, 7:30pm
Skipton Town Hall UK

Saturday 22 April 2023, Time tbc
Oxford (more details coming soon) UK

Saturday 6 May 2023, 7:30PM
Robinson Performance Hall, AR USA

Samantha Ege & Arkansas Symphony
Orchestra

Sunday 7 May 2023, 3pm
Robinson Performance Hall, AR USA

Samantha Ege & Arkansas Symphony
Orchestra

Castle of our Skins



Founded by violist **Ashleigh Gordon** and composer **Anthony Green**, Castle of our Skins draws its name from a line in Nikki Giovanni's 'Poem for Nina.'

*We are all imprisoned in the castle of our skins
And some of us have said so be it
If I am imprisoned in my skin let it be a dark world
With deep bass walking a witch doctor to me for
spiritual consultation
Let my world be defined by my skin and the skin of my
people
For we—spirit to spirit—will embrace this world*

Castle of our Skins is a Boston-based concert and educational series dedicated to celebrating Black artistry through music. From classrooms to concert halls, Castle of our Skins invites explorations into Black heritage and culture, spotlighting both unsung and celebrated figures of the past and present. Violist Ashleigh Gordon and composer Anthony R. Green founded Castle of our Skins in 2013 to address the lack of equity in composer representation on concert stages and the omission of important stories and figures in Black history. A decade on, the organisation still shines as a beacon for diversity in the arts.



Gabriela Díaz began her musical training aged five, studying piano with her mother then violin with her father. A childhood cancer survivor, Gabriela supports cancer research and treatment through music. She won an Albert Schweitzer Foundation grant to organise chamber music concerts in cancer units across Boston hospitals. Gabriela teaches at Wellesley College and is co-artistic director of the chamber music and outreach organization Winsor Music. Her recording of Lou Harrison's Suite for Violin and American Gamelan was highlighted in the New York Times' "5 Minutes That Will Make You Love Classical Music."



Matthew Vera is known for his versatility as a soloist, chamber musician, and orchestral leader. Matthew is first violinist of the Izarra String Quartet, a Boston-based ensemble exploring fresh interpretations of the classic repertoire with a keen focus on amplifying compositional voices of the LGBTQIA + BIPOC communities. Matthew is a violinist with Castle of our Skins and has also been heard with Radius Ensemble, Juventas New Music Ensemble, and Monadnock Music. Matthew has shared the stage with The Boston Philharmonic, The Albany Symphony, The Portland Symphony, The Rhode Island Philharmonic, The Boston Modern Orchestra Project, and Teatro Nuovo.



Ashleigh Gordon has been described as a “charismatic and captivating” violist. She has recorded with Switzerland's Ensemble Proton and Germany's Ensemble Modern; performed with Grammy-award winning BMOP and Grammy-nominated A Far Cry string ensemble; and appeared at the prestigious BBC Proms Festival and Carnegie Hall with the Chineke! and Gateways Music Festival Orchestras respectively. She is the Artistic and Executive Director of Castle of our Skins, a Boston-based concert and educational series devoted to celebrating Black Artistry through music. In recognition of her work, she was nominated for the 2020 "Americans for the Arts Johnson Fellowship for Artists Transforming Communities.”



Francesca McNeeley began her journey as a cellist in her native Haiti, aged four. Today she enjoys an eclectic career in Boston as a soloist, chamber musician, contemporary music specialist, and orchestral player. She plays regularly with Castle of Our Skins, the Celebrity Series of Boston, A Far Cry, and the Boston Symphony & Boston Pops Orchestras. She is a graduate of Princeton University, Rice University and the New England Conservatory. Her mentors included Tom Kraines, Darrett Adkins, Norman Fischer, Yeesun Kim, and Astrid Schween. Francesca is dedicated to community engagement through teaching and mentoring, and is compelled by the story-telling power of classical music.

<https://www.castleskins.org/>

LORELT | Odaline de la Martinez | Lontano

The award-winning Cuban American composer-conductor **Odaline de la Martinez** co-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, Lontano was one of the first ensembles to form its own record company when in 1992 it established the **LORELT** label (Lontano Records Ltd). Now with a catalogue of 43 recordings, LORELT features soloists as well as other ensembles and is noted for its archive of important and often neglected composers.

lorelt.co.uk

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

Nicky Thomas Media

2-6 Baches St, London N1 6DN

+44 (0)20 3714 7594 | +44 (0)7768 566 530

info@nickythomasmedia.com

www.nickythomasmedia.com