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The University of Manchester

THE MARTIN HARRIS CENTRE
FOR MUSIC AND DRAMA

Cosmo Rodewald Concert Hall
Walter Carroll Lunchtime Concert Series
Thursday 26 November 2026, 13.10

The South African Double Bass

With Leon Bosch & Rebeca Omordia





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Photography and/or recording of this performance are strictly prohibited.

- Please ensure that mobile phones are switched off,
- Please stifle coughing as much as possible,
- Please ensure watch alarms, and any audible devices are switched off

Today's Performance

Yihle Moya — **Grant McLachlan**

Yihle Moya was written under lockdown at the request of Leon Bosch, who sought a work for solo double bass which would reflect his South African roots.

The Hymn Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika (God bless Africa) was composed in 1897 by Enoch Santonga, a Methodist clergyman at a school near Johannesburg. It stems from an extraordinary tradition of choral music that grew up in the Eastern Cape province in of South Africa in the 19th century and which spawned a plethora of musicians and composers. The hymn has become a liberation song for most of the Southern Africa countries and has become the national anthem for several of them.

I first got to know the hymn after arriving in the UK from South Africa in 1975. At that point the hymn was suppressed in South Africa as it had become a symbol of the struggle against apartheid. Several musicians managed to surreptitiously include the hymn in their songs such as the iconic Weeping by the band Bright Blue.

For my adaptation, I took the melody as it is, and extended some bars in a few places. I make much use of the open strings and harmonics of the double bass, and the resonance of these strings enhances the harmonies. At one point the melody is played entirely on the high harmonics of the G string. The recurrence of the octave harmonic on the D string string gives a drone-like effect. I have also extended the range of the hymn over three and a half octaves, which, using both the deep resonance and the singing quality of the bass enhances the emotional impact of the work.

The title of the work, Yihle Moya, can be translates as "Descend o spirit', and is taken from the chorus of the original hymn.

One of the most emotional musical experiences of my life was singing Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika in a choir during an evensong in Worcester Cathedral during theThree Choirs Festival in 1996. This remarkable work by Enoch Santonga continues to move and inspire people from Southern Africa, and the diaspora round the world.

© Grant McLachlan 31/08/2020

Stimela & Senzeni Na (What Have We Done?) **Grant McLachlan**

These two traditional songs have a strong resonance among the people of South Africa, and are inextricably linked to the struggle for freedom and democracy.
Both works are traditionally sung in the form of "call and response". In other words, a solo voice is followed line by line by a responding chorus. Arranging them for a single solo instrument is therefore something of a challenge. The double bass, with its extraordinary pitch range and its wide range of different timbres and textures, is the ideal instrument to achieve this.

Stimela is based on the traditional song, Shosholoza. This is a rhythmic work song that was sung by migrant gold miners. 'Shosholoza' is an onomatopoeic word representing the sound from the steam trains which transported the mine workers across the country.

What Have We Done (Senzeni na)? is based on an anti-apartheid protest song, often sung at funerals and at demonstrations. It includes the lines: "What have we done? Is our sin that we are black?" The chorus part of the song has its origins in a Victorian psalm chant composed by Arthur Troyte in 1887 that reached South Africa through the missionaries in the Eastern Cape. The transformation of the song with the addition of the solo voice makes it one of the most iconic and moving of all protest songs.

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18 Negro Spirituals arranged for Double Bass and Piano **Leon Bosch**

The forcible enslavement of people taken from West Africa to the Territories and States of the American South reached its zenith in the second half of the 18th-century. As the States grew in number and cohesion, the practice led to the Civil War between the northern-based Unionists and the Confederacy of the southern States before being abolished in the 1860s. Traces of this deep stain on American history have taken longer to eradicate, but the abiding musical legacy of African-American religious folksong – often referred to as Negro Spirituals – is now recognised as the most significant and lasting of all the influential strains within indigenous American music.

The Spirituals' melodic lines and harmonies were often derived from age-old folk roots. Many were composed, complementing those as transplanted folk music, with melodic lines often cast from pentatonic scales, and almost always danced. The earliest examples were performed in what evolved as being a "ring shout" – a shuffling-style circular dance, propelled with group chanting and handclapping. The texts of almost all Negro Spirituals derive from Biblical sources. The term itself is clearly inspired by St Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians - "Speak to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord."

It is a fabulously rich musical heritage, and its influence is found even today. Several so-called Freedom Songs, such as Bob Marley's 'Redemption Song', share their musical roots with those of the great spirituals, and several songs by the great John Holt can also be traced to this tradition. The deep, wide-ranging male Negro voice, refined through a dignity of natural musical expression, produces a profound depth of utterance finely reflected in the range and concert arrangements of Leon Bosch.
In these concert arrangements it is the powerful melodies and simple but telling harmonies that produce the deep emotional impact, a remarkably original and memorable series of haunting musical

expressions that, at the distance of several centuries, speak to all with a directness of utterance that remains immortal. Such significant, concert spiritual arrangements assert an unstated sense of genuine racial pride – understood and shared by all sympathetic listeners.

Examples of sorrow songs within this collection include: "*Nobody knows de trouble I've seen*," "*Go Down Moses*," and "*Were You there*." Additionally, jubilee songs include "*Ev'ry time I feel the spirit*," and "*I'm Goin' to Lay Down my Heavy Load*."

The most significant original composer of Spirituals was Henry Thacker (H.T.) Burleigh (1866-1949), who learned many original Spirituals from his grandfather, a former slave. It was Burleigh who introduced Dvořák to the genre when the great composer was director of the National Conservatory of Music in New York City. Burleigh, who also possessed a fine singing voice, played the double bass and timpani in the National Conservatory Orchestra, making Leon Bosch's arrangements doubly authentic. Burleigh also travelled with Samuel Coleridge-Taylor during the Englishman's American visits, introducing the Englishman to many Spirituals, which caused Coleridge-Taylor to claim that Burleigh was 'the greatest singer of my songs.' Visiting England, Burleigh performed for King Edward VII a selection of his original songs and arrangements of plantation and minstrel songs; he also sang at the Temple Emanu-El in New York City.

It is impossible to over-emphasize Burleigh's significance in the history of Spirituals – as an early 'ethno-musicologist' (before the term was invented), a proselytiser of the genre, a performer of such music as singer and double-bass player, teacher of both the great black concert singers Marian Anderson and Paul Robeson, and as a composer of immortal melodies in various Spiritual styles – Burleigh was, without question, both the keeper and sword-bearer of the great Negro Spiritual tradition, and Leon Bosch's arrangements. There can be little doubt that, had Burleigh not existed, the great lineage of Negro Spirituals would have withered on the vine of history.

It is thanks to Burleigh that, for example, we can hear several of his arrangements of such immortal melodies, including "By an' by," "Deep River," "I got a robe," and "I want to be ready", and jubilee (sometimes referred to as 'shout') songs, together with spiritual settings by the exceptional black female composer Florence Price (1887-1953), whose concert and chamber music has recently become the subject of re-evaluation. Several of her concert and chamber-music compositions used sorrow spirituals themes in their construction, and amongst several examples of sorrow spirituals in this programme are "Nobody knows de trouble I've seen," "Go Down Moses," and "Were You there." Additionally, and in contrast, Leon Bosch's jubilee songs selections include "Ev'ry time I feel the spirit," "I got a robe," and "I'm Goin' to Lay Down my Heavy Load." Spirituals often feature microtonally-flatted notes, syncopation and counter-rhythms, suggestive of handclapping, so naturally expressive when instrumentally recreated as here on the double-bass.

© Robert Matthew-Walker

Sonatina for Double Bass and Piano **Grant McLachlan**

The first performance took place at the Baxter Concert Hall in Cape Town on 1st October 2016, performed by Bosch and Albie Van Schalkwyk.

ABDI

The opening material for this movement comes from music originally composed for a documentary of the same name. The film documented a Somalian filmmaker returning to Africa from America to film wildlife in Zimbabwe and Zambia, and the music is inspired by the music of those countries. The metre is an irregular 9/8 (2+2+3+2) which is juxtaposed as a polyrhythm with the more common configuration of 3+3+3. The pace of the movement is gentle and rolling, making use of continuous cyclical movement.

NOCTURNE

The solo double bass opens in reflective mood, and with the entry of the piano, the music moves in a cyclical pattern of dissonance and tension which is resolved on each return to the pivotal consonant G major chord. A simple melody forms the central section before the return of a variation of the cyclical pattern. The movement ends quietly with a series of remote harmonies on the piano over sustained harmonics in the double bass, before the piano finally resolves on the ubiquitous G major chord.

FUGUE

This fugue starts out with very good intentions, but soon abandons trying to be a fugue, and resorts to reprising material from the first two movements. The main fugue subject is however presented in different forms, such as stretto and inversion. The sonatina ends with a strident recall of the opening theme from the first movement.

Today's Performers

Leon Bosch – Double Bass



Having worked with the finest conductors for 30 years as a member of groups such as the Academy of St Martin in the Fields, Philharmonia and Hallé, he learnt the repertoire and conductor's craft from inside the orchestra, and finally made the transition to the podium in 2015, when he left Academy of St Martin in the Fields and went to study in St Petersburg with Alexander Polishchuk. Since then he has conducted orchestras across the UK, Europe, India, South Africa and Mozambique.

During his playing career, he performed concertos around the world and served as a guest with ensembles such as the Lindsays, Brodsky Quartet and Zukerman Chamber Players.

Leon is committed to rediscovering neglected music, as well as expanding and diversifying the double bass repertoire, and has recorded 16 CDs of wide-ranging programmes, with more in planning.

Throughout his career he has worked with leading composers, and his latest project is to revive the sonatina form for a programme he will tour and record for Meridian Records in 2021. He also commissions chamber arrangements of well-known symphonic classics for his ensemble I Musicanti, and set up I Musicanti Publishing in order to distribute these works.

He is professor of double bass at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance in London and gives masterclasses in the US, Europe, South Africa and the Far East. He has also served as double bass coach for youth orchestras including the I, Culture Orchestra, National Youth String Orchestra, Miagi Orchestra and Buskaid. He has contributed to programmes on BBC Radio 3 and 4 and written for The Strad and Classical Music magazines.

Leon grew up in South Africa, the son of the political activist Jonas Fred Bosch, and spent time in a police cell for organising protests while at school. He left the apartheid regime behind to study at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester.

He became a British citizen in 2000. In recent years he has returned to his roots, musically, forming the Ubuntu Ensemble with other UK-based South African musicians, and commissioning music for the South African Double Bass project, the first CD of which was released in 2020. He also acts as a mentor for South African musicians worldwide.

Away from music, he runs marathons and ultra-marathons and holds a Master's degree in Intelligence and International Relations from Salford University.

Rebeca Omordia - Piano



"I've been working with the brilliant young pianist, Rebeca Omordia. She is half Romanian, half Nigerian – and it's a powerful combination! ... Rebeca's technique knows no bounds but, more importantly, she plays with a depth of insight and understanding which is all too rare today."

- Julian Lloyd Webber, London Magazine

London-based award-winning pianist Rebeca Omordia was born in Romania to a Romanian mother and a Nigerian father. She graduated from the National Music University in Bucharest in 2006 when she was awarded full scholarships to study at Birmingham Conservatoire and later at Trinity College of Music in London.

Prize winner in international piano competitions, Rebeca Omordia was awarded the Delius Prize in 2009, which led to an extensive duo-partnership with the British cellist Julian Lloyd Webber. They toured the UK, performing in renowned venues including the Wigmore Hall and Kings Place in London, at Highgrove for the Prince's Trust and they made several broadcasts for BBC Radio 3.

Described by the Guardian as " the virtuoso pianist who cast spell on Lagos", Rebeca Omordia has made a name for herself as a vibrant and exciting virtuoso who is in demand throughout the UK and abroad. She has performed as a soloist with all the major Romanian orchestras including the Romanian National Radio Orchestra and MUSON Symphony Orchestra in Nigeria. She has collaborated with world-renowned artists including Raphael Wallfisch, Amy Dickson and Elizabeth Llewellyn. Rebeca's recording with Mark Bebbington, "The Piano Music of Ralph Vaughan Williams" reached No. 3 in the UK's Classical Music Chart.

Rebeca is a great advocate of Nigerian classical music. Her CD "EKELE: Piano Works by African Composers", released in March 2018 on Heritage label, features music by three of Nigeria's most prolific composers and was described as an "appealing album" (BBC Music Magazine), "fascinating programme "(Gramophone Magazine) and "beautifully delivered recital" (The Sunday Times)".

Rebeca is also a talented arranger; her arrangement of "The Seal Lullaby" by Grammy-winning composer Eric Whitacre, for cello and harp, was released on Deutsche Gramophon.

In 2016, Rebeca received the Honorary Membership Award (HonBC) from Birmingham City University for her contribution to the music industry as an alumna of Birmingham Conservatoire. She is currently writing her PhD thesis.

Coming up at the Martin Harris Centre

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UoM Chorus and MUMS Symphony Orchestra Concert.

Date: Friday 27 **and** Saturday 28 November 2026
Venue: Cosmo Rodewald Concert Hall
Time: 19:30 (Friday) **and** 15.00 (Saturday)
Price: £19.25, Standard **//** £14.85, Concessions **//** £6.33, Students/Under 18's **//** £4.00, MUMS/Chorus Members.

WCLC: Clare Wilkinson and Jacob Heringman.

Date: Thursday 03 December 2026
Venue: Cosmo Rodewald Concert Hall
Time: 13:10
Price: FREE

Relaxed Performance Festive Sing-along.

Date: Friday 04 December 2026
Venue: Cosmo Rodewald Concert Hall
Time: 11:00
Price: FREE **(Booking Required for groups of 10 or more people)**

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