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HUES

Vol. 19 No. 8 • April 15, 2024 • Free • www.capitalcityhues.com

Boardman Clark

Double Impact

Michelle Behnke Joins Boardman Clark as She Prepares for the American Bar Association Presidency

Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra Releases "Harmony in Black"

Symphonic Breakthrough



Patrice Rushen

By Jonathan Gramling

Part 2 of 2

It was a moment that was two or more years in the making. Once could say that the seeds for this project were planted long ago when WCO's composer in residence, Dr. Bill Banfield, and Andrew Sewell, WCO's music director were just starting out and went to school together. Sewell and Banfield kept in touch and in the 1990s when Banfield released his Musical Landscapes in Color, the seeds began to sprout. When the Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra wanted to expand its horizons, Sewell turned to Banfield and Musical Landscapes in Color was created, a five-year project to record the compositions of Black composers performed by the Wisconsin Symphony Orchestra.

Black composer Patrice Rushen contributed one work to the first CD called "Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory," her tribute to the work and life of Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Banfield contributed two symphonies to this first project.

"There were two pieces performed by the WCO," Banfield said. "One was an older piece that got lost. It was performed 20 years ago. The other piece was a new piece that they commissioned. And so you have my baby, the new baby, meets the old baby. And the old baby has never been seen or heard by anyone. And they are being seen in the room at the same time. It's that kind of thing. Having those two pieces performed in the same concert was really an experience for me. It was quite wonderful. That's what I am experiencing with the symphonies and the CDs. Those two pieces were brought together at the same time, which is really unique."

The first symphony, "Symphony No. 8, is about the late Paul Robeson, who was a bass-baritone concert artist, actor, professional football player, and



Dr. Bill Banfield

activist who actively spoke out about America and about working people around the world who was oppressed by the U.S. government.

"Paul Robeson has achieved redemption in so many ways," Banfield said. "You express it majestically. [Expressed in a strong bass voice] You can hear Paul Robeson singing that. He's redeemed because obviously we know that he was a champion of the right thing even though he got shut down during this awful period in our history where you didn't want to hear revolutionary voices. Now his ideas are the

very ideas that continue to push our country forward in many ways. He is redeemed. But then also, the thing that I thought was cool from a musical standpoint is Paul Robeson was a great baritone singer. He had this really big, deep voice. And I put that voice in my symphony in the tuba and the concert bassoon, which are

really the lowest instruments in the orchestra. They kind of represent and champion and celebrate Paul Robeson's low, deep resonate voice and his low deep resonate and very powerful ideas. It comes back in the first, second and third movement. And by the end, when you hear the tubas and the trombones doing that, you go, 'Okay, the composer is trying to celebrate Paul Robeson's low voice.' That's how I did that."

Banfield's Symphony No. 8 is devoted to the essence of Frederick Douglass, newspaper publisher and abolitionist who was a key figure in the lead-up to the American Civil War.

"Interestingly enough, I learned from a great author here that Frederick Douglass would have the people sing Negro spirituals before his speeches," Banfield said. "Now that to me was an interesting fact that none of us knew. He would have people get in the spirit of his ideas by having them sing these very important Negro spirituals that speak of

spirituality and freedom and looking to the heavens for the answer. And then when he got them all warmed up with spirituals, then he would hit them with, 'Now if you are feeling that way, change the way this country is headed.' And I think Paul Robeson, in another way, did the same thing. He would sing them spirituals to people. Then he would talk as an artist who had political power and political ideals. I kind of see them as not part of singular force at all. I think Paul Robeson is part of a great wave of voices composed of Black preachers and a lot of forward thinkers way before Paul Robeson's time who were even before and during Frederick Douglass' time. There are these men and women who were saying these things. Paul Robeson had a platform that the others didn't have. In some ways, he had a bigger platform than Frederick Douglass had. He was doing this in the 1940s-1960s. He's championing these ideas through the 1930s-1940s when we had a lot of forces against him."

While others also stood up in their own unique ways — people like Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Zora Neale Hurston and Billie Holiday — Robeson was a singular force in that he often stood on the stage alone, open to the political headwinds that he was defying.

"He is standing there alone," Banfield said. "And then they took his passport away so he couldn't travel to sing. Can you believe that. He was singing about Chinese workers. He was singing about Russian workers and common, everyday people in every other kind of place, not just in America. He was a real champion of people's rights and identity and their right to work hard and make a fair wage. And those are things that are really a part of the American formula for success. Every common working person can work hard and do something for their families and their community. That's important."

Banfield had to take a different approach in incorporating Douglass' voice into Symphony No. 14.

"To express Frederick Douglass, I think you have to redraw these figures sometimes in a way that is more palpa-

ble and a way that people see the depth and the universal brotherhood and sisterhood, which he talked about," Banfield said. "At the time, it was difficult in our country. But what he hoped to do was to speak about a universal brotherhood. Do you know how you do that? You have music that makes people feel like, 'Oh, everyone could feel good in this room. Everyone can feel that this is a human motion forward that we can all celebrate. That's what you try to do with this artistically.'

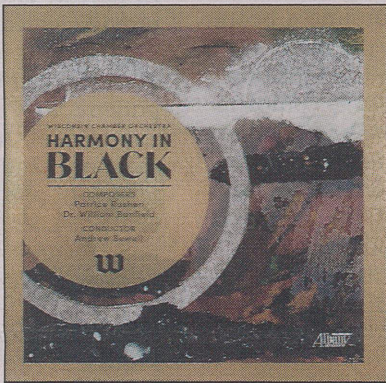
Banfield talked about how he created Douglass' presence in the work.

"You have Paul Robeson's voice in the low range," Banfield said. "So I imagined that if you are going to have a speaker saying important things, what is an instrument do we know that does that? The saxophone. So I have the saxophone in my piece for Frederick Douglass representing Frederick Douglass' voice. So the orchestra that you hear is the world. So you have the saxophone moving through the orchestra like Frederick Douglass is moving through the world speaking. And then I had a speaker, a live person, Judge Paul Higginbotham, actually speaking the words of Frederick Douglass. But the words that we chose were words that were universal. They weren't always the preaching that he was doing about the problems in America, although I include some of those. The most important speeches of the Frederick Douglass values were him talking about how great America was because it had the strength to be her better self by reaching a universal brotherhood and sisterhood that people would be proud of and everyone could espouse. And that is what I did purposely."

Banfield feels that the main challenge for composers — and other artists — is to get people to visualize the music, to touch people's imaginations beyond just appreciating the musical value of the work.

"We have to figure out a way as musicians to write music that communicates ideas that people can live with and understand," Banfield emphasized. "We

See Bill Banfield on Page 15



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Black Spaces From Page 7

communities, the average time that a dollar spends its time in the Black community or circulates in the Black community is less than six hours. That number hasn't changed for a while. How do we create African American owned spaces and places where we also are the business owners who also have a stake in creating, building, and planning for those spaces so that our money starts to circulate a little bit more than six hours in our community. So ownership, not just of the space, but also of the various entities that are creating those spaces is important."

Ford isn't content with just owning the spaces, he feels that it is important to create the spaces as well.

"Organizations like the Boys & Girls Club have huge initiatives to introduce people to the construction trade," Walters observed. "And cities like Milwaukee have the Acre Program where they introduce underrepresented communities to the development space. Michael Emem, one of the panelists, is a graduate of the Acre Program. Owning the building is one thing. But having architects, contractors and people who actually play a part in creating those spaces is also vital in helping to enrich that community, not just bringing services, but also the opportunity to create support as we build Black Spaces."

Walters has seen the progress that Madison has made through the years.

"I didn't see a lot of this stuff coming up," Walters observed. "And now you are starting to see things and kind of forward traction in big ways in Madison. That is something that I am proud of as a Madisonian."

This didn't all happen by accident or was destined to happen. It comes through intentionality to make a change in Madison.

"Even with just the social events, they are all necessary," Walters said. "They have to be intentional and they don't have to not include a group. But the groups that are partaking and attending these events need to be aware and accepting of the intentionality behind it. So when I am having a block

party and it's to highlight Black businesses and Black food trucks and all of the great excellence that Madison has, it doesn't mean that white people or other ethnic groups can't come. It just means you need to be supporting and being aware of what we are trying to do and an ally of it. And so I think all of those things combined is how you continue to come up with these spaces."

Madison College's Brunch Series is intended to generate discussion about those "Black Spaces," but also to generate action and change.

"It's all about economic development and our work in the community impacts this," said Dr. Jimmy Cheffen Jr., who is part of Madison College's community outreach initiative. "It's important for us to think about how we interact with the community, especially as development goes. A lot of our community members need help and they need learn the steps in the decisions to do it. I think it was awesome that our first one is talking about Black Spaces where we talk about real estate development, commercial development and architecture. And one of the friends who helped me curate is Mike Ford, the hip hop architect of BrandNu Design Studio. We've been talking a lot about how Black people in architecture, development and commercial development are unseen. And we talk about how these white companies call him and try to take over these developments. There are Black architects out there. There are Black developers out there. There are Black commercial and real estate developers. And then on the other side, we talk about the steps to do these things, especially in development. There are the steps in how you get the money for the project, how you obtain capital. There are all those steps that you take before there are 'shovels in the dirt.' There are steps that we are unaware of. We need to start talking about it, especially if we're going to start having a discussion about economic development."

Wanjiku Kibera From Page 1

Gender Studies and Women's Studies in many parts of the world. This has been going on for the last 50-60 years. But the African Women's Studies Center is all about African Women's Studies. We don't have studies in other areas unless you are comparing some aspects."

African Women's Studies teams up with other departments to offer degrees in a number of areas.

"In our foundational classes, we give you the tools to do the analysis, the theoretical basis for these studies," Kibera said. "But you can do most of this in African Women's Health, African Women's Education, African Women's Economic Empowerment, African Women in Politics. Any discipline fits into that."

And from there, the social change spreads outwards throughout Africa.

"Here we are talking about women getting into disciplines where they have been marginalized," Kibera said. "For instance, women in the factory, women in construction, women in the hard sciences and so on. We are promoting women's participation in all sectors of the economy, not just in agriculture. In agriculture, we are promoting women's involvement in the African trade and global trade as well as value addition like you are looking at cows and you have been milking them for a long time, but you don't get into value addition, making cheese, yogurt and so on. That's for many communities that focus on livestock. But also those who are growing herbs and so on, there is value addition. It's not enough to just grow it and sell the food. Economic empowerment involves you adding value and therefore you get more for your family."

An important component of African Women's Studies is its research arm, which provides the data, the ammo, to make the case for women's empowerment throughout Africa.

"We are also carrying out research

in all of these areas," Kibera said. "We're using what you call a debits-based policy advocacy. For instance, with women in manufacturing, you identify what is the percentage of women getting into manufacturing. How are they paid in comparison to the men and so on. We use the data now to advocate for policy change for women's economic empowerment and also political empowerment. In many areas, this information is very useful because it is outside the institution. Now you can argue the case to influence policy for taking into consideration women's interests."

And just like the Wisconsin Idea, Kibera's work has not been limited to the classroom. She has been a board member of the board member of the International Center for Research on Women based in Washington, D.C., and a consultant to develop gender analysis tools for the seven countries in the Inter Governmental Authority on Development region namely: Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, Ethiopia, Uganda and Djibouti among many other projects beyond the classroom.

Kibera is not content to teach about African Women, she works to actively promote their empowerment.

"There are still problems in terms of women's access to resources or controlling these resources, but changes are taking place," Kibera noted. "For this, I also participated in the drafting of the new constitution. We're developing women verbal skills to actually give their views because it was a highly participatory process."

Kibera has also been working to establish other African Women's Studies Departments in other African universities and beyond. Dr. Wanjiku Kibera is a change maker who was influenced by what she saw and experienced during her stay at UW-Madison in the late 1970s.

Bill Banfield From Page 11

want those ideas to hit people in a way that hits them spiritually and intellectually, but also hits them sonically so that they hear sounds and ideas and they go, 'Oh.' It's like John Williams with Jaws.' Everyone knows [makes Jaws theme sounds], even generations today who have seen the new Jaws. They know it's like a shark coming to tear you up. That's what you have to do in a symphony model. You have to create an emotional motif that connects that sound idea with a real concrete idea where you say, 'Oh, that's what they are doing.' People don't understand all of the language, but they can understand these kinds of themes. Thjat's how musicians and composers get you to understand. If you say, 'I love roses,' you have to create music in an emotional way that says, 'I love roses.' How does that translate? Well a beautiful melody with lush harmonies or with a color palette that you have created with instruments to get people to think of things that are beautiful and lovely. That's how musicians think about music. It's like how a dancer thinks about an idea. A dancer has to move in a certain way that makes it a cognitive profession of an idea. A poet doesn't always say, 'The sun is red.' He or she might say, 'The sun is a reflection of what didn't happened yesterday.' It was cold yesterday. Everything is cold. They use these symbols. That's kind of what we do when we write music. We have to write music that communicates ideas through sounds and melodies. And you have to write to touch people's emotions or you are not doing music that matters. Music has to matter. So in order for music to matter, it has to touch people's emotions."

Banfield emphasized that Harmony in Black is not elevator music or music in the background as one chats it up with friends at a coffee shop. The symphonies have a life of their own and are an important experience onto themselves.

"Patrice and I had an interview today," Banfield said. "We tried to say to the interviewer that we hope the reaction of the interviewer to the music was much like we want listeners to have that same experience. And the WCO is doing this so that people have a relationship with music, with new music, not music that was done 100 years ago. And so what we want people to do is say, 'This is important. It's valuable.' And we want them to

pay attention to new music being made and that music is made for people to listen to. You have to sit down and listen to music or it doesn't have any purpose. People are busy doing everything, drinking their coffee and having a conversation. But people in the symphony world and in jazz, they appreciate the music, not all of the jumping around or winning Grammys and all of that. They appreciate the music, sitting down and listening to the power and the beauty of music is something. We have to have conversations with audiences in this generation. You have to sit down and just listen to music sometimes. You have to listen. And it's not just to put on your playlist. A playlist is just a cliché. When you sit down and listen to music, real music, it is a transformative experience. It's not just you liking it. You understand and you value the music. That's a different kind of listening experience. It's just what we want people to do. We want them to sit down and listen to the music because it's a language and it's an experience and it says things and it represents things. So the one thing that I want listeners to do and readers to do is sit down and listen to some great music."

And while the series of CDs that the Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra is performing and producing is about giving Black composers the exposure that is their due, the music is not just for Black folks.

"We want people to sit down and listen to music," Banfield emphasized. "It doesn't matter if it is from a Martian or someone who is Japanese or someone from Cuba. We want, as musicians, for people to listen to music because it is the universal language. People listen to the music and they go 'Wow' and they hear the beauty and the rhythms. Musicians want people to listen to music."

And Patrice Rushen and Dr. William Banfield have written and the Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra has performed music worth listening to. *Harmonies in Black* can be purchased at the Wisconsin Chamber Orchestra's website, <https://wisconsin-chamber-orchestra.square.site/>. It costs \$15.00. It can also be purchased on Amazon and other music outlets.



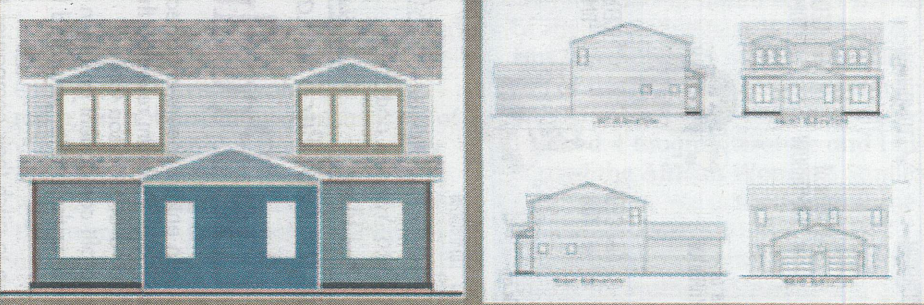
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