

The Boston Musical Intelligencer

*a virtual journal and essential blog of the classical music scene in
greater Boston*

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BSO Soundscapes Series Visits Jamaica Plain

by FRED BOUCHARD

Boston Symphony's Community Chamber Concerts, a lively outreach program of the BSO's education department to urban neighborhoods, brought them on a blustery if mild Saturday afternoon in late November, to St. John's Episcopal Church in Jamaica Plain. The wildly successful conductorless string orchestra *A Far Cry* first tightened its pegs in St. John's neo-Gothic apse, sweetly dominated by a stained glass Black Madonna. Maisha Grant, the CCC's program director, proved a lively emcee, warmly welcoming the audience and introducing the concert of three BSO commissioned pieces by established composers Elena Roussanova, Julius P. Williams, and Andrew List. Coincidentally, they're all professors on the composition faculty at Berklee College and long-time Jamaica Plain residents.

Their three suites reflect aspects of Jamaica Plain's colorful history and variegated geography, while honoring a formidable personality through a personal lens: Williams celebrates a Creole woman historian-musician, Roussanova a composer-conductor of international distinction (and fellow Russian emigré), and List, himself a devoted gardener and birdwatcher, a globally known landscape architect with a sharp eye for nature. The chamber orchestra under the alert baton of BSO assistant conductor Samy Rachid comprised 14 BSO members: five strings, five winds (three doubling), trumpet, three percussion.

Williams's *Songs of My Culture: A Tribute to Maud Cuney Hare* invokes the underground railroad's dynamism and abolitionist spirit by weaving folk styles that pianist-musicologist-activist Hare espoused: African love song, African American spiritual, and Creole folk dance. Elizabeth Klein's pensive flute leads to a richly integrated theme led by brass into a spirited 6/4 dance

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COMMENTS

Martin Snow on *Lang Lang Eventually Warmed Our Heart*

John W. Ehrlich on *BSO, Guerrero Brilliant in Ortiz Revolución diamantina*

Bennett on *BSO, Guerrero Brilliant in Ortiz Revolución diamantina*

Vivian on *MIT Finally Gets its Music Groove*

Bill Horne on *A (Mostly) Sturdy Fellow This Ruddigore*

Ian Wiese on *Chameleons Blended Multiple Worlds*

Mary Runkel on *A (Mostly) Sturdy Fellow This Ruddigore*



Maisha Grant, Julius P. Williams, Zoe Murphy (Robert Torres photo)

composer-multi-instrumentalist-arts-patron and longest-tenured BSO conductor (1924-49). A lyrical quotation from his Double Bass Concerto evokes a snow-covered Jamaica Pond that reminded him of Russian tundra. Melodic motifs elegantly thread between soloists amid rich parallel harmonies; thematic continuity unfolds in tight-woven textures. Benjamin Wright's brisk muted trumpet and a taut snare drum by Samuel Solomon sound the alarm — Bolshevik revolution! — as the young conductor searchingly follows his muse first to Berlin (1920), then Paris, and climactically Boston. The trumpet exalts American ideals of hope and opportunity, strongly felt by immigrants, and a pastoral swell evokes views of the Berkshires from Saranek, his Lenox home, and a walk down a wooded path to his beloved Tanglewood Music Center. Cue a rousing crescendo — timpani roll, Mr. Schulz! — to a Dmitri Tiomkin-esque finale.

List, inspired by Frederick Olmstead's practical philosophy in designing

underlined by Charles Clements' bass and Josh Baker's bassoon, with dashing ostinati. A running string interlude with flute and horn leads to thick-textured harmonies with an oboe theme to the fore; an undulating flute/bassoon susurrus underscores unusual unisons and hymnic cadences. An off-accented motif breaks in for timpani and horn, as vying voices call and respond on an amiable rustic theme, when all cohere at a rousing finale. I felt flashes of Roy Harris's communal fervor and Carlos Chavez's piquant pulse.

In A Journey to a New Land: An Homage to Serge

Koussevitsky, Roussanova deftly explores an expansive post-romantic filmscape in tracing career highlights of the

steve wiger on [*Chameleons Blended Multiple Worlds*](#)

[*David Deveau on MIT Finally Gets its Music Groove*](#)

Geo. on [*MIT Finally Gets its Music Groove*](#)

Rob Schmieder on [*Daring Duo Delivers*](#)

Don Drewecki on [*BPO Illuminates Strauss and Mahler*](#)

Boston's signature serpentine park/waterway system, focuses his tripartite suite on key geographic and archeological features of the Emerald Necklace: road, pond, flints.

“Compression:” Man and machine ally and tussle with Ma Nature to create fresh, integrated naturalistic spaces along the Jamaica way. Strings vie with brass and winds in a bustling, dissonant amalgam; John Snider's French horn eventually rules over woodblocks



Andrew List greets audience member (Robert Torres photo)



Samy Rachid conducting a Chamber Orchestra at St. John's Episcopal (Robert Torres photo)

and pizzicato strings.

“Release”: Man seeks an evening of refuge and contemplation admiring Jamaica Pond's serene wildlife. In artful orchestration, with oblique nods to

Igor's *Rite: Part II*, List pits Klein's alto flute over teetering muted strings, lightly countered with horn and bassoon. Mickey Katz' cello rises over muted brass and sustained vibraphone. The mood shifts as Andrew Sandwick's bass clarinet incites genial sectional interplay and dawn awakens to the yearning of Andrew van der Paardt's English horn.

"Surprise" explores List's own imagined visions of a Native American hunting party as he handles Arnold Arboretum's trove of prehistoric arrowheads and tools. Ensemble daydreaming gives way to a stark trek with rolling timpani and tossed-about ostinati: a raw horn gallops over wind glissandi, a colliding of hunter and prey brings an abrupt conclusion. Bravos all around!

BSO Community Chamber Concerts (2024-5) [HERE](#)

Fred Bouchard, lifelong part-time journalist, wrote about jazz for Downbeat Magazine and Jazz Times, wine and spirits for Massachusetts Beverage Business and Middlesex News, travel for Fodor's Boston and Boston Phoenix, nature and birdwatching for Brookline Tab and Belmont Citizens Forum. He writes occasionally for The New York City Jazz Record and Belmont Citizens Forum. He was associate professor in liberal arts, teaching music journalism, college writing, and American literature at Berklee College (2001-15), and sang second tenor in choral groups (1955-2000).

Comments Off

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