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Conservatory

Concert Program

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Welcome to NEC!

I am thrilled to share New England Conservatory's 2024-25 concert season—a celebration of the power of music to connect and inspire one another.

Whether you are seated in one of our concert halls or watching online, we hope you are uplifted by the performances of our students, faculty, and guest artists.

Above all, we thank you for your support of our students as they cultivate their artistry and contribute to the world through music.

Andrea Kalyn
President

West African Art Music Festival

NEC Chamber Orchestra

Donald Palma, artistic director

Wednesday, February 12, 2025

7:30 p.m.

NEC's Jordan Hall

This performance is part of the NEC West African Art Music Festival, hosted by Felicia Sandler and the NEC Music Theory Department, and in celebration of Black History Month.

The festival takes place between February 12–14.

Learn more about upcoming festival events at [Schedule of Events, West African Arts Music Festival](#)

PROGRAM

Edward Elgar
(1857–1934)

Serenade for Strings in E Minor, op. 20 (1892)

Allegro piacevole
Larghetto
Allegretto

Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson
(1932–2004)

Sinfonietta No. 1 (1976)

Sonata Allegro
Song Form: Largo
Rondo: Allegro furioso

Intermission

**Olufela Obafunmilayo “Fela”
Sowande**
(1905–1987)

African Suite (1944)

Joyful Day
Nostalgia
Onipe
Lullaby
Akinla

NEC Chamber Orchestra
Donald Palma, artistic director

<i>Violin</i>	<i>Viola</i>	<i>Bass</i>
Darwin Chang ‡	John Harry Clark §	Cailin Singleton
June Chung §	Wednesday Hsu *	
Lingyu Dong **	Peter Jablokow	<i>Harp</i>
Michael Fisher	Jeonghwan Yoon ‡	Shaylen Joos
Evan Johanson ‡‡		
Hojung Kwon §§	<i>Cello</i>	<i>Principal players</i>
Seungwon Park *	Jihyeuk Choi	* Elgar
Caroline Smoak	Lexine Feng	‡ Perkinson
Yixiang Wang	Xinyue Zhu	§ Sowande
		Double symbol for principal 2 nd violin

Orchestra Department

Hugh Wolff

Stanford and Norma Jean Calderwood Director of Orchestras

Marjorie Apfelbaum	David Loebel	Jordan Lau
<i>Director of Performance</i>	<i>Associate Director of</i>	<i>Student Librarian</i>
<i>Administration</i>	<i>Orchestras</i>	
Donald Palma	Andrés Almirall	
<i>Artistic Director of</i>	<i>Performance Librarian</i>	
<i>Chamber Orchestra</i>		

Elgar *Serenade for Strings in E Minor, op. 20*

Edward Elgar was one of the leading figures in what has come to be known as the “second English Renaissance”, and he was the first English composer since Henry Purcell (d. 1695) of truly international standing. But all of that still lay in the future when he wrote the *Serenade*. Elgar was a fine violinist and spent most of his early career as a performer, but beginning in the late 1880s he began to focus increasingly on composition. His reputation grew slowly, until the triumphant premieres of his *Enigma Variations* (1899) and the oratorio *The Dream of Gerontius* (1900). The *Serenade* is a much smaller work and seems to have been a revision of an earlier set of pieces he had composed in 1888. Much of his earliest orchestral music is light fare intended for small salon and dance orchestras, but this is a much more substantial piece, in the

tradition of the earlier Brahms and Dvořák serenades. Years later, Elgar described it as one of his personal favorites.

Elgar's background as a violinist allowed him to write particularly effective and idiomatic music for strings, and he described the *Serenade*—with tongue firmly in cheek—as “very stringy in effect.” It is in three movements, beginning with wistful music marked *Allegro piacevole* (a “pleasing” *Allegro*). There is an underlying note of sadness in the main theme heard at the outset, and Elgar sets against this a more lilting middle section with brief solo turns for the principal violin. The long central *Larghetto* begins with an introduction that adapts ideas from the opening movement, but Elgar then introduces a gorgeous Romantic theme that is spun out in the same patient way as in his more famous “Nimrod” movement from the *Enigma Variations*. There is a brief contrasting interlude before this theme returns in the full orchestra. The movement ends in a whisper. The brief closing movement, *Allegretto*, returns to the *Serenade's* opening mood, but in a more dancelike character.

Perkinson *Sinfonietta No. 1*

American composer Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson earned BM and MM degrees in composition from the Manhattan School of Music in the 1950s, a time of great division in American classical music. Proponents of extreme experimentalism dismissed the tastes of the general public and endeavored to keep classical music composition strictly within the academy. Provocative essays such as Milton Babbitt's “Who cares if you listen?” circulated at the same time that traditional works by composers such as Ludwig van Beethoven were becoming further cemented into a classical music canon aimed at pleasing the public.

Named after the influential Black British composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875–1912), Perkinson enjoyed a multi-faceted musical career that expanded far beyond these conflicting viewpoints about the function of classical music. When asked to define Black music in an interview for the 1978 book *The Black Composer Speaks*, Perkinson said: “I cannot define Black music. I could say that it is a music that has its genesis in the Black psyche or the Black social life, but it is very difficult to say what Black music really is. There are kinds of Black music, just as there are kinds of other musics.” Indeed, his rich musical career encompassed a vast array of classical, jazz, dance, pop, film, and television music.

In 1954, when he was just twenty-two years old, Perkinson composed *Sinfonietta No. 1*. Premiered in 1966, the work is a unique fusion of influences from baroque counterpoint, classical forms, American romantic harmonies, blues, and spirituals. The opening *Sonata Allegro* movement mixes elements of sonata form, the most common first-movement form in the Classical and Romantic periods. The movement also contains imitative counterpoint in the style of Johann Sebastian Bach.

The “*Song Form: Largo*” is the second of three movements and features carefully controlled dissonances and soaring lyrical melodies. Ambiguous meters, a disrupted rhythmic flow, and a driving pulse are the defining characteristics of the third movement. This movement is written in the Classical rondo form, in which the

opening section of music is consistently repeated between contrasting themes.

Sowande *African Suite*

“Fela” Sowande is now generally acknowledged as the most important twentieth-century West African composer of concert music and performer of jazz.”¹ Olufela (Fela) Obafunmilayo Sowande was a prolific composer, with numerous works for chorus, solo voice, and organ as well as several for orchestra. Sowande’s *African Suite*, composed in 1944 for strings and harp, is a rich exemplar of an intercultural work – a composition that reflects features from more than one culture. In this case, the work fuses African musical elements with the Western European features Sowande grew up hearing in British-colonized Nigeria. Nigeria gained independence in the Fall of 1960, a good sixteen years after the premiere of the work on this program. These European elements were first encountered by Sowande in the Nigerian Anglican church (his father was a priest), and then also from his studies in London at the Royal College of Organists where he earned his diploma as a performer.

The suite is in five movements, and apart from the second movement which is completely original to the composer, the other four movements are based on West African melodies. Two movements draw directly on Nigerian traditional song – the third and fifth movements: Lullaby, and Akinla. The first movement and fourth movements incorporate original melodies composed by Ghanaian composer Ephraim Amu (1899-1995): Joyful Day is based on Amu’s *Enne ye anigye da*, and Onipe, on Amu’s choral work by the same name. For any who wish to hear the original songs, they are songs in Vol. 1 of Amu’s complete works, and available for listening here (<https://amuscoreproject.com>). Sowande is often referred to as the Father of Nigerian Art Music, and Amu holds the comparable distinction in his native Ghana. *African Suite* was premiered by the BBC Orchestra and broadcast on BBC Radio shortly after its composition.

– Felicia Sandler

Tonight’s program is part of a wider festival happening at NEC this week (Feb. 12-14, 2025): West African Art Music @ NEC! Our guest scholar for the week is Prof. Olabode Omojola whose work on Sowande looms large in the discipline and from whom much of the information in this note was gleaned.² Please check out the other events and join us as you are able. <https://necmusic.edu/on-campus/performances-events/west-african-art-music-festival/>

¹ Olabode Omojola, “Black Diasporic Encounters: A Study of the Music of Fela Sowande,” in *Black Music Research Journal*, 2007, Vol. 27(2):141.

² Ibid, and Olabode Omojola, *Nigerian Art Music*, IFRA, 1995.

The NEC Chamber Orchestra was created to provide the students with an opportunity to apply the principals of chamber music in a small orchestral setting. The participants are chosen by audition at the beginning of the academic year and remain together throughout. As the ensemble rehearses and performs without a conductor, leadership responsibilities are rotated for every work performed. This affords the students an opportunity to develop communication skills, take responsibility for musical decisions and broaden their aural and score reading capabilities. Participation in the program also allows them to explore a wide range of the incredibly rich chamber orchestra literature.

Donald Palma

Artistic Director

Donald Palma has an active career as double bassist, conductor, and educator. A native New Yorker, Don attended at the Juilliard School and at the age of nineteen joined Leopold Stokowski's American Symphony Orchestra. As a member of the newly formed contemporary music ensemble, Speculum Musicae, he went on to win the Naumburg Competition and secure management with Young Concert Artists. A founding member of the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, Don has toured the globe and recorded over fifty compact discs for Deutsche Grammophone, including the Grammy Award winning Stravinsky CD, *Shadow Dances*. Don has also been a member of the Los Angeles Philharmonic and played Principal Bass in the National Arts Centre Orchestra under Trevor Pinnock. He played principal bass for Leonard Bernstein on his recording of *West Side Story* and was a featured artist on Kathleen Battle's recording, *Grace*. As a performer devoted to contemporary music, he has played and conducted dozens of premieres and recordings of important works. Elliott Carter's *Figment III*, Mario Davidovsky's *Synchronism No. 11*, and Charles Wuorinen's *Spin-Off* are among the many works composed for him. He has conducted three critically acclaimed CDs of American music with the Odense Symphony in Denmark. Don has conducted the Xalapa Symphony, the Bridgeport Symphony, at the Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center and at the Teatro Colon in Buenos Aires. He recorded Stravinsky's *L'histoire du soldat* with Rogers Waters narrating which was released by SONY in 2018. Don also appears with Orpheus on Wayne Shorter's *Emanon*, which won a 2018 Grammy. He frequently performs with Mistral, the Walden Chamber Players, at the Bridgeton Chamber Music Festival, the White Mountains Festival and is Music Director of the Symphony-by-the-Sea in Beverly, MA.

Symphonic Music at New England Conservatory

Stanford and Norma Jean Calderwood Director of Orchestras Hugh Wolff is joined by Associate Director of Orchestras David Loebel, Chamber Orchestra founder Donald Palma, and a rich array of guest conductors and coaches for dozens of FREE orchestral concerts in NEC's Jordan Hall this year.

Visit necmusic.edu for complete and updated concert information:

NEC Symphony, Hugh Wolff and Tianyi Ren '25 MM conductors

Wagner *Prelude and Liebestod* from *Tristan and Isolde*; Debussy *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*; Kerr ('25 MM) *Desolate Void, Ecstatic Flight*; Elgar *Enigma Variations*
Wednesday, March 5, 2025 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

New Music Ensemble, Jacob Joyce, conductor

Gruber *Charivari*; Balch *all around the sea blazes gold*; Mazzoli *These Worlds Within Us*; Saariaho *Semafor*; Wagner *Limbic Fragments*; Ligeti *Romanian Concerto*
Wednesday, March 12, 2025 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

NEC Baroque Orchestra, Guy Fishman, director

Wednesday, April 2, 2025 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

NEC Chamber Orchestra, Donald Palma, artistic director

Say *Chamber Symphony, op. 62*; Honegger *Symphony No. 2*
Wednesday, April 9, 2025 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

NEC Philharmonia and Symphonic Choir, Hugh Wolff, conductor

Brahms *Ein deutsches Requiem*
Wednesday, April 16, 2025 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

NEC Opera: Monteverdi "L'Incoronazione de Poppea"

Joshua Major, director; Tim Ribchester, conductor
Wednesday-Saturday, April 16-19, 2025 at 7:30 p.m.
Plimpton Shattuck Black Box Theatre

NEC Symphony, David Loebel and Jherrard Hardeman '25 MM, conductors

Brahms *Tragic Overture*; Tomer Rozen '25 MM *Orchestral Overture*;
Brahms *Violin Concerto*
Wednesday, April 23, 2025 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

NEC Philharmonia, Hugh Wolff, conductor

Tan Dun *Fanfare Overture*; Dvořák concerto; Stravinsky *Le sacre du printemps*
Wednesday, April 30, 2025 at 7:30 p.m., Jordan Hall

NEC Lab Orchestra

Timothy Ren '25 MM, Jherrard Hardeman '25 GD, and Clancy Ellis '26 GD,
conductors

Thursday, May 1, 2025 at 8:00 p.m., Brown Hall

Support the future of music at NEC!

Your gift to The NEC Fund has a direct and immediate impact on student scholarships, NEC's world-class faculty, and a collaborative and innovative learning environment rooted in the highest level of musical excellence.

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Food and drink are not allowed in the concert hall,
and photography and audio or video recording are prohibited.
Assistive listening devices are available for all Jordan Hall concerts;
contact the head usher or house manager on duty or inquire at the Coat Room.
Latecomers will be seated at the discretion of management.

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Thank you to our generous community of donors who remain committed to elevating the NEC experience and make it possible for our students to continue their artistic pursuits. Every gift to **The NEC Fund** supports all pillars of an NEC education, from scholarship to community engagement, to our world-renowned faculty.



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