



Spilling Over

Music Inspired by the
Life and Works of Bob Thompson

black moon
TRIO



Program Description

In partnership with the Smart Museum of Art at University of Chicago, Black Moon Trio offers a rich reconsideration of the visionary African American painter, Bob Thompson. The program traces Thompson's brief but prolific transatlantic career, examining his formal inventiveness and his engagement with universal themes of collectivity, bearing witness, struggle, and justice. The musical selections are curated to mirror the inspirations of Thompson's own art including the sounds of the New York City jazz scene, new representations of the past, the struggles of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement, and the richness of artists of color.

Designed for visual art and music lovers alike, *Spilling Over* centers Bob Thompson's work within expansive art historical narratives and ongoing dialogues about the politics of representation, charting his enduring influence in this interdisciplinary experience.

List of Terms *(A glossary can be found at the end of this guide)*

Abstract Expressionism
Articulation
BIPOC
Character
Civil Rights
Composition
Dynamics
French Horn

Improvisation
Jazz
Melody
Ostinato
Piano
Rhythm
Tempo
Violin

Musical selections may include excerpts from the following:

Suite for the Duo by Billy Strayhorn
Walden Trio by Daniel Schnyder
Filter by Daniel Bernard Roumain
Blackbird by Nina Simone

Un Abrazo para Sharon by Jeff Scott
Jazz Suite for Violin and Piano by David Baker
Linda Deila by George Butcher and Julius Watkins
Pictures at Another Exhibition by Leo Brouwer

Program Notes

Suite for the Duo

Billy Strayhorn (1915-1967)

Originally a distinctive representation of jazz with the French horn, piano and string bass, Billy Strayhorn worked with the French horn-piano duo of Dwiki Mitchell and Willie Ruff on a suite that he originally titled "North by Southwest Suite". Mitchell and Ruff recorded the suite after Strayhorn's passing as 'Suite for the Duo'.



Walden Trio

Daniel Schnyder

Walden Trio was composed in the late 1990s for Lincoln Center Chamber Music french hornist, Robert Routh who premiered it along with violinist Ann Kavafian, and pianist Ann Mc Dermott.

The piece was originally combined with the Brahms Horn Trio, Op. 40 and shares some formal ideals with that composition in order to fit in a program.

Walden refers to Walden Pond outside of Boston, Massachusetts.

- Daniel Schnyder



Filter

Daniel Bernard Roumain (b. 1970)

With Filter, violinist and composer Daniel Bernard Roumain conjures the sound world of hip hop and electronic dance music on the acoustic violin. While spinning blistering virtuosic patterns, the performer is asked to "filter" the violin's coloring by moving the bow "as close to, and as far away from, the bridge as possible."



Blackbird

Nina Simone (1933-2003)

Nina Simone is known for her hauntingly beautiful alto voice. She was a jazz, blues, classical, folk, R&B, and gospel songstress, as well as a civil rights activist. The meaning behind Simone's song, "Blackbird" speaks to the struggles and pain of black women, as black birds. She expresses the pain of feeling unloved and uncared for, not understood. Black women face a triple jeopardy of race, class, and gender oppression, which is detailed by the term intersectionality. Simone's lyrics express the collective pain of many black women, the words of her song speaking for themselves.



Un Abrazo para Sharon

Jeff Scott (b. 1967)

Un Abrazo Para Sharon was commissioned by Madelon and John Grobman in 2005 in honor of Sharon Moe, private teacher of their son, Benjamin Grobman. Many thanks to the Grobman family for their support of my dream and belief in my talent.

Benjamin Grobman's parents were none too shy in confessing the difficulties Sharon would have in lessons with the young student, often having to use popular music, by way show tunes, pop, and jazz to encourage him to practice. The piece musically depicts this relationship.

- Jeff Scott



Linda Delia

George Butcher and Julius Watkins (1921-1977)

Julius Watkins chose to explore the technical and interpretative possibilities of the French horn in jazz, performing with names such as Thelonius Monk, John Coltrane, Miles Davis, and Quincy Jones. Watkins' musical legacy has enabled subsequent generations to discover the versatility of the French horn, an instrument that is particularly well suited to improvisation and the sounds of jazz music.

Founder of the Julius Watkins Sextet, Watkins and his colleagues (including pianist George Butcher) recorded and released *Linda Delia* as part of the LP *Julius Watkins Sextet* in 1954, with the original comprised of bass, drums, french horn, guitar, piano, and tenor saxophone.



Pop Construction from Pictures at Another Exhibition

Leo Brouwer (b. 1939)

Leo's Brouwer's *Pictures At Another Exhibition*, with a title that tips a hat to the Mussorgsky suite of 1874, is presented here for a chamber group of Piano, Horn and Violin. The Cuban composer has created a set of programmatic musical depictions inspired by six works of art ranging from Bosch's *Garden Of Earthly Delights* to Rauschenberg's *Pop Construction*. The pieces are brimming with the vitality and energy of Brouwer's Cuban origins.



Guidelines for Follow-Up Discussion

What type of instrument is a french horn? A violin?

French horn is a brass instrument. Violin is a string instrument.

What do we call a person who writes music?

A composer.

How is classical music similar to other types of music?

Almost all music has a pulse, or a beat you can tap your foot to or dance to, and lots of music uses a rhythmic ostinato. The sounds and instruments may be different, but lots of the parts are the same.

What is chamber music?

Chamber music is when people come together to make music without a leader. A soloist plays music alone. An orchestra follows a conductor. A chamber group is a group of people who make decisions together.

How did the ensemble show different characters?

Different instruments played with different "voices." Each one had a different sound and played something different. Sometimes the characters had dialogue with each other.

How can you tell which musical character is speaking and which is listening?

A musical character who is speaking is playing the melody, or the part of the music that is easy to sing and remember. A character who is listening is playing the accompaniment.

What are some ways composers or artists start making something new?

Composers create plot and action in their stories by creating musical conflict and dialogues between characters, and writing music that helps us think of certain things or feel certain ways.

Ask your student(s) for feedback using some of the following questions or topics

What was your favorite piece and why?

What was your favorite instrument and why?

How did the string instrument make sound?

How did the brass instrument make sound?

The term chamber music refers to...

How might comparing music to visual art be helpful in understanding them?

A few things I have learned about classical music include...

A few things I have learned about how artists create include...

A few things I have learned about BIPOC artists include...

Additional Activities

I See Me: Self Portrait Activity

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ILA6yktWjWK5sOQWWGy3TKrUTciOnmvz/view?usp=share_link

Glossary

Abstract Expressionism - a development of abstract art that originated in New York in the 1940s and 1950s and aimed at subjective emotional expression with particular emphasis on the creative spontaneous act.

Articulation - clarity in the production of successive notes.

BIPOC - stands for Black, Indigenous, and people of color. Pronounced "bye-pock," this is a term specific to the United States, intended to center the experiences of Black and Indigenous groups and demonstrate solidarity between communities of color.

Character - expressive of a specific mood or idea.

Civil Rights - the rights of citizens to political and social freedom and equality.

Composition - a work of music, literature, or art.

Dynamics - the variation in loudness between notes or phrases.

French Horn - a brass instrument with a coiled tube, valves, and a wide bell.

Improvisation - creating and performing (music, drama, art, or verse) spontaneously or without preparation.

Jazz - a type of music of Black American origin characterized by improvisation, syncopation, and usually a regular or forceful rhythm, emerging at the beginning of the 20th century.

Melody - the part of the music that is easy to sing and remember.

Ostinato - a continually repeated musical phrase or rhythm.

Piano - a keyboard musical instrument having wire strings that sound when struck by felt-covered hammers operated from a keyboard.

Rhythm - the placement of sounds in time.

Tempo - the speed or pace of a given piece.

Violin - a stringed musical instrument of treble pitch, played with a horsehair bow.

Additional Online Resources and Information for Exploring Artists of Color

Black Moon Trio
<https://blackmoontrio.com>

Caribbean Cultural Center African Diaspora Institute
<https://cccadi.org/>

d-composed
<https://www.dcomposed.com/>

Music by Black Composers
<https://www.musicbyblackcomposers.org/>

Scott, Jeff
<https://www.musicbyjeffreyscott.com/>

Smart Museum of Art at University of Chicago
<https://smartmuseum.uchicago.edu/>

Sphinx Organization
<https://www.sphinxmusic.org/>

Other Composers of Color to Explore (*not an exhaustive list*)

Ahmed Al Abaca
 Angel Bat Dawid
 Margaret Bonds
 Valerie Coleman
 Samuel Coleridge-Taylor
 Duke Ellington
 Robert Glasper
 Adolphus Hailstork

Quinn Mason
 Jessie Montgomery
 Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson
 Florence Price
 Daniel Bernard Roumain
 Carlos Simon
 William Grant Still

About the Musicians: Black Moon Trio

Black Moon Trio is committed to collaboratively affecting positive change in communities through chamber music. They reimagine the breadth of a horn, violin, and piano trio by showcasing underrepresented voices in their artistic programming and original commissions, inspiring young musicians and non-musicians alike through captivating educational programs, and connecting community members through the arts. By engaging with diverse audiences, youth, and artists of every type, Black Moon Trio works to prove that classical music is for everyone.

Black Moon Trio was founded in 2022 by Parker Nelson, Jeremy Vigil, and Khelsey Zarraga. Each rooted in musical, cultural, and community organizations across the Chicago region, Parker, Jeremy, and Khelsey aim to continue making classical music available and relevant to everyone. Harnessing the experience from years of professional chamber music performance, music-making in social service settings, facilitating workshops at universities, and developing curriculum for youth in schools and community development through music, Black Moon Trio is excited to provide a classical music experience that resonates far beyond the reverberations of a final chord.

Recent projects include *Spilling Over*: a program created in collaboration with the Smart Museum of Art at the University of Chicago inspired by the works of visual artist and activist, Bob Thompson; *Honeybee*: a co-created performance and workshop of Candace Fleming and Eric Rohmann's award-winning children's book, *Honeybee: The Busy Life of Apis Mellifera* promoting the understanding, appreciation, and preservation of honeybees and other migratory pollinators; and *Sow the Seeds*: a collaboration with New York Times Best-Selling author and Chicago-native, Michael Tyler, in an interactive concert and journaling experience for audiences to actively address subjects of wellness and community through music, poetry, and nature guided by Tyler's *Sow the Seeds: A Composition in Verse*.

Reaching thousands of students annually through its arts-integrated educational programs, Black Moon Trio connects K-12 core curricula to vivid, custom-crafted, and interactive musical experiences which challenge students to share and lead. Black Moon Trio has presented performances and residencies at numerous Chicago public schools in partnership with Classical Music Chicago and Ravinia's Reach*Teach*Play program.

Black Moon Trio is ensemble-in-residence at **Brushwood Center at Ryerson Woods**.



About the Author: Bob Thompson

Robert Louis (Bob) Thompson briefly studied medicine at Boston University before enrolling in the studio program at the University of Louisville, which had desegregated in 1951. As an art student, Thompson explored the languages of totemic abstraction then in vogue and developed an extraordinary proficiency in academic drawing. He spent the summer of 1958 in Provincetown, Massachusetts, where he continued his training at the Seong Moy School of Painting and Graphic Arts and forged valuable friendships. Thompson also encountered the work of the recently deceased German émigré artist Jan Müller (1922–1958), whose figurative style pointed him toward new expressive possibilities.

Thompson soon settled in New York City, where he joined fellow artists Allan Kaprow and Red Grooms in some of their first so-called “Happenings,” multimedia performance events. A devotee of jazz, Thompson frequented downtown clubs such as Slugs’ Saloon and the Five Spot Café, where legendary performers including Ornette Coleman, John Coltrane, and Charlie Haden played. These musicians materialize in many of Thompson’s paintings and drawings including Ornette (Birmingham Museum of Art, 1960–61) and Garden of Music (Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art, 1960). This pivotal period was marked by Thompson’s first solo New York City exhibition, and within the next few years his work entered some of the preeminent modern art collections in the United States.

In 1961, Thompson and his wife, Carol, made their first trip to Europe together, spending time in London and Paris and eventually settling in Ibiza. Thompson was able to fully immerse himself in the traditions that formed the core of his practice. While in Spain, he deepened his study of Francisco de Goya (1746–1828), and canvases such as *Untitled* (Colby College Museum of Art, 1962) demonstrate his heady dialogue with *Los Caprichos*, the Spanish artist’s mordantly satirical print series. On a second trip to Europe, the couple settled in Rome, where Thompson died tragically on May 30, 1966, of complications following gallbladder surgery.

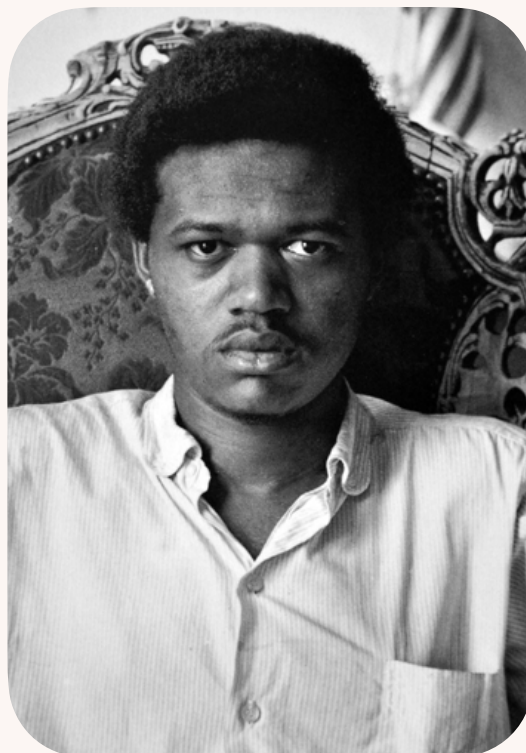
Memorial exhibitions at the New School for Social Research (1969) and the Speed Art Museum (1971) celebrated his life and career. In 1998, Thelma Golden and Judith Wilson mounted a foundational scholarly retrospective of his work at the Whitney Museum of American Art. More recently, paintings by Thompson have featured in group exhibitions such as *Witness: Art and Civil Rights in the Sixties*; *The Color Line: African-American Artists and Segregation*; and *Soul of a Nation: Art in the Age of Black Power*. The Estate of Bob Thompson is represented by Michael Rosenfeld Gallery.

Written by the Colby College Museum of Art.

Above: Bob Thompson in his studio on Rivington Street, NY, c. 1964. © Charles Rotmil.

Learn more about Bob Thompson and view more of his artwork here:

<https://museum-exhibitions.colby.edu/exhibition/bob-thompson-this-house-is-mine/>



About the Collaborator:

Smart Museum of Art at University of Chicago



The Smart Museum of Art at the University of Chicago is a site for rigorous inquiry and exchange that encourages the examination of complex issues through the lens of art objects and artistic practice. Through strong community and scholarly partnerships, the Museum incorporates diverse ideas, identities, and experiences into its exhibitions and collections, academic inquiry, and public programming. The Smart first opened in 1974.