

## Decoda

Clara Lyon, violin  
Sæunn Thorsteinsdóttir, cello  
Catherine Gregory, flute  
Brad Balliett, bassoon  
David Kaplan, piano

**IGOR STRAVINSKY (1882–1971)/JEAN-PHILIPPE RAMEAU (1683–1764):** Reimagined Dance Suite after excerpts from Suite italienne and Les Gentils Airs (arr. Catherine Gregory):

*Les Indes Galantes* (Rameau)  
*Introduzione* (Stravinsky)  
*Serenata* (S.)  
*Tarantella* (S.)  
*La Furstenburg* (R.)  
*Gavotta con due variazioni* (S.)  
*Scherzino* (S.)  
*Tambourin* (R.)  
*Minuetto e Finale* (S.)

Intermission

**VALERIE COLEMAN** (b. 1970):  
Maombi Asante

**ANTONIN DVORAK** (1841-1904):  
Piano Trio No. 4 in e minor, Op. 90 “Dumky”

*Lento maestoso — Allegro quasi doppio movimento*  
*Poco adagio — Vivace non troppo — Vivace*  
*Andante — Vivace non troppo — Allegretto*  
*Andante moderato — Allegretto scherzando — Quasi tempo di marcia*  
*Allegro*  
*Lento maestoso*

## Program Notes

Today's program by Decoda explores the emotional power and complexity of dance music across four centuries and three continents.

### **IGOR STRAVINSKY (1882–1971)/JEAN-PHILIPPE RAMEAU (1683–1764)**

#### **Reimagined Dance Suite after excerpts from Suite italienne and Les Gentils Airs (arr. Catherine Gregory)**

Igor Stravinsky, a figure as central to modernist music as Picasso was to modernist painting, also had an ear for musical idioms of the past, and for his own musical past. Through relentless revision, he often transformed his own work—sometimes for artistic reasons, and sometimes purely for business purposes (the 1945 version of his iconic ballet *The Firebird*, for example, was created solely to retain copyright in the United States).

Stravinsky transformed works of other composers as well, including Johann Sebastian Bach and Carlo Gesualdo, but his most famous transformation occurred in his 1919 ballet *Pulcinella*. Stravinsky had fallen in love with a collection of 18th-century pieces that he believed to be by Giovanni Pergolesi; in fact, it was an anthology of works not only by Pergolesi, but also a host of lesser-known composers including Gallo, Wassenauer, Monza, and Parisotti.

*Pulcinella* marked a watershed moment in Stravinsky's career, launching his second and longest major compositional phase, the so-called neoclassical period. Of the work, Stravinsky wrote: "Pulcinella was my discovery of the past, the epiphany through which the whole of my late work became possible. It was a backward look, of course—the first of many love affairs in that direction—but it was a look in the mirror, too."

The completed ballet *Pulcinella* itself was subject to several transformations by Stravinsky in later years, including versions for both violin and cello with piano accompaniment. Tonight's version is a transformation of the *Suite italienne* (Stravinsky's cello and piano version of *Pulcinella*), transcribed for quintet by Decoda flutist Catherine Gregory—a transformation of a transformation!

As a final level of transformation, Gregory juxtaposes three arrangements of selections from Jean Philippe Rameau's compilation *Les Gentils Airs* between the Stravinsky movements. *Les Gentils Airs* is roughly contemporary with Pergolesi's original pieces, and shares Stravinsky's sparkling sense of abandon and celebration.

*(originally by Brad Balliett, published by Carnegie Hall; adapted and edited by David Kaplan)*

### **VALERIE COLEMAN (b. 1970)**

#### ***Maombi Asante***

The composer Valerie Coleman (b. 1970) first came to prominence as a flutist, performing widely as a recitalist and with the Imani Winds Quintet, of which she is a founding member. Her steady but gradual pivot to composition has been remarkable-- she was named one of the "Top 35 Women Composers" by The Washington Post, and was Performance Today's 2020 Classical Woman of the Year.

Coleman describes her short work *Maombi Asante* as “an anthem of joy.” In the original Swahili, its title literally means “prayer of thanks”, and the work borrows from traditional African dance rhythms. An infectious groove takes over the violin and cello, while the flute radiates pure and exultant happiness and gratitude. Of all the dance inspired music on today’s program, this is perhaps the most unambiguous—no darkness threatens to unravel the celebratory emotional affect.

Decoda and Coleman have an extended history of collaboration-- in 2018, Decoda commissioned a new work, *Revelry*, which was premiered in Carnegie Hall, and will soon be released as the title track of a disc on the Bright Shiny Things label.

(David Kaplan)

**ANTONIN DVORAK (1841-1904)**  
**Piano Trio No. 4 in e minor, Op. 90, *Dumky***

Whereas *Maombi Asante* shines with pure optimism and gratitude, the subtitle *Dumky* signifies a complex and ambivalent emotional world. Originally from Ukrainian, the term is a diminutive of *duma*, meaning an epic ballad or poem expressing the suffering of an oppressed people. However, romantic era composers from numerous Slavic countries appropriated the genre into a musical form that interspersed slow brooding lamentation with jubilant, ecstatic celebration.

Dvorak’s body of work threads the needle through steadfast Germanic traditionalism, ethnographic forays into folk traditions, and harmonic and formal progressivism. The *Dumky* Trio is ingenious in its perfect combination of these three disparate impulses.

The way in which it combines jaggedly contrasting dances into a coherent whole recalls Schumann’s many sets of dance and character pieces for solo piano (*Carnaval*, *Papillon*, *Davidsbündlertänze*, etc.). Nevertheless, Dvorak pivots from Germanic to Slavic by foregrounding the folk lineage of the *dumka* material with driving rhythms, crash dissonances, and evocations of traditional instruments such as the cimbalom (the resonant, percussive dulcimer). Like the worldly scholar returning to their hometown, it plays up its local dialect at the village tavern: the work feigns to be less coherent and sophisticated than it really is. The apparent disjointedness of the form is therefore purposeful: according to Czech music scholar Michael Berckerman, Dvorak “allows each of the six dumky to stand fully realized on its own.” Despite its folksy manner, however, the Trio’s masterful balance of contrasting material, the virtuosic and expressive utilization of the three instruments (especially the cello!), and the artful threading of material throughout show its underlying craft and architecture.

The *Dumky* Trio has always been very ingratiating to audiences, making it one of Dvorak’s most popular works ever since the premiere in 1891. The composer performed the piece himself in over forty concerts he gave throughout Moravia and Bohemia as a farewell tour before moving to New York to lead the new “National Conservatory of America.”

(David Kaplan)