

A photograph of George Walker, an African American man with glasses, wearing a light-colored suit jacket and a dark tie. He is seated at a piano, looking down at the keys. The background shows a lamp and curtains. The image has a blue tint and is overlaid with various colorful horizontal bars and patterns.

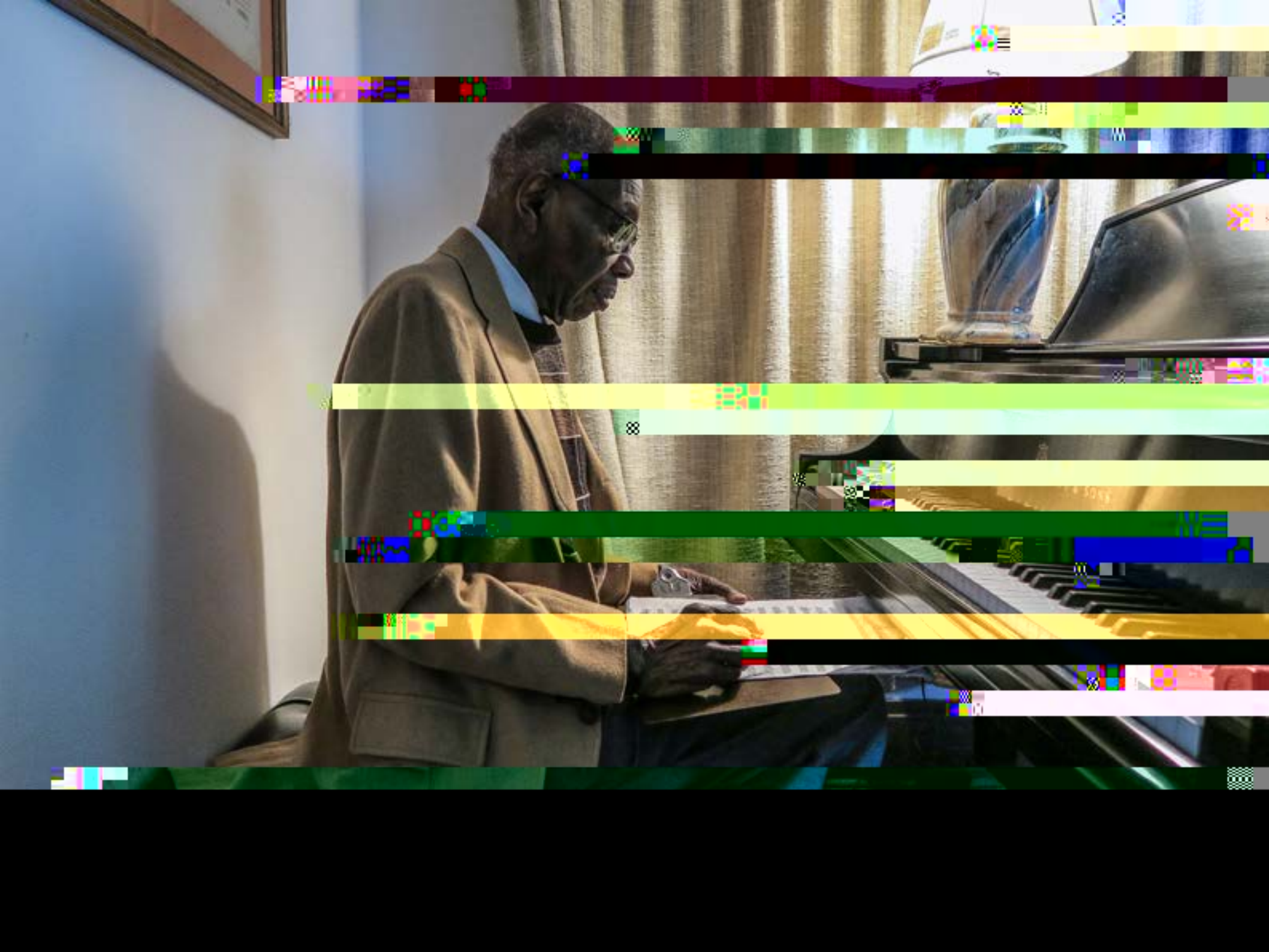
GEORGE WALKER

Five Sinfonias

National
Symphony
Orchestra

The
Kennedy
Center

Gianandrea Noseda



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ALKE
Fivonias

National Symphony Orchestra

Gianandrea Noseda, conductor

George Walker (1922–2018)

Sinfonia No. 1 (1984, revised 1996)

- | | | | |
|----|-----|------|------|
| 1. | i. | = 92 | 6:20 |
| 2. | ii. | = 60 | 5:08 |

Sinfonia No. 2 (1990)

- | | | | |
|----|------|--|------|
| 3. | i. | = 76 | 6:43 |
| 4. | ii. | Lamentoso e quasi senza misura. = 63
Aaron Goldman, flute | 3:16 |
| 5. | iii. | = 116 | 5:56 |

Sinfonia No. 3 (2002)

- | | | | |
|----|------|---------|------|
| 6. | i. | = 76 | 5:20 |
| 7. | ii. | = 54 | 4:35 |
| 8. | iii. | = 72-88 | 4:05 |

- | | | | |
|----|---|--|------|
| 9. | Sinfonia No. 4, “Strands” (2011) | | 9:42 |
|----|---|--|------|



- | | | | |
|-----|---|--|-------|
| 10. | Sinfonia No. 5, “Visions” (2016) | | 14:12 |
|-----|---|--|-------|

Shana Oshiro, soprano | DeMarcus Bolds, tenor | Daniel J. Smith, bass-baritone
V Savoy McIlwain, bass-baritone | Kevin Thompson, bass

Total: 65:17

Sinfonia No. 1 (1984, revised 1996)

In January 2022, the National Symphony Orchestra and Music Director Gianandrea Noseda began performing and recording the complete cycle of George Walker's five sinfonias, in celebration of the composer's 100th birthday. Remembering and honoring the music of George Walker is particularly special for the National Symphony Orchestra given the mutual connection to Washington, D.C. and its unique history of collaboration and commissions.

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"I've always thought in universal terms, not just what is Black, or what is American, but simply what has quality," George Walker said in an interview on the occasion of his 90th birthday in 2012. British critic Tom Service, writing in *Gramophone* in 2015, cited Hindemith and Stravinsky as two of Walker's "musical heroes," but

stressed that the American composer "has created a distinctive world that is modernist and multifaceted yet richly communicative."

This distinguished composer, pianist, and educator, who won the Pulitzer Prize for his orchestral song cycle *Homecoming* in 1996, published a fascinating memoir in which he recounted a lifetime of successes and honors and also spoke quite frankly about his musical likes and dislikes. He had studied piano with Rudolf Serkin and composition with Samuel Barber's teacher Rosario Scalero at the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia, and first made his name with the often performed *Homecoming*, a creative response to Barber's *Homecoming*. As a composer, he always remained true to his classical roots and built an oeuvre of symphonic and chamber works that earned him the esteem not only of the profession but of a wide audience as well.

Between 1984 and 2016, Walker composed five sinfonias. The first of these, commissioned by the Fromm Foundation, was premiered by the Berkshire Music Center Orchestra under Gunther Schuller at Tanglewood on August 1, 1984. It is a compact work in two movements, in which moments of great energy and powerful outbursts alternate with calm, lyrical sections. There are massive, block-like chords for the brass and wild percussion passages, but also sensitive violin solos and agitated outbursts for the clarinet and the flute, among others. In turn dramatic and tender, the work covers a lot of emotional ground in just over 10 minutes, and ends with a climactic statement for the entire orchestra.

- Notes by Peter Laki

Handwritten musical score on aged paper, featuring multiple staves with notes, rests, and clefs. The word "Begin" is written at the top of the page. The notation includes various musical symbols such as treble clefs, notes, rests, and beams. The paper shows signs of age and wear, with some discoloration and faint markings.



## Sinfonia No. 2 (1990)

George Walker never wanted to be seen simply as a Black composer. He refused to be pigeonholed in that way, and while he occasionally made allusions to Negro spirituals in his music, his mature style is firmly rooted in European modernism. Some critics have detected influences of Stravinsky and Hindemith, but the fiercely independent Walker was, essentially, going his own way and did not profess allegiance to any “camp.”

Sinfonia No. 2 was commissioned by the Koussevitzky Foundation, one of the most prestigious organizations devoted to the promotion of contemporary music, honoring the memory of Serge Koussevitzky, long-time music director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Walker’s work was first performed by Neeme Järvi and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra in 1993. The composer provided the following concise

description:

The first movement begins with a four-note motive for full orchestra. An ascending melodic line in the violins continues in the woodwinds. Repeated notes in the brass terminate that section. In the next section an extended melodic line beginning in the celli and contra basses and moving to violins, woodwinds, and horns leads to a contrasting four-note motive stated by an oboe. This becomes the genesis of a new section that climaxes with a restatement of the four-note motive from the opening of the movement. Rhythmic similarities to this material appear with intervallic alterations. A flurry of notes in the strings and woodwinds subsides quickly to a sustained “D” in the violins that is punctuated by pizzicati in the lower strings. An ascending melodic line culminates in a tutti of repeated notes. A brief coda closes the movement

quietly. The second movement, marked “Lamentoso e quasi senza misura,” begins as a flute solo before a chord played by four celli and a guitar support the florid figuration in the flute part. With the return of the initial segment of the flute solo, three more celli and a double bass are added to the orchestration. The rhythmic impulse of five notes played initially by the English horn and bass clarinet are the core elements that can be identified in the third movement. The subtle emergence of an eighth-note pattern with a steady pulse provides the basis for the imposition of rhythmic fragments above it. Interposed between these sections are brief sustained moments that interrupt the foot-tapping insistence of the bass line of eighth notes. The brilliant conclusion of the work incorporates the five notes heard at the beginning of the movement.  
Notes by Peter Laki







## **Sinfonia No. 3 (2002)**

George Walker's third sinfonia was premiered a decade after the second, and once more by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra (conducted, in this case, by Andrey Boreyko). But it was composed a full 22 years after its predecessor. The fact that it had to wait a much shorter time for its first performance certainly speaks to Walker's growing recognition as an American master.

The present work finds the octogenarian composer at the height of his creative powers, as vigorous and full of energy as ever. In three compact movements following the traditional fast-slow-fast outline, it is a technically challenging and emotionally charged composition, in turns majestic and tender, agitated and more relaxed. An energetic opening sets the stage for an austere first movement, dominated by massive blocks of chords. The middle movement starts out with some lyrical woodwind

lines, yet its elementary melodic gestures build up to a dramatic high point, followed by a resolution of the tensions. The final movement is tumultuous and intense throughout. Unlike many of his younger colleagues, Walker remained a committed modernist in his harmonic language. As the British critic Tom Service has written: [Walker's music] "has a sharp-edged clarity in its modernist dissonances and angularity, and yet you feel his essential desire to communicate with his audiences throughout."

- Notes by Peter Laki



George  
WALKER

# Sinfonia No. 4, “Strands” (2011)

George Walker celebrated the year of his 90th birthday with the premiere of a brand new work, Sinfonia No. 4, “Strands”. The commission came from a consortium of orchestras, including the National, Cincinnati, New Jersey, and Pittsburgh symphony orchestras, with a grant from Meet the Composer, and was premiered by the New Jersey Symphony in March 2012 under the direction of Jacques Lacombe.

The subtitle refers to the “strands” from two spirituals, “There is a Balm in Gilead” and “Roll, Jordan, Roll” that the composer wove into the fabric of his composition. Walker’s use of these quotes is rather subtle and somewhat reminiscent of the way Charles Ives worked with church hymns in many of his works: the melodies are fragmented, transformed, and hinted at more than presented in full. Their “strands” are integrated into a rhythmically vibrant

and colorfully orchestrated one-movement work, projecting high energy and constant excitement.

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Commenting on his piece, Walker offered the following pointers:

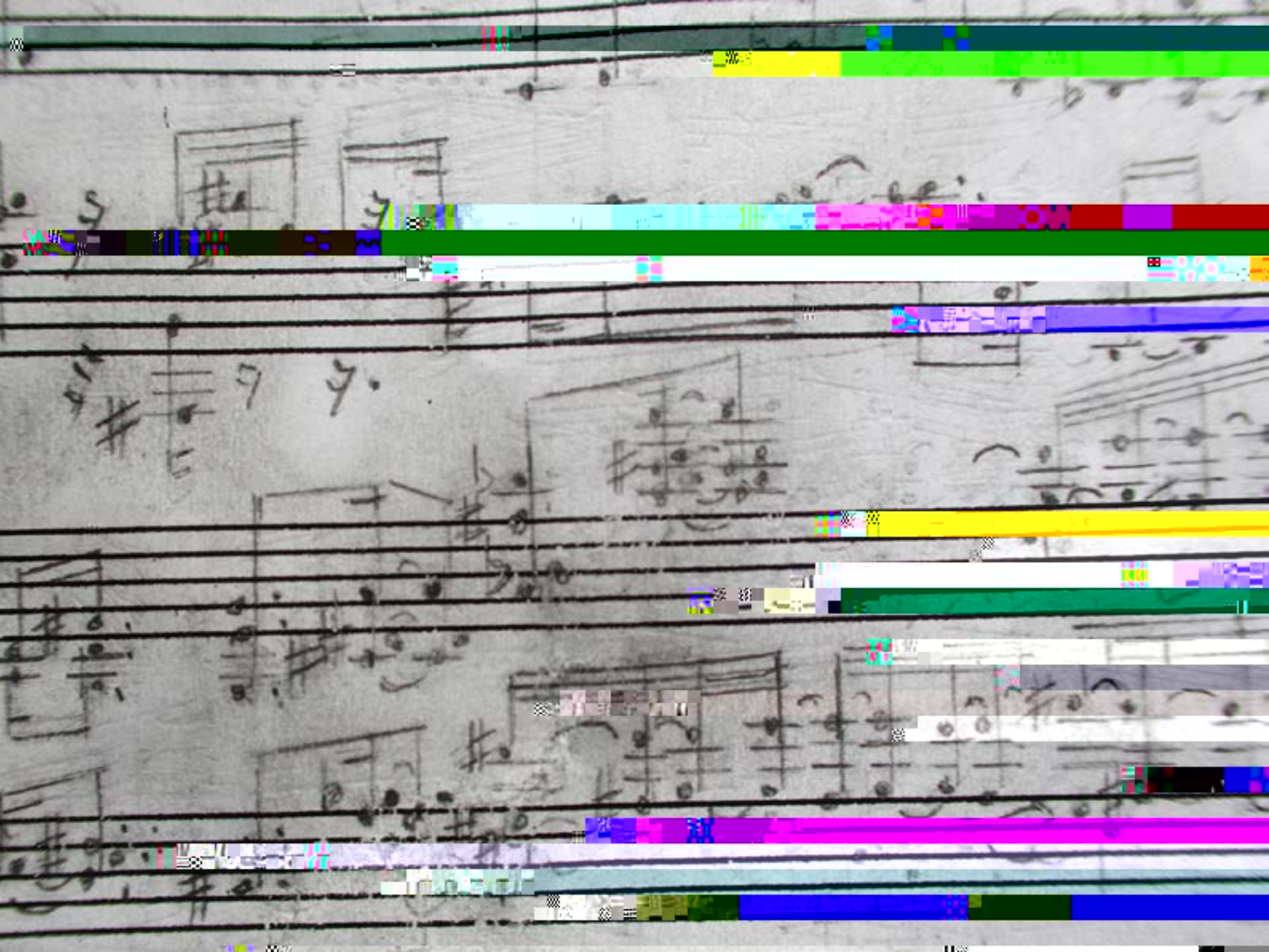
The Sinfonia begins with an introduction that consists of several sections before the principal theme is stated. This theme recurs several times. The quotation of the first spiritual provides a pensive relief from the proclamatory nature of the theme that precedes it.

The briefer snippet of the second spiritual is a rhapsodic. The following section consists of a melodic bass line over which fragmented interjections are superimposed. A similar section recurs, combining with the opening phrase of the second spiritual played by the piano

during the course of the work. The bass material appears briefly in the coda.

- Notes by Peter Laki





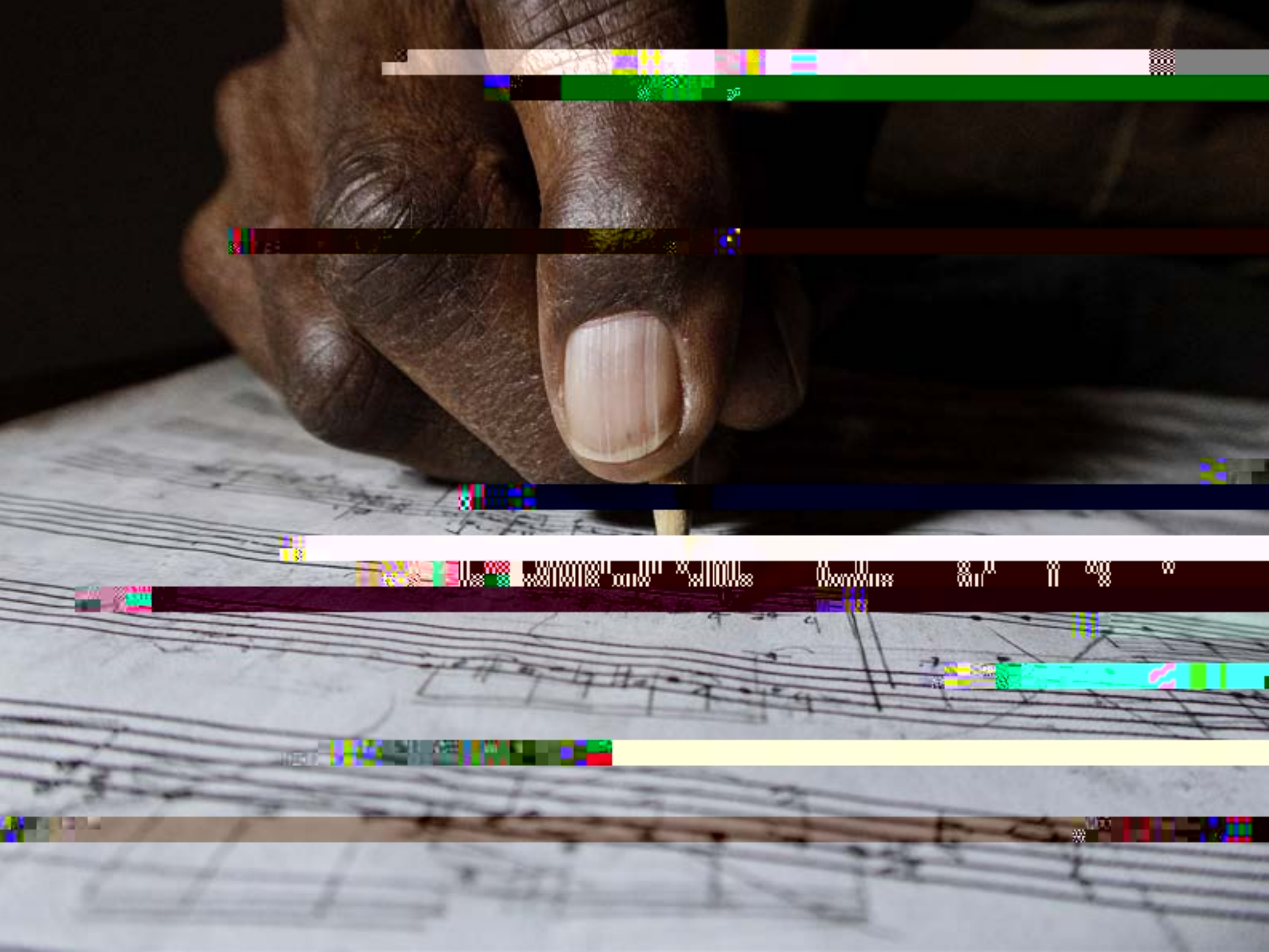


The last of George Walker's *sinfonias* is an unrelentingly modernist work from the pen of the 94-year-old composer who seemed to become ever more radical as he grew older. On June 27, 2015, a 21-year-old white supremacist

# Sinfonia No. 5, “Visions” (2016)

## Texts

1. **Drink, drink to me!**  
*Wò d b Bè n Jòn on*  
Tenor and bass-baritones
2. **Sit quietly on the pebbled shore as waves crest  
high and peak  
And dolphins leap and soar near reefs  
Dim, dark and bleak**  
*Wò d b Sè hen Fò e*  
Soprano and tenor
3. **I dream**  
*H m n*  
Tenor
4. **The sun sets deep into the sea  
And ships afar glide stealthily**  
*S i i a l*  
Soprano and tenor
5. **A lighthouse beams a stream of light that  
Parts the misty shroud of starless night.**  
Bass-baritones
6. **I see the harbors and the ports where men enslaved  
Were beaten, chained, auctioned and bought.**  
Soprano, tenor, bass-baritones, and bass
7. **Arma virumque cano!**  
Bass
8. **And it was so!**  
Tenor



# **George Walker (1922–2018)**

A native of Washington, D.C., George



Prize for music (April 1996), for his composition *1* for Voice and Orchestra.

Walker was a distinguished member of several faculties, including that of the Dalcroze School of Music, the New School for Social Sciences, Smith College, the University of Colorado, and the Peabody Institute of Johns Hopkins University. In 1969, he was appointed Professor of Music at Rutgers University, where he served as chairman of the music department. In 1975, he was appointed the first Distinguished Minority Chair at the University of Delaware. Walker retired from Rutgers in 1992 as professor emeritus. He was awarded honorary doctorates from Lafayette College (1981), Oberlin College (1983), the Curtis Institute of Music (1996), Montclair State University (1996), and Bloomfield College (1996). In 1998, Walker received a Letter of

Distinction from the American Music Center for his significant contributions to the field of contemporary American music, and in 1999 he was elected to the Academy of Arts and Letters. Walker published over 80 works, which comprise music for orchestra, chamber ensembles, chorus, piano, string quartet, voice, and organ. His music has been performed by virtually every major American orchestra.

George Walker died on August 23, 2018, in Montclair, New Jersey at the age of 96.

Biography by Ingrid Monson



# Gianandrea Noseda

## Conductor

Gianandrea Noseda is one of the world's most sought-after conductors, equally recognized for his artistry in both the concert hall and opera house. Since 2017, he has served as Music Director of the National Symphony Orchestra.

Noseda's artistic leadership has inspired the NSO and reinvigorated it both at home at the Kennedy Center and beyond via media projects and on tour to New York where in 2019 and 2023, the NSO earned rave reviews both at Lincoln Center and Carnegie Hall. The artistic partnership continues to flourish with the NSO recording label distributed by LSO Live for which Noseda also records as Principal Guest Conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra.

In September 2021, Noseda began his tenure as General Music Director of the Zurich Opera House where the centerpiece of his tenure is a new Ring Cycle.

Noseda has conducted the most important orchestras and at the leading opera houses and festivals including the Berlin Philharmonic, Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Cleveland Orchestra, Edinburgh Festival, La Scala, Munich Philharmonic, The Metropolitan Opera Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, NHK Symphony, Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia, Orchestre de Paris, Orchestre National de France, Philadelphia Orchestra, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Royal Opera House (UK), Salzburg Festival, Verbier Festival, Vienna Philharmonic, Vienna State Opera, and Vienna Symphony.

From 2007 until 2018, Noseda served as Music Director of Italy's Teatro Regio Torino where he ushered in a transformative era for the company matched with international acclaim for its productions, tours, recordings, and film projects. His leadership resulted in a



golden era for this opera house.

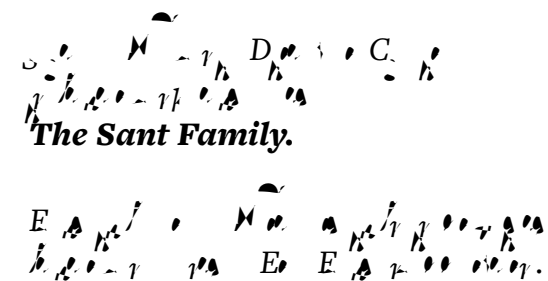
Other institutions where Noseda has had significant roles include the BBC Philharmonic which he led from 2002–2011; Principal Guest Conductor of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra from 2011–2020; the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra, where the Victor de Sabata Chair was created for him as Principal Guest Conductor from 2010–2014; and the Mariinsky Theatre in St. Petersburg, which appointed him its first-ever foreign Principal Guest Conductor in 1997, a position he held for a decade. He served as Artistic Director of the Stresa Festival from 2000–2020. He was also Principal Guest Conductor of the Rotterdam Philharmonic from 1999–2003; Principal Guest Conductor of the Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale della RAI from 2003–2006; and Principal Conductor of the Cadaqués Orchestra from 1994–2020.

Noseda's intense recording activity counts more than 70 CDs on Chandos, Deutsche Grammophon, and other

labels, many of which have been celebrated by critics and have received awards. He has made numerous recordings with the London Symphony Orchestra.

Gianandrea Noseda's cherished relationship with the Metropolitan Opera dates back to 2002. At the Met he has conducted 13 operas and nearly 100 performances of mainly new productions, most recently *Aida* featuring Anna Netrebko. Many of his critically acclaimed performances have been broadcast on radio, Met Live in HD, and released as DVDs.

A native of Milan, Noseda is Commendatore al Merito della Repubblica Italiana, marking his contribution to the artistic life of Italy. He has been honored as Conductor of the Year (2015) and International Opera Awards Conductor of the Year (2016). In December 2016, he was privileged to conduct the Nobel Prize Concert in Stockholm.



The National Symphony Orchestra was founded in 1931 and has been lead by Music Director, Gianandrea Noseda since 2017. The Italian conductor serves as the Orchestra's seventh Music Director, joining



Since assuming the leadership of the NSO, Gianandrea Noseda has brought a renewed sense of energy and focus to the orchestra, which has resulted in wide-ranging recognition from local, national, and international publications, increases in subscription and single ticket sales, and the expansion of the Orchestra's reach through live streamed concerts and recordings. The *Washington Post* called the NSO and Noseda's 2019 Carnegie Hall appearance "Spectacular," while the *Washington Post* wrote that "There's a certain flair going on at the National Symphony Orchestra," consistently reinforcing that this artistic partnership continues to gain momentum.

The National Symphony Orchestra's media label was launched in 2020 with its first release: Dvorák's Symphony No. 9 and Copland's *Brahms*, and is distributed in partnership with LSO Live.

Founded in 1931, the Orchestra has always been committed to artistic excellence and music education. In

1986, the National Symphony Orchestra became an artistic affiliate of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, where it has performed a full season of subscription concerts since the Center opened in 1971. The 96-member NSO regularly participates in events of national and international importance, including official holiday celebrations through its regularly televised appearances on PBS from the lawn of the U.S. Capitol for Capital Concerts, livestreamed performances from the Kennedy Center Concert Hall on Medici.tv, and local radio broadcasts on Classical WETA 90.9FM, making the NSO one of the most-heard orchestras in the country.

Additionally, the NSO's community engagement projects are nationally recognized, including NSO *Live at Home*, an annual week of approximately 35 performances in schools, churches, community centers, and other unexpected venues; *NSO at Home*, which offers free performances for active, veteran, prior service, and retired members of the military and

their families; and Sound Health, a year-round initiative that focuses on the intersection of music and wellness. Sound Health partners include the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Career development opportunities for young musicians include the NSO Youth Fellowship Program and the NSO's acclaimed, tuition-free Summer Music Institute.

For more information, visit [nationalsymphony.org](https://nationalsymphony.org)

**Violins**

Nurit Bar-Josef

C

Ying Fu

A

J

Ricardo Cyncynates

A

Jane Bowyer Stewart

Teri Hopkins Lee

Pavel Pekarsky

Heather LeDoux Green

Joel Fuller

Lisa-Beth Lambert

Jing Qiao

Angelia Cho

Marissa Regni

Dayna Hepler

A

Desimont Alston

Cynthia R. Finks

Deanna Lee Bien

Glenn Donnellan

Natasha Bogachek

Carole Tafoya Evans

Jae-Yeon Kim

Wanzhen Li

Hanna Lee

Benjamin Scott

Malorie Blake Shin

Marina Aikawa

Peiming Lin

Derek Powell

Meredith Riley \*\*

**Violas**

Daniel Foster

Abigail Evans Kreuzer

A

Lynne Edelson Levine

Denise Wilkinson

James Francis Deighan

Nancy Thomas

Jennifer Mondie

Tsuna Sakamoto

Ruth Wicker

Mahoko Eguchi

Rebecca Epperson

**Cellos**

David Hardy

H

F . . . . . E C . . . . . A . . . . . FEFF BDC . . . . .

Da

A

**Harp**

Adriana Horne

**Flutes**Aaron Goldman  
Leah Arsenault BarrickAlice Kogan Weinreb  
Alyce Johnson \*\*  
Carole Bean**Oboes**Nicholas Stovall  
Jamie RobertsHarrison Linsey  
Kathryn Meany Wilson**Clarinets**Lin Ma  
Eugene MondiePaul Cigan  
Peter Cain B<sup>1</sup> C<sup>2</sup>**Bassoons**Sue Heineman  
David YoungSteven Wilson  
Samuel Blair \*\* C<sup>1</sup>**Horns**Abel Pereira  
Laurel Bennert Ohlson

James Nickel

Markus Osterlund

Robert Rearden  
Scott Fearing  
Georey Pilkington \*\***Trumpets**William Gerlach  
Michael Harper

Thomas Cupples

Keith Jones  
Timothy McCarthy \*\***Trombones**Craig Mulcahy  
Evelyn CarlsonDavid Murray  
Matthew GuilfordB<sup>1</sup>**Tuba**

Stephen Dumaine

**Timpani**Jauvon Gilliam  
Scott Christian**Percussion**Eric Shin  
Scott Christian  
Greg Akagi  
Joseph Connell \***Keyboards**Lambert Orkis  
Lisa Emenheiser \***Organ**

William Neil \*

**Librarians**

Elizabeth Cusato Schnobrick

Susan Stokdyk  
Karen Lee

\* Regularly engaged extra

\*\* Temporary position







**V Savoy McIlwain, bass-baritone** – A graduate of the Duke Ellington School of the Arts, and the creator of The Savoy Series Emerging Artist Project, McIlwain holds a bachelor of music degree from the University of Northern Iowa and a master of music degree from the University of Maryland. McIlwain is a 2007 Metropolitan Opera regional finalist, NATS regional finalist, Omega Psi Phi first place winner, and former National Endowment for the Arts award recipient. McIlwain has numerous national and international operatic and concert credits. His recent performances include Spencer Coyle in Britten's *Motets*, Officer Jones in Nembeko's *Officer Jones*, and his debut in Tulsa Opera's 75th Anniversary production as Haly in Rossini's *La Cenerentola*, where he serves as a 2022–2023 resident artist.



**Kevin Thompson, bass** – Thompson was born in Washington, D.C. He is an alumnus of the Juilliard School in New York, San Francisco Opera's prestigious Merola Program, and the Santa Fe Opera Program. Acclaimed by the *San Francisco Classical Voice* as a "stentorian bass," he "possesses a voice with extraordinary range, depth, color combined with a commanding stage presence... a mountain of a voice, with resonance from the Escorial of Philip II to the throne of Boris Godunov, and the majestic court of Sarastro..." (*San Francisco Classical Voice*). Recent credits include debuts with Washington National Opera in *Der Pflieger*, as both Der Pflieger des Orest and Ein Alter Diener; with Fort Worth Opera in *Il Re*; and with Utah Opera as Sparafucile in *Macbeth*. In concert, Thompson returned to Opera Omaha for an Opera Outdoors concert with scenes from Boito's *Mefistofele* as Mefistofele; with Roanoke Opera for their Opera Gems Gala Concert; and Eureka Symphony for Verdi's Requiem.

## About the Photographer

### Frank Schramm



**Frank Schramm** is a photographer and filmmaker celebrated for his portraits of musicians and artists. His work encompasses a wide range of subjects which he documents meticulously, sometimes over the span of several years. A boundless curiosity and obsession with the technical and formal qualities of his subject matter challenge him to document the familiar in new and unexpected ways. His work is held in many permanent collections including the Metropolitan Museum (New York), Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery (Washington), San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Los Angeles County Museum, The Library of Congress, Victoria and Albert Museum (London), Bibliothèque nationale de France (Paris), and the Musée de l'Elysée (Lausanne).

## Frank Schramm on **Documenting George Walker**

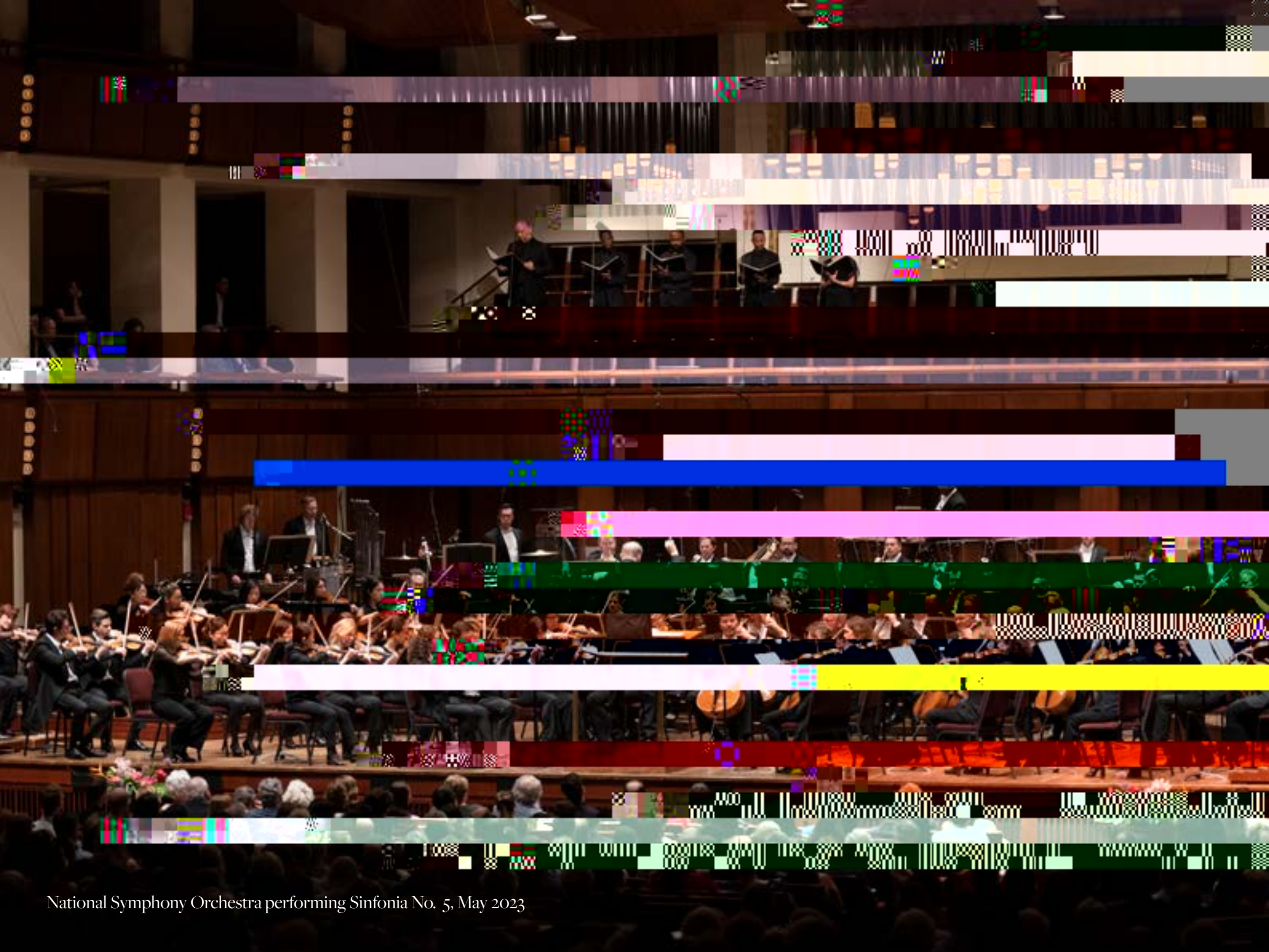
I had the great honor and unexpected privilege to document George Walker's life for over 14 years. I met George after hearing one of his works on the radio back in 2004 and reached out to him the same evening to see if I could get a copy of his Sinfonia No. 3 which was performed by the Detroit Symphony. I did not realize that in fact we lived in the same town, Montclair, New Jersey, until he personally hand-delivered a cassette recording, dropping it through my front door mail slot. George and I became very close friends, and I assisted him in many of his projects.

Even though he won the Pulitzer Prize and was the first African American to do so, it was a continual uphill effort for him to make contact with orchestras and have his works performed. George shared with me many times his running into "Dead ends!" in his efforts to be recognized as a classical composer.

He was frequently confronted with stereotypical questions; "Are you a jazz pianist?" Is your music "Jazz oriented?" During the 14 years I spent documenting George Walker, I felt that God had placed me in the serendipitous presence of a great genius; one who became a very close friend. In 2017, I made a short film *Documenting George Walker*, which had its world premiere at the Musée de l'Élysée in Lausanne, Switzerland presented at the festival *Documenting George Walker*. I also worked with George in making a video which is a projection for his now final work, Sinfonia No. 5 "Visions" for Orchestra. Walker asked me to create a video to commemorate the Charleston massacre of 2015 (see page 14). He wanted specific images: the Charleston harbor, a slave ship, a lighthouse, ocean waves, and other images related to slavery. Though relatively short, the Sinfonia includes a full orchestra, five voices and

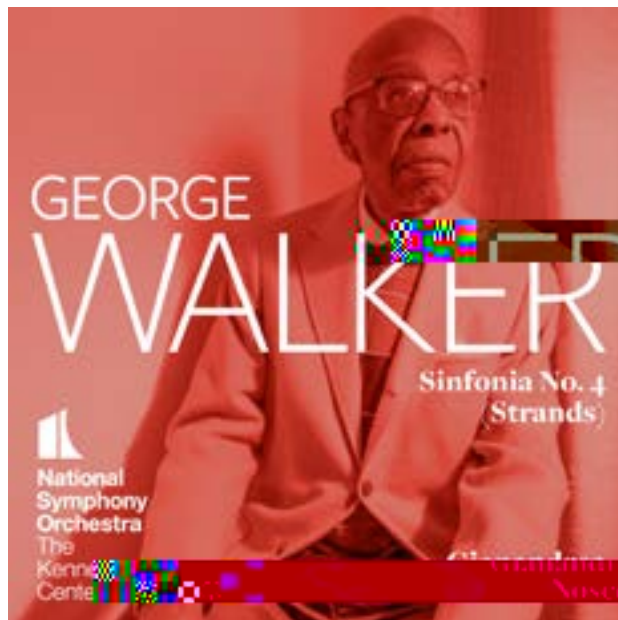
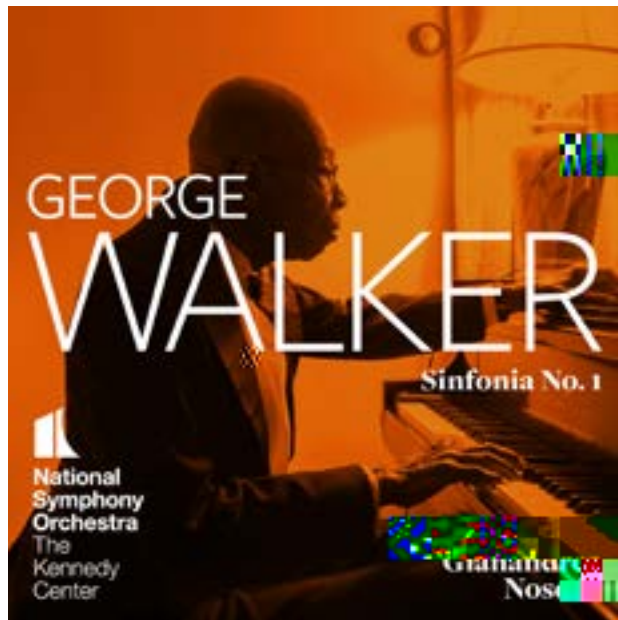
the film. As Walker said, "This work will be like no other..."

To view the video of Sinfonia No. 5 visit <https://www.kennedy-center.org/nso/home/nso-media-label/walker/> - or click [link](#)



National Symphony Orchestra performing Sinfonia No. 5, May 2023





Celebrate George Walker's work with this digital recording cycle of performances from the National Symphony Orchestra.

Download the complete album or purchase the CD, available September 2023.