



---PROGRAM NOTES---

Suite Brasileira de Natal ***(Brazilian Christmas Suite) (2019/2020)****

Jovino Santos Neto (b. 1954)

I. À Espera (Waiting)

II. Rancho das Pastoras (March of the Shepherdesses)

X. Moon Dew • XI. Bom Natal • XII. Finale

Suite Brasileira de Natal (Brazilian Christmas Suite)

by Jovino Santos Neto is a Christmas collection of 12 musical vignettes inspired by the way Brazilian culture blends Iberian, West African, Middle Eastern, Celtic, and jazz traditions. The music depicts a time of waiting for an important arrival, followed by a procession of shepherdesses, the birth of a special child, nightfall (inspired by Boas Festas, a popular song by Assis Valente), and how sages from distant places followed the stars to convene in a celebration of cultural and spiritual diversity.

During the COVID pandemic in 2020, Apollo Chamber Players asked me to compose an additional three movements to this suite for their Apollo Christmas Special livestream program. These new movements - Moon Dew, Bom Natal, and Finale - explore the influences of jazz and “scatting” vocal elements in Brazilian music culture and holiday traditions.

-- Note by **Jovino Santos Neto** --



Brazilian Christmas Suite premiere with Jovino Santos Neto
(December 2019)





A Sephardic Chanukah performance with Isabelle Ganz
(December 2021)

A Sephardic Chanukah (2018)*

Isabelle Ganz

A Sephardic Chanukah is based upon five songs from the Judeo-Spanish tradition: four folk songs and one composed by the Bosnian singer-composer, Flory Jagoda. Of these, the final two songs are Chanukah melodies. Middle-Eastern music in general involves microtonal melodies and complex rhythms. Attempting to harmonize such melodies in a “Western” manner without losing the Eastern flavor is the challenge. My solution in this quartet was to compose introductory and connecting material within the maqam (mode), a technique used by both instrumentalists and vocalists in Middle-Eastern music performance. Such improvisations within the maqam are called “taksims”, an example of which can be heard in the last song, “Ocho Candelicas”, played by the 1st violin between verses.

-- Note by **Isabelle Ganz** --



Kwanzaa Suite,
for string quartet and tenor (2021)*
Brian Raphael Nabors (b. 1991)

I. Umoja (Unity) • II. Kujichagulia (Self-Determination) • III. Ujima
IV. Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics) • V. Nia (Purpose)
VI. Kuumba (Creativity) • VII. Imani (Faith)

Kwanzaa Suite was commissioned by the Apollo Chamber Players featuring tenor, Wanye Ashley. When pondering a work that could capture the spirit of the Kwanzaa celebration, I felt it best to approach the work with the structure of a suite in seven short movements. This would allow for each principle of the Nguzo Saba (one for each of the seven days of Kwanzaa) to have its own musical characteristics. In addition to the music, I've taken the time to study and become close with the seven principles. From this meditation, I have written seven short poems to accompany the music of each movement. It is a joy to add this work to the body of music that encompasses the spirit of such a culturally rich celebration.



I. **Umoja (Unity)**

One love,

One people, Together

One light, In harmony, Together

One heart, One mind, With goals and dreams Aligned

One Family, Aligned Aligned

II. **Kujichagulia (Self-Determination)**

We are empowered by our will to persist.

We are creators.

We are builders.

We make our own destiny We shape our future

We define ourselves

III. Ujima

(Collective Work and Responsibility)

We work and we build, We build and we work.

We work to build strength in our community.

We work to give hope and prosperity.

We work and we build, We build and we work.

IV. Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics)

We dream.

We plan and forge new paths To build wealth for
our children.

Collective and strong, Wealth unshakable,
Rooted in endurance, Rooted in love.

V. Nia (Purpose)

I am a seed

Full of life and springing up, Bursting with
world-altering potential.

I am filled with the blessing of my ancestors to be all
that I am meant to be.

VI. Kuumba (Creativity)

Let your imagination take flight As on the wings
of an eagle Soaring through eternity.

May it create such beauty

That darkness has no place to hide.

May it create such wonder That light is all that abides
Shoot for the moon Reach for the stars Touch infinity

VII. Imani (Faith) We believe.

We believe in a future.

Free of hatred, Free of malice, Free of deception.

Full of light, Full of equity, Full of dreams.

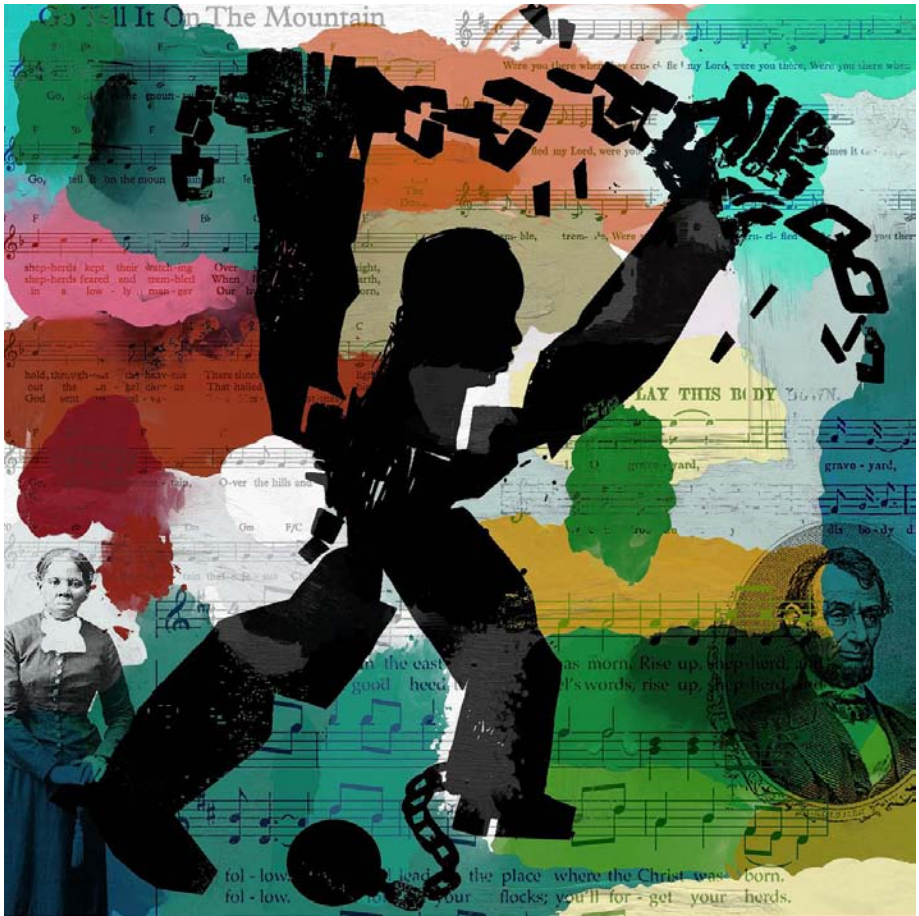
We believe In life.

-- Note by **Brian Raphael Nabors** --



Kwanzaa Suite premiere with Wayne Ashley
(December 2021)





Mary Had a Baby, Yes, Lord (2022)*

(Christmas Spiritual)

John L. Cornelius (b. 1966)

‘Mary Had a Baby, Yes, Lord’ is a rare Christmas spiritual that is, perhaps, best known in a choral arrangement by William Dawson. (Scholars have noted that Christmas-themed spirituals may be rare because the idea of a helpless baby wasn’t as potent as an adult Savior.) This particular

arrangement was inspired by the version presented by James Weldon and J. Rosamond John in their Second Book of American Negro Spirituals (1926). The tune is slightly different from that which was used by Dawson and includes a curious additional line of text: “The people keep-a comin’ an’ de train done gone.” As a composer this presented me with an interesting opportunity: to ruminate on the Train motif that often shows up in Af-Am spirituals and to incorporate a sense of movement in a moment which is typically depicted as a frozen tableaux. Listen for call-and-response between the singers, between the individual singer and the quartet and the grand, deliberate sense of this Great Train carrying them away to that Better Place.

-- Note by **John L. Cornelius** --





L. WAYNE ASHLEY

L. Wayne Ashley, tenor, is a versatile artist known for his charismatic vocal tone and appreciation for many genres. Wayne is a member of the internationally acclaimed Houston Chamber Choir and can be heard on their 2020 Grammy® Award winning album Duruflé: Complete Choral Works. A native of Arkansas, Wayne was raised in a stellar musical environment surrounded by Gospel, Delta Blues, Zydeco and RnB musicians, many within his own family.

A graduate of Henderson State University and the University of Houston Moores School of Music, Wayne is a choir member and Cantor at St. Paul's United Methodist Church- Houston, founding member of the Cloudburst Vocal Jazz Quartet, and soloist with the Houston Ebony Opera Guild. Beyond his love for music, Wayne is an avid follower of current events, politics and public policy. Wayne is a frequent collaborator with Apollo Chamber Players.



DR. JOHN L. CORNELIUS

Dr. John L. Cornelius' works are garnering increasingly frequent performances throughout the United States. His output includes a number of chamber works, orchestral works, and song cycles. Having been the music director/arranger/composer for a number of theaters including the Great Caruso, the Ensemble Theater, Adventure Theater in Glen Echo Park, Main Street Theatre and Theater Under the Stars' Humphries School, he has also written, along with his collaborator, Michael J. Bobbitt, several works for the lyric theater including, *Mirandy and Brother Wind*, *Say It Ain't So!*, *The Yellow Rose of Texas* and his latest, an adaptation of the Negro Baseball League classic, *Bingo Long and his Traveling All-Stars and Motor Kings*.

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Dr. Cornelius was featured at a number of Prelude Festivals at the Kennedy Center and has received a commission from the Smithsonian Institute, *Going the Distance*, a children’s musical about the lives and careers of Wilma Rudolph and Jesse Owens. Of his chamber works, Charles Ward in the Houston Chronicle wrote, “The highlight...was a set of three spirituals arranged for tenor and string orchestra by composer John Cornelius. In *O Fix Me*, the juxtaposition of an elegant, long melody floating over a sharp, jazzy string riff was electric.” His most recent works include *Chansons Creoles*, a song cycle whose text is by gens de colour of 19th-century Louisiana and *Sonata of Attitudes* for 2 Horns and Piano, and *PAX* (Peace) for string quartet, voice and spoken word, commissioned by Apollo Chamber Players.

Dr. Cornelius is a native of Jackson, Mississippi and received his D. M. A. in Composition from Rice University.

PAX premiere at Holocaust Museum Houston (February 2022)



Photo: Lynn Lane



ISABELLE GANZ

An international performing and recording artist and one of the pioneers in the field of Sephardic music, **Isabelle Ganz** and her New York-based ensemble have produced 4 CDs of Judeo-Spanish music. She holds a D.M.A. in Voice and Music Literature from the Eastman School of Music, has been a Fulbright scholar to Jerusalem and received a Solo Recitalist grant from the N.E.A. to perform works of living composers. She has recorded “Ryoanji for Voice and Percussion” by John Cage (composed for her) and “Sequenza III” by Luciano Berio, included on a 4-CD set of the Sequenzas and cited by the NY Times as “one of the best classical recordings of 2006”.

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Her original choral compositions have been published by Boosey & Hawkes, Transcontinental and Shalsholet Publications. In 1989 her song “Go Away Tango” for voice and piano was the first prize winner in the “Lind Solo Song” competition sponsored by Cornell University. She has been on the faculties of the Moores School of Music, Lamar University, Texas Southern University, Houston Community College, H.S.P.V.A., the University of St. Thomas, the American Institute of Musical Studies in Graz, Austria, conducted improvisation “playshops” on three continents and recorded over 25 CDs.

This past February 5, 2022, Apollo Chamber Players premiered a newly commissioned work by Isabelle, “La Palomba”, at Holocaust Museum Houston.





KENNETH GAYLE

Tenor **KENNETH GAYLE'S** national credits include performances with: *Lyric Opera of Chicago, Ravinia Music Festival, Grant Park Music Festival, Seattle Opera, Seattle Symphony, Opera Omaha, Omaha Symphony, Opera Idaho, Shenandoah Valley Bach Festival.*

A Seattle native and Houston resident, local performance credits include appearances with the Houston Ebony Opera Guild, Mukuru: Arts for AIDS Series, Three Mo' Tenors and the Southwestern premier of the chamber opera "*Fragments from Augustine the Saint*" at Rothko Chapel.

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Local producing/performance credits also include performances benefitting: The Houston Women's Home, AIDS Foundation Houston, Legacy Community Services, The Montrose Counseling Center, The Parish School, Interfaith Ministries of Greater Houston, and many others.

In 2019 Mr. Gayle served as Interim Music Coordinator for Unity of Houston, and has recently served as Music Doing Good's Producing Director, and Program Director for Music Doing Good with Instruments. Recent local appearances as a featured soloist include: Foundation for Modern Music (*Founders Concert*), The Greenbriar Consortium (*Das Lied von der Erde*), as well as with Houston Ebony Opera Guild, and Apollo Chamber Players.





MUYASSAR KURDI

Muyassar Kurdi (b. 1989 in Chicago) is a Palestinian-American New York City-based interdisciplinary artist. Her work encompasses sound art, extended vocal technique, performance art, movement, painting, analog photography, and film. She has toured extensively in the U.S. and throughout Europe. She currently focuses on interweaving electronic instruments into her vocal and

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dance performances, stirring a plethora of emotions from her audience members through vicious noise, ritualistic chants, and meditative movements.

Kurdi was a finalist in the Jerome Hill Artist Fellowship for Combined Disciplines 2023, she was awarded a Roulette Intermedium 2020 commission and artist residency in 2022 (with support from Jerome Foundation). She is also a recipient of the Queens Fund New Works Grant, NYFA City Artist Corps grant, and Puffin Foundation grant. Recent residencies include Harvestworks and The Watermill Center with OPERA ensemble. Love is Blue, Kurdi's solo exhibition, opened in 2023 at LaMaMa Gallery in NYC.

Performance highlights include Roulette Intermedium, Center For Performance Research, Lincoln Center, The Rubin Museum of Art, Issue Project Room, Cafe OTO, Chicago Cultural Center, Center for Contemporary Art Laznia, Fridman Gallery, Zaratan - Arte Contemporânea, and Judson Memorial Church as well as exhibitions and film screenings (solo and group works) at VIERTE WELT, Trieze Gallery, Knockdown Center, Queens Museum, Spectacle Theatre, and Anthology Film Archives. She taught workshops in movement and voice throughout Europe most notably in Portugal at Zaratan - Arte Contemporânea and in Istanbul Turkey at Bilgi University and Cultur as well as a MoMA PS1 in NYC.





ARMANDO HERNANDEZ

Armando Hernandez is a versatile tenor with professional classical training and theatrical performances in lyrical studies at Universidad de las Artes (formerly Instituto Superior de Arte) in Havana, Cuba. He is a member of The Voices of Houston and Houston Ebony Opera Guild in Houston, TX. Hernandez left Cuba seeking freedom of expression and freedom of speech, and to pursue the dream to continue his music career.





JOVINO SANTOS NETO

3-time Latin Grammy nominee **Jovino Santos Neto** is a master pianist, flutist, composer, arranger and conductor from Rio de Janeiro. After 15 years as a member of the legendary Hermeto Pascoal Group, he moved to Seattle in 1993. Since then, Jovino has established himself as a fascinating performer, whether playing solo piano, leading his award-winning Quinteto, or in guest appearances with ensembles and orchestras worldwide. He has shared the stage and the studio with some of the most creative musicians of our times. Jovino is available for lectures on the connections between biology and music, usually coupled with his live performances. He is a Professor of Music at Cornish College of the Arts in Seattle.

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Jovino's personal style is a creative blend of energetic grooves, deep harmonies, telepathic improvisation, lyrical melodies and great ensemble playing, always inspired and informed by the colorful richness of Brazilian music. His compositions include samba, choro, baião, xote, forró, marcha and many more styles, rooted in centuries-old musical tradition while pointing to new and adventurous harmonic languages.

Jovino's compositions have been performed by the Seattle Symphony, NDR Big Band in Hamburg, Swiss Jazz Orchestra and by numerous jazz and chamber music groups. His orchestration of Hermeto Pascoal's Suite Universal was premiered in January 2019 by the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra. Jovino was featured in NPR's Tiny Desk Concert in October 2019.





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Released on the Grammy-winning label Azica Records, Apollo's *With Malice Toward None* album reached No. 1 on Amazon's Hot New Release chart, and the ensemble's catalog of albums has been featured on hundreds of radio and media stations worldwide. A passionate advocate of contemporary music and underrepresented composers, Apollo recently concluded a bold initiative to commission 20 new multicultural works by the end of the last decade. *20x2020* features a diverse roster of the world's leading composers including Jennifer Higdon, Libby Larsen, Pamela Z, Leo Brouwer, Jerod Tate, and Vanessa Vö.

Apollo's community partners include schools and universities, at-risk youth centers, refugee and veterans service organizations, and public libraries. The ensemble's vanguard Library Voyage project is the first of its kind in the nation. Apollo was founded in 2008 by violinist and music entrepreneur Matthew J. Detrick.

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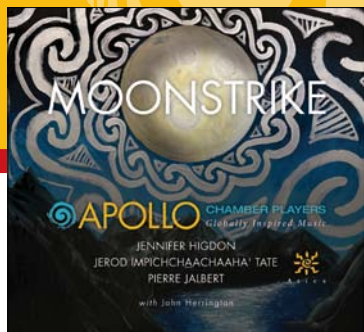
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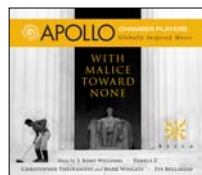
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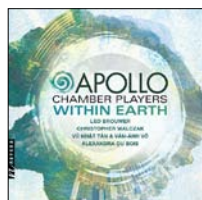


With Malice Toward None (2021)

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-- **San Francisco Classical Voice**



Within Earth (2019)

(Parma Recordings)

"Relentless, starkly exhilarating music"

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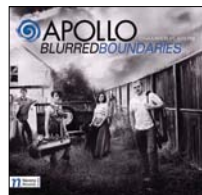


Ancestral Voices (2017)

(Parma Recordings)

"...intimate and detailed, loud and fun."

-- **Gramophone**



Blurred Boundaries (2015)

(Parma Recordings)

"This is truly lovely music played exceptionally well by the adventurous and gifted young ensemble. Highly recommended!"

-- **Daniel Coombs, Audiophile Audition**



European Folkscapes (2013)

(Parma Recordings)

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-- **WQXR-NYC 'Album of the Week' (April 2014)**



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