



CEDILLE

Difficult Grace

SETH
PARKER
WOODS

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FREDRICK GIFFORD
(b. 1972)

1 *Difficult Grace** (6:20)

COLERIDGE-TAYLOR
PERKINSON (1932-2004)

2 *Calvary Ostinato* from
*Lamentations: Black/Folk
Song Suite* (3:23)

MONTY ADKINS (b. 1972)

3 *Winter Tendrils** (10:19)

NATHALIE JOACHIM
(b. 1983)

4 *The Race: 1915** (7:05)

ALVIN SINGLETON (b. 1940)

5 *Argoru II* (12:13)

NATHALIE JOACHIM

6 *Dam Mwen Yo* (5:25)

WITH NATHALIE JOACHIM

TED HEARNE (b. 1982)

7 *free fucked (1)** (1:45)

8 A Wedding, or What
We Unlearned from
Descartes* (5:16)

9 *free fucked (2)** (3:00)

10 The Lion Tamer's
Daughter vs. the Ledge*
(4:16)

11 *After We Ruin** (2:18)

WITH TED HEARNE

TT: (61:51)

*World Premiere Recording

*This recording is made
possible by generous support
from the DEW Foundation*



Barbara Earl Thomas,
Sonorous (2021)

Fredrick Gifford

Difficult Grace (2019)

AS SETH PARKER WOODS AND I brainstormed a new work that would simultaneously feature his voice and cello playing, I asked if he would be willing to share several authors and works that were important for him. In reading through these, I was struck by Dudley Randall's poem, "Primitives" — and *Difficult Grace* began. I wanted to create a musical process, a kind of sonic network of relations that would set Randall's original poem in dialogue with itself in musical time, both verbally and sonically. In *Difficult Grace*, I sought to create a work where aspects of Randall's poem (rhythms, durations, phonetic timbre, syntax, and meaning) would generate each musical gesture, and where Seth's voice and cello would be the instruments — all of the sounds in the live electronics layers are untransformed recordings of his performance.

Program notes written by the composer unless otherwise indicated

All of the words in *Difficult Grace* are derived from Randall's poem via a process where the letters of the words of the second stanza (capitalized in the excerpt below) are used as filters to extract and recombine Randall's words. The first letters of the words in the first line begin sampled words, the second letters of the words in the second line appear as the second letter of sampled words, etc. This process continues to the fifth letter position (the word "syllables") and then changes direction.

To give one example, below are the lines that open *Difficult Grace* in the present recording ("crushe[d]" is the filter word from the original):

fears and guilt Conquering
a little Rubble;
bUmp,
aS if by
them, tHe middle,
the poEms of old.

Primitives

BY DUDLEY RANDALL

Paintings with stiff
homuncules, flat in iron
draperies, with distorted
bodies against spaceless
landscapes.

Poems of old
poets in stiff metres whose harsh
syllables
drag like
dogs with
crushed backs.

We go back to
them, spurn difficult
grace and symmetry,
paint tri-faced
monsters,
write lines that

do not sing, or
even croak, but that
bump,
jolt, and are hacked
off in the mid-
dle, as if by these dis-
tortions, this,
magic, we can
exorcise
horror, which we
have seen and fear to
see again:

hate deified,
fears and
guilt conquering,
turning cities to gas,
powder, and a little rubble.*

*Dudley Randall, "Primitives" from *Cities Burning*.
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Woods performing
Difficult Grace by
Fredrick Gifford with
overlay of poetry by
Dudley Randall

Coleridge-Taylor Perkinson

Calvary Ostinato, Lamentations: Black/Folk Song Suite (1980)

NOTE BY AARON GRAD

COLERIDGE-TAYLOR PERKINSON WAS destined to be a composer from birth, when his mother, a pianist and organist, gave him that hyphenated name in honor of the Black British composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (whose name was itself a tribute, derived from the British poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge). Perkinson gained entry to New York's legendary High School of Music and Art as a dancer, but he took up composing during his time there and earned a top music prize before he graduated. He went on to study music at the Manhattan School, Princeton University, and the Berkshire Music Festival (now called Tanglewood), and he also studied conducting in Europe. As part of a rich professional life centered in New York, Perkinson co-founded the Symphony of the New World in 1965, the first racially integrated orchestra in the country. In 1973, he wrote *Lamentations*

for one of the orchestra's cellists, Ronald Lipscomb, creating a "Black/Folk Song Suite" in four movements, each referencing an aspect of traditional African American music. "The common denominator of these tunes," Perkinson explained, "is the reflection and statement of a people's crying out."

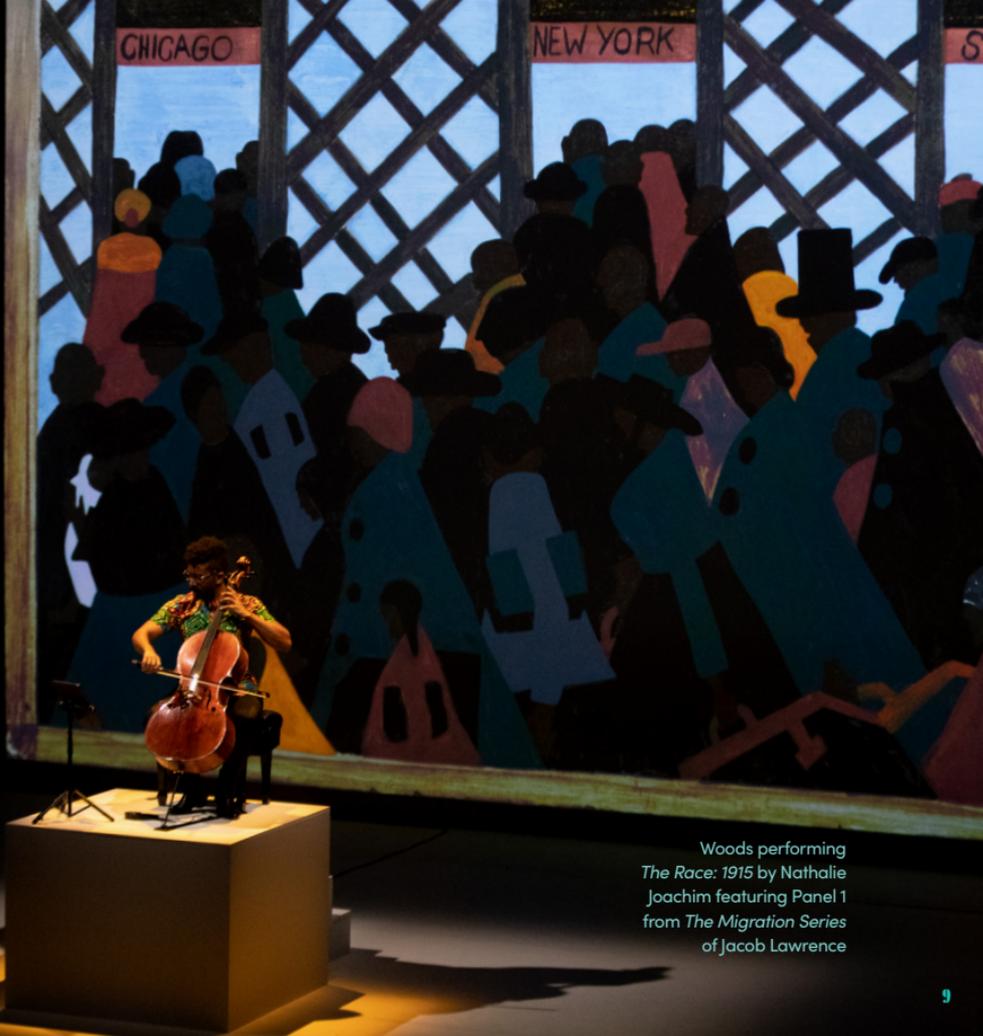
The all-plucked third movement, *Calvary Ostinato*, takes its name and thematic material from an African American spiritual. Its refrain, "Surely he died on Calvary," recalls the site outside Jerusalem where Jesus was crucified, but it has also been viewed as a veiled reference to lynching. *Ostinato* refers to the musical technique of cycling through a steady pattern, in this case a nine-beat loop that makes ample use of open strings, allowing the cellist to superimpose a melody.

Monty Adkins

Winter Tendrils (2014/2020)

WINTER TENDRILS WAS COMMISSIONED by the Swedish Arts Council for cellist Seth Parker Woods. The work is inspired by an image the composer created of freshly fallen snow on the fragile bare branches of a tree. This image was subsequently processed and overlaid on itself several times. The composition follows a similar model. In the first part the solo cello presents the main musical line. In the second part the ‘tendrils’ from this line are superimposed. These lines are transposed and fragmented. As a result, five canonic lines (tendrils) spin off from the initial line and are heard simultaneously. The canons are strict, but not heard in their entirety. This creates a rich harmonic web akin to the final processed image. The second section of the work draws on materials from the first, creating further tendrils from the harmonic, timbral, and melodic implications of the opening movement.

“The work is inspired by an image... of freshly fallen snow on the bare branches of a tree”



Woods performing
The Race: 1915 by Nathalie
Joachim featuring Panel 1
from *The Migration Series*
of Jacob Lawrence

Nathalie Joachim

The Race: 1915 (2019)

THE RACE: 1915 IS INSPIRED BY THE colorful vibrancy and nostalgic realism of visual artist Jacob Lawrence's "The Migration Series," which depicts images of African Americans as they embarked on one of the most expansive migratory movements in history. The work, for solo cello and electronics, combines blues inspired melodies (including a quote from "Praise God We Are Not Weary" by Tom Brown and Tom Lemonier) with the angst and uncertainty of transient movement against a colorfully active and vibrant electronic palette. It addresses at once the uprooting and resilience of black people in America.

The work calls for the performer to recite text sourced from *The Chicago Defender*, one of the most important and historic Black newspapers. Weekly issues of *The Chicago Defender* played an essential role in promoting The Great Migration, and all of the text set within

this musical work is excerpted from editions published in 1915 — the year that marked the beginning of a movement that would span nearly six decades. By citing the atrocities faced by African Americans in the oppressive and violent Jim Crow south, and providing resources for those seeking freedom, millions were compelled to embark on incredibly challenging journeys, leading to the development of the northern and western city centers of the United States. The publication adopted the term "the race," which was used in lieu of the terms negro or Black — a significant and powerful statement of self.

From The Chicago Defender, 1915

Nine human beings hanged within 24 hours

...and today, a lynching party is pursuing a tenth member of the race. Look at it: see these men hanging from a limb of a tree

Then look at the other race farmers who were made to come and look at them. Race woman slain like cattle on public street

...she begged for help, but not a hand
was turned.

The race that has slated for the country,
felled the trees,

built its railroads, labored day and night

was not given opportunity

No person identified with this intelligent and progressing race
should allow this. Any effort to deprive us of our rights

should be referred to the authorities

because such is against the Constitution of these United States.

Alvin Singleton

Argoru II (1970)

Commissioned by cellist Ronald Crutcher

*Premiere: December 11, 1970; New Haven, Connecticut,
Sprague Memorial Hall, Yale University*

ARGORU II FOR CELLO IS THE SECOND in a series of solo pieces for various musical instruments. As with all of the *Argoru* pieces, this composition provides a musical platform for sheer virtuosic display. The title, *Argoru*, comes from the Twi language (spoken in Ghana) and means “to play.”

Argoru II is a most unusual work in that it both presents the cello at play (fulfilling the title’s meaning) and presents it in a circumstance of intellectual seriousness. Fascinating extended techniques are employed, but only to give birth to a solid, albeit wild and unusual composition. Music written for the traditional “mellow cello” is supplanted here by a string of unexpected, largely gestural technical activities laid out in highly contrasted phrasings.

These contrasts seem almost theatrical in their contention for domination of the sound space. In *Argoru II* the composer constructs a world of “strange characters” for whom he seems to have created an original language they use to scream out, cajole, shout, mumble, and chuckle. Single, powerful shots alternate with long-phrased ultra-soft scramblings. This is the theatre of sound. The piece at times sounds improvised (although its scoring is precise to the very number of seconds between notes — even the rates of vibrato are indicated in the score) and at times sounds like behavior patterns of characters on strikingly clear, although different, missions. The result is a very tightly constructed, compelling work of art.

“And the cello
sings their
song—one
of strength,
beauty,
pain, and
simplicity...”

Nathalie Joachim

Dam Mwen Yo (2017)

DAM MWEN YO IN HAITIAN CREOLE translates to “they are my ladies.” In Haiti, the cultural image of women is one of strength. They are pillars of their homes and communities, and are both fearless and loving, all while carrying the weight of their families and children on their backs. As a first generation Haitian-American, these women — my mother, grandmother, sisters, aunts, cousins — were central to my upbringing and understanding of what it means to be a woman. In Dantan, Haiti-Sud, where my family is from, it is rare to walk down the countryside roads without hearing the voices of women — in the fields, cooking for their loved ones, gathering water at the wells with their babies. This piece and the voices within it are representative of these ladies — my ladies. And the cello sings their song — one of strength, beauty, pain, and simplicity in a familiar landscape.

Ted Hearne

Freefucked (2022)

FREEFUCKED IS A SUITE OF SONGS set to poems by Kemi Alabi, from their first full length poetry collection “Against Heaven.” Xan Phillips calls Alabi’s poems “a sacrament to the underworld, ushering in a vast network of ritual and erotic apertures.” Kemi’s poems honor the wounds of inheritance while simultaneously activating their magic. My musical setting for Seth seeks to reflect this vast network and duality through soulful singing, a patchwork of sharp musical juxtapositions and references, and vocal processing that evokes a multiplicity of voices.

The poems “A Wedding, or What We Unlearned from Descartes,” “free fucked,” “The Lion Tamer’s Daughter vs. the Ledge,” and “After We Ruin My Love’s Heart, the God of Annihilation Prays Back to Me” are from *Against Heaven* by Kemi Alabi © 2022 and used with permission of the author and Graywolf Press.

“My musical setting for Seth seeks to reflect this vast network and duality”



free fucked (1)

verb, never passive

- : to meditate before you read the news
- : to lose six rainy days smiling at the neighbors, picking wet pennies off the ground
- : to skip the news
- : to write a poem about their shoulders, then fall asleep, two fingers inside yourself
- : to read the news
- : to pray to your neighbors
- : to know you have never been a brain in a jar
- : to learn we are bodies welding crowns for other bodies
- : to feel crowns are made by hands
- : to taste hands are water and sugar and know they should return
- : to make good practice of this melt
- : to spill from the bath
- : to unhinge your front door
- : to feed your body to the falling sky



A Wedding, or What We Unlearned from Descartes

Beloved, last night I doused us in good bourbon,
struck a match between our teeth, slid the lit head
lip to chest, throat zippered open and spilling.
Our union demands a sacrifice. Take my masks—
my wretched, immaculate children. Sharp smiles
bored with cavities. Braids thick with hair
slashed off lovers as they slept. The masks grew limbs
and danced, so last night, to the fire—plank pushed,
cackling as they bubbled and split. Then dreamless dark.
Then mercy, somehow, morning reached for me.
Sun found us swaddled in sweat-through sheets—
gauze and salve while night wore off. O body,
always healing despite me. O body, twin spy
tasked against my plot to rush the dying,
guardian of the next world's sweets, yes,
I'll lick this salt. Yes, I'll wait our turn
because today we hold hands, mother
each other, bathe in warm coconut oil.
Our union, our long baptism. O body,
all I forced you to know of thirst. Yes
body, you are owed a whole lake. Yes
body, I'll kiss our wrists, hold them
to our ears and spend our days
losing to the waves.



free fucked (2)

verb, never passive

- : to meditate before you read the news
- : to lose six rainy days smiling at the neighbors, picking wet pennies off the ground
- : to skip the news
- : to write a poem about their shoulders, then fall asleep, two fingers inside yourself
- : to read the news
- : to pray to your neighbors
- : to know you have never been a brain in a jar
- : to learn we are bodies welding crowns for other bodies
- : to feel crowns are made by hands
- : to taste hands are water and sugar and know they should return
- : to make good practice of this melt
- : to spill from the bath
- : to unhinge your front door
- : to feed your body to the falling sky



The Lion Tamer's Daughter vs. the Ledger

O taxi glass, O broken fall, be soprano, be alto.

Give me sea sharp, give me doh doh doh, give mi fa so?

O gravity, slip soft. Lay with this sorry child

before they soulsplint & ugly up this here garden.

O slurred night, be witness, be whole sky peopled,

sagging, buttons gaped & threatening *pop!*

O blanket tent stonebones, be a ledger.

(How much blood does this sorry child owe?

Make it twenty-eight cavified teeth,

twelve still attached to gum?

Half a spine & nineteen fistfuls of *salt?*)

Tailored crew cut 3L be a *so?*

Euro backpack gap year, be a Snapchat ohmygoding

Popcorn-passing crowd, with your one long pointed finger,

be strangers still.

Shivers & splints, O gaping, breathless skies,

be siblings now.

O weave, dread, & head wrap, be a praise twerk smudging.

O coven, keep this child's eyes in a jar.

Stuff pillows with their kinks.

Make soaps from their cheeks.

O coven, fry their brains in butter & sage, grease your scalps,

then eat.

Your fingernails will spike long as sugarcane. Your skin will

glow garnet & gold.

Dig a garden, each eyelash: seed.

Watch the medicine grow.



After We Ruin My Love's Heart, the God of Annihilation Prays Back to Me

O brick fist,
storm's eye, twitching
guardian of angels cast
as devil-to-be, tell me: how has
the ammonia cloud and rootshred of
your bed, blazing crash site, kept your
hands casket-still, ghost-
cool? praise
ye treeless planet,
my bleach and flame-
forged mirror:
twinning the dark, your faith
burnt silk
my sweat-drenched slip,
the truest skin I know—

O scalpel-crowned
roach king, salivating
into the blister-white void—
that all-breath and sweet-mud heart earned
you? whole home devoured.
all-knuckle, unblooded
desire: malware mimicking
the body, now one burst seam.
O frothing ocean of
licked bone,
what does one call a god
with no worshippers? where's the
thread between freedom and death
when you're
the last one left?





Seth Parker Woods

Hailed by *The Guardian* as “a cellist of power and grace,” Grammy-nominated cellist Seth Parker Woods has established his reputation as a versatile artist and innovator across multiple genres. His projects delve deep into our cultural fabric, reimagining traditional works and commissioning new ones to propel

classical music into the future, inspiring *The New York Times* to write, “Woods is an artist rooted in classical music, but whose cello is a vehicle that takes him, and his concertgoers, on wide-ranging journeys.”

Highlights of recent seasons include the premieres of *Difficult Grace* at 92Y, UCLA, and Chicago’s Harris Theater; curating a program honoring the centennial of George Walker at The Phillips Collection in Washington D.C.; premiering Freida Abtan’s *My Heart is a River*, commissioned by the Seattle Symphony; and a world premiere by Anna Thorvaldsdottir at Carnegie Hall. The Great Northern Festival presented Woods in the final iteration of his *Iced Bodies*, in which Woods, in a wetsuit, plays an obsidian ice cello. He is also a member of celebrated new music ensemble Wild Up, with which he was nominated for a 2023 Grammy Award. Woods’ debut solo album, *asinglewordisnotenough*, was released on London-based Confront Recordings in 2016. A fierce advocate for

contemporary arts, Woods has collaborated and worked with a wide range of artists and premiered concertos by Rebecca Saunders and Tyshawn Sorey.

Woods serves on the faculty of The University of Southern California as Assistant Professor of Practice – Cello and Chamber Music and previously taught at the University at Buffalo, University of Chicago, Dartmouth College, Chicago Academy of the Arts, University of Miami, and Northwestern University.

Woods holds degrees from Brooklyn College and Musik Akademie der Stadt Basel, and a PhD from the University of Huddersfield. In the 2020–2021 season, Woods was an Artist in Residence with the Kaufman Music Center. From 2018–2020 he served as Artist in Residence with the Seattle Symphony and Creative Consultant for the interactive concert hall, Octave 9: Raisbeck Music Center.

Seth Parker Woods is a Pirastro Artist and endorses Pirastro Perpetual Strings worldwide. sethparkerwoods.com

PRODUCERS

Elaine Martone
Seth Parker Woods
Ted Hearne (*Freefucked*)

ENGINEER Bill Maylone

ASSISTANT ENGINEER Jonathan Lackey

MIX ENGINEER (*A Wedding, or
What We Unlearned from Descartes*)
Christopher Bott

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Image from *The Migration Series*
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*Panel 1: During World War I there was
a great migration North by southern
African Americans.*

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