

SANTA BARBARA NEWS-PRESS



Undiscovered Classic - Santa Barbara Music Club unveils the work of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor

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IF YOU GO

SANTA BARBARA MUSIC CLUB
AFTERNOON CONCERT

When: 3 p.m. Saturday

Where: Faulkner Gallery, Santa
Barbara Public Library, 40 E.
Anapamu St.

Cost: Free

Information: sbmusicclub.org

He was known in his day as the "African Mahler," but in 2010, few people know of the composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, and not just because his name is so close to that of the famous poet. Although prolific and popular, enthusiasm for his work vanished slowly in the 20th century. But as part of Saturday's Santa Barbara Music Club afternoon concert, one Santa Barbaran intends to reintroduce audiences to the man's work.



British composer Samuel Coleridge-Taylor

Steven Schneider has appeared as a pianist at previous Music Club concerts for six years. He came across Coleridge-Taylor's work not by hearing it, but when he attended a workshop at Humboldt University that specialized in music for large and odd combinations. "I just started looking and digging," says Schneider. He came across a nonet — a work for nine musicians, a chamber music rarity — by the composer, but soon learned it was very hard to find a published copy. After a call to the Royal College of Music in England, Schneider reached Patrick Meadows, who is considered a Coleridge-Taylor authority and responsible for discovering three lost works, including the nonet, and making them available for performance.

"It's curiosity," explains Schneider. "It's the interest of hearing something that you don't hear every day." People like Patrick Meadows are champions, he says, because they crusade for this music. After all, the composer isn't alive to promote himself.

Not that Coleridge-Taylor had much time to promote himself: he died in 1912, age 37, of pneumonia. But his life is an interesting tale. He was born out of wedlock in Holborn, London to a Sierra Leonean Creole father and a white, British mother. When the father left, he was raised by his mother and her father. He attended the Royal College at an early age, and started composing. (The Nonet in F minor, Op. 2, in fact, dates from when he was 19).

He was championed by Edward Elgar and music writer August Jaeger, who called him a genius. And his compositions became very well known, in particular the cantata "Hiawatha's Wedding Feast," which often fared in popularity alongside Handel's "Messiah."

Schneider has created the Nonet group just for this performance, in which they will play two of the four movements of the work. The ensemble consists of Schneider on piano, Laury Woods on violin, Helena McGahagan on viola, Andrew Saunders on cello, Nancy Chase on bass, Elizabeth Turner on oboe, Per Elmfors on clarinet, Sherry Trujillo on French horn, and John Wisniewski on bassoon. The mix of woodwinds, strings, and piano is about as rare as the nonet itself.



For its December concert, the S.B. Music Club's Steven Schneider assembled a nonet, a rarity in chamber music, to perform Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's work

"Each movement has character," he says. "The Allegro Moderato is a big symphonic piece; the Scherzo-Allegro sounds a little like Mendelssohn. It has interesting harmonic changes and moods."

The feedback among the group has been positive over six months of rehearsals, and the work offers a chance for everybody to shine.

The other two works on the program for Saturday are Suite No. 5 in C minor, BWV 1011 and Sonata in G major, BWV 1039, both by Bach. On the former, Rebecca Shasberger plays cello, and on the latter, John Sonquist on harpsichord is joined by Suzanne Duffy and Jane Hahn on flutes.

"If the audience is happy — and you tell from the quality of applause when they are happy," says Schneider, "then we've done our job."