

In 2019, while I was singing through massive piles of music set to Christina Rossetti's poetry, I came across a song cycle by Samuel Coleridge-Taylor. I couldn't put the music down. What struck me initially were the unexpected final notes and the rhythmic interplays between the lines. *Six Sorrow Songs, Op. 57* was that cycle. Since that date, I have performed, taught, and discussed much of Coleridge-Taylor's music. Currently, I collaborate with New York's Institute for Composer Diversity on Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's songs, supporting performers, researchers, and educators. It's been a dream of mine to bring Coleridge-Taylor's music to new communities, and today marks the first time his choral music is sung for Ottawa audiences. This is indeed a meaningful step toward bringing his vocal works to a broader Canadian audience.

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, a Black British composer from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, was named after one of the leading poets of the English Romantic movement, Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In fact, the composer's family called him by his middle

name, Coleridge. Born just 45 years after the Emancipation Proclamation in the US, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor was a prolific musician who wrote operas as well as vocal, choral, orchestral, chamber, and incidental music. He was the very first Black student at The Royal College of Music in England, the first Black composer to have an internationally acclaimed piece of music, and the first composer to introduce and actively incorporate musical elements of slave songs into the British classical music scene of the time.

Up until his mid-20s, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor grew up and worked within white circles. A series of events ignited in him a heightened interest in Black history and culture. He attended the First Pan-African Conference in London, where he met several influential figures such as W.E.B. DuBois. DB wrote some of the most powerful books on African rights, which Coleridge-Taylor became familiar with. In the years following this historic event, he embarked on three trips to the US, where he met and became

friendly with even more African American figures involved in the civil rights movement.

Following his visits to the US, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor composed a substantial portion of his African-inspired compositions. In my research, I discovered how he creatively blended the genres of art songs and sorrow songs/slave songs, mapping sorrow songs' rhythmic elements into the songs of the cycle I mentioned earlier.

As a Black musician, composer, and conductor working in predominantly white musical circles, he encountered racism throughout his studies and professional life. The sources tell of incidents ranging from classmates setting his hair on fire, to inappropriate comments from fellow students and members of ensembles he conducted, to being turned away from the home of his future wife's family. These experiences offer only a glimpse into the prejudice and microaggressions he faced throughout his life.

In spite of these, he broke many barriers. In one notable instance, the US Marine Band invited the composer to the US to conduct them in a concert featuring his most famous composition, *The Song of Hiawatha, Op. 30*. This event, referred to as the “Coleridge-Taylor Festival,” featured the Black composer conducting an all-white band in a still-segregated country. He also dined with President Roosevelt at the White House, which was extremely significant for the time, as only the most renowned public figures in white circles would have such an offer.

Like many other Black artists and social activists, Samuel Coleridge-Taylor used his art as a vehicle for challenging social structure and demanding equal rights for Black and other minority populations. Coleridge-Taylor’s instrumental music is often performed. However, his vocal pieces are still largely unknown. Although he lived only for 37 years, the musical legacy he left behind is rich and extensive. Over 200 vocal pieces still await our discovery. Thank you!