

# “REFLECTIONS on BEAUTY”

celebrating Madam C. J. Walker

## PROGRAM at 8:00

Friday 6th of December, 2019

A.C. Institute, N.Y.

### PRELUDE.

Break Away ..... Jessie Montgomery  
Snapshot: Circa 1909 ..... John Corigliano

\*

### REFLECTIONS on BEAUTY.

Motherless Child Blues ..... Elvie Thomas, arr. H.B.  
St. Louis Rag ..... Tom Turpin, arr. N.R.  
Ave Verum Corpus (K.618) ..... W.A.  
Mozart  
Dream Sequence ..... N.R.  
Ragtime Millionaire ..... Irving Jones  
Wall Street Rag ..... Scott Joplin, arr. J.N.  
Pavement Pounding Rose ..... Fats Waller, arr.  
C.S.  
Agnus Dei ..... Trad.  
My Journey to the Sky ..... Sister Rosetta Tharpe, arr. J.N.

### PUBLIQuartet

Jannina Norpoth, vn.1, Curtis Stewart, vn.2, Nick Revel, va., Hamilton Berry, vc.

**A’Lelia Bundles, narrator**

Made possible with the support of New Music USA.

**SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY.**

1. A’Lelia Bundles, *On Her Own Ground: The Life and Times of Madam C. J. Walker* (New York: Scribner, 2001).
2. A’Lelia Bundles, “Madam C. J. Walker: A Brief Biographical Essay” (madamcjwalker.com, accessed December 2019).
3. Ruth McBain, *Madam C. J. Walker’s 100-Year-Old Estate - Villa Lewaro - Acquired* (savingplaces.org, 2018).

\*

**FURTHER LISTENING.**

Go Down, Moses ..... Harry T. Burleigh / Paul Robeson  
“Celeste Aida” from Verdi’s *Aida* ..... Enrico Caruso  
Memphis Blues ..... James Reese Europe’s 369th U. S. Infantry “Hell Fighters” Band  
How Ya Gonna Keep ‘Em Down On the Farm ..... Ibid.  
Castle House Rag ..... Europe’s Society Orch.  
St. Louis Blues ..... W. C. Handy  
Stack O’ Lee ..... Mississippi John Hurt  
Communion in G ..... Caleb Simper  
Westward Bound ..... Noble Sissle  
Harlem Rag ..... Tom Turpin  
“Dr. Watts” Hymns .....  
Various  
Last Kind Words Blues ..... Geeshie  
Wiley

## **Madam C. J. Walker: A Brief Biographical Essay** by A'Lelia Bundles

Sarah Breedlove—who later would come to be known as Madam C. J. Walker—was born on December 23, 1867 on the same **Delta, Louisiana** plantation where her parents, Owen and Minerva Anderson Breedlove, had been enslaved before the end of the Civil War. This child of sharecroppers transformed herself from an uneducated farm laborer and laundress into one of the twentieth century's most successful, self-made women entrepreneurs.

Orphaned at age seven, she often said, “I got my start by giving myself a start.” She and her older sister, Louvenia, survived by working in the cotton fields of Delta and nearby **Vicksburg, Mississippi**. At 14, she married Moses McWilliams to escape abuse from her cruel brother-in-law, Jesse Powell.

Her only daughter, Lelia (later known as A'Lelia Walker) was born on June 6, 1885. When her husband died two years later, she moved to **St. Louis** to join her four brothers who had established themselves as barbers. Working for as little as \$1.50 a day, she managed to save enough money to educate her daughter in the city's public schools. Friendships with other black women who were members of St. Paul A.M.E. Church and the National Association of Colored Women exposed her to a new way of viewing the world.

During the 1890s, Sarah began to suffer from a scalp ailment that caused her to lose most of her hair. She consulted her brothers for advice and also experimented with many homemade remedies and store-bought products, including those made by Annie Malone, another black woman entrepreneur. In 1905 Sarah moved to **Denver** as a sales agent for Malone, then married her third husband, Charles Joseph Walker, a St. Louis newspaperman. After changing her name to “Madam” C. J. Walker, she founded her own business and began selling Madam Walker's Wonderful Hair Grower, a scalp conditioning and healing formula, which she claimed had been revealed to her in a dream. Madam Walker, by the way, did NOT invent the straightening comb or chemical perms, though many people incorrectly believe that to be true.

To promote her products, the new “Madam C.J. Walker” traveled for a year and a half on a dizzying crusade throughout the heavily black South and Southeast, selling her products door to door, demonstrating her scalp treatments in churches and lodges, and devising sales and marketing strategies. In 1908, she temporarily moved her base to Pittsburgh where she opened Lelia College to train Walker “hair culturists.”

By early 1910, she had settled in **Indianapolis**, then the nation's largest inland manufacturing center, where she built a factory, hair and manicure salon and another training school. Less than a year after her arrival, Walker grabbed national headlines in the black press when she contributed \$1,000 to the building fund of the “colored” YMCA in Indianapolis.

In 1913, while Walker traveled to Central America and the Caribbean to expand her business, her daughter A'Lelia, moved into a fabulous new Harlem townhouse and Walker Salon, designed by black architect, Vertner Tandy. “There is nothing to equal it,” she wrote to her attorney, F.B. Ransom. “Not even on Fifth Avenue.”

Walker herself moved to **New York** in 1916, leaving the day-to-day operations of the Madam C. J. Walker Manufacturing Company in Indianapolis to Ransom and Alice Kelly, her factory forelady and a former school teacher. She continued to oversee the business and to work in the New York office. (*cont. on reverse*)

Once in Harlem, she quickly became involved in Harlem's social and political life, taking special interest in the NAACP's anti-lynching movement to which she contributed \$5,000.

Madam Walker was a member of the 1917 Negro Silent Protest Parade committee.

In July 1917, when a white mob murdered more than three dozen blacks in East St. Louis, Illinois, Walker joined a group of Harlem leaders who visited the White House to present a petition advocating federal anti-lynching legislation.

As her business continued to grow, Walker organized her agents into local and state clubs. Her Madam C. J. Walker Hair Culturists Union of America convention in Philadelphia in 1917 must have been one of the first national meetings of businesswomen in the country. Walker used the gathering not only to reward her agents for their business success, but to encourage their political activism as well. "This is the greatest country under the sun," she told them. "But we must not let our love of country, our patriotic loyalty cause us to abate one whit in our protest against wrong and injustice. We should protest until the American sense of justice is so aroused that such affairs as the East St. Louis riot be forever impossible."

By the time she died at her estate, Villa Lewaro, in Irvington-on-Hudson, New York, she had helped create the role of the 20th Century, self-made American businesswoman; established herself as a pioneer of the modern black hair-care and cosmetics industry; and set standards in the African-American community for corporate and community giving.

Tenacity and perseverance, faith in herself and in God, quality products and "honest business dealings" were the elements and strategies she prescribed for aspiring entrepreneurs who requested the secret to her rags-to-riches ascent. "There is no royal flower-strewn path to success," she once commented. "And if there is, I have not found it for if I have accomplished anything in life it is because I have been willing to work hard." ([madamejwalker.com](http://madamejwalker.com), ©A'Lelia Bundles)

