



Black History Month: Samuel Coleridge-Taylor

Citizenship & Music

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Samuel Coleridge-Taylor was an English **composer** and **conductor** born in 1912 in London. His mother’s family were very musical and he started learning the violin as a child. He showed a great talent for music and went to study at the famous Royal College of Music aged 15.

After graduating, Samuel became a **renowned** composer and conductor, as well as a political activist fighting against **racial prejudice**. His first composition was called ‘Ballade in A Minor’ for which music publisher August Jaeger called him “a genius”. He took **inspiration** from traditional African music and from poetry. His most famous composition, called ‘Hiawatha’s Wedding Feast’ was based on a poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow and was called “one of the most remarkable events in modern English musical history”.



He became so successful that he was invited to the White House in the USA to meet President Theodore Roosevelt. However, this time period was very difficult for black people and he faced much racism and **struggled** to make money, despite his incredible success and talent. Samuel Coleridge-Taylor died at the very young age of 37, but his music continues to be played today. You can see a blue **plaque** dedicated to his memory at his previous home in Croydon.

Match the words with a definition:

composer

famous

conductor

treating people badly because of their race

renowned

something that gives you ideas

racial prejudice

a sign on a wall, often to remember an important person after they die

inspiration

tried hard to do something difficult

struggled

someone who writes music

plaque

someone who stands in front of a group of musicians and leads them

Read the text again and answer the questions:

1 What instrument did Samuel Coleridge-Taylor first learn to play?

2 Where did he study music?

3 What two things mentioned in the text inspired his music?

4 What did he do in America?

5 What problems did Samuel face during his life?

6 Where can we find a memorial to this composer today?



Discuss with a friend, teacher, or your class

How do you think Samuel Coleridge-Taylor felt as a successful musician who also faced racism?

Do you think if Samuel Coleridge-Taylor was born today he would be more famous? Why?

If you were a composer, what things would you take inspiration from to make your music?



Curriculum link: Music

Listen to one of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor's compositions on YouTube. Do you like it? Research the piece of music and write a description of it. Include your opinion on the music.

