

Full Biography

James Kimo Williams is a Vietnam veteran and American composer whose work stands at the intersection of the symphonic tradition, chamber music, and contemporary cultural narrative. His music—performed by major orchestras and chamber ensembles throughout the United States, Europe, and Asia—engages themes of history, memory, service, and civic identity, transforming the concert hall into a space for reflection and dialogue.

Williams earned his Bachelor of Music in Composition from Berklee College of Music, followed by advanced private studies in counterpoint and composition in Boston with Dr. Hugo Norden and Michael Gibbs. He pursued graduate studies in composition at Pacific Lutheran University and later completed a Master of Arts in Management and Human Relations at Webster University. While at Berklee, he founded the experimental ensemble The Paumalu Symphony (later known as Kimotion), an early expression of a lifelong passion for large-scale orchestration that continues to shape his distinctive orchestral voice.

At the core of Williams's catalog is a substantial body of works for full orchestra, string quartet, chamber orchestra, and solo piano, many commissioned by leading arts organizations and performed by prominent ensembles. His music has been presented by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, Atlanta Symphony, Chicago Sinfonietta, Maryland Symphony Orchestra, Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, Bay Atlantic Symphony Orchestra, Lancaster Symphony Orchestra, Ho Chi Minh City Orchestra, Apollo Chamber Ensemble, and the Ethel Quartet, among many others.

One of his most widely performed works, *Fanfare for Life*, has been presented by orchestras across North America and internationally and recorded by the St. Petersburg Academic Symphony (Russia). His orchestral work *Symphony for Vietnam Veterans* (formerly *Symphony for the Sons of Nam*), a reflection on his service as a combat soldier in Vietnam, has been performed consistently since its 1990 premiere and was featured on NPR's *Performance Today*.

In addition to his work as a composer, Williams is an award-winning photographer whose images have appeared in Smithsonian Magazine and National Geographic. He also served as Executive Director of the National Vietnam Veterans Art Museum, further extending his commitment to cultural memory and public engagement.

Continuing his dedication to bringing music to service members, Williams founded the classic-rock ensemble C&K; Classic Rock Band (later known as The Lt. Dan Band) and partnered with actor-musician Gary Sinise to perform for military members and their families worldwide through the United Service Organizations (USO).

A Fulbright Specialist, former associate professor at Columbia College Chicago, former U.S. Army Bandmaster, and recipient of the 1999 Lancaster Symphony Composer of the Year award, Williams brings a deep sense of civic purpose to every facet of his creative work.

In 2015, he began a new chapter, relocating from Chicago to West Virginia with his partner and artistic collaborator, Carol Williams. While Carol presents social commentary through her textile art, Kimo continues to compose in both classical and progressive-rock genres, expanding the boundaries of his musical and cultural vision.