



UIW Department of Music

2022 UIW Florence Price Celebration Concert

Saturday, February 5, 2022

7:30 p.m.

Diane Bennack Concert Hall

University of the Incarnate Word

Program Notes

FLORENCE B. PRICE (1887-1953) achieved a level of renown that defied all expectations for an African American woman in her day.¹ Having studied at the New England Conservatory from 1903 to 1906, she pursued a career that included teaching at Shorter College (Little Rock) and heading the Music Department at Clark College (Atlanta). After moving to Chicago in 1927 to pursue a better, safer life than anything possible in the virulently racist U.S. South, she immersed herself that city's bustling cultural and educational life, becoming actively involved with the National Association of Negro Musicians and studying music and a variety of subjects at American Conservatory, Chicago Teachers College, Central YMCA College, the Lewis Institute, and the University of Chicago.² Today she is celebrated as the first African American woman to have her music performed by a major U.S. orchestra (her First Symphony was performed by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra as part of the World's Fair in 1933), but her fame spread far beyond that, and lasted much longer. The following two decades witnessed performances of her music by at least nine other orchestras, as well as by some of the world's greatest soloists and chamber players. More than a decade after her death her reputation was still so great that the City of Chicago Public Schools named the Florence B. Price Elementary School after her in 1964. That school closed in 2012, but the same building still bears her name: the Florence B. Price Twenty-First Century Academy for Excellence.

And through it all, she composed. Florence Beatrice Price penned hundreds of compositions of astonishing richness and breadth which gave voice to a musical imagination that would not be stilled despite the limitations that her world would have imposed on her because of her race and her sex. Her reputation has been steadily broadening in recent decades thanks to dedicated and brilliant scholarly work by Rae Linda Brown, Marquese Carter, Samantha Ege, Barbara Garvey Jackson, Douglas Schadle, Bethany Jo Smith, Eileen Southern, and Helen Walker-Hill, among others.³

But if Price the composer never had to be rediscovered, the same could not be said of her music itself – simply because she published little of what she wrote. That began to change when her elder daughter, Florence Price Robinson (1917-75), donated a significant body of her music manuscripts and biographical materials to the University of Arkansas Libraries (Fayetteville), and the situation further improved with that library's acquisition of a sizeable “addendum” in the late 1980s. Another major development was the discovery of a sizeable trove of music manuscripts and other documents in an abandoned house in St. Anne, Illinois, in 2009 – a recovery that eventually met with major media coverage. Florence Price, having already during her lifetime overcome the forcible marginalization and erasure that were her lot as an African American and a woman in a profoundly racist and sexist world, was now in a position to have her voice heard again.

- John Michael Cooper
Denton, Texas, 10 May 2021

¹ Although Price is mentioned in many texts that deal with African American composers and women in music, many of these sources repeat the same, rather basic information. Until recently, the most detailed and authoritative biography was the Introduction to the late Rae Linda Brown's edition of Price's First and Third Symphonies (“Lifting the Veil: The Symphonies of Florence B. Price,” in *Florence Price: Symphonies Nos. 1 and 3*, ed. Rae Linda Brown and Wayne Shirley, Recent Researches in American Music, No. 66 [Middleton, Wisconsin: A-R Editions, 2008], xv-lii). The situation improved significantly in June 2020 with the publication of the first book-length life-and-works study (Rae Linda Brown, *The Heart of a Woman: The Life and Music of Florence B. Price*, ed. Guthrie P. Ramsey, jr. [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2020]).

² Brown, “Lifting the Veil,” xxiv.

³ See, for example, Barbara Garvey Jackson: “Florence Price, Composer,” *The Black Perspective in Music* 5 (1977), 30-43; Eileen Southern, *The Music of Black Americans: A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1971; 3rd ed., 1997); Rae Linda Brown, “Selected Orchestral Music of Florence B. Price (1888 [sic] - 1953) in the Context of Her Life and Work (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1987); Helen Walker-Hill, “Music by Black Women Composers at the American Music Research Center,” *American Music Research Center Journal* 2 (1992): 23-52; Calvert Johnson, “Florence Beatrice Price: Chicago Renaissance Woman,” *The American Organist* 34 (2000): 68-76; Scott David Farrah, “Signifyin(g): A Semiotic Analysis of Symphonic Works by William Grant Still, William Levi Dawson, and Florence B. Price” (Ph.D. diss., Florida State University, 2007); Bethany Jo Smith, “‘Song to the Dark Virgin’: Race and Gender in Five Art Songs of Florence B. Price” (M.M. Thesis, College-Conservatory of Music, Cincinnati, 2007); Marquese Carter, “The Poet and Her Songs: Analyzing the Art Songs of Florence B. Price” (D.M. diss., Indiana University, 2018); Samantha Ege, “Florence Price and the Politics of Her Existence,” *The Kapralova Society Journal* 16, no. 1 (Spring 2019): 1-10; Douglas Schadle, “Plus ça change: Florence B. Price In The #Blacklivesmatter Era,” *NewMusicBox* 20 February 2019, New Music USA, accessed 21 September 2019, <https://nmbx.newmusicusa.org/plus-ca-change-florence-b-price-in-the-blacklivesmatter-era/>; Samantha Ege, “Composing a Symphonist: Florence Price and the Hand of Black Women's Fellowship,” *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 24 (2020): 7-27.

Song Texts

“God Gives Me You”

Poetry by Nora Connelly

Because you hold my hand and say “I do”
Before love’s altar I pledge my soul to you.
All through my life This promise will hold true,
Because within this hour God gives me you.

Thy spirit soars on wings of visions fair;
From out the space of life you called to me there
With gifts of love I came endowed anew,
Because within this hour God gives me you.

Love’s conquering peace becalms my restless soul
And angels sing as our hearts they enroll.
Through-out life’s day my vows I will hold true,
Because within this hour God gave me you.

“Peter, Go Ring Dem Bells”

Spiritual

Peter, go ring dem bells,
Peter go ring dem bells,
Peter, ring dem bells,
I heard from heav’n today.

Oh Peter, go ring dem bells,
Peter, go ring dem bells,
Peter, go ring dem bells,
I heard from heav’n today.

I wonder where my mother is gone,
I wonder where my mother is gone,
I wonder where my mother is gone,
I heard from heav’n today.

I wonder where my mother is gone,
I wonder where my mother is gone,
I wonder where my mother is gone,
I heard from heav’n today.

I heard from heav’n today;
I heard from heav’n today;
I thank God an’ I thank you, too,
I heard from heaven today.

Oh, Peter, go ring dem bells,
Peter, go ring dem bells,
Peter, go ring dem bells;
I heard from heav’n today.

“I Am Bound for the Kingdom”

Spiritual

I am bound for the Kingdom,
I am bound for the Kingdom,
I am bound for the Kingdom.
Glory in my soul!

If you get there before I do,
Glory in my soul,
Look out for me, I’m a comin’ too,
Glory in my soul.

I am bound for the Kingdom,
I am bound for the Kingdom,
I am bound for the Kingdom.
Glory in my soul!

“I’m Workin’ on My Building”

Spiritual

I’m workin’ on my buildin’,
Workin’ on my buildin’,
I’m a workin’ on my buildin’
All for my lord.

If I was a mourner,
I tell you what I’d do,
I’d give my heart to Jesus
And work on my building too.

I’m workin’ on my buildin’,
Workin’ on my buildin’,
I’m a workin’ on my buildin’
All for my lord.

If I was a sinner,
I tell you what I’d do,
I’d give my heart to Jesus
And work on my building too.

I’m workin’ on my buildin’,
Workin’ on my buildin’,
I’m a workin’ on my buildin’
All for my lord.

“Brown Arms”

“Words by a Colored Poet”

Listen, oh brown kind mother,
I am weary and I would rest
Put your old warm arms about me,
Let me lie on your withered breast.

I am very sick of cities,
of faces cold and strange;
I long for your sunwashed spaces, blue skies,
And windswept range.

I am sick of the huddled houses
And the selfish hearts of men.
Put your warm kind arms about me,
Let me lie on your heart.

Let me lie, let me lie on your heart,
On your heart, on your heart again.

“King Jesus Is A-Lisenin”

Spiritual

King Jesus is a-lisenin' all night long,
King Jesus is a-lisenin' all night long.
King Jesus is a-lisenin' all night long
To hear some sinner pray.

I know I've been converted
An' I know my work's been done.
'Cause my soul's been anchored in my Jesus
An de devil can't do me no harm.

Dis world am filled wid trials
An' a tribulations too,
But I jes depends on Jesus
Cause I know he'll carry me through.

“Great Camp Meeting”

Spiritual

O walk together children,
Don't you get weary;
Walk together children,
Don't you get weary;
Walk together children,
Don't you get weary;
There's a great camp meeting in the promised land.

Goin' to mourn an' never tire,
Mourn an' never tire,
Mourn an' never tire;
There's a great camp meeting in the promised land.

O talk together children...
O sing together children...
A better day is coming...
O travel with me children...

“Roll Jordan, Roll.”

Spiritual

Roll Jordan, roll
Roll Jordan, roll
I want to go to
Heaven when I die
To hear old Jordan roll.

My brother, you ought to been there;
Yes, my Lord;
A setting in the kingdom
To hear old Jordan roll.

My sister, you ought to been there...
My leader, you ought to been there...

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TEXAS LUTHERAN UNIVERSITY
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Program

All works by Florence B. Price unless otherwise indicated.

Tarantella

Ara Koh, piano

In Sentimental Mood

Ara Koh, piano

Ticklin' Toes

Ariana Flores, piano

“Dusk” from *African Sketches* by Nkeiru Okoye (b. 1972)

Beatriz Leal, piano

“God Gives Me You” (Nora Connelly)

Nia Newton

William Gokelman, piano*

“Peter Go Ring Dem Bells” (Spiritual)

Alexander Montalvo

William Gokelman, piano*

Two Traditional Negro Spirituals

“I Am Bound for the Kingdom”

“I’m Workin’ on My Buildin’

Roberta Ramos

William Gokelman, piano*

“Brown Arms”

Orit Eylon*

William Gokelman, piano*

from the *8 Spirituals for Choir*

“King Jesus Is A-Lisenin”

“Great Camp Meeting”

Nia Newton and Stephanie Huskin, soloists

“Roll Jordan, Roll”

Ayesha McCauley, soloist

UIW Chorale