

American Music

The Rediscovery of Florence B. Price

Submitted as thesis for the Master of Music in Composition, San Francisco Conservatory of Music, spring 2019 by Shawne Anell Workman

Contents

Dedication	1
Introduction	1
References	5
Roles/Instrumentation/Setting	7
Libretto	7
Full Score	13
Vocal Score, Instrumental Parts	47

Dedication

*for Chasiti Lashay Walker,
the inspiration for this piece,
and Jasmine Johnson and Auburn Joseph
with admiration and gratitude*

Introduction

In 2009, two property renovators began work on a neglected home south of Chicago.^{1,2} A protected corner of the attic yielded a curious discovery: a sizeable collection of books, personal correspondence and musical manuscripts. In neat lettering on the carefully hand-inked sheet music, one name appeared again and again: Florence B. Price. A quick internet search identified composer Florence Beatrice Smith Price (1887-1953), the first African-American woman to have her music played by a major U.S. symphony. The University of Arkansas added the rediscovered

¹ Micaela Baranello, “Welcoming a Black Female Composer Into the Canon. Finally,” *The New York Times*, February 9, 2018.

² Alex Ross, “The Rediscovery of Florence Price: How an African-American Composer’s Works Were Saved from Destruction,” *The New Yorker*, February 5, 2018.

Text and music copyright © 2018-19 by Shawne Anell Workman (ASCAP). All rights reserved.

July 1943 letter from Florence Price to Serge Koussevitzky quoted under academic fair use and with verbal permission of the estate of Florence Price, Trustee Vicky Hammond; written confirmation anticipated as of this printing.

For the accompanying score, reduction, and parts, bars 23–28:
SYMPHONY NO. 1 IN E MINOR
Florence B. Price
Copyright © 2018 by G. Schirmer, Inc. (ASCAP)
This arrangement © 2019 by G. Schirmer, Inc. (ASCAP)
International Copyright Secured. All Rights Reserved.
Used by Permission.

For the accompanying score, reduction and parts, bars 33–39:
SYMPHONY NO. 3 IN C MINOR
By Florence B. Price
Copyright © 2018 by G. Schirmer, Inc. (ASCAP)
This arrangement © 2019 by G. Schirmer, Inc. (ASCAP)
International Copyright Secured. All Rights Reserved.
Used by Permission.

materials to their existing Florence Price collection, making newly available several works that had been thought lost, including her fourth symphony and two violin concertos.³

The present 12-minute chamber opera was inspired by Price's life and music, and the gentle dignity and determination reflected in her letters. In a fictional reimagining of the 2009 discovery, this work quotes one of several letters that Price wrote to Boston Symphony Director Serge Koussevitzky, asking him to consider her work.⁴ Koussevitzky was an important force in the development of American symphonic music, helping to promote the work of Aaron Copland, among others, and programming as many as one-hundred new American works over the years 1924–1946.^{5,6}

It is a proper question to ask, what songs, then, belong to the American and appeal more strongly to him than any others? . . . The most potent as well as the most beautiful among them, according to my estimation, are certain of the so-called plantation melodies and slave songs, all of which are distinguished by unusual and subtle harmonies, the like of which I have found in no other songs but those of old Scotland and Ireland. . . .

—Antonín Dvořák, "Music in America," *Harper's Magazine*, Feb 15, 1895

Price's bid for inclusion in the American canon was grounded in a strong musical background that blended African-American and European traditions. A successful artist of both the Harlem Renaissance and Chicago Black Renaissance, Price worked steadily throughout her career to promote African-American arts and literature while developing an extensive body of vocal, chamber and symphonic music, drawing on the rich experiences of her early life and education.⁷ In Price's hometown of Little Rock, Arkansas, her family enjoyed relatively privileged status that gave young Florence chances to interact with notable visitors including Frederick Douglass and the composer Blind Boone.⁸ The family attended a musically active and racially integrated church.⁹ Her father worked as a dentist to respected clientele, rumored to secretly include the

³ Florence Beatrice Smith Price, *Papers: Correspondence, Musical Scores, and Other Papers, 1906-1975* and addenda (Manuscript Collections 988, 988a, 988b). Special Collections Department, University of Arkansas Libraries. Accessed July 16, 2018. <https://libraries.uark.edu/specialcollections/findingaids/price.html>, <https://libraries.uark.edu/specialcollections/findingaids/ead/transform.asp?xml=mc988a>, <https://libraries.uark.edu/specialcollections/findingaids/ead/transform.asp?xml=mc988b>.

⁴ Florence Beatrice Smith Price, Personal correspondence to Serge Koussevitzky. Serge Koussevitzky Archive, Music Division, Library of Congress, as quoted in *Florence Price: Symphonies Nos. 1 and 3*, eds. Rae Linda Brown and Wayne Shirley (Middleton: A-R Editions, Inc., 2008), xxxv.

⁵ Leon Botstein, "On Conductors, Composers, and Music Directors: Serge Koussevitzky in Retrospect," *The Musical Quarterly* 86, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 583-590.

⁶ Hugo Leichtentritt, "About this Book," *Serge Koussevitzky, The Boston Symphony Orchestra, and the New American Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1947).

⁷ Samantha Ege, "Florence Price and the Politics of Her Existence," *The Kapralova Society Journal* 16, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 1-10.

⁸ James Greeson, "The Caged Bird: The Life and Music of Florence B. Price," narr. Julia Sampson, DVD, 2015.

⁹ WQXR Features, "The Price of Admission: A Musical Biography of Florence Beatrice Price," narr. Terrance McKnight, February 6, 2013, <https://www.wqxr.org/story/271521-musical-biography-florence-beatrice-price/>.

state governor.¹⁰ Young Florence started piano study at age 3, and published her first composition by age 11.¹¹

Price entered the New England Conservatory of Music at age 14 and became the first NECM student to graduate with dual degrees, in piano pedagogy and organ performance, while also studying composition with George Chadwick and Frederick Converse.¹² Though NECM did accept African-American students—a rarity in that time—Price’s mother insisted she disguise her racial heritage; the 1906 NECM yearbook listed her hometown as Puebla, Mexico.¹³ Later in life, Price identified her maternal and paternal heritage as “French, Indian, Spanish” and “Negro, Indian, English.”¹⁴

It matters little whether the inspiration for the coming folk songs of America is derived from the Negro melodies, the songs of the creoles, the red man's chant, or the plaintive ditties of the homesick German or Norwegian. Undoubtedly the germs for the best in music lie hidden among all the races that are commingled in this great country.
—Antonín Dvořák, “Music in America,” *Harper’s Magazine*, Feb 15, 1895

After NECM, Price returned to Little Rock to marry and begin a family, but her home town had changed.¹⁵ Jim Crow legislation and racial violence drove the family northward. Price found a vibrant and welcoming community of African-American writers and musicians in Chicago, where she spent most of her remaining years and developed a strong reputation as a piano and organ teacher, performer and composer.¹⁶ She achieved a major breakthrough in 1932 when the Rodman Wanamaker Competition awarded her first prize for her *Symphony Number 1 in E Minor* (1931–32) and third prize for her *Piano Sonata in E Minor*.^{17,18,19} The resulting 1933 performances of her *Symphony Number 1* by the Chicago Symphony under Frederick Stock made Price the first African-American woman composer to receive performance by a major U.S. orchestra.²⁰ In addition, Price’s many songs received national attention when contralto Marian

¹⁰ WQXR Features, “The Price of Admission.”

¹¹ WQXR Features, “The Price of Admission.”

¹² WQXR Features, “The Price of Admission.”

¹³ Barbara G. Jackson, “Florence Price, Composer,” *The Black Perspective in Music* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1977): 30–43.

¹⁴ Florence Beatrice Smith Price, “Form A, Florence Price’s Biographical Summaries, Featuring Information about Her Musical Background, Her Works, and Her Achievements,” University of Arkansas Libraries, Special Collections, Fayetteville, AK, accessed July 12, 2018, page 1.

<http://digitalcollections.uark.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p17212coll3/id/60>.

¹⁵ Jackson, “Florence Price, Composer.”

¹⁶ Helen Walker-Hill, “Black Women Composers in Chicago: Then and Now,” *Black Music Research Journal* 12, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 1, 7–12.

¹⁷ Rae Linda Brown, “The Woman’s Symphony Orchestra of Chicago and Florence B. Price’s Piano Concerto in One Movement,” *American Music* 11, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 185.

¹⁸ WQXR Features, “The Price of Admission.”

¹⁹ Rae Linda Brown, “Lifting the Veil: The Symphonies of Florence B. Price,” in *Music of the United States of America Volume 19: Florence Price: Symphonies Nos. 1 and 3*, ed. Rae Linda Brown, Wayne Shirley (Middleton, Wisconsin: A-R Editions, 2008), xv–xlix.

²⁰ Brown, “The Woman’s Symphony Orchestra of Chicago and Florence B. Price’s Piano Concerto.”

Anderson closed her historic 1939 Lincoln Monument performance with Price's spiritual, "My Soul's Been Anchored in the Lord."²¹

Despite these successes and nascent interest in Europe, Price struggled to achieve recognition as a major American composer during her lifetime.^{22,23,24} There is no reported evidence that Koussevitzky responded to her letters, and Price describes on a late-career application form "an accumulation of hundreds of unpublished and unsubmitted manuscripts," many of which were thought lost after her death in 1953.²⁵ Since the 2009 discovery, Price's symphonic music has garnered renewed attention. Her violin concertos received their first recording in February 2018.²⁶ Also in 2018, music publisher G. Schirmer acquired the rights to Price's catalog, including her rediscovered symphonic works.^{27,28} Additional performances and recordings continue, including a world premiere recording of her *Symphony Number 4 in D Minor* by the Fort Smith Symphony and a well-received January 2019 revival performance of her *Symphony Number 3 in C Minor* by the Oakland Symphony.^{29,30}

²¹ Lizzie Davis, "The Inspirational Life of Florence Price – and Why It's One of the Most Important Stories in Music," Classic FM, August 15, 2017, accessed July 15, 2018, <https://www.classicfm.com/discover-music/florence-price/>.

²² Brown, "The Woman's Symphony Orchestra of Chicago and Florence B. Price's Piano Concerto."

²³ Walker-Hill, "Black Women Composers in Chicago."

²⁴ Brown, "Lifting the Veil."

²⁵ Price, "Form A," page 3.

²⁶ Baranello, "Welcoming a Black Female Composer into the Canon. Finally."

²⁷ University of Arkansas Associate Professor of Violin Er-Gene Kahng, e-mail to author October 12, 2018 and November 12, 2018.

²⁸ Print Licensing and Data Coordinator Will Adams, Music Sales Corporation, e-mail to author January 14, 2019.

²⁹ Fort Smith Symphony, *Price: Symphonies Nos. 1 & 4*. Naxos Orchestral Classics, January 11, 2019, CD.

³⁰ Joshua Kosman, "Oakland Symphony revives music of overlooked African American composer," *San Francisco Chronicle* January 26, 2019.

References

Baranello, Micaela. "Welcoming a Black Female Composer Into the Canon. Finally." *The New York Times*, February 9, 2018. <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/09/arts/music/florence-price-arkansas-symphony-concerto.html>.

Brown, Linda Rae. "The Woman's Symphony Orchestra of Chicago and Florence B. Price's Piano Concerto in One Movement." *American Music* 11, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 185–205.

Brown, Rae Linda and Shirley, Wayne, eds. *Music of the United States of America Volume 19: Florence Price: Symphonies Nos. 1 and 3*. Middleton, Wisconsin: A-R Editions, 2008.

Botstein, Leon. "On Conductors, Composers, and Music Directors: Serge Koussevitzky in Retrospect." *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 86, No. 4 (Winter 2002), pp. 583-590.

Davis, Lizzie. "The Inspirational Life of Florence Price – and Why It's One of the Most Important Stories in Music." Classic FM, August 15, 2017. Accessed July 15, 2018. <https://www.classicfm.com/discover-music/florence-price/>.

Dvořák, Antonín. "Music in America." *Harper's Magazine*, February 15, 1895: 429–34. <https://harpers.org/archive/1895/02/music-in-america/>. As quoted on <https://www.tagg.org/others/dvorak1895.html>. Accessed February 16, 2019.

Ege, Samantha. "Florence Price and the Politics of Her Existence." *The Kapralova Society Journal* 16, no. 1 (Spring 2018): 1–10.

Fort Smith Symphony. *Price: Symphonies Nos. 1 & 4*. Naxos Orchestral Classics. January 11, 2019. CD. <https://naxosdirect.com/items/price-symphonies-nos.-1-4-479015>.

Greeson, James. "The Caged Bird: The Life and Music of Florence B. Price." Narrated by Julia Sampson. Independent film supported by grants from the Arkansas Humanities Council, Department of Arkansas Heritage, and the University of Arkansas. 57 minutes, DVD, 2015.

Jackson, Barbara Garvey. "Florence Price, Composer." *The Black Perspective in Music* 5, no. 1 (Spring 1977): 30–43.

Kosman, Joshua. "Oakland Symphony revives music of overlooked African American composer." *San Francisco Chronicle* January 26, 2019.

Leichtentritt, Hugo. *Serge Koussevitzky, The Boston Symphony Orchestra, and the New American Music*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1947. <http://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674430778>.

Price, Florence Beatrice Smith. "Form A, Florence Price's Biographical Summaries, Featuring Information about Her Musical Background, Her Works, and Her Achievements." Item Location: MC 988a, Box 1, Folder 1. University of Arkansas Libraries, Special Collections,

Fayetteville, AK. <http://digitalcollections.uark.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p17212coll3/id/60>. Accessed July 12, 2018.

Price, Florence Beatrice Smith. Papers: Correspondence, Musical Scores, and Other Papers, 1906-1975 (Manuscript Collection 988). Special Collections Department, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville. Accessed July 16, 2018. <https://libraries.uark.edu/specialcollections/findingaids/price.html>.

Price, Florence Beatrice Smith. Papers Addendum (Manuscript Collection 988a). Special Collections Department, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville. Accessed September 28, 2018. <https://libraries.uark.edu/specialcollections/findingaids/ead/transform.asp?xml=mc988a>.

Price, Florence Beatrice Smith. Papers Second Addendum (Manuscript Collection 988b). Special Collections Department, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville. Accessed November 8, 2018. <https://libraries.uark.edu/specialcollections/findingaids/ead/transform.asp?xml=mc988b>.

Price, Florence Beatrice Smith. Personal correspondence to Serge Koussevitzky. Serge Koussevitzky Archive, Music Division, Library of Congress. Call Number: ML31.K66, quoted in *Florence Price: Symphonies Nos. 1 and 3*, eds. Rae Linda Brown and Wayne Shirley (Middleton: A-R Editions, Inc., 2008), xxxv.

Ross, Alex. "The Rediscovery of Florence Price: How an African-American Composer's Works Were Saved from Destruction." *The New Yorker*, February 5, 2018. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2018/02/05/the-rediscovery-of-florence-price>.

Walker-Hill, Helen. "Black Women Composers in Chicago: Then and Now." *Black Music Research Journal* 12, no. 1 (Spring 1992): 1–23.

WQXR Features. "The Price of Admission: A Musical Biography of Florence Beatrice Price." Narrated by Terrance McKnight. WQXR, February 6, 2013. Accessed September 2, 2018. <https://www.wqxr.org/story/271521-musical-biography-florence-beatrice-price/>.