

ADORATION

3½ minutes

Sw. Horn $D\sharp$ Prepare B 13 3545 430

Gt. Dulc. D

Ped. Ged. Ped. 31, Chorus

FLORENCE B. PRICE

Andante $\text{♩} = 84$

Sw. \circ



Black History Month

Tribute Concert to Black Composers

Featuring music by
Florence Price,
Margaret Bonds,
and
William Grant Still



Black History Month and this Concert

Black History Month is an opportunity to celebrate the achievements of Black Americans and to highlight Black figures who have been too-often neglected in history books that privilege white narratives.

For 98 years, the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH) has chosen a theme to focus our attention during Black History Month. **ASALH's 2024 theme is African Americans and the Arts.** This theme reminds us of how Black artists have used their art “to preserve history and community memory as well as for empowerment.” Because Western intellectuals have long ignored the contributions of Black artists, this attention to African Americans and the Arts puts their rich history and vibrant future into the national spotlight.

In alignment with the 2024 theme for Black History Month, this concert showcases the musical brilliance of the Black composers Margaret Bonds, Florence Price, and William Grant Still. These three artists put their Black heritage in conversation with the present day, drawing on the traditions of folk-songs and spirituals. We hope that through this concert highlighting Black composers, you are not only educated about the artistic legacy they passed down but also inspired by the deep courage and resolve they displayed as artists in a time when the white musical establishment would not give them the credit they were due.

Hamilton-Garrett Center for Music and Arts

St. Ignatius Parish is donating half of the proceeds from this concert to Hamilton-Garrett Center for Music and Arts.

Hamilton-Garrett is committed to preserving, educating, and celebrating Black music. The center offers music instruction to the next generation of innovative artists, challenging inner-city youth to see themselves as producers of Black culture, music, and art. For over 20 years, Hamilton-Garrett's Academy and Center have been proponents of community-based youth programs for musical training in the tradition of Black music.

Located in Roxbury, MA, Hamilton-Garrett Music and Arts is invested in the people of Greater Boston. Their mission helps to advance the rich legacy of Black artistic expression.



The Composers

Florence Price

April 9, 1887–June 3, 1953



Florence Price grew up in Little Rock, Arkansas, where she took piano lessons from her mother. She gave her first performance when she was 4 and published her first composition at 11. After high school, she attended the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, where she double majored in organ and piano teaching.

After spending time in Atlanta and Little Rock, Price moved to Chicago, beginning a new era in her career as part of the Chicago Black Renaissance. She taught composition to Margaret Bonds, and in 1930 Bonds premiered Price's composition "A Negro Phantasy," securing both musicians' place as prominent figures in the arts world.

Price's First Symphony was included in a program performed by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra for the Century of Progress World's Fair in 1933–34; Price was the first African American woman to have a composition performed by a major US orchestra. Price maintained a long-term association with the Women's Symphony Orchestra of Chicago, which regularly performed her works.

Margaret Bonds

March 3, 1913–April 26, 1972

Margaret Bonds was born in Chicago, the daughter of Estella Bonds, a pianist and church organist. Estella was Margaret's primary piano teacher, and by age 13 Bonds had already written her first composition. In high school, Margaret began studying under Florence Price, and the two would continue to work together throughout their lives.

Margaret matriculated at Northwestern University when she was 16 and eventually earned her Bachelor of Music and Master of Music degrees. As one of few Black students, Bonds faced discrimination in this white institution. However, at Northwestern she encountered the poem on the next page, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" by Langston Hughes. This poem, which she later set to music, strengthened Bonds' resolve and—as she would later say—helped "save her."

Bonds won accolades for her compositions, and she would become the first Black American to perform with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. When she moved to New York in 1939, she frequently collaborated with Langston Hughes and became an advocate for Black performers.



William Grant Still

May 11, 1895–December 3, 1978

Like Florence Price, William Grant Still grew up in Little Rock, Arkansas. His step-father helped nurture Still's musical talents with records of classical music, while his grandmother inculcated him with Negro spirituals. He started violin lessons in Little Rock, and also taught himself to play the clarinet, saxophone, oboe, cello, and viola.

Though Still initially pursued a Bachelor of Science at Wilberforce University, he would later leave to study at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music. Because he could not afford to study composition, George Whitfield Andrews agreed to teach him without charge.

Following World War I, Still moved to Harlem and became part of the Harlem Renaissance. In the 1930s, he worked primarily as an arranger of popular music. Still composed *Song of a City* for the exhibit "Democracy" at the 1939 World's Fair, though he could not attend the fair without police protection. His opera *Troubled Island* about the Haitian Revolution became the first opera by an American composer to be performed by the New York City Opera.



Eastman School of Music



The Negro Speaks of Rivers

Langston Hughes, 1901–1967

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the
flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy
bosom turn all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

Top Left: A young Florence Price.

Top Right: Margaret Bonds in 1956. Photograph by Carl Van Vechten, Yale University Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

Bottom: William Grant Still (holding music case) with school friends at Wilberforce University, ca. 1915. From the William Grant Still and Verna Arvey Collection (MC 1125), University of Arkansas Libraries.



Musical Selections

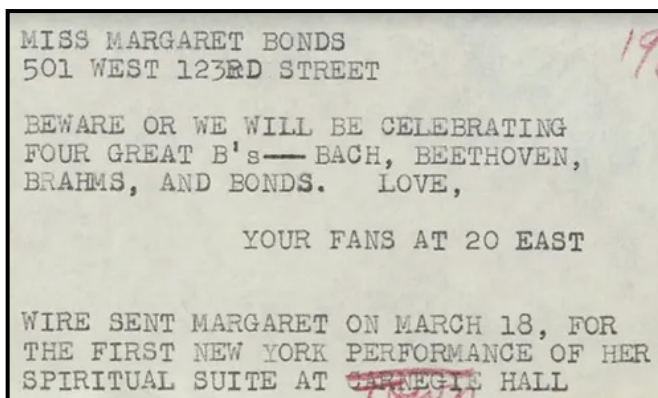
Spiritual Suite Margaret Bonds (piano)

1. “The Valley of the Bones”
2. “The Bells”
3. “Troubled Water”

Bonds’ *Spiritual Suite* is the magnum opus of her piano compositions, drawing on and adapting Negro spirituals. The third movement “Troubled Water” (based on the spiritual “Wade in the Water”) was published alone in 1967, while the first two remained unpublished in her lifetime. It wasn’t until 2020 that Louise Toppin published the *Spiritual Suite* as a complete three-movement piece. Bonds performed “The Valley of the Bones” (based on “Dem Bones”) and “The Bells” (based on “Oh, Peter, Ring dem Bells”) separately throughout her career, and though she was not the first to perform the Suite in its entirety, she did perform all three movements at a Gala Emancipation Concert held on February 12, 1963—Abraham Lincoln’s birthday in the centenary of the Emancipation Proclamation.

Telegram sent from
Langston Hughes to
Margaret Bonds on the first
New York performance of
the *Spiritual Suite*.

*Yale University, Beinecke Rare
Book and Manuscript Library,
Langston Hughes Papers, JWJ
MSS 26 Box 16, folder 377.*



“Elegy” William Grant Still (organ)

This work is one of two composed for the organ by Still. “Elegy” was almost certainly inspired by spirituals, but Still’s classical sensibilities also shine through in the piece. The music features a minor tonality, a somber flow moving from its quiet opening to the dramatic climax on the full organ, suiting the work for a memorial service. “Elegy” was published in 1963 by the Long Beach, Los Angeles, Pasadena, and Valley District Chapters of the American Guild for Organists. Like Bonds’ *Spiritual Suite* above, one can easily imagine this piece as an “Elegy” for Lincoln.

“Here’s One” William Grant Still (piano w/viola)

This beautiful adaptation of the spiritual “Talk about a child that do love Jesus, here’s one. . .” reflects Still’s own heritage and enhanced ability to depict certain emotions through his music. The spiritual recounts the voice of God calling a child, and the child’s response. “Here’s One” imitates that dialogue: the piano introduces the piece, and then the viola calls out with a low voice on G string before responding in the higher alto register. Still continues the spiritual’s theme, making it more complex as it transcends into a higher register and more open sound.

“Summerland” William Grant Still (piano w/violin) *from Three Visions (1935)*

Feelings of tranquility and sublime melody weave together the piano and violin in “Summerland.” The faster passages and trills from the violin suggest summer songbirds, and the entire piece lends itself to the beauty of a quiet country scene resting after the enthusiastic liveliness of spring. “Summerland” is the second work in Still’s *Three Visions*, which tells the story of what happens to the soul after death; this piece is the portrait of promised rest and repose in the afterlife, and Summerland can, in many ways, be another name for Heaven.

“Adoration” Florence Price (organ w/violin)

This piece was one of Price’s last works, but echoes of her earlier work as an organ accompanist for silent films shine through. Composed in the 1950s, the song was considered lost until it was discovered in 2009 in a box of her compositions. Though originally composed as a church organ solo, “Adoration” gained a second life with future arrangements for solo violin and string orchestra. The deep devotion of “Adoration” is plain in the music, and we can hear Price’s mother’s religious influence on her in its sincerity. Perhaps the best-known of Price’s oeuvre, “Adoration” is marked by its deceptive simplicity.

Suite No. 1 for Organ Florence Price

1. “Fantasy”
2. “Fughetta”
3. “Air”
4. “Toccato”

This is the longest of Price’s organ compositions. The opening movement, “Fantasy,” is held together by its initial flourish which recurs throughout. The last three movements have melodies that recall spirituals, without being explicit adaptations of the folk songs. In “Fughetta,” “Air,” and “Toccato,” Price borrows elements from not only spirituals but also ragtime bass lines, the Juba dance, and jazz harmonies. Price wrote about her symphonies that her intention was “to picture a cross section” of contemporary Black life with its heritage, how contact with the present can influence things from the past.



“Untitled,” Harold Newton, n.d., (oil on board, 21 ½ x 27 ¼ in.). Courtesy of the Asselstine Collection. Photo by Tariq Gibran.

This painting by Black American landscapist Harry Newton depicts a royal poinciana in the Florida summer sun. The vibrant colors evoke an exultant scene of summer repose. In Newton’s painting one can imagine something of the serenity William Grant Still captures in “Summerland.”

Performances by

Andrew Sheranian piano and organ

Since 2010, Andrew Sheranian has been Organist and Master of Choristers at the Parish of All Saints, Ashmont in Boston, an Anglo-Catholic church known for its commitment to excellence in music and liturgy. His duties at Ashmont include recruiting, training, and conducting the choir, as well as playing the parish's two pipe organs: C.B. Fisk Opus 103 of 1995 and Skinner Opus 708 of 1929, the latter installed in 2015 during Mr. Sheranian's tenure. He is also organist on staff at The College Church of Seventh-Day Adventists in Lancaster and at the Parish of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, Chestnut Hill.



Allyn McCourt violin and viola

Allyn Hayes McCourt III is a versatile artist whose passion and dedication have left an indelible mark on the realms of music education, performance, and artistic leadership. Hailing from Jamaica Plain, MA, Allyn is a graduate of the New England Conservatory of Music (M.M.) and proudly serves as the Director of Music Ministry at St. Ignatius of Loyola in Chestnut Hill. Throughout his career, Allyn has lent his musical prowess to various orchestras across New England, including the New Hampshire Philharmonic, Quincy Symphony, and Fall Rive Symphony. Currently, he holds the position of principal violist with the Cambridge Chamber Ensemble, and is the violist of the newly founded Moss Hill String Quartet.



About the Program

The photographs included in this program came from the University of Arkansas Special Collections Library, Yale University Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, the Eastman School of Music at the University of Rochester, the Detroit Public Library. These groups have extensive catalogs of letters and photographs pertaining to Florence Price, Margaret Bonds, and William Grant Still.

The program notes for the musical selections have been adapted from several sources, with original additions. Lucius R. Weathersby, PhD, John Michael Cooper, Louise Toppin, Aaron P. Dworkin supplied the basis for these notes.



Mural of William Grant Still conducting his opera *Troubled Island*. Painted by Noni Olabisi for the William Grant Still Art Center.

Thank You for Joining Us!

If you would like donate to our St. Ignatius Concert Series, you can give in the baskets at the main entrance, use the iPad to give via card, or give on Venmo @StIgnatius-Church with “Concert Series” as the payment description.



As a reminder, half of the proceeds from this event will be donated to Hamilton-Garrett Center for Music and Arts.



Langston Hughes (left) and Margaret Bonds (right) with Helen Menken and two unidentified men at an event.

The friendship between Hughes and Bonds was a source of great artistic inspiration for both, and Bonds set many of Hughes' poems to music.



Florence Price with her Daughter