

UOS MUSIC PRESENTS

**SAMANTHA EGE'S *BLACK RENAISSANCE WOMAN:
LIVES, LEGACIES AND MUSIC***

MONDAY 14 MARCH 2022

Zenobia Powell Perry (1908 – 2004) *Homage*

Margaret Bonds (1913 – 1972) *Spiritual Suite*

Betty Jackson King (1928 – 1994) *Four Seasonal Sketches*

Florence Price (1887 – 1953)

Piano Concerto in One Movement, arr. by the composer for two pianos

***Homage*, Zenobia Powell Perry (1908 - 2004)
approx. 4 minutes**

Unlike the other composers on this programme, Zenobia Powell Perry did not operate in Chicago and Harlem to a great extent. But, as a socially conscious and civically aware practitioner, she was well attuned to the intellectual and creative developments of the era and the activities of its key players.

Born in Boley, Oklahoma, Perry pursued the serious study of classical music, which led to her attending private classes with the famed Robert Nathaniel Dett through the 1920s and 30s. Dett inspired Perry to begin notating her musical ideas; he was, in fact, an inspiration to many classical practitioners (Black and white) during this time and a sought after composer, pedagogue, and performer. Perry went on to study with William L. Dawson, one of the great composers associated with the Harlem

Renaissance, as well as the modernist composer Darius Milhaud.

Perry composed *Homage* (1990) as a tribute to Dawson for his 90th birthday. The melodic theme derives from one his favourite spirituals: *I Been 'Buked and I Been Scorned*. *Homage* begins with a solo melody, akin to a solo vocal part, that follows the shape of the original spiritual tune. The tempo picks up slightly as more musical lines enter. The chordal textures thicken and the melody begins to wander, retaining some of the original shape, but largely venturing into new directions. The middle section increases in emotional intensity, introducing further chromaticism, before mellowing and drawing the work to a peaceful close. Though a short composition, *Homage* is full of intriguing cultural inspirations and musical developments, making it a fitting tribute to one of the giants of the Harlem Renaissance.

Spiritual Suite, Margaret Bonds (1913 - 1972)
approx. 13 minutes

Margaret Bonds was a child prodigy and daughter of the Black Chicago Renaissance. Her music teachers included her mother Estella Bonds, who was an influential community figure in Chicago. Margaret also studied under Price, Dawson, and other prominent names in the Black classical scene. The Bonds family home was open to the community as a rehearsal space, intellectual salon, and place of refuge for those in need. The Bonds' circles included composers such as Will Marion Cook, performers such as the soprano Abbie Mitchell and poets such as Langston Hughes. Though an accomplished concert pianist, Margaret Bonds also rose to prominence with her own compositions, representing a new generation of Black Renaissance composers.

Spiritual Suite for solo piano (1967) comprises three movements that draw upon specific spirituals. *Valley of the Bones* is based on *Dry Bones*, *The Bells* is based on *Peter Go Ring Dem Bells*, and *Troubled Water* is based on *Wade in the Water*. Bonds encases the spiritual melodies in jazzy chords and, at times, builds up to moments of gushing Romanticism. Yet, the distinctive spiritual melodies ground each movement in the unromantic reality of African American history. Although Bonds was no longer living in Chicago when she wrote the *Spiritual Suite*, the influence of women like Holt and Price is undeniable. Like her predecessors, she brings together Black vernacular idioms and classical conventions. She finds inspiration in the past, and shapes this into a distinct voice that suggests hope for the future.

Four Seasonal Sketches, Betty Jackson King (1928 - 1994)
approx. 10 minutes

Betty Jackson King was born and raised in Chicago. She belonged to a very musical family. Her mother, Gertrude Smith Jackson, was deeply involved in musical life in the city, and together with Betty's sister Catherine, they formed the Jacksonian Trio, touring Chicago and beyond. King's father, Reverend Fred D. Jackson, was very supportive of his wife's and children's musical pursuits, notably assisting Gertrude in organizing her own opera company. With vocal music and performance being very much a part of King's upbringing, it is no surprise that she went on to study voice, piano,

and compositions at Chicago's Roosevelt University, which is where she earned her bachelor's and master's degrees.

Musicologist Helen Walker-Hill remarks upon how the close harmonic singing style of the Jacksonian Trio influenced Betty's own compositions. Indeed, we can hear vocal influences in her *Four Seasonal Sketches* (1955), such as the flowery lyricism of the opening *Spring Intermezzo*, the warm harmonic colourings of *Summer Interlude*, the melodic catchiness and singability of *Autumn Dance*, and the close harmonies and crisp dissonances of *Winter Holiday*. Little has been documented about the performance history of this work, but one striking detail is that she dedicates *Four Seasonal Sketches* to her Chicago colleague and friend Geneva Handy Southall. Dr. Southall was a pianist and pioneer in Black music scholarship. This dedication therefore demonstrates the collegiality and reverence that defined the dynamics between the women of the Black Renaissance.

Piano Concerto in One Movement, arr. by the composer for two pianos, Florence Price (1887 - 1953)
approx. 18 minutes

Florence Price was born in Little Rock, Arkansas, in 1887. Price's musical education began at the age of 3 with piano lessons from her mother. At the age of 19, she graduated with the highest honours earning a double major in piano teaching and organ performance from the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston. Five years after moving to Chicago, Price entered the 1932 Rodman Wanamaker Music Contest, which was a national competition for African American composers. Price came first in the piano composition category with her Sonata in E Minor and also won the symphonic category with her Symphony in E Minor. Price became the first African American woman composer to achieve national success when the Chicago Symphony Orchestra premiered her winning Wanamaker work in 1933.

Despite its title, the Piano Concerto in One Movement comprises three different movements that are played through without interruption. The concerto begins with a pensive call in the upper voice. Its melody circles the pentatonic (five-note) scale in D minor and

purposefully evokes African American folk song. Lower voices answer and their dialogue continues until, after a few bars, the solo pianist announces their arrival with a stunning cadenza. The influence of Liszt, Brahms, and Chopin abides in Price's piano writing, while the rich colours of the Romantic tradition are unmistakable. The Adagio second section moves into the key of D major with the pentatonic scale largely guiding its lyrical and Spiritual-esque melody. Black folk dance infuses the final section with a lively character.

Price's rhythmic writing imitates a body percussion style known as the patti'n' juba, which the enslaved performed for their own leisure on plantations. As with many of her works, Price channels the dynamic energy of Black vernacular dance to bring the concerto to a brilliant end.

Programme notes by Dr Samantha Ege

Dr Samantha Ege is the Lord Crewe Junior Research Fellow in Music at Lincoln College, University of Oxford. She holds a PhD in Musicology from the University of York and a BA with honours in Music from the University of Bristol. She spent her second undergraduate year at McGill University as an exchange student. She taught music internationally for almost a decade after graduating from Bristol. She joined Lincoln College in 2020.

Dr Ege is a leading interpreter and scholar of the African American composer Florence B. Price. Dr Ege's performances and publications shed an important light on composers from underrepresented backgrounds. In 2021, she received the American Musicological Society's Noah Greenberg Award for her recording project on five female composer-pianists from the Black Renaissance era. In 2019, she received both the Society for American Music's Eileen Southern Fellowship and a Newberry Library Short-Term Residential Fellowship for her work on women's contributions to concert life in interwar Chicago. Dr Ege's first book is called *South Side Impresarios: Race Women in the Realm of Music* (University of Illinois Press, under contract). She has been contracted as co-author alongside Douglas Shadle of *Price* (Master Musicians Series, Oxford University Press) and co-editor alongside A. Kori Hill of *The Cambridge Companion to Florence B. Price* (Cambridge University Press).

As a concert pianist, Dr Ege made her Barbican debut in 2021 in which she gave the UK premiere of Vítězslava Kaprálová's *Sonata Appassionata*. In her London debut at the 2021 London Festival of American Music she gave the world premiere of Florence Price's complete *Fantasie Nègre* set. In 2018, she made her international lecture-recitalist debut at the Chicago Symphony Center with her event *A Celebration of Women in Music: Composing the Black Chicago Renaissance*. She has additionally presented her research and repertoire at a number of other institutions and venues in the UK, US, Canada, Australia, Singapore, and Hong Kong.

Dr Ege released her debut album in May 2018 with Wave Theory Records, called *Four Women: Music for solo piano by Florence Price, Vítězslava Kaprálová, Ethel Bilsland and Margaret Bonds*. The album featured the world premiere recording of Bilsland's *The Birthday Party*, which led to Dr Ege preparing an edition of the suite, now published by Faber Music. She released her critically acclaimed second album in March 2021, called *Fantasie Nègre: The Piano Music of Florence Price*, with Lorelt (Lontano Records Ltd.). Her third album (also with Lorelt) is called *Black Renaissance Woman* and is available now.

Dr Nicole Panizza has emerged as one of the UK's leading recitalists, scholars, and educators. A Fulbright Award recipient, she completed her postgraduate studies with Roger Vignoles at the Royal College of Music (UK) in 2014. She has since gained international renown for her inter-medial research regarding American song, and the creative exploration of the text-music partnership. Her specialism encompasses the life and work of the poet Emily Dickinson; incorporating performance, publication, and initiatives that promote international engagement and readership.

Nicole has worked for Opera Australia, the Cologne and Covent Garden Opera Awards, and as Education Manager for The Royal Opera, Covent Garden. She is an experienced international research consultant and speaker, with key lectures and presentations in Ireland, Australia, France, Italy, Japan, and the USA. She is also regularly in demand as a vocal and instrumental collaborative pianist, performing in international venues such as the Sydney Opera House, the Lincoln Center, the Royal Opera House, and the National Concert Hall in Dublin. Her research includes the critically-acclaimed albums *Nature* (2014) with soprano Jane Sheldon, and *Emergence - Emily Dickinson* (2019) with soprano Nadine Benjamin; and research fellowships held at Harvard University and Manhattan School of Music (USA) in 2010, and at The Orpheus Instituut (Belgium) in 2018.

Current ventures feature collaborative projects that explore art song and opera, in both tradition and practice. Select examples include inter-medial performance projects showcasing American poets and composers, a digital archive and monograph exploring practice-led approaches to the performance and study of Emily Dickinson's poetry and letters, an immersive song project showcasing critical examples of American war, memorial and remembrance, and an international opera project based on the musical legacy of the Panizza dynasty.

Nicole is the Artistic Director of The Panizza Dynasty Project; and is a creative partner of The International Centre for American Music (Florence, Italy), and Emergence Music, in collaboration with soprano Nadine Benjamin. She currently holds the positions of Assistant Professor, Music (Coventry University, UK); Research Associate of TORCH/Oxford Song Network (University of Oxford, UK); the International Women's Song Forum, and is a board member of the Emily Dickinson International Society, the Lincolnshire International Chamber Music Festival, and the London Song Festival.

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