



Michelle Cann Dazzles with Florence Price Featured Program

February 28, 2022 - Asheville, NC
by Danielle Schroeder

Michelle Cann, sponsored by the [Asheville Symphony Orchestra](#) and David and Pamela Lane, performed in a solo piano recital at [Central United Methodist Church](#) in Asheville that featured two works by [Florence Price](#) framed within complimentary pieces. Cann, who is a self-proclaimed champion of Price and her compositions, also played the role of educator, announcing each piece and providing backstory, which helped to foster an intimate gathering of people excited to learn.

Frederic Chopin's Ballade No. 3 in A-flat, Op. 47 began the program. This piece made clear early on that one of Cann's most striking characteristics is how cinematic her interpretations are. Her attention to detail enhances every melody and punctuates the phrasing. Similarly, Brahms' Ballade in D, Op. 10, No. 2 is a deeply sensitive piece that epitomizes the romantic Euro-centric aesthetic. I felt that the two ballades presented back-to-back set the stage for the following piece, Price's Sonata in E minor.

Florence Price (1887-1953) was a composer whose music is now experiencing an international renaissance of sorts. An African-American woman composer, Price was born and raised in Little Rock, Arkansas, and had the privilege of obtaining a music education. Her Symphony in E minor won Price first place in the Wanamaker composition competition and was the first symphonic work composed by an African-American to be performed by a major orchestra (in this case, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra). Coincidentally, many of Price's unpublished manuscripts were discovered in a house in Illinois back in 2009, the house found to be the Price's summer home. Thus, the restoration of Florence Price's genius began.

The Sonata in E minor is a unique fusion of the European Romantic ballade sound with Black spiritual foundations. It requires a dramatic cohesive approach, and Cann displayed an ease and familiarity that was astonishing. The entire piece was played with an improvisatory attitude, belying its underlying meticulous structure. It flowed effortlessly, like a grandparent passing on a family story, and was a personal favorite of the night.

The first piece after intermission was Clara Schumann's *4 Pièces Fugitives*, a surprise change in the program (which stated another Brahms piece was to be played). Schumann's music showcased Cann's articulation and dynamic sensitivity. A composition I was unfamiliar with, the Schumann is now certainly one I'll have to revisit. *Fantasia Negre* No. 1 in E minor by Price again showed Cann's cinematic presentation of each story to the audience. The virtuosic explosion of this piece only made it more obvious. The *Fantasia Negre* was dedicated to Price's compatriot and student, [Margaret Bonds](#), who composed the finale of Cann's program, "Troubled Waters."

"Troubled Waters" is a piano fantasia of sorts, its foundational theme based on the Black spiritual "Wade in the River" (also known as "Wade in the Water"). It is bluesy and resonant and makes no apologies in its emotional depths. I loved the atmosphere this final piece created in the building, and everyone in the audience held their breath. It was a powerful ending both emotionally and musically.

The intensity that the programmed pieces created and the vibrant execution from Cann made this recital experience very profound for me. It was contemplative and impactful, a beautiful musical journey that I was excited to witness the moment it was announced.

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