

MUSIC OF PRICE & BONDS MICHELLE CANN PIANO

REVIVAL



Curtis
Studio

REVIVAL

Piano Sonata in E minor by Florence Price

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|----------|------------------------------|--------------|
| 1 | I. Andante - Allegro | 08:33 |
| 2 | II. Andante | 06:57 |
| 3 | III. Scherzo: Allegro | 08:43 |

***Fantasia nègre* by Florence Price**

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|----------|-------------------------|--------------|
| 4 | No. 1 in E minor | 10:15 |
| 5 | No. 2 in G minor | 08:26 |
| 6 | No. 4 in B minor | 07:31 |

***Spiritual Suite* by Margaret Bonds**

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|----------|-------------------------------|--------------|
| 7 | I. Valley of the Bones | 03:20 |
| 8 | II. The Bells | 03:52 |
| 9 | III. Troubled Water | 05:41 |

Total		1:03:18
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Pianist Michelle Cann

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Acclaimed as a “pianist of sterling artistry” by *Gramophone*, called “exquisite” by the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, and praised as a “compelling, sparkling virtuoso” by the *Boston Music Intelligencer*, Michelle Cann is known for her dynamic and sensitively nuanced performances of classical piano repertoire. One of the defining features of her exceptional career has been an unwavering commitment to promoting, programming, and performing works of underrepresented composers, notably Florence Price and Margaret Bonds, whose extraordinary music was either neglected in their lifetimes or abandoned after their deaths.

Cann’s debut solo piano recording, *Revival*, celebrates the vast legacy of these women through stunning performances of Price’s prize-winning Piano Sonata in E minor, three of her sumptuous *Fantasie nègre*, and Bonds’s magnum opus for piano, *Spiritual Suite*. Embedded in the Romantic idioms of these selections are the influences of folksong, blues, and spirituals, imbued with the unique compositional voices of these trailblazing women—it is the sound of the human spirit and of America, a Black America. Inspired by their fascinating stories and brilliant compositions, Michelle Cann’s deep connection and profound understanding of this music pervades her soulful interpretations of these works.

Revival honors the genius of Price and Bonds, acknowledges the deep spiritual, political, and artistic significance of their innovative compositions, and expands our view of American classical music by illuminating the rich lineage of artists who forged its past and its future.

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Florence Price

Born on April 9, 1887, in Little Rock, Arkansas, to Dr. James H. Smith and Florence Irene Smith in the racially segregated era of Jim Crow, Florence Beatrice Price (née Smith) began her musical journey at age four when she played her first piano recital. By age 11, she had published her first composition, and following high school, where she was valedictorian of her class, she went on to study organ and piano at age 16 with mentor George Whitefield Chadwick at the New England Conservatory of Music. She returned to Little Rock at 19 and began teaching at Shorter College, but the death of her father and the disappearance of her mother prompted her to leave Arkansas once again and accept a position as chair of music at Clark University in Atlanta. After enduring a failed marriage and years of racial discrimination in the south, she moved her family to Chicago, where she forged a new life as an organist in silent film theaters and established herself as a composer.

Entering both her Symphony No. 1 in E minor and Piano Sonata in E minor for the Wanamaker Foundation Award, she received first and third places, respectively. This landmark achievement paved the way for a performance of her symphony by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra at the 1933 World's Fair, becoming the first African American woman to have her music played by a major American orchestra. However, this initial success was fleeting, for the sexism and racial bias she endured were accompanied by overwhelming financial hardship that lasted until her premature death in 1953. Throughout Price's lifetime, her compositions were often rejected by orchestras, and few publishing companies would print her music. It was not until 2009, when a couple discovered nearly 300 of her manuscripts in an Illinois summer home attic, that a renaissance of Price's music was finally ignited.

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“It humbles you in a certain way because you realize that there are a lot of stories that are yet to be told, that should be told. Loving both of their music so much, it's really an important mission for me to program and to share their music with as many people as I can, so that they have a voice in our time.”

—MICHELLE CANN

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Margaret Bonds

Margaret Jeanette Allison Bonds was a composer, pianist, and arranger who drew inspiration from the spirituals, folksong, jazz, gospel, and blues music of the 1920s and '30s. Born in Chicago on March 3, 1913, Bonds studied the piano with her mother, Estella Bonds, at an early age. As a child prodigy, she attended the Coleridge-Taylor Music School and began writing her first compositions at thirteen. Bonds attended Northwestern University and The Juilliard School and became a close friend, pupil, and creative collaborator of Florence Price, her devoted mentor. In 1932, she won first place in the song category for her piece "Sea Ghost," receiving the same Wanamaker Foundation Award as Price. Throughout her lifetime, Bonds experienced the isolating pain of racism and misogyny, turning to the poetry of Langston Hughes—with whom she met in 1936 and developed a lifelong friendship—and her faith as solace, weaving these religious ideologies into her art. The first Black musician in history to perform with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, Bonds played piano with the ensemble during their Century of Progress Series in 1933, later to return and perform Price's Piano Concerto in D minor the following year. While she composed more than 200 works, only 75 scores survived, of which only 47 were published while she was alive. These include symphonic and choral works, cantatas, a children's opera, solo voice and piano pieces, and incidental music for stage plays in New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago. Bonds is best known for her popular arrangements of spirituals and her collaborations and text settings with poet Langston Hughes, with whom she created several works that explored African American history and culture.



Margaret Bonds

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Piano Sonata in E minor

Written in her forties, Florence Price's Piano Sonata in E minor infuses elements of her heritage with European classical music traditions. Drawing inspiration from Romantic composers such as Sergei Rachmaninoff and Camille Saint-Saëns, this sprawling, three-movement work opens with an Andante - Allegro, featuring energetic piano passages that build in intensity. Price's use of syncopated rhythms, polyrhythms,

and harmony explore African American spiritual melodies that are manifested in different forms as the sonata proceeds. Cann describes the second movement as one of "the most beautiful pieces of music I've ever played." This lush Andante movement in rondo form is a stirring expression of Price's musical voice, one that is accompanied by luxuriant harmonies that ache with a sense of nostalgia. The use of chromaticism and unexpected modulations add to the movement's emotional depth. The final movement, Scherzo: Allegro, is a lively, imaginative conclusion to the sonata, infused with themes from the first movement and featuring intricate runs and trills that demonstrate Price's technical mastery and bring the work to a triumphant close.



Florence Price

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***Fantasia nègre* Nos. 1, 2, and 4**

On September 3, 1930, 17-year-old Margaret Bonds premiered Florence Price's *Fantasia nègre* No. 1 in E minor at the 12th National Association of Negro Musicians convention. Not only did this well-received performance strengthen the recognition of Price as a composer of note, but it elevated the visibility of Bonds as a prodigious young talent to watch and was one of their earliest collaborations. This groundbreaking piece established a new genre and was the first of four fantasies she wrote to blend the classical music tradition with Negro spirituals and plantation songs. In *Fantasia nègre* No. 1, Price incorporated the melody of the beloved spiritual, "Sinners, Please Don't Let This Harvest Pass," into the score, with interludes that evoke both Brahms and Chopin. In the remaining fantasies, all of her themes were stylistically based upon Black musical idioms, yet the tunes were solely composed by Price. Each of these innovative pieces features extended, improvisatory introductions, while the rhythms create a sense of tension and release. From its opening bars, the ambitious *Fantasia nègre* No. 2 in G minor introduces a distinctive call-and-response figure that evolves in four stages as the piece gathers to a dramatic finale. The last of Price's surviving essays for solo piano, *Fantasia nègre* No. 4 in B minor, was premiered on July 15, 1937, by pianist Marion Hall MacFadyen at a Composers Forum concert of the Federal Music Project in Chicago. This audacious and challenging work introduces a spiritual-inspired rhapsodic main theme, contrasted by a Jazz Age blues-hued melodic subject and an arpeggiated transitional passage reminiscent of the piano music of Robert and Clara Schumann. The final virtuosic minutes of the piece gather all the ingenious ideas Price has introduced throughout and compress them into a breathtaking 32-bar conclusion.



**Margaret Bonds performing
Florence Price's Piano Concerto in
D minor with the Women's
Symphony Orchestra of Chicago,
Ebba Sundstrom, conductor,
October 12, 1934**



**Michelle Cann performing selections
from Florence Price's Piano Concerto
in One Movement with The Philadelphia
Orchestra, Yannick Nézet-Séguin,
conductor, February 25, 2021**

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Spiritual Suite

Composed as a show-stopping closer for her solo recitals and performed as an inspirational statement of racial and cultural pride, Margaret Bonds's dazzling *Spiritual Suite* was inspired by the concert encores of legendary Black vocalists Marian Anderson and Roland Hayes. Based on settings of traditional Negro spirituals ("Dry Bones," "Peter, Go Ring Dem Bells," and "Wade in the Water") and infused with the idioms of gospel, jazz, and blues, this three-movement suite was drafted throughout the 1930s and 1940s. Although it became one of Bonds's most celebrated and studied works, the rousing finale, "Troubled Water," was the only movement to be published during her lifetime. It was not until 2020, when Dr. Louise Toppin, a significant force in archiving the repertoire of Black composers, edited all three movements of the suite and had them printed as part of the Videmus African American Art Song Series, that "Valley of the Bones" and "The Bells" became available for future generations of pianists to rediscover and bring to life—a fitting revival to one of the most significant classical artists of the twentieth century.

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Credits

Executive Producer

Vince Ford

Producer, Recording Engineer, Mastering Engineer

Alan Bise

Atmos Engineer

Stan Kybert

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Publishers

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Sincere thanks to Orestes Richardson for his assistance with Bonds's *Spiritual Suite*

Photos

Michelle Cann headshot: Steven Mareazi Willis

Florence Price: Portrait of Florence Price seated at a piano (MC 988a), Box 2, Folder 2,

Item 1. Special Collections, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville

Michelle Cann and The Philadelphia Orchestra: Jeff Fusco

Liner Note

Ryan Lathan, Daniel J. Armistead

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