



**CCM**

GUEST ARTIST SERIES  
PRESENTS

**KAREN WALWYN,  
PIANO**

**Monday, November 28, 2022  
Robert J. Werner Recital Hall  
3:00 pm**

University of   
**CINCINNATI** | COLLEGE-CONSERVATORY  
OF MUSIC

# PROGRAM

Sonata #2 in B-flat Minor, Op. 35

Frédéric Chopin  
(1810-1849)

*Grave; Doppio Movimento*

In the Land O' Cotton Suite

Florence Price  
(1887-1953)

*I. At the Cotton Gin*  
*IV. Dance*

Preludes

Florence Price

*No. 1 Allegro moderato*  
*No. 2 Andantino Cantabile*  
*No. 5 Allegro*

Sonata in E Minor

Florence Price

*Andante; Allegro*

A Journey from Afar ; from Mother Emanuel Suite (Charleston 2015)

Karen Walwyn

## Program Notes

**Sonata #2 in B-flat Minor, Op. 35** (1839) by Frédéric Chopin

Much has been written about the first four bars and two chords – so distinctive, so memorable. In 1929, Ludwik Bronarski devoted a separate study to them. Chopin instructs them to be played grave and forte. Thus they have weight and strength. One hears in them tragedy, menace, gnawing questions and oracular judgment. Such words have been used by monographers to describe the moving and disturbing music of the opening bars of the B flat minor Sonata. There is no doubt that it does not augur anything good. And that is probably its function. What follows (the Sonata's first movement) has the form of a sonata allegro: the clashing of two themes in an exposition, then a development and a reprise. In its details, the form departs from sonata principles, but in general it conforms to them. Yet this Allegro is pervaded by the spirit not of a sonata, but of a ballade. Restlessness, mystery, extreme contrasts of expression, subtle sonorities facing sinister sounds. And most of all that propulsion, unusual in a sonata, evoking a horse's galloping. And it is in this breathless rhythm and propulsion that the first of the Allegro's themes (agitato) appears (bars 5–24). Suddenly, unexpectedly, the frenzied rush comes to a halt. The music – with a couple of chords – stands still (bars 35–40 (41)).

## Program Notes (continued)

And a vista onto another world opens up. It is filled with the song of the Allegro's second theme, sounding in the relative key (D flat major). The song of the chords radiates peace and warmth, as yet restrained (*sostenuto*), though slowly rising to a peak (bars 41–56). Soon, this music will bloom and sing out in high octaves, surging towards a moment of ecstasy (bars 65–80). Then the original motion and propulsion returns, bearing the closing motives, which bring a strong and passionate end to the so-called exposition of the sonata allegro, and so the presentation of the principal characters (or the principal forces) of the drama (bars 81–104). The middle section of the Allegro leads us into a space and time that seem surreal: wholly balladic. Imbued with mystery, the narrative unfolds in a hushed voice. It is full of importunate questions and enigmatic replies (bars 106–124 (125)). A moment later, the music will erupt violently, almost spasmodically (bars (128) 129–143). The reprise is particularly beautiful: there is another explosion of the narrative, ending with great abatement. And on the crest of that wave (this time in the key of B flat major), the captivating melody of the second theme manifests itself again (bars 162–176). The first theme vanishes, resurfacing again for just a moment in the coda, in the ominous, disturbing octaves of the bass (bars 230–242). The first movement of the B flat minor Sonata ends with a series of chords played *fff*, but a sensitive listener feels that nothing has really ended here yet, that the closing cadence of the Allegro has not concluded the drama. This was barely the opening act.

The Sonata in B-flat Minor, Op. 35, composed in the summer of 1839 at Nohant, was published in Paris and Leipzig in the spring of the following year. It was not furnished with any dedication. This is quite understandable: it would be difficult to dedicate a sonata with a funeral march to anyone. It was written under the roof of George Sand and under her tender and solicitous care. But, as we know, Chopin did not consider it suitable to 'publicly' offer Mrs Sand – through an editorial dedication – any of his works. He separated the intimate domain from the public domain quite radically. Nevertheless, it seems unquestionable that personal experiences were written into the music of the B flat minor Sonata, which arose around a Funeral March inspired by patriotic sentiment. It is heard and felt like some testimony to the extreme situation in which Chopin found himself at that time and in that place. The Sonata was written in the atmosphere of a passion newly manifest, but frozen by the threat of death. In the times of Mieczysław Karłowicz, it might have been called a 'Sonata of love and death'. It became a 'soliloquial' utterance – an inward conversation about existential matters.

*Author: Mieczysław Tomaszewski*

### **Suite: In the Land O' Cotton** by Florence Price

*I. At the Cotton Gin:* This suite begins with an Allegro movement, in 2/4 meter, and in A-flat major. The meter and tempo both signal a quick dance movement. Harmonically, Price writes the outer sections (the form is ABA/Coda) in A-flat major. What historically gives her music a nostalgic, even slightly somber character, is her ability to use harmonically ambiguous relationships over pedal points. As an example, the opening two measure introduction clearly implies A-flat major with the open fifths on Ab and Eb. The right hand, however, provides a little dissonance, with the C (the third of A-flat major), and the F. The opening section of the work is comprised of a bar-form (mm. 1-16), where the melodic material has several key motives. First, the repeated quarter notes, the leap of a minor third (Eb to C in the beginning), and the eighth-triplet sixteenth rhythmic motive. This last motive gives the melody its improvisatory vocal sound, almost as though the tune is being whistled offering an implied narrative scheme of the title of the suite and this particular piece.

## Program Notes (continued)

Interestingly, the B section uses rising minor third motives in its melodic material. Price's melody in this section also employs sixteenth notes, which give the music a vocal and quasi-improvisatory character as well. Not unlike the A section, Price uses bar form to create phrase relationships in this part. The transition back to A' is carefully constructed like the opening. The coda uses a descending series of fourths/fifths to travel down the register of the piano. Ultimately, the coda borrows from both the A and B sections (which we have seen are thematically and motivically unified), to round off the final measures of the work. Price's opening dance in this suite reflects her stylistic characteristics of rhythmic motives, half-step motives, minor thirds, large scale harmonic structure, and enharmonic reinterpretations of notes to make smooth but unrelated chromatic shifts.

*IV. Dance:* In this E major movement (which is a half-step away from the previous movement's F major, and also the key of the middle section of the first movement!), Price again creates a lively dance using cyclic motives from previous movements. In 2/4 meter, the off-beat left hand chords punctuate a fiddle-like tune in the right hand. This tune incorporates motives such as the minor third and repeated notes. The initial A section has an internal form of aba' while the large middle B section is quite interesting: it is a quasi-transposition of A into A-flat major, but each phrase is slightly modified melodically, more chromatic harmonically, and the transition back to the A' section is expectedly chromatic and unstable. Moving to Ab of course is the OPPOSITE harmonic gesture from the first movement, making this a formal palindrome of sorts. What is more ingenious is how Price, not unlike say Beethoven's compositional process, creates so much expressively varied music with so little motivic material. Given Price's cultural background, what makes this dance so energetic and vibrant is the rhythmic material of the melody. The syncopated sixteenth-dotted eighth note is used in ragtime traditions quite a bit, and here, it has the same jovial expressive energy. The entire suite closes with a coda, marked Presto, that cascades down the piano five octaves! This massive registral space helps to close off the movement, and the entire suite, with a rousing finish!

*Dr. Lia Abbott, Author*

### **The Preludes** by Florence Price

Published for the first time, Price's Preludes are her first major set for piano – and they are not without their enigmas. For one, only one of the autograph sources bears Price's name, a rare occurrence in her papers.

For another, the earliest manuscript version (now surviving as two separate autographs, identified as sources AS 2 and AS 3 below<sup>4</sup>) is dated June, 1926, but neither it nor the only complete autograph that survives intact (source AS 1) names Price as author. Most curious of all, that autograph is found not with most of the remainder of Price's musical estate in the Special Collections division of the University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville, but rather in the papers of Margaret Bonds (1913-72) at the Booth Family Center for Rare Books and Manuscripts in the Georgetown University Libraries (Washington, D.C.).

Because Price collaborated with Bonds on several projects in 1932-34, lived in the Bonds home after her separation from her second husband, P.D. Arnett, in late 1933 or early 1934, and had no sustained interaction with Bonds after the younger composer's move to New York in 1939, this autograph was probably written between 1932 and 1939. But source AS 1 clearly served as the basis of a separate autograph for No. 4 titled "Wistful" (source AS 4, below), and that manuscript survives in a brown-paper folder bearing the address "4404 Vincennes Ave.," where Price lived with Arnett in 1931-1933/34. Finally, source AS 1 is written on PHILADA paper, which is rare in Price's manuscripts after 1932. The complete set may thus be tentatively dated 1926-32.

## Program Notes (continued)

The Preludes are also unique among Price's sets for piano solo in that they are her only set of "absolute" rather than characteristic or programmatic pieces. All of Price's later sets bear descriptive collective titles and movement titles such as Village Scenes ("Church Spires in Moonlight," "A Shaded Lane," and "In the Park") or Snapshots ("Lake Mirror," "Moon behind a Cloud," and "Flame").<sup>5</sup> But the lack of a descriptive collective title for the Preludes should by no means be taken to indicate that they are abstract, abstruse, or (least of all) bland. The existence of No. 4 as a separate work titled simply "Wistful" clearly assigns a distinct and melancholy character for that movement, and the other movements all possess sharply contrasting characters as well as imaginative and evocative music. No. 1 as a whole is conspicuously impetuous, alternating between the dotted main theme in C major, fanfare-like figures, and a lyrical second theme; No. 2 is dominated by a leisurely, songlike theme but includes a middle section of greater urgency; and No. 3 seems to take the character of the middle section of No. 2 as its point of departure. Nos. 4 and 5 form a complementary pair in G minor, moving from an exploration of Tchaikovsky-like melancholy to a rapid and concentrated technical study to bring the set to an exciting close.

*Dr. John Michael Cooper, Author*

### **A Journey from Afar ; from Mother Emanuel Suite** by Karen Walwyn

The first of five moments of Mother Emanuel: Charleston 2015 entitled A Journey from Afar, is a work depicting the plight of the enslaved African people's journey to the United States. This first movement moves through some of the atrocities of slavery, struggles for freedom, and the building of the first black church built in the south, the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, which was built by slaves; its original foundation was laid in 1891.

This work was written weeks after the tragedy on June 17, 2015, at Mother Emanuel, in Charleston, South Carolina where nine lives were lost during a prayer meeting. I had the opportunity to speak with some church members including one of the oldest trustees of the church, Mr. Charles Williams. He gave me a personal tour of not only the church but the city and I came to understand and know the history, culture and the spirit of the church and its family. The strength of the family of the church along with the spirit of the city of Charleston are the two sources of inspiration of this work.

*Karen Walwyn*