

Friday, June 21, 2024

**Florence Price** (1887–1953)

*The Deserted Garden*

Fantasia No. 1 in G Minor

Gabrielle Després, violin

Patricia Tao, piano

Despite her traditional conservatory training, Price's music conveys a deep sense of roots in the American South. Her attractive, nuanced style weaves African-American folk elements together with European classical traditions and a forward-looking artistic direction that reflects a rapidly modernizing American society.

*The Deserted Garden* is a short meditation for violin and piano that strongly recalls the music of Dvořák's years in the United States. This miniature conveys the plaintive emotions of an African-American spiritual on either side of a brief foray into the major key.

**Lena McLin** (1928–2023)

*Songs of Love*

*Silence*

*The Unlucky Apple*

*If I Could Give You All I Have*

The 36-year teaching career of Atlanta-born composer Lena McLin has had a lasting impact on 21<sup>st</sup> century R&B and Soul; her students included Chaka Khan and Jennifer Hudson. *Songs of Love* sets three short Dunbar poems to intriguing piano accompaniments that evoke a wide range of emotions through contrasting melodic and harmonic textures.

**Rosephanye Powell** (1962– )

*Miss Wheatley's Garden*

*I Want to Die While You Love Me*

*A Winter Twilight*

*Songs of the People*

Catherine Daniel, mezzo-soprano

Patricia Tao, piano

Rosephanye Powell is recognized as one of America's premier composers of choral music, with an impressively diverse compositional style influenced by African-American idioms, the choral tradition of Bach and Handel, and the art song. The three songs of *Miss Wheatley's Garden*, for soloist and accompaniment, look back lovingly on a late-19<sup>th</sup> century lieder tradition, each an attractive setting of Phillis Wheatley's poetry.

**R. Nathaniel Dett** (1882–1943)

*Incantation*, from *Enchantment*

*Beyond the Dream*, from *Enchantment*

David Fung, piano

The music of Dett's 1922 suite for solo piano, *Enchantment*, is interesting for the many diverse influences it straddles. Across its movements we encounter moments of thundering Lisztian virtuosity, intimate Schumannesque asides, and wafts of wandering chromaticism. Though composed before his 1928 journey to France to study with the renowned teacher Nadia Boulanger, it's clear that the Canadian-born Dett already had a considerable command of, and nostalgia for, European tradition and a deep interest in the emerging modernist style. In combining these elements, the music of *Enchantment* spirits listeners from points of solemn ritualistic incantation to dazed ecstasy.

### ***Intermission***

**Johannes Brahms (1833–1897)**

Piano Quartet No. 3 in C Minor, op. 60 (1875)

Allegro non troppo

Scherzo: Allegro

Andante

Finale: Allegro comodo

Kerson Leong, violin

Marina Thibeault, viola

Peter Eom, cello

David Fung, piano

The last of Brahms' three quartets for piano and strings was first performed in Vienna, in 1875. Brahms' reputation as the heir of a longstanding musical tradition passed down through Mendelssohn and Schumann was becoming widely acknowledged after the premiere of *Ein Deutsches Requiem* in 1868. The most mature of his essays in the genre, the C Minor Quartet goes beyond its two earlier siblings, in terms of both its adventurousness and Brahms' treatment of the individual parts.

Tonal instability pervades the work's grave opening movement. Loud octave statements from the piano contrasted with hushed thematic statements in the strings seem to look ahead to the tumultuous beginning of his First Symphony, a work still underway at this time. An optimistic second theme in the major unfolds through a series of short variations before a developmental middle section in which the opening material is considered from all angles, highlighting Brahms' masterful economy and invention. A terse scherzo follows the ponderous opening movement. Short and direct, this music is vigorous and unrelenting, driven by Brahms' unequalled rhythmic intensity.

The emotional heart of the work lies in the andante. Here Brahms is at his most tender, creating a melancholic musical atmosphere that is at the same time warm and embracing, nostalgic and a bit sad. The tragedy of the first movement returns in the finale. With a lean violin theme heard overtop eerie unison lines in the piano, the turmoil that opened the work soon resurfaces with a renewed sense of urgency. While passing through moments of comparative calm, the music is never completely at ease and struggles to escape despair. Only at the very end, with an acceptance of bitter fate, does the tension seem to let up. Unison passagework for the pianist returns at the end, culminating in a spidery downward chromatic scale on the piano as the music loses its steam. The strings eke out a soft C major chord before two violent blows bring the work to a haunting close.

***Program notes by Morgan Lueth***