

re-sung
re-do. re-learn. re-imagine.

AMERICAN VOICES

3 November 2021

7pm - St John the Divine, Kennington

Charlotte Bowden, Francesca Chiejina, Ella de Jongh, Ella Taylor
Dylan Perez, piano

Love Let the Wind Cry...How I Adore Thee

I am in doubt

Night

My Dream

Hyacinth

I Know My Mind

I Want to Die While You Love Me

Lyric for Truelove

A Set of Three Dunbar Poems

Dawn

Theology

Compensation

Feast

What Lips My Lips Have Kissed

Songs of the Seasons

Winter Moon

Poème d'automne

Young Love in Spring

Summer Storm

Undine Smith Moore

Sappho / Bliss Carmen

Undine Smith Moore

Florence Hynes Willette

Florence Price

Louise C. Wallace

Florence Price

Langston Hughes

Margaret Bonds

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Margaret Bonds

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Undine Smith Moore

Georgia Douglas Johnson

Undine Smith Moore

Florence Hynes Willette

Betty Jackson King

Paul Dunbar

Margaret Bonds

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Margaret Bonds

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Margaret Bonds

Langston Hughes

HELLO and welcome to a new season of *re-sung* recitals! I am so happy that these concerts are back and live at St. John the Divine, Kennington. I hope tonight's recital will illuminate some song repertoire that is still underrepresented, especially on this side of the Atlantic. I want to view this performance as the tip of the iceberg - a little taster of what is available for us as audience members and performers to push to include alongside the standard repertoire.

Known as the 'Dean of Black Women Composers', **Undine Smith Moore** (1904-1989) was a trained pianist and organist who studied at Fisk University, Juilliard, and Columbia University. Her heart was in vocal music, however, and she produced many songs and arrangements of spirituals. She was a prolific music educator who was on faculty at Virginia State College (now University) for 40 years where she taught piano, organ, and theory. Smith Moore never thought of herself as a composer, saying: "*One of the most evil effects of racism in my time was the limits it placed upon the aspirations of blacks, so that though I have been 'making up' and creating music all my life, in my childhood or even in college I would not have thought of calling myself a composer or aspiring to be one.*" Even though she wrote over 100 compositions, only 26 were published in her lifetime, including her Pulitzer Prize nominated oratorio *Scenes from the Life of a Martyr*. Tonight you'll hear songs that reflect deep love and commitment to a relationship. *Love Let the Wind Cry* is an outpouring from someone who wants their beloved to know from every part of the world (and inside themselves) how much they love them. *I Am in Doubt* speaks to the uncertainty of love, even though deeply felt. *I want to die while you love me* characterises being so happy with someone that you want to bring their love even beyond this world. *Lyric for Truelove* is a call to the beloved - come away with me where all is bright and happy!

Florence Price (1887-1953) was born into a wealthy family in Arkansas. Her father was a successful dentist and her mother was an accomplished pianist with whom she began studies at a very young age. She gave her first piano recital at age four and her first compositions were published at age eleven. She went on to study at New England Conservatory in Boston and integrated African American folk music into her compositions after being encouraged during a visit from Dvorak. She was the first African American woman to be recognised as a symphonist and the first to have a symphony performed by a major orchestra. She is the composer of many songs and spiritual arrangements, most famously *My Soul's Been Anchored in the Lord* which closed the historic concert at the Lincoln Memorial given by Marian Anderson. *Night* is a lovely miniature depicting the moment when the sun sets and the moon is lifted into the sky, bringing peace to the weary day. *My Dream* is about freedom from day until night - being able to do what you like, when you like.

Chicago born **Betty Jackson King** (1928-1994) had her first piano lessons from her mother. She went on to study at Roosevelt University where she obtained a Masters degree. She was an influential piano and composition teacher who also served as a choral clinician and lecturer in churches and universities. Performed tonight are *A Set of Three Dunbar Poems*. *Dawn* harkens back to the text of Price's *Night* and describes how the word came into existence. In *Theology* Dunbar wants reassurance that there is indeed a hell - where his neighbours will surely go. *Compensation* talks about the gifts given by God and how they should be treasured. King's compositional style in these three songs are varied - from bitonality to twelve tone.

Margaret Bonds (1913-1972) is best remembered today for her popular arrangements of spirituals and for her collaborations with Langston Hughes. She studied piano with Florence Price and enrolled at Northwestern University at age 16. She graduated with degrees in piano and composition. She went on to pursue studies with Nadia Boulanger who dismissed her saying she needed no more formal training. She was a prolific pianist who performed regularly with the Chicago Symphony and teacher whose students include Ned Rorem. She composed many songs that integrated folk and jazz idioms as well as being well versed in European traditional classical music. The four settings of Edna St. Vincent Millay poetry tonight are dense, as if she is flexing her compositional muscle. Though requiring a broad range of technical and emotional aspects from both performers, it is evident that Bonds loved this poetry in the speech pattern she gives to the voice part. Listen out for the weaving sadness in *Hyacinth*, the rhythmic determination in *I Know My Mind*, the greedy textures of *Feast*, and the oscillating tenderness of *What Lips My Lips Have Kissed*. Her *Songs of the Seasons* are more light-hearted fare with poetry by her long time collaborator, Langston Hughes. In *Winter Moon* there is a sparseness in both words and music. *Poème d'automne* incorporates jazz and blues of the slowing of summer before jagged harmonies bring the cold harshness of winter. *Young Love in Spring* is buoyant with expectancy in a budding relationship, just as nature wakes up from the ice. *Summer Storm* is a rush of energy in the heat of the sun with your beloved - does it get any better?

-Dylan Perez