

Marquette Symphony Orchestra

# WALTON'S VIOLA CONCERTO

Saturday, January 20, 2024  
7:30pm at Kaufman Auditorium



*with Jay Julio, Viola*

Octavio Más-Arocas, Music Director

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Octavio Más-Arocas, Music Director

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Susan Balmer  
Matt Mitchell  
Arum Park  
Danielle Simandl  
Shoua Xiong

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Anne Asplund  
John-Paul R. Cherniawski  
Kyle B. Danek  
Kimberly Eggleston  
Brooke LaMonica  
Dilaine Noel  
Zoe Rudisill  
Robert Yin

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*String players are listed alphabetically.*

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# Marquette Symphony Orchestra

Octavio Más-Arocas, Principal Conductor

presents

## *William Walton Viola Concerto*

Saturday, January 20, 2024 – 7:30 p.m.

Kaufman Auditorium

**Special thank you to Concert Sponsor,  
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Concerto for Viola and Orchestra ..... Sir William Walton

Andante comodo

Vivo, con molto preciso

Allegro moderato

**Featuring 2023 Youth Concerto Winner Jay Julio, Viola**

### INTERMISSION

THE INTERMISSION WILL BE 15 MINUTES IN DURATION

Symphonoy No. 3 in C minor..... Florence Beatrice Price

Andante

Andante ma non troppo

Juba: Allegro

Scherzo: Finale



Afterglow immediately following the concert at Canale Funeral Home

*Upcoming Concerts:*

March 2, 2024

April 13, 2024

## Octavio Más-Arocas, Musical Director

Octavio Más-Arocas is a versatile and dynamic conductor whose achievements demonstrate his talent and musicianship. Más-Arocas is the Director of Orchestras and Professor of Orchestral Conducting at Michigan State University College of Music, and serves as Music Director and Conductor of the Mansfield Symphony Orchestra in Ohio, Music Director and Conductor of the Marquette Symphony Orchestra in Michigan, Music Director and Conductor of the Clinton Symphony in New York, and Conductor-in-Residence at the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music in California.

Mr. Más-Arocas served as Principal Conductor of the Green Bay Symphony Orchestra, Wisconsin, and held the positions of Director of Orchestras and Professor of Orchestral Conducting at Ithaca College in New York, Director of Orchestral Studies and Opera Conductor at the Lawrence University Conservatory of Music in Wisconsin, Director of Orchestral Studies and Associate Professor of Conducting at the Baldwin Wallace University Conservatory of Music in Ohio, Director of Orchestras at the Interlochen Arts Academy in Michigan, Resident Conductor of the Sewanee Summer Music Festival in Tennessee, and Assistant conductor of the National Repertory Orchestra in Colorado. In 2013, simultaneously to his work with the Lawrence Symphony Orchestra, Mr. Más-Arocas was the Resident Conductor of the Unicamp Symphony Orchestra in Campinas, Brazil, where he also was a Visiting Professor of conducting at the Universidade Estadual de Campinas. Mr. Más-Arocas spends part of his summers in the Grand Traverse area, where he continues his association as conductor at the Interlochen Center for the Arts.

An award-winner conductor, Mr. Más-Arocas won the Robert J. Harth Conducting Prize at the Aspen Music Festival, the Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy Award, given by Kurt Masur, is the recipient of the Thelma A. Robinson Award from the Conductors Guild, a Prize Winner of the Third European Conductors Competition, and a winner of the National Youth Orchestra of Spain Conductors Competition. Mr. Más-Arocas was selected by the League of American Orchestras to conduct the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra in a showcase event during the League's National Conference in Dallas.

Chosen by Kurt Masur, Mr. Más-Arocas was awarded the prestigious Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy Scholarship.

Consequently, he worked as Maestro Masur's assistant with the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra and the Helsinki Radio Orchestra, and made his German conducting debut with the Leipziger Symphonie-orchester. The offer came after Mr. Más-Arocas' New York debut concert sharing the podium with Maestro Masur and the Manhattan School of Music Symphony.



In the last few years Mr. Más-Arocas has conducted orchestras across North and South America and Europe including the Filarmonica George Enescu in Romania, the Orquesta de Valencia and Granada City Orchestra in Spain, the Leipziger Symphonieorchester in Germany, the Orquestra Sinfônica da Unicamp in Brazil, the Green Bay, Traverse City, Bluewater, Catskill, Clinton, Fort Worth, Spokane, Toledo, Phoenix, Memphis, Kansas City, and San Antonio Symphonies, the National

Repertory Orchestra, the Manhattan School of Music Symphony, the orchestras of Viana do Castelo and Artave in Portugal, the Interlochen Philharmonic, the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico Philharmonic, the Rosario Symphony in Argentina, Kharkov Symphony in Ukraine, the National Youth Orchestras of Portugal and Spain, the Pescara Symphony in Italy, the Amsterdam Brass in the Netherlands, and the Ciudad Alcala de Henares Symphony. In addition, Mr. Más-Arocas has served as assistant conductor at the Madrid Royal Opera House.

Mr. Más-Arocas was assistant conductor of the National Repertory Orchestra, which he conducted in subscription, family, and pops concerts. As the Resident Conductor at the Sewanee Summer Music Festival he conducted the Festival, Symphony, and Cumberland Orchestras. Other festival appearances include the Aspen Music Festival, the Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music, the Festival Internacional Carlos Gomes in Campinas, Brazil, the Interlochen Music Festival, the Bach Festival at Baldwin Wallace University, and the MidAmerican Center for Contemporary Music.

His ability to work, inspire, and transform young talents has led him to be a frequent guest conductor with prominent music education organizations and ensembles around the world. He has worked with the World Youth Symphony Orchestra, the national youth orchestras of Portugal and Spain, has conducted All-State Honor

## ♪ Jay Julio, viola ♪

Originally from Uniondale, New York, 26-year old first-generation Filipino-American Jay Julio is a multi-instrumentalist, teacher, and composer-arranger based in NYC. Jay is the Assistant Principal Violist of the Opera Philadelphia Orchestra, substitute violist with the Chamber Orchestra of Philadelphia, the Kennedy Center Opera Orchestra, the Dallas, Memphis, Charleston, and Virginia Symphonies, and has been invited to play with the New York Pops, the American Composers Orchestra, the Metropolis Ensemble, and PROTESTRA. Recent appearances include solo turns with the Ocala Symphony and the Brooklyn Youth Chorus and chamber music performances on the TIME SPANS Festival with the Talea Ensemble, the Broadway Advocacy Coalition's Arts in Action Festival, and on tour with Norman Menzales' Sampaguita Filipino Flute Project.

They have shared the stage with Broadway singers, pop stars, and classical music's hottest young talents in performances from Washington D.C. to the Philippines, and can be heard on violin and viola on Captured Tracks, Fiendish Endeavor, and Broadway Records. They appeared in the official collaborative music video for Major Lazer & Marcus Mumford's single, Lay Your Head On Me, released as a fundraiser for COVID-19 research efforts, performed with Nigerian artist Burna Boy in his Hollywood Bowl debut, and have played behind Audra McDonald on Carnegie Hall's Great Artists series. Their 2023 debut solo recording of Ann Southam's Re-tuning is forthcoming from the American Viola Society.

Jay has attended the Music Academy of the West, Orpheus@Mannes, the New York String Orchestra Seminar and the Aspen, Pacific, Thy, Spoleto and Lake Tahoe music festivals; they have also spent summers at the Yellow Barn Young Artists Program and the National Symphony Orchestra's Summer Music Institute as a Young Artist of Color. They have served as a Teaching Fellow at the Juilliard School's Music Advancement Program and as substitute viola & chamber music faculty at the Manhattan

### *Octavio Más-Arocas* ——— *continued from page 4*

Orchestras, and has been in residence with university orchestras in Chicago, Cornell University, Portugal, and Brazil. Mr. Más-Arocas has lead tours with the National Youth Orchestra "Templarios" of Portugal, the Interlochen Symphony, the Baldwin Wallace Symphony, and toured Argentina with the Silleda Wind Symphony.

In demand as a conducting teacher, Mr. Más-Arocas has taught workshops and masterclasses in the USA, Portugal, Brazil, and Spain and is currently on the faculty of two of the world's most competitive conducting workshops, the Cabrillo Festival Conducting Workshop, which

School of Music Precollege Division. They have coached the Inner City Youth Orchestra of Los Angeles, have been on faculty at the Stony Brook University Chamber Strings Camp, and hold teaching positions at the Interlochen Center for the Arts Viola Intensive and Midori and Friends.

A prizewinner in national competitions held by the National Federation of Music Clubs and the Music Teachers National Association and recipient of a 2019 Juilliard Career Grant, Jay is indebted to the Virtu Foundation and the American Viola Society for their past support through instrument and bow loans. They were recipient of a 2020 Music Academy of the West Fast Pitch Award for their work as head of Sound Off: Music for Bail, which has since been awarded a 2021 Juilliard School Career Grant, 2022 and 2024 YoungArts Foundation Creative Microgrants, a 2022 Puffin Foundation Grant, a 2023 Surdna Foundation Thriving Cultures Sponsorship, a 2023 New Music USA Organizational Fund Grant, and a 2023 Copland Fund Grant.

After taking their first viola lesson at age 14 at the Mannes Preparatory Division, Jay graduated from the Interlochen Arts Academy at 16 studying with Renee Skerik with their highest musical honor, the Young Artist Award, received their BM in Viola Performance from the Manhattan School of Music under Karen Ritscher on full scholarship, and received their MM at the Juilliard School on a full-tuition Susan W. Rose Fellowship under the tutelage of Heidi Castleman and Misha Amory. Other important mentors include Anne Leilehua Lanzilotti and Lina Bahn. For rhythm, Jay studies poetry.



attracts the most talented conducting students from all around the world, and the Ithaca International Conducting Masterclass. He has taught at the Queens College Conducting Workshop in New York and lead the very selective graduate orchestral conducting program at Ithaca College.

Mr. Más-Arocas is an alumnus of the prestigious American Academy of Conducting at Aspen, where he studied with David Zinman. He completed doctoral studies and his main mentors include Kurt Masur, Harold Farberman, and Emily Freeman Brown.



# Concerto for Viola and Orchestra

(1929, revised 1962)

- I Andante comodo
- II Vivo, con molto preciso
- III Allegro moderato

Sir William Walton  
Born 1902—Died 1983

Featuring 2023 MSO Youth Concerto Winner  
**Jay Julio, viola**




Sir William Turner Walton is one of the three indisputable leaders of the first generation of 20th century British composers, together with Michael Tippett and Benjamin Britten. Their musical predecessors were Vaughan Williams and Holst, and were all contemporaries of Edward Elgar, who was the closest in style to Walton. Elgar and Walton were both born in provincial towns to middle class parents and both had no formal musical education at an academy. But Walton achieved fame earlier in his life, and during a sixty-year career, he wrote music in several classical genres and styles, from film scores to opera. Some of his more well-known works include

*Façade*, the cantata *Belshazzar's Feast*, the *First Symphony* and his most famous composition of all, the *Viola Concerto*, which the MSO will present to you this evening.

Walton was born in 1902 in Lancashire. His parents were singers, his father a bass-baritone who became organist and choirmaster at St. John's Church, his mother a fine amateur contralto. Walton also learned to play the piano and the violin. His musical talent was obvious and when he was ten he was entered for a probationary voice trial for choristers at Christ Church Cathedral School, Oxford. Although he arrived late because of a missed train, his mother begged the administration to let him be heard. The organist accepted him after he performed. So, Walton was able to exchange what he considered the nightmare of a boarding school in Lancashire for an Oxford boarding school. His first term was not easy for him, because he spoke with the Northern English vernacular accent characteristic of Lancashire. He was embarrassed by it and apparently tried to hide it from people, but was never able to abandon it totally.


In 1912-1918, Walton was at the choir school. When war was declared in 1914, his singing students declined in number and he would have been brought home to become a clerk in a cotton mill if Dr. Thomas Strong, Dean of Christ Church, had not paid the balance of the school fees



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not covered by the scholarship. Dr. Strong was a firm believer in Walton's talent, who by then was composing anthems and songs, some of which Strong showed to Sir Hubert Parry, who remarked: "There's a lot in this chap, you must keep an eye on him."

His musical education at Oxford was supervised by Hugh Allen, who went on to become a professor at Oxford University and Director of the Royal College of Music. Through Allen and Strong, Walton was introduced to the music of Stravinsky, Schoenberg, Ravel, Debussy and Prokofiev, the avant-garde of the time.

In 1918, Walton began to compose a piano quartet, his first large-scale work. It caught the attention of another undergrad at Oxford, Sacheverell Sitwell, who insisted that his older brother come to Oxford to encounter a "genius." Genius? Well, Walton had failed his exams and he said to Sacheverell: "What the hell am I going to do?" The reply was "Why not come to stay with us?" The Sitwell brothers with their sister Edith, were just beginning to make a flamboyant impact on literary circles in London. Walton decided to stay in London for a few weeks. As the saying goes, weeks turned into years. They more or less adopted Walton and guaranteed him an annual income good enough to devote all his time to composition and never to have to fear returning to Lancashire. As it turned out, he

became part of an upper echelon atmosphere he could never have imagined. He met giants in the musical world like Diaghilev and Ansermet, was introduced to jazz, contemporary music and the country of Italy, with which he fell in love right away.

The first result of his association with the Sitwells was *Façade*, an entertainment in which eighteen poems written by Edith were recited over a background of Walton's music. The poems were delivered by a megaphone thrust through a painted curtain. By 1926, the piece became the talk of the town, although some of the talk was in reference to it being a "cacophony." Walton revised it, adding and subtracting material, and didn't settle on a definitive version until 1951, when it was published. It was a nineteen-year-old's work of genius, original, and, as it proved, inimitable.

The *Piano Quartet* was completed in 1921, a string quartet of some complexity was selected for the International Society for Contemporary Music's festival in Salzburg in 1923. Later, Walton earned some money by doing arrangements of foxtrots for bands at the Savoy Hotel. He met Gershwin in 1925, at about the time he began to compose the overture *Portsmouth Point*, which was selected for the 1926 ISCM festival in Zurich.

His next important work was the *Sinfonia Concertante* for

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piano and orchestra, each movement being dedicated to one of the Sitwells. But it was overshadowed by the 1928-29 *Viola Concerto* on tonight's program, pairing the orchestra with viola soloist **Jay Julio**, the winner of the 2023 MSO Youth Concerto Winner, performing.

In 1928, the conductor Sir Thomas Beecham suggested to the 26-year-old William Walton that he write a work for the viola. Walton was intrigued, largely due to his liking for Berlioz's *Harold in Italy*, a viola concerto in all but name. He also felt the new work might offer him the chance to escape the reputation as a modernist "bright star" he had acquired through pieces like *Façade* and *Portsmouth Point*. The *Viola Concerto* was written at Amalfi in Italy and was intended for renowned viola virtuoso Lionel Tertis (1876-1975) who had almost single-handedly raised the status of the viola to the ranks of solo instruments. He inspired and performed many new works for the instrument, was a prolific arranger of works originally written for other instruments and even produced his own design for the Tertis-model viola, in pursuit of a stronger, more sonorous tone. To Walton's hurt and dismay, Tertis rejected the *Viola Concerto*, (but not to worry—he later admitted he was wrong, and performed it.) However, the first performance, at a Promenade Concert in 1929, was given by composer and violist Paul Hindemith.

Many still regard this concerto as Walton's masterpiece, and with good reason. In it we can hear a melancholy and dreaminess reminiscent of Elgar. The *Scherzo* is typical of Walton in its rhythmical electricity and syncopation, while the *Finale* is poignant, bittersweet and superbly balanced. In the writing for the orchestra, Walton takes expert care to ensure that the viola is clearly heard throughout. With this great work, Walton at the age of 27, was in the forefront of English composers of his generation, and his reputation was reinforced with subsequent works.

Walton was an English man who loved the sun and character of Latin countries. While traveling for a conference in Argentina he met the 24-years-younger Argentinian woman who'd become his wife. They married two months later, in 1948, and then went to live in Italy, on the island of Ischia, near Naples, where, over the years, the Waltons built a luxurious villa with an impressive garden.

After hard work, in 1954, his only full-length opera *Troilus and Cressida* was completed. It was successful in London and USA but not as well-received in Italy. The composer's self-confidence was weakened by this. Walton composed less, but continued to travel to conduct his own works, also visiting Australia, New Zealand and Russia.



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- C. S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*

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In the 1960s, Walton's health was beginning to fail. He was operated on in 1966 for lung cancer and recovered fairly well, but more illnesses struck him. His 75th and 80th birthday concerts in London were illustrious events which left him in no doubt that he was regarded as one of the great men of British music. During his life, Walton received several awards for his work, including an honorary degree from Oxford University, and the knighthood (hence his title Sir) and the Order of Merit from the Queen. He passed away in 1983, three weeks before his 81st birthday, in Ischia.

Walton was a slow worker, a painstaking perfectionist, and his complete body of work across his long career is not large. His most popular compositions continue to be frequently performed in the twenty-first century, and by 2010 almost all his works had been released on CD.

Walton's *Viola Concerto* brings together a pensive opening movement, a rapid scherzo (a playful, short movement – scherzo literally means “jest” in Italian) and a large-scale, complex finale. The *Andante comodo*'s first theme is an achingly nostalgic melody passed between the viola and the oboe. For the calmer second theme, the viola is accompanied by pizzicato strings. The unpredictable development section includes two dramatic orchestral outpourings, a brief tango-like episode and a short cadenza-like passage for viola with tremolo string accompaniment. In the final section which returns to material from the opening, the viola's flowing triplets accompany the orchestral melody.

The short *Vivo, con molto preciso* is by contrast lively, complete with dance-like syncopated rhythms and intense fluctuations in dynamics and textures. Noisy full-orchestral passages alternate with virtuosic viola solos featuring plentiful dramatic double-stops. The closing bars are amusing and playful.

The ambitious *Finale* comes out of the gate with a brazen theme introduced in the bassoon. The second theme could not be more different— a tender dialogue between viola and woodwind with (in the 1962 version) harp accompaniment, it recalls Walton's beloved Edward Elgar at his most lyrical. The two themes vie for supremacy, and in walks a massive orchestral interlude that includes a fugue. The viola's re-entrance recalls music from the work's opening, and leads into a dreamy final section that Walton's biographer Michael Kennedy believed was “the single most beautiful passage in all his music, sensuous yet full of uncertainty.”

The premiere of the *Viola Concerto* met with much acclaim, and established Walton's reputation as a leading British composer. Lionel Tertis admitted he had misjudged

the work, and from 1930 performed it many times. However, Walton himself was not wholly satisfied. In 1962 he revised it, creating a more intimate scoring, adding a harp, reducing the triple winds to double, and cutting the tuba and one of the trumpets. It is this version, which received its premiere in 1962 and is now considered definitive, that will be performed tonight.

The concerto is inscribed “To Christabel,” referring to Christabel McLaren, Lady Aberconway, for whom Walton had unrequited feelings. Michael Kennedy wrote that “there is no need to know this to appreciate the lyrical melancholy and poetic longing at the heart of the music.” The work was an instant success, as Christopher Palmer comments: “It was a work of such obvious mastery that it probably did even more than *Façade*, *Portsmouth Point* and the *Sinfonia Concertante*—all already behind him—to establish his place in the vanguard of contemporary English music. The concerto exceeded all these in emotional depth, richness and profusion of ideas and technical assurance. “The viola is not an easy instrument for which to write an effective concerto. The violin is a multi-faceted personality; and it can always ride on top of the orchestra. The luscious cantabile and expressive power of the cello can command attention at all times. But the viola is more introvert, a poet-philosopher, conspicuously lacking in brilliance of tone and ever liable to be blotted out by an unheeding orchestra. Yet in Walton's *Concerto* we are never aware of any of these limitations....”

The whole masterpiece is characterized by Walton's use of lush chromatic harmonies; elegant, searching melodies, an ongoing dichotomy between major and minor, and the romantic idiom for which he is famous. What a tour de force this piece is, from the original to its revised state many moons later.

## *Symphony No. 3 in C minor*

Andante  
Andante ma non troppo  
Juba: Allegro  
Scherzo: Finale

Florence Beatrice Price  
Born 1887—Died 1953



**B**orn in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1887, one of three children in a mixed-race family, Florence Beatrice Price was a talented pianist, organist and singer from a young age. Despite racial issues of the era, her family was well-respected and did well within their community. Her father was the only African American dentist in the city,



and her mother was a music teacher who was committed to guiding her daughter's early musical training. She gave her first piano performance at the age of four and her first composition was completed and published when she was just 11.

She enrolled in the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston at 14, where she studied composition, became valedictorian of her class and graduated in 1907. She married a prominent civil rights attorney in 1912, and returned to Little Rock, but sadly racial violence, including a lynching in 1927, caused the family (they had two daughters by then) to move to Chicago. Soon after that, both the financial strain and the emerging issue of her husband's abusiveness led Price to divorce him. This was quite a bold action for a woman of any race at that time in history. To make ends meet as a single mother, Price worked as an organist for silent film screenings and composed songs for radio ads under a pen name. During this time, she lived with friends, and eventually moved in with her student and friend, Margaret Bonds, also an African American pianist and composer. This friendship led to Price meeting poet Langston Hughes and contralto singer Marian Anderson, both prominent figures in the art world who aided in Price's future success as a composer. In 1931, Price would wed widower Pusy Dell Arnett, an insurance agent and former baseball player for the

Chicago Unions, who was thirteen years older than her.

Although she had written numerous children's and practice pieces for her piano students in Arkansas, Price only turned to composing major orchestral works relatively late in life, when she was in her mid-forties. Her *Symphony No. 1 in E Minor* became her first big success. She wrote the majority of her symphony in 1931, finding the humor in an accident she had when she wrote to a friend, "I found it possible to snatch a few precious days in the month of January in which to write undisturbed. But, oh dear me, when shall I ever be so fortunate again as to break a foot?" The resulting piece was well received nationwide, granting Price a degree of legitimacy that encouraged her to continue writing major orchestral works. It had its premiere by the Chicago Symphony and was the first composition by an African American woman to be performed by a major orchestra.

Three more symphonies, incorporating melodies from Negro spirituals, three concertos, assorted smaller orchestral works, including one of her most widely arranged pieces, *Adoration*, a wonderful, otherworldly piece originally written for organ, which the MSO performed in June of 2021, and more than one hundred songs, many sung by some of the most admired voices of her day, would follow. Price found a powerful public stage for her



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pieces at the Chicago World's Fair of 1933. She would go on to show her southern heritage and pride in some of her shorter works: *Arkansas Jitter*, *Bayou Dance*, and *Dance of the Cotton Blossoms*. At the age of 66, after suffering a stroke, she died in June 1953.

It has always been extremely important that composers require backing and sponsorship. Mozart needed Haydn to promote his string quartets. Mendelssohn resurrected Bach's *St. Matthew Passion*, Leonard Bernstein breathed new life into Mahler's symphonies, many water-damaged master tapes from the 1970s by Bob Marley were restored by a sound tech specialist. Sometimes the whims of history blaze new trails for an artist's legacy. Now Price's work is considered an important part of the New Negro Arts Movement, but the legacy of this great talent was largely forgotten until 2009. In that year, the discovery of a treasure trove of her works was made at her summer home in St. Anne, Illinois, where scores were strewn on the floor after an apparent robbery. The home's new owners contacted the University of Arkansas and donated the scores to Price's archive. An important step in the long march for social justice is to perform, record, teach, conduct, research, and respect the life and work of Florence Price. Alex Ross wrote in *The New Yorker* in February 2018, "not only did Price fail to enter the canon; a large quantity of her music came perilously close to obliteration.

That run-down house in St. Anne is a potent symbol of how a country can forget its cultural history." In November 2018, the New York-based firm of G. Schirmer announced that it had acquired the exclusive worldwide rights to Florence Price's complete catalog.

In March of 2022, the MSO performed Price's *Symphony #1 in E minor*. In this engaging and colorful work, the composer freely uses idioms such as jazz and blues, which are vital to African American music. Tonight, we shall hear another of Price's landmark works, her *Symphony #3 in C minor*. The symphony has a duration of roughly 30 minutes and is composed in four movements.

Price started writing the symphony in the summer of 1938, but later revised the work prior to its 1940 premiere. It is notably different from her first symphony in that it uses less African-American themes; its beginning is almost Wagnerian. Some passages resemble Russian composers like Shostakovich.

Contemporary reception for the symphony was positive. Reviewing the 1940 world premiere, J. D. Callaghan of the *Detroit Free Press* wrote:

"Mrs. Price, both in the [piano] concerto and in the symphony, spoke in the musical idiom of her own people, and



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spoke with authority. There was inherent in both works all the emotional warmth of the American Negro, so that the evening became one of profound melody satisfaction. In the symphony there was a slow movement of majestic beauty, a third in which the rhythmic preference of the Negro found scope in a series of dance forms, and a finale which swept forward with great vigor.”

One might expect the historic premiere of Florence Price’s *Symphony #1* by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in 1933 to have won her a heaping helping of access to that orchestra and others for her later compositions—but that was not the case. Her *Symphony #1* remained unpublished until 2008, the *Symphony #2* is missing, and her *Symphony #4* (1945) went unperformed in her lifetime and remained unpublished until 2020.

How could the work of such a brilliant and significant symphonist remain so obscure for so long? “Two Handicaps—Those of Sex and Race” Florence Price’s letters answer that question plainly. She repeatedly tried to persuade conductor Serge Koussevitzky (1874–1951) to program her music—in vain. One of her letters to him, dated July 5, 1943, describes the difficulties she faced outright: To begin with I have two handicaps—those of sex and race. I am a woman; and I have some Negro blood in my veins. Knowing the worst, then, would you be good

enough to hold in check the possible inclination to regard a woman’s composition as long on emotionalism but short on virility and thought content;—until you shall have examined some of my work?. ... As to the handicap of race, ... I should like to be judged on merit alone—the great trouble having been to get conductors, who know nothing of my work ... to even consent to examine a score.”

Fortunately, Price’s *Symphony #3* did not go entirely unheard in her lifetime: It was performed by Valter Poole and the Michigan WPA Symphony Orchestra on November 6 and 8, 1940. Those performances were a success, and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt reported enthusiastically on the work in her syndicated newspaper column, *My Day*. However, that was not enough to rescue the piece from the oblivion to which the “handicaps” of its composer’s race and sex doomed it. It was not heard again in her lifetime and remained unperformed until 2001 and unpublished until 2008. Only now is it beginning to be heard in concert halls with any regularity.

Nevertheless, Price’s *Symphony #3* towers over its surviving predecessor in originality and maturity of conception—and the composer’s correspondence shows that she was fully aware of the significance of this fact. In a 1940 letter she stated that it was “Negroid in character and



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expression” but hastened to clarify that it did not merely replicate the African American tradition as it was represented in her *Symphony #1*. The later work, she said, was “a cross section of present-day Negro life and thought with its heritage of that which is past, paralleled or influenced by concepts of the present day” (emphasis added)—a reference to the *Symphony’s* cultivation of dissonant passages, jarring percussion, and other Modernist expressive devices that were absent from the *Symphony #1*, to 20th-century music in general, and to much of Price’s later music. These descriptions do not just reveal Price’s ideas about the music of this ambitious work. Even more, they reveal that she understood that it signaled a new stage in her development as a composer and paved the way for some of the most important and startlingly original compositions of her entire career.

The *Symphony #3* is cast in four movements, all seeking to bring competition between Black and Modernist musical elements against each other. The first movement highlights 20th-century styles from the outset, beginning with an unsettled slow introduction (*Andante*) and moving from there to a turbulent and dissonant main theme (*Allegro*); only with the lush and expansive second theme, entrusted first to the solo trombone, do the flavors of

Black vernacular styles come to the foreground. Those flavors launch the tranquil *Andante ma non troppo* second movement, but the serene beauty of its opening section is repeatedly interrupted by unsettled whole-tone material that reminds us that this is, after all, music of the 20th century, not the 19th.

The third movement is an exploration of orchestral virtuosity and swirling colors. Although Black stylistic influences make themselves felt here, on the whole the turbulence and harmonic adventure of mid-20th-century classical music predominate. Time and again the restlessness promises to subside, and time and again the barely established calm is broken—until finally Price abandons any attempt to resolve the conflict between the two. The *Symphony’s* close is a magnum opus of swirling, chaotic abandon punctuated by dissonance and chromaticism, and its final bars are a fury of roaring percussion and chordal material that finally reclaim the work from turbulence and discord—the conflicting and discordant forces of the musical world, and the Black condition, given eloquent voice in this *Symphony*.

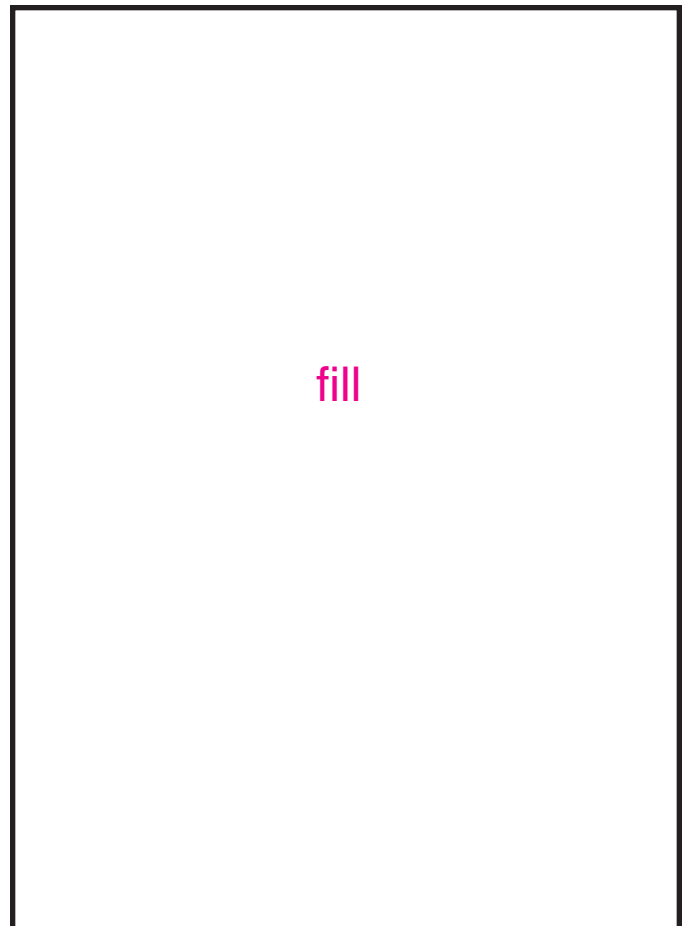
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