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Faculty Recital

Russell Wilson, piano
with Michelle Matts, flute

Monday, November 4, 2019 at 7 p.m.

Sonia Vlahcevic Concert Hall
W. E. Singleton Center for the Performing Arts
Virginia Commonwealth University
922 Park Avenue | Richmond, VA

arts.vcu.edu/music



Richmond Sinfonia, where he has performed as a soloist and accompanied world class artists including Mel Tormé, Dick Hyman, Cab Calloway, Chet Atkins, Steve Allen and Carol Lawrence. Wilson's performances over the years have been numerous and varied —pianist with the Joe Kennedy Quartet at the National Association of Jazz Educators Conference in Atlanta; with the Louisville Symphony Orchestra as accompanist for flutist Leslie Burrs; and at the Smithsonian Institution as pianist with Trio Pro Viva, a chamber ensemble devoted to the performance of music by black composers. As a soloist, he has performed Beethoven's "Piano Concert No. 1 in C Major" with the Petersburg Symphony Orchestra, Duke Ellington's "New World a' Comin'" with the New River Valley and the Richmond symphony orchestras and Mozart's "Piano Concerto No.23 in A Major." Wilson was also selected to perform in master classes conducted by Earl Wild and Leon Fleisher.

In addition to his performances, Wilson has conducted improvisational workshops for the Richmond Music Teachers Association, Richmond Jazz Society (Bach, Bop and Beyond), Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, and Virginia State University with violinist Joe Kennedy Jr. He has also presented benefit concerts for American Field Services and Richmond Area Retarded Citizens.

As a recording artist, he is featured as soloist on "Moonlight Piano" and "The Memphis Convention." During the summer of 1995 he became pianist for the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra conducted by David Baker and Gunther Schuller. Wilson began touring with the SJMO in January 1996, in celebration of the Smithsonian's 150th year. The group has since traveled throughout the U.S., Canada, Spain, Italy, France, London, Istanbul, Helsinki and the Hague, performing "The Cotton Club Revue," featuring the music of Duke Ellington. During July 2002, in conjunction with the Smithsonian Associates and RAICES Latin Music Museum, Wilson presented a lecture/performance at the Museum of the City of New York. His program traced the development of Latin jazz and its influence on American jazz. He received the Theresa Pollak Award for excellence in the arts in 2002.

Michelle Matts earned a Bachelor of Music Education Degree from Virginia Commonwealth University, and a Master of Music Degree in Flute Performance from the University of Arkansas. Michelle performs as a soloist and chamber musician in various concerts and events throughout Virginia, the United States, and Europe. She is the flutist of The Sull'aria Trio, PolyCeltic, The Dolce Bella Flute & Harp Duo, The Rosewinde Flute & Guitar Duo, and The Serendipity Flute & Piano Duo. Michelle is also a recording artist. She can be heard on various albums; most recently "Stirred to Be Still", "Classical Meets Irish" and "Amid the Winter's Snow". Her website is www.mfifer.com.

to show him her face. She unveils herself and kills him with a kiss.

Florence B. Price, was born in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1887 and died in Chicago, Illinois in 1953. Even though her training was steeped in the European tradition, Price's music consists of mostly the American idiom and reveals her Southern roots.[4] She wrote with a vernacular style, using sounds and ideas that fit the reality of urban society. After moving to Chicago in 1926, her works received increasing recognition. Her Symphony in E minor (performed by the Richmond Symphony Orchestra) won the Rodman Wanamaker Prize in 1932, leading to its performance by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra under Frederick Stock at the Chicago World's Fair.

Price was one of the pioneer black symphonists along with William Grant Still and William Dawson. Of her many compositions for solo piano, *Fantasie Negre*, is dedicated to Margaret Bonds, another influential black composer who arranged many spirituals for voice and studied composition with Florence Price and William Dawson.

Being deeply religious, Price frequently used the music of the African-American church as material for her arrangements. At the urging of her mentor George Whitefield Chadwick, Price began to incorporate elements of African-American spirituals, emphasizing the rhythm and syncopation of the spirituals rather than just using the text. Her melodies were blues-inspired and mixed with more traditional, European Romantic techniques. The weaving of tradition and modernism reflected the way life was for African Americans in large cities at the time.

Fantasie Negre, written in 1929 for solo piano, was the composer's first large-scale work for this instrument. It interpolates the Negro spiritual *Sinner Please Don't Let This Harvest Pass* into a lush, virtuoso setting. Soon after this composition of 1929, a dance troupe, led by Russian ballet teacher Ludmilla Sperranza and pioneering African American choreographer, Katherine Dunham premiered *Fantasie Negre* as a ballet.

About the Artists

Russell Wilson is adjunct keyboard faculty at VCU Music. He is a native of Memphis, Tenn., and an outstanding classical and jazz pianist who received his bachelor's and master's of music degrees from Memphis State University. Formerly a member of Virginia Union University's faculty, he now teaches at VCU and the University of Richmond. Wilson performs regularly with the Russell Wilson Quartet, the Joe Kennedy Quartet and the Smithsonian Jazz Masterworks Orchestra.

Wilson enjoys a distinguished career as a solo and chamber music performer. He is the principal pianist of the Richmond Symphony Orchestra and the

Program

Prelude and Fugue No. 12 in F minor from W.T.C. Book II	J.S. Bach (1685 – 1750)
Sonata No. 1 Allegro energico Moderato Allegro con brio	George Walker (1922 – 2018)
-Intermission-	
Sonata for Flute and Piano, Op. 167 Allegro Intermezzo Allegretto vivace Andante tranquillo Finale Allegro molto agitato ed appassionato, quasi Presto	Carl Reinecke (1824 – 1910)
Fantasie Negre	Florence Price (1887 – 1953)
Promenade	George Gershwin (1898 – 1937)
All Too, Soon	Edward "Duke" Ellington (1899 – 1974)

Program Notes

J.S. Bach's The Well-Tempered Clavier, often acts as a kind of bible for many pianists because it is a timeless work transcending its history and is capable of reaching a wide spectrum of generations and music fans. Generally, it is regarded as one of the most influential works in the history of Western Classical Music, and is a litmus test on many levels that even the pianist who has heard and played it hundreds of times, finds new 'voices' in the work. Believe it or not, Bach's style went out of favor in the time around his death, and most music in the early Classical period had neither contrapuntal complexity nor a great variety of keys. But with the maturing of the Classical style in the 1770s, the W.T.C. began to influence the course of musical history with Haydn and Mozart studying these works more closely.

Structurally, the Preludes are formally free, meaning certain rhythmic liberties may be taken with regards to melodic enhancement. The Fugue, on the other hand exhibits a kind of on-going drive that has a sense of buoyant swing. My decision to program this work is mainly due to my continued fascination of Bach and in following Bach's reason for composing them: "for the profit and use of musical youth desirous of learning," and especially for the pastime of those already skilled in this study."

George Walker's music was firmly rooted in the modern classical tradition, but also drew from African-American spirituals and jazz. His nearly 100 compositions range broadly, from intricately orchestrated symphonic works and concertos to intimate songs and solo piano pieces.

George Walker's piano Sonata No. 1 makes use of quartal fragments both harmonically and melodically and his use of chromaticism produces a restless quality. However, the sections are well-defined. The second movement consist of six short variations and is based on a Kentucky folk song, Oh Bury Me Beneath the Willow. The third movement, in rondo form, is guided by a primary motive which is essentially rhythmic and is characterized throughout the movement by octave transpositions. The first contrasting theme is also based on a folk song found in Carl Sandburg's Songbag.

Walker was a trailblazing man of "firsts". . . In the year 1945 alone, he was the first African-American pianist to play a recital at New York's Town Hall, the first black instrumentalist to play solo with the Philadelphia Orchestra and the first black graduate of the Curtis Institute of Music in Philadelphia. In 1996, he became the first black composer to receive the Pulitzer Prize in Music for his work, Lilies for voice and orchestra. In 1955, he became the first black recipient of a doctoral degree from Eastman School of Music. Walker had a long and distinguished academic career. He held teaching posts at New York's New School, Rutgers University in New Jersey (where he chaired the music department), the University of Colorado, the Peabody Institute in Maryland, the University of Delaware

member. Walker received two Guggenheim Fellowships, an American Academy of Arts and Letters Award, and honorary doctorates from six institutions, including Oberlin and Spelman Colleges. In 1997, Washington D.C.'s mayor, Marion Barry, declared June 17th as George Walker Day.

Walker is often identified as an "African-American" composer instead of simply an American composer. In a 1987 interview with broadcaster Bruce Duffie, Walker said there are two sides to that label. "I've benefited from being a black composer in the sense that when there are symposiums given of music by black composers, I would get performances by orchestras that otherwise would not have done the works," Walker said. "The other aspect, of course, is that if I were not black, I would have had a far wider dispersion of my music and more performances." Mark Clague, who wrote the entry on George Walker for the International Dictionary of Black Composers, points to elements of race and politics in Walker's compositions. "He constructs his music so that the unknown listener should not be able to distinguish it from that of his 'canonized' white contemporaries," Clague writes, citing influences from Stravinsky, Debussy and the serialist school of composers. "He frequently draws on black musical idioms, such as spirituals, blues patterns and jazz tropes. Walker's music, however, is not a collage of modern styles, or a pastiche, but has its own distinct voice." In 2009, Walker told NPR's All Things Considered that as a composer, right from the start, he knew he had to become an individual. "I had to find my own way," he said. "A way of doing something that was different, something that I would be satisfied with."

Carl Reinecke's Sonata in e minor is based on the German romantic tale by Friedrich de la Motte Fouque. The tale is of the water spirit Undine, who longs for an immortal soul which can be obtained only through uniting in love with a mortal man.

The first movement portrays Undine in her underwater world. She leaves the water kingdom in search of love with a mortal man and is discovered as a child by a fisherman and his wife, who raise Undine as a daughter. The second movement begins with a playful musical chase between the flute and piano that paints a picture of Undine's life with her foster parents. The piano's carefree folk-like solo section represents the knight Hildebrand, who seeks shelter from a raging storm and falls in love with Undine.

The third movement represents the couple's years of marriage filled with contentment. The peacefulness is interrupted when a fountain is uncovered and water spirits rush out and beckons Undine to return. All is stilled suddenly by the dropping of a boulder over the fountain. In the fourth movement, the couple takes a trip on the Danube, which rouses the anger of the water spirits. Undine falls overboard and sinks to the bottom. Thinking she is dead, Hildebrand makes plans to remarry. On the night of his wedding Undine returns as a spirit, veiled and shrouded like a bride. Knowing he is to die, he begs Undine