

Florence Price: Forgotten No More

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Florence Price: Forgotten No More



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Introduction

Florence Price was a composer and musician who lived from 1887 to 1953. She composed music in every genre except for opera. The music of Florence Price traveled practically everywhere; from the radio to the concert halls to the church. Throughout her life, she became well-known as the first African American female composer who was featured by a major symphony. Florence Price was tenacious, brave, and courageous during her era which contributed to the level of acceptance that society now holds for African American composers.

Background

Florence Beatrice Smith Price entered the world in Little Rock, Arkansas during the year of 1887. She was one of three children born to Dr. James Smith and Florence Gulliver.

Her musical abilities were noticed and developed from a young age as she gave her first piano concert at the age of four and began her published compositional career at the age of eleven. To say that she was simply gifted would be a grave mistake and understatement as all of her musical gifts and capabilities point to her being a child prodigy and gifted well beyond her years.

After graduating from Capitol Hill School in 1903 as valedictorian, Price continued on in her academics by pursuing a dual music degree program at the New England Conservatory of Music. While she was pursuing academia there, she studied with George Whitefield Chadwick, Henry M. Dunham, and Frederick Converse.

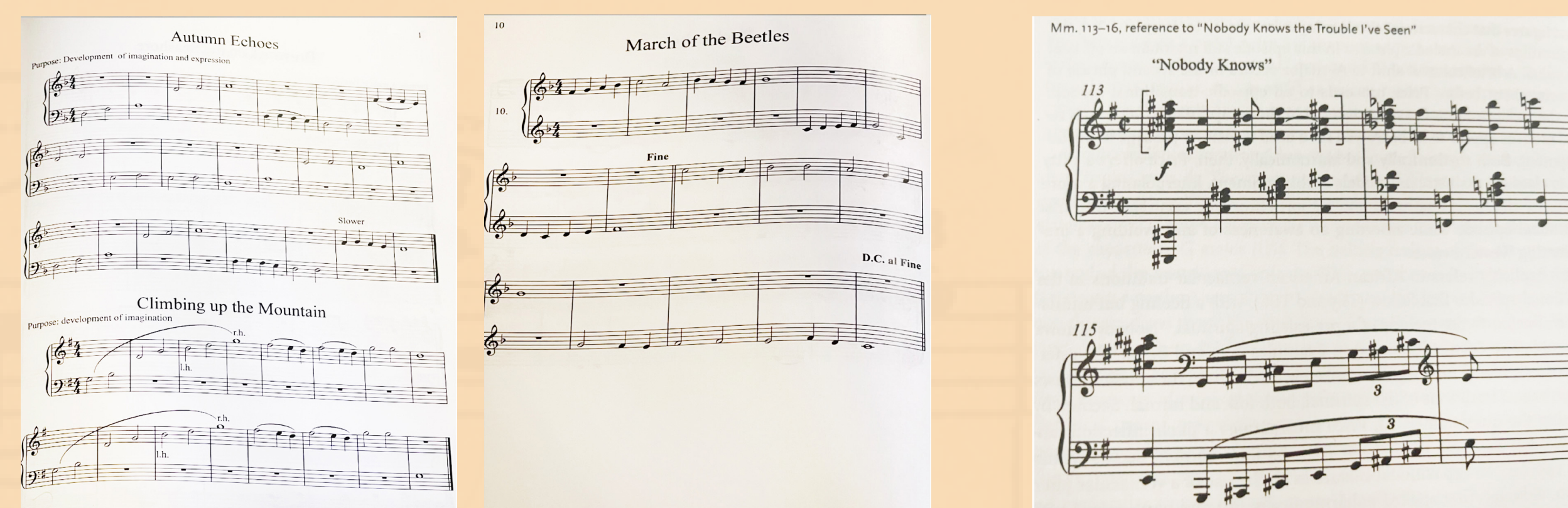
Upon graduation, Price returned to Arkansas, her home state, to teach. Later, Florence Price ended up marrying a lawyer named Thomas Price on September 9, 1912. They had three children.

Price unexpectedly passed away on June 3, 1953. She was 66 years old. The great composer, Florence Price, was laid to rest in Lincoln Cemetery on June 5, 1953.

Compositions

Throughout Florence Price's compositional career, she composed over 300 pieces in every genre except for opera. Price's generation had the opportunity to assist people in viewing African Americans as equals in all fields but especially in music. In doing so, a pride for their work was aroused and many people began to view them as legitimate composers of great worth. Because the music of African American composers was becoming more popular and accepted, Price was able to recruit famous singers such as Marian Anderson to premiere her vocal works.

In addition to her advanced performance works and art songs, Price also created teaching pieces for her students. Price may not have had access to many published piano teaching methods. Or, perhaps her students could not afford to purchase them. Price was willing to create works for her students which would eventually allow them to be advanced enough to perform pieces such as the "Sonata in E Minor."



Examples of Florence Prices' Teaching For Piano

With her teaching pieces, the above example demonstrates how Price would often write a note and place it under the title which allowed for students to understand explicitly what was expected of them as musicians and also where exactly their imagination could run wild. She desired for her students to be creative and use their imagination and expression when performing as these skills are learned more thoroughly when a musician is younger.

Present Day

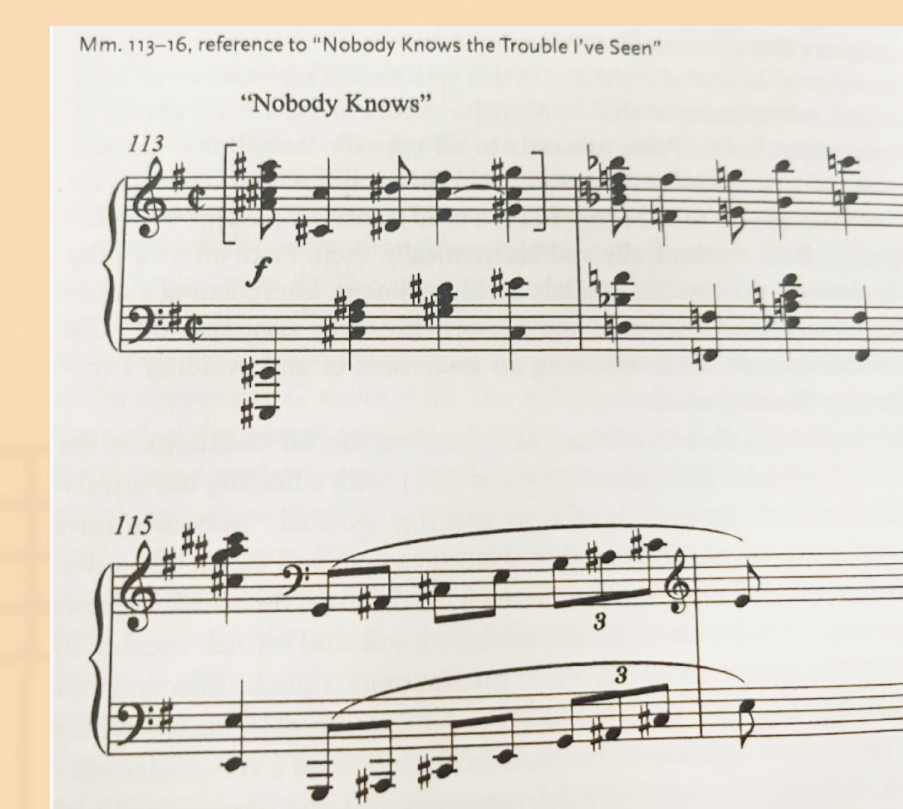
While some will say that Florence Price became famous in 1932 when the Chicago Symphony debuted her "Symphony in E Minor," and made her the first African American woman to have her music played by a professional symphony, others will claim that she rose to fame after some of her lost compositions were found once again in 2009. The mere fact that these compositions even were found is a miracle. Once scores of a composer go missing, it is thought that those works are most likely lost forever, either destroyed or beyond recognition if they still happen to exist.

In the last fourteen years, Florence Price has been making a dramatic stir on the national level. Since the world now realizes how important Florence Price is as a composer, her pieces must be published, performed, and cherished because if they are not performed, what lesson did the truly world learn? In order to not make the same mistake in the future of discounting the work of a female African American composer, the music community must do its due diligence and honor the works of Florence Price.

Conclusion

As time marches on, it is safe to say that Florence Price is to an extent, forgotten no more. Music scholars and performers alike have realized the folly in ignoring Price's contributions to the music repertoire. Her life, compositions, and recent rise to fame all ensure that she will be remembered for years to come. Much can be learned and applied after viewing how Price approached life and music. She was dedicated, tenacious, determined, strong, and courageous.

Price turned her trials into musical jewels which decorate the music repertoire in everything except for opera. Hopefully, the invaluable musical treasures that Price left for future generations will become more commonly performed, treasured, and transcribed as the days go by.



"Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen," original tune
"Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen" form "Sonata in E minor"

In this sonata, Price has the concept of "Negro music" flavoring her themes as one spiritual in particular chases the performer throughout the entirety of the piece. Contained within it are references to a spiritual entitled "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen."