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“I, TOO”: A GRADUATE VOICE RECITAL CELEBRATING THE WORKS OF
FOUR BLACK FEMALE COMPOSERS

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Music

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Pittsburg State University

Pittsburg, Kansas

November 2022

**“I, TOO”: A GRADUATE VOICE RECITAL CELEBRATING THE WORKS OF
FOUR BLACK FEMALE COMPOSERS**

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FOUR BLACK FEMALE COMPOSERS**

An Abstract of the Thesis by
Xavier Moore

This thesis is an extension of Mr. Moore’s graduate vocal recital program notes, highlighting the works of four Black female composers. Each chapter includes biographical information about each composer, analysis of each piece, information about the larger works, and an argument about why the works of these composers should be included in the vocal canon.

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Chapter I

Betty Jackson King

Composer Biography

Betty Jackson King (1928-1994) was a teacher, lecturer, composer, and pianist born in Chicago, Il in 1929. Born into a musical family, Jackson began her musical studies on piano with her mother, Gertrude Jackson Taylor, who was a well-respected musician in her own right, having founded the Imperial Opera Company and served as the organist for various Black churches in the Chicago area. Faith was a large part of King's life, her father being the Reverend Frederick D. Jackson, and thus she spent a large amount of her youth in the Community Church of Woodlawn. The time that she spent fostering her faith became another source of King's musical education as she would regularly sing in the Jacksonian Trio with her mother and sister Catherine.¹ The three traveled the country performing spirituals and other songs at various venues. Those spirituals had a profound effect on King, and they went on to become the basis of much of her musical output.

King's love for music ultimately led to her attending the Chicago Musical College of Roosevelt University, where she earned her Bachelor of Music in piano in 1950 and

¹ Anne Gray, *The World of Women in Classical Music* (La Jolla, CA: WordWorld, 2007), 210.

Master of Music in composition 1952. Her master's thesis would end up being the first of her three operas, *Saul of Tarsus*, with a libretto written by her father, who went on to write the libretto for her two other operas, *My Servant Job* and *Simon of Cyrene*. Her opera was performed widely after its premiere in 1952 by the Imperial Opera Company. After completing her studies, King went on to teach at various schools, including the University of Chicago Laboratory School, Dillard University in New Orleans, and later Wildwood High School after a move to New Jersey in 1969.

Her move to New Jersey proved to be a productive one, as it was here that she gained much recognition as a teacher and composer.² She became the choir director for Wildwood High School and Riverside Church in New York. During her lifetime, King composed works for piano, organ, choir, and solo voice, many of which have been recorded by popular artists such as Kathleen Battle and Jessye Norman. After being elected president of the National Association of Negro Musicians in 1979, King often gave lectures on the importance of the preservation of Negro spirituals and encouraged other Black composers to incorporate the melodies of these spirituals into their compositions. Betty Jackson King died in 1994, leaving behind a legacy full of musical accomplishments and a library of compositions rich with beautiful melodies and text that reaffirmed her belief in God.

“A Lullaby for You”

In her song “A Lullaby for You,” King not only shows off her ability to create a melodic line, but also her poetry skills, as the text of this song is by the composer herself.

² “African American Composer,” The Composer, accessed May 9, 2022, <https://www.bettyjacksonking.com/African-American-composer-chicago-il.html>.

Sleep, my baby, close your eyes,
Mother's (Daddy's) here to soothe your cries.
Won't you try to stop your weeping,
All the other folks are sleeping,
Close your eyes, my baby,
Close your eyes, my dear.
Why are you crying, have no fear,
Nothing will harm you while I am here.
Don't be afraid of the dark my dear
Wipe your eyelids, dry your tear.

Before the words are sung, King provides a dream-like introduction with a triplet motif that continues throughout the entirety of the song. This pattern creates an almost timeless feeling to the music and is very effective at almost lulling the listener into a peaceful feeling before the melody is even introduced (Figure 1.1). After the mood is set by the two-measure introduction, the vocal line enters with a simple, flowing melody, adding to the peaceful figure that the piano continues to play underneath. King adds slur marks over each of the phrases in the vocal line, an indication for the singer to keep the melody as legato as possible (Figure 1.2).



Figure 1.1 Betty Jackson King, "A Lullaby for You," mm. 1-2



Figure 1.2 Betty Jackson King, “A Lullaby for You,” mm. 4-6

The slur marks end once at the middle section of the song, which King marks as *Con moto*, or with movement, coupled with a dynamic marking change from mezzo-piano to mezzo-forte, indicating a more urgent feeling to this section. This urgency calms down with the help of a *poco ritardando*, as the tempo reverts back to that of the beginning, as the opening music and text returns. However, unlike the first time through, King adds a bit of vocal line sung on an “oo” before the last lines of the first stanza. The song ends with an ascending figure in the vocal line first, followed by another in the accompaniment, ultimately ending on a DM7 chord, which in the key of D Major does not sound resolved. This lack of resolution plus the ascending figures right at the end can be seen as the child finally drifting off to sleep.

“In the Springtime”

The text for King’s “In the Springtime” comes from a very popular source, a song from William Shakespeare’s play *As You Like It*. While this song’s text has been set to music in its entirety by many composers, King decides to use only the refrain for her piece.

In the springtime, the only pretty ring time
When birds do sing, hey ding a ding ding,
Sweet lovers love the spring!

The song begins with rolled chords and a repeated eighth note octave figure in the right hand. She ends the introduction with a descending line of eighth notes that lead right into the beautifully simple melody in the vocal line. King includes a bit of text painting in this song, with a figure in the accompaniment while the text discusses the birds singing. There is a fairly long piano interlude, which leads to a key change and the repetition of the music from the beginning of the song, ending with a decently long outro in the accompaniment. Overall, this song is very piano heavy, showing King's prowess as a pianist.

“Way By an’ By”

King's arrangement of this Negro Spiritual hearkens back to the songs that she would have heard and sung in church.

Way by an’ by
I’m gonna have a good time
Way by an’ by

My God spoke unto me
Early one mornin’ soon
When you get up in the kingdom chile
You gonna have a good time
Way by an’ by

Brothers and sisters all
Hallelujah

Better be ready when the roll is called
You gonna have a good time
Way by an' by

The first thing of note in this arrangement is the “Lento” tempo marking. This coupled with the chordal structure of the introduction, which is almost entirely in the right hand of the piano, give this song an almost haunting feeling. This chordal structure continues throughout the entire piece. The chords give the tune of the refrain before the whaling vocal line enters. The vocal line repeats the refrain multiple times throughout the song, which is traditional for spirituals. When it comes to each verse, King gives the “con moto” marking, indicating that this section should have some urgency to it. After the last time that the refrain is sung, King has the vocal line hum a shortened variation on the melody of the refrain. Underneath this hum, the chords in the piano are sustained, and the piece is ended with a very large chord in the accompaniment, giving the song a definitive conclusion. This song is a good example of the influences that King took from growing up in church.

“The Pledge”

Written in the later years of her life, “The Pledge” is another song where King chooses to set a text of her own to music. It is a song about devotion to a loved one, and King sets the text beautifully.

The sun is rising in the eastern sky,
The day has come and I await your sigh.
My eyes will seek, my voice will sing a song.
I'll search for you, dear, all life long.

The sun is setting in the western sky.
My heart doth ask, my soul cannot reply.
The night has come and I still sing my song.
I'll wait for you, dear, all life long.

As is typical for King, the song begins with a beautiful piano introduction, setting the mood for this joyous song. The vocal line soars over the flowing accompaniment, as the singer stays in the middle-upper part of the voice. Keeping the tessitura of this song this high creates a sense of lightness throughout the piece. As the first verse comes to an end, King brings the voice back down, indicating an acceptance of this first part of the pledge. After a brief piano interlude with a lovely 16th note figure in the right hand, the melody from the beginning returns with the text of the second stanza. The music of the second verse plays out just as the first half of the song did, until King decides to repeat the last line, extending the voice into the upper register, evoking a powerful declaration of “All life long.” She ends the song with a repetition of this text, with the vocal line holding the word long for a total of fifteen beats, leaping an octave to soar back into the upper register.

“Ride Up In The Chariot”

Another example of King pulling influence from her faith and upbringing in the church is her arrangement of “Ride Up in the Chariot.”

Gonna ride up in the chariot soon-a in the mornin’
Gonna walk and talk with Jesus, soon-a in the mornin’
Gonna chatter with the angels, soon-a in the mornin’
Oh Lord, have mercy on me.

This very lively spiritual is characterized by its syncopated rhythms, which happens to open the song in the piano. King uses this rhythm to introduce the song's melody, having both hands in the piano accompaniment play in unison. This simplifies the texture of the intro so that the melody can be clearly heard. The vocal line takes up the melody and the syncopated rhythm and expands it into the full melody. As is the tradition of Negro spirituals, the text changes as the music stays the same throughout the piece, shifting dynamics over each phrase. Before ending the piece, King creates variations on the music of the refrain, while repeating the text and having the vocal line sing the climactic line over and over again, until she ends the piece with a very commanding declaration, extending the rhythm and marking the tempo as slow and the dynamic as fortissimo.

Betty Jackson King's songs show an incredible ability to create beauty out of simplicity. In each of these songs, she crafts beautiful melodies over appropriately supportive accompaniments. This makes her songs extremely approachable for new singers, while providing more experienced vocalists with much room for interpretation.

Chapter II

Undine Smith Moore

Composer Biography

Known by many as the “Dean of Black female composers,” Undine Smith Moore (1904-1989) was a well-respected music educator and a prolific composer for various instruments, including solo voice, piano, and choir. In various interviews, Moore describes her compositional style as being strongly contrapuntal, freely tonal, and dominated by the “black idiom,” referring to the syncopated rhythms, call and response motifs, and the “deliberate use of striking climax with almost unrestrained fullness” often found in many genres of Black music.³ Moore’s two main influences, which she notes are Black folk music and J.S. Bach (1685-1750), combine to create music that is lush, deeply emotional, and maintains traditional compositional practices.⁴

Born in the small town of Jarratt, VA, Undine Smith Moore grew up surrounded by music. Though her parents were not officially educated, they understood the importance of knowledge and instilled that in their children. Moore’s mother Hardie Turnbull Smith was a lover of music and books, and she passed that love onto her

³ Helen Walker-Hill, *From Spirituals to Symphonies: African-American Women Composers and Their Music* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 67.

⁴ David Baker, Lida M. Belt, and Herman C. Hudson, *The Black Composer Speaks* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1978), 191.

offspring, often ordering cases of books to read to her children and urging them to read on their own as well. Moore's father James William Smith was a brakeman for the Norfolk and Western Railroad, which paid decently well and provided his family with relative comfort.

In 1908, Moore's parents moved her and her two older siblings to Petersburg, Virginia for better educational opportunities for their children. Moore described her childhood in Petersburg as being "saturated with the music of one kind or another."⁵ Though Black people were prohibited from attending theaters or music halls besides the Petersburg Academy of Music, a local performance venue, Moore found herself surrounded by a culture of music through churches, social dinners, and competitive interactions with her young peers. They often asked each other if they had learned to read sheet music yet. At the age of seven, Moore began attending the neighbor children's piano lessons, absorbing all of the knowledge that she could by simply observing. These sessions benefitted Moore so much that by the time her parents purchased an upright piano for her older sister, who was seven at the time, Moore was already able to play a piece called "Boat Song," to her parents' amazement. This prompted Moore's parents to enroll her in her own piano lessons with Lillian Allen Darden (1887-1983), the wife of a local physician and graduate of Fisk University. Moore's studies with Mrs. Darden would prove to be very useful, ultimately leading to Moore's decision to study piano at the collegiate level.

Moore's talents and hard work led to her being offered a scholarship to attend Virginia Normal Institute (now Virginia State University) in Petersburg, however Darden

⁵ Walker-Hill, 55.

and Moore's father convinced her to study at Fisk University in Nashville, TN instead. Moore studied piano and organ with Alice M. Glass and music theory with Sara Leight Laubenstein at Fisk, at first mainly focusing on piano. After her freshman year, Moore was awarded a scholarship from the Juilliard School to continue her studies at Fisk, the first of its kind. Throughout her collegiate career, Moore's aptitude for composition was recognized and encouraged by her professors, including the head of the music department Dr. Mary Hillman, who would go on to conduct performances of Moore's compositions. Moore soon discovered her love of choral music via her participation in the Mozart Society, conducted by John Wesley Work II (1871-1925). The group performed large-scale choral works and unaccompanied spirituals, which became one of Moore's favorite mediums to compose for. Moore graduated cum laude from Fisk University in 1926 with a Bachelor of Music in piano performance.

Though her professors advised her to attend the Juilliard Graduate School in New York, Moore accepted a position as music supervisor in the Goldsboro, North Carolina public schools upon her graduation from Fisk University. Just one year later, Moore accepted an offer to join the music faculty at Virginia State College, moving her back to Petersburg. Though she took the position of piano professor and organist at Virginia State, Moore soon found her role expanded into teaching other classes as well. One of these assignments during her first year was working with the D. Webster Davis Laboratory High School chorus on campus. This venture proved to be the beginning of a prolific time of choral composition in Moore's life, as the lack of funding for music scores led to Moore composing and arranging works that would fit the needs of her chorus out of mere necessity. Though none of the works that Moore composed during

this time working with various high school ensembles survive, they clearly left a mark on her, as she once openly admitted her preference for composing choral works.⁶

In 1929, Moore decided to pursue graduate studies, and commuted from Petersburg to Columbia University's Teachers College in New York City, while continuing her teaching duties at Virginia State. At Columbia, Moore studied composition and music theory with Howard Murphy (1896-1962), who eventually became a friend and advisor long after her graduation. Moore graduated from Columbia in 1931 with a Master of Arts degree and a professional diploma in music.

Moore married Dr. James Arthur Moore, the chairman of the physical education department at Virginia State College, in 1938. The pair would often perform together in recitals, with James singing and Undine accompanying him on piano. In 1941, their daughter Marie Hardy was born. While the added responsibilities of marriage, raising a child, and teaching various classes took precedence over her compositional production, Moore continued to write music to meet the needs of her students and church ministries.

Over time, Moore took on even more roles at Virginia State College, including directing the collegiate choir, chair of the music theory department, supervisor of student teaching in music, and acting head of the music department. Moore's students recall her being an integral part of why they continued their studies in music, many of them ultimately becoming heads of music departments throughout the United States themselves. Moore felt that it was important to present Black music of all styles in music education, going so far as to include snippets of this music in her unpublished theory workbook, "A Recorded Supplement to Studies in Traditional Harmony," which gained

⁶ Baker, Belt, and, Hudson, 188.

recognition in its own right for how innovative and formidable the information was.

Moore considered teaching to be one of her most important accomplishments, and this is backed up by the many individuals that were affected by her instruction.

Moore increased her compositional output in the 1950s. During this time, she produced 22 works, including her popular piano piece “Before I’d Be a Slave” and the unaccompanied choral piece “Daniel, Daniel, Servant of the Lord.” Moore also resumed her commutes to New York, studying composition with Howard Murphy (1896-1962) of the Manhattan School of Music and attending composition workshops at the Eastman School of Music. It is at this time that Moore’s music begins to include more dissonances and twentieth-century techniques, a move away from her earlier works, which she describes as being similar to that of Leopold Godowsky (1870-1938).

Though she did not compose as much in the 1960s, some of Moore’s most important work happens in this decade. In response to the civil rights movement that dominated most of the decade, Moore opened the Black Music Center at Virginia State College with her colleague and cofounder Altona Trent Johns (1904-1977) in 1968. The center brought awareness of the contributions of Black people in music in the United States and throughout the world. A course entitled “The Black Man in American Music” was offered in conjunction with the center to help further its cause, and remained a popular course for the duration of its existence. The Black Music Center remained in operation until Moore and Johns retired from teaching in 1972.

Moore and Johns decided to take a trip to West Africa in 1971, presenting lectures at the U.S. Embassy in Nigeria. The trip affected Moore deeply, especially when interacting with individuals in rural and urban areas in Senegal, Ghana, and the Ivory

Coast. Moore stated that she was taken aback by the physical resemblance between the Africans she met and her relatives back home. She was also moved by the fact that so many people that looked like her never knew what it meant to be a minority in their daily lives. Moore thought that if she was younger, she would like to stay in Africa and live in a world where people looked like her.

Upon her retirement from Virginia State College in 1972, Moore was presented with numerous awards. These awards included a citation from New York City Mayor John Lindsay (1921-200) and an honorary Doctor of Music degree from Virginia State College. She received a Humanitarian Award from Fisk University in 1973, was named an outstanding educator by the National Association of Negro Musicians in 1975, was presented with a second honorary doctorate from Illinois University in 1976, and was named music laureate of Virginia in 1977. Numerous galas were presented in Moore's honor over the years, and she received much recognition for the impact that she had on the music world.

Though she officially retired from teaching in 1972, Moore continued to work frequently over the next two decades. She served as a distinguished professor at Virginia Union University from 1972-1976 and returned to Virginia State as artist-in-residence from 1976-1977. Moore also worked as visiting professor at Carleton College, College of St. Benedict, and St. John's University in Minnesota from 1972-75. She continued to give numerous lectures and workshops and served in several advisory roles as well. During this time, Moore produced twenty-seven additional compositions, and completed her magnum opus, a 16 movement oratorio for soloists, narrator, chorus, and orchestra, entitled *Scenes from the Life of a Martyr*, an homage to the life of Dr. Martin Luther

King, Jr. The piece premiered at Carnegie Hall in 1981 and was performed numerous times across the United States, as well as being nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. Undine Smith Moore died from a stroke in 1989 at the age of 84. Her funeral was held at Gillfield Baptist Church in Petersburg, Virginia, and included several of her choral arrangements of spirituals sung by the Virginia Union University Choir. The impact that Undine Smith Moore had on the music world through her compositions and her teaching are self-evident. The accolades that she received in life point to the appreciation that many had for Moore. While she did not suffer neglect to the same extent that many Black female composers often have, Undine Smith Moore is still typically relegated to the sub-genre of “Black women composers” and is not included in the regular canon of vocal repertoire, which she clearly deserves to be.

Scenes from the Life of a Martyr

Perhaps Moore’s most ambitious work, *Scenes from the Life of a Martyr* is a showcase in the versatility of her compositional abilities. Moore takes the traditional oratorio genre and combines it with black idioms, lush accompaniment, dramatic melodic lines, and strong dissonances. The text is a driving force throughout the oratorio, coming from a combination of poem excerpts, quotes, and verses from the Bible. The music that Moore composes in *Scenes* overall serves to empower her choice of text, creating a powerful piece that comments on the life of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The seventh movement of *Scenes*, entitled “Arise My Love, My Fair One” serves as the first words that Dr. King spoke upon meeting his wife, and is a continuation of the text from the sixth movement, sung by a soprano. The text for this movement is taken from the Bible, Song of Solomon Chapter 2, verses 13-14:

Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away

O, my dove, that art in the clefts of the rocks

In the covert of the steep places

Let me see thy countenance

O, my dove, let me hear thy voice

For sweet is thy voice

And thy countenance is comely

The image shows a handwritten musical score for the piece "Arise My Love, My Fair One" by Undine Smith Moore. The score is written in ink on aged paper. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system, starting at measure 231, features a vocal line (soprano) and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line has lyrics: "and said un- to me: — A - rise — my love, my fair one, & come a-". The piano accompaniment includes a "poco ritard. p" marking. The second system, starting at measure 234, continues the vocal line with lyrics: "way. O, — my dove, that". The piano accompaniment continues with various chords and melodic lines. The notation includes treble and bass clefs, key signatures (one sharp), and various musical symbols such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Figure 2.1 Undine Smith Moore, Movement VII “Arise My Love, My Fair One”, from *Scenes from the Life of a Martyr*, mm. 233-236.

One of the most notable things about this movement is the constant meter changes. This clearly indicates how important the text is to Moore, and with what specificity she sets it to music. As shown in Figure 3.1, each of the first four measures of the movement are in a different meter, first 7/4, then 2/4, followed by 3/4, and finally 7/4.

Moore's changing of meters in this fashion shows that she wants the text to be expressed in a specific way. This is a theme that shows up throughout the entire oratorio, but especially during the tenor solos.

The vocal line in this piece is another point worth mentioning. Moore sets this piece with a high tessitura for the tenor voice. This serves two purposes in the music. First, the tessitura needs to be relatively high in order for the performer to be heard over the very dense texture in the accompaniment. Although the orchestra does double the voice on multiple occasions throughout this piece, it is still filled with very large chords which could potentially overpower the singer. This high tessitura also provides the movement with a feeling of excitement and power, which mimics the feeling that one gets from listening to Dr. King's speeches. Moore's use of this tessitura is appropriate for the tenor voice in this movement, as well as in the other two tenor solos, as the tenor soloist serves as the voice of Dr. King himself.

Moore also uses the phrase shapes in the vocal line to evoke specific references to the speech patterns of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Each line follows an ascending and then descending pattern. This pattern serves as text-painting of the first line of text in this movement, "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away." The vocal line soars to the top of the tenor's vocal range at the beginning of each phrase, and swiftly falls down, creating a mental image of these first words. This rise and fall pattern also strongly emulates the rise and fall of Dr. King's voice when giving speeches and sermons, a common pattern used by Black Baptist ministers to stir up the emotions of their congregations. An example of this phrase shape can be seen in figure 3.2.

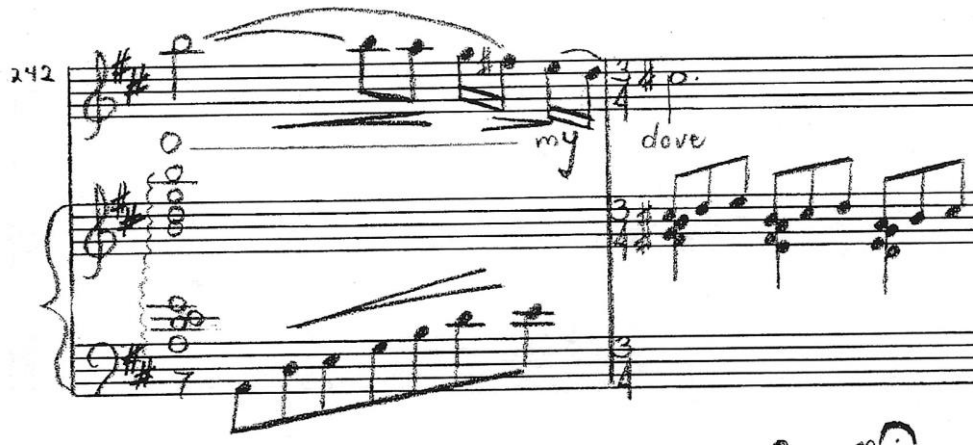


Figure 2.2 Undine Smith Moore, Movement VII “Arise My Love, My Fair One”, from *Scenes from the Life of a Martyr*, mm. 242-243

Several of the concepts found in the seventh movement can also be found in the twelfth movement entitled “Lord, Thou Knowest.” Again, we see the dense accompaniment and high tessitura. The theme of constant meter changes appears again, pointing to the importance of the text, which is as follows:

Lord, Thou knowest

I have tried to do justly, and live holy

And walk humbly before our God

Lord, Thou knowest

All the days of my life

I have loved peace and freedom for the bondsman

I had believed that love never faileth

I have not sought riches

I have not sought honor

Lord, Thou knowest I have not sought fame

But, Thou hast blessed me to hear the voice of rejoicing
And salvation in the tabernacle
Thou hast blessed me to see the people
Come up after me with great joy
Oh, my God!



Figure 2.3 Undine Smith Moore, Movement XII "Lord, Thou Knowest", from *Scenes from the Life of a Martyr*, mm. 336-341

One of the first things that stands out about this movement is the very long introduction by the accompaniment. Although there is no text in this introduction, the music still paints a picture that relates to the words. There is a pattern of constant eight note pulses, while above the melody wanders, creating various dissonances. As shown in Figure 3.3, this creates a feeling of weary travel, evoking the journey that Dr. King has

been on through his life at this point, which is reflected upon once the vocal line appears. It is also interesting to note that throughout the introduction, the meter remains in 4/4, which only begins to change, again, once the vocal line enters, further reinforcing the fact that Moore was very particular about how the text was to be sung.

Moore's use of Black idioms in this movement are not difficult to find. She uses the rhythm to invoke these idioms on multiple occasions throughout this movement. Syncopation is used extensively in both the vocal line and the accompaniment with each phrase typically beginning on the off-beat. One particular use of this technique that stands out is the use of a blues scale ornamentation in measure 357. This ornamentation is first voiced by the tenor soloist, and is repeated in the accompaniment, as shown in figure 3.4. This particular ornamentation is a staple in Black-influenced genres of music, and is instantly recognizable.



Figure 2.4 Undine Smith Moore, Movement XII “Lord, Thou Knowest”, from *Scenes from the Life of a Martyr*, mm. 336-341

The final tenor solo in *Scenes* comes in the thirteenth movement, entitled “Martin’s Lament.” Moore marks this movement as “Quasi Recitativo,” which puts even more emphasis on the text:

Now, Lord, I have come down from the mountain top

I have journeyed from city to city

I have seen the iniquity of the cities of the plain

Evil days are upon men

When I have sought to aid thy suffering servants

Enemies have arisen against me

Oppressors seek after my soul

Oh God! How many are them that hate me!

Moore’s “Quasi Recitativo” marking and musical setting of the text makes it clear that the text reigns supreme in this movement. The vocal line often has repeated notes, focusing less on the beauty of the melody, and more on the emotion that the text expresses. These repeated notes also help to create a pleading, chant-like feeling. Along with the repeated-note pattern, Moore extensively uses triplets to reinforce the clarity of the text. While triplet patterns are present in the previous tenor solos of this piece, Moore greatly increases her use of them in this movement, with all but a few of the lines of text set almost entirely in triplets, which can be seen in figure 3.5. This text heavy, speech-like setting is appropriate for this movement, as it is the last time that we hear from the personification of Dr. King in the oratorio before it is announced in a later movement that he is dead.



Figure 2.5 Undine Smith Moore, Movement XII “Lord, Thou Knowest”, from *Scenes from the Life of a Martyr*, mm. 336-341

Moore devoted much thought and deliberation to her composition of *Scenes from the Life of a Martyr*. The decision to set this work as an oratorio was surely a very intentional one, as it is a large work that includes every instrument that Moore composed for in her lifetime: solo voice, mixed chorus, and orchestra. The choice of the oratorio genre also allowed Moore to combine a traditionally religious genre of music with the Black idioms that she felt influenced by to create an emotional, bombastic homage to one of the most influential Black activists in her lifetime, who happened to be a preacher. During a time in her life where she received many commissions for works, Moore decided of her own volition to create this piece to honor Dr. King in the grandest way that she could.

“I Want to Die While You Love Me”

Undine Smith Moore composed “I Want to Die While You Love Me” out of necessity. The song was composed for mezzo-soprano Marie Goodman Hunter (b. 1929) after she replaced a soprano that was to sing in a concert honoring Moore’s accomplishments. Moore wanted to write a piece that highlighted Hunter’s vocal timbre,

and so she went to bed thinking about what to write. When she woke the next morning, Moore had dreamt of a line from a poem by Harlem Renaissance poet Georgia Douglas Johnson (1880-1966) entitled “I Want to Die While You Love me, as well as a melody and accompaniment. She finished the song at the piano in two hours.⁷ Moore decided to rearrange the poem for her song, swapping the second and fourth stanzas. The text to Moore’s version is as follows:

I want to die while you love me,
While yet you hold me fair,
While laughter lies upon my lips
And lights are in my hair.

I want to die while you love me
I could not bear to see
The glory of this perfect day
Grow dim or cease to be.

I want to die while you love me
Oh, who would care to live
Till love has nothing more to ask
And nothing more to give!

I want to die while you love me,

⁷ Walker-Hill, 67.

And bear to that still bed,
Your kisses turbulent, unspent
To warm me when I'm dead.

Moore's setting of this poem is very reminiscent of a chorale by J.S. Bach (1685-1750). Each musical phrase, and thus each line of text, ends in a cadence. Though she does not go so far as to include a fermata over each cadence as Bach does in his chorales, it is plain to see how the music pauses for a moment at the end of each phrase, as shown in figure 3.6. Furthermore, the accompaniment is mainly block chords, which helps to reinforce the feeling of a Bach chorale.



Figure 2.6 Undine Smith Moore, "I Want to Die While You Love Me," mm. 1-6

Moore also employs the use of emotional extremes to set this text. She accomplishes this by changes in the tessitura of this song. The song begins with the vocal line soaring to the top of the staff. While each phrase in the vocal line does follow a pattern of starting high and subsequently cascading down, all of the notes are located within or above the staff for the first half of the song. However, after a brief piano interlude, the vocal line begins to go beneath the staff for the first time, often staying there for the majority of a measure, as seen in figure 3.7. This change in tessitura creates

a shift in emotional tone, splitting the song into two sections on the opposite ends of the emotional spectrum.



Figure 2.7 Undine Smith Moore, "I Want to Die While You Love Me," mm. 1-6

"Is There Anybody Here That Loves My Jesus"

Undine Smith Moore's arrangements of Negro Spirituals can often come across as very simplistic, and this is very much Moore's intention. Moore stated that her intention of arranging these melodies was never to "make something 'better'...but to have them experienced in several different ways."⁸ Thus, Moore's solo arrangements retain the original melody that she heard growing up, but she adds elements that enhance the fullness of the performance of the song. These elements can be found in her arrangement of "Is There Anybody Here That Loves My Jesus."

One of these elements is the way in which Moore composes the accompaniment. After a piano introduction, the accompaniment is very hymn-like, with primarily block chords supporting the vocal line. This stays the same throughout the first two iterations of the refrain. However, the piano line becomes more intricate leading into the first verse.

⁸ Walker-Hill, 65.

Moore begins to introduce larger, more complex chords and fermatas. This complexity increases throughout the second verse, and the texture becomes broader, doubling the vocal line as it approaches the end of the verse. Finally, during the third ending of the refrain, the chords in the accompaniment become even larger, and sit higher on the staves, before becoming more subdued, only to broaden again for the ending of the song. This growing complexity in the accompaniment helps to gradually build the emotional intensity of the song until its climactic ending.

Another element that Moore uses to add to the richness of this arrangement is dynamic markings. These markings only begin to show up once the first verse begins, where she writes “slower” and a “piano” volume. Moore then adds a crescendo into the second verse, and marks the second verse as “marcato, maestoso,” and marks the volume as “forte.” Figure 3.8 shows this increase in intensity, and how Moore uses these dynamic markings to create her arrangement without altering the original melody.



Figure 2.8 Undine Smith Moore, “Is There Anybody Here That Loves My Jesus,” mm. 16-23

Undine Smith Moore’s music is crafted to touch the soul. Her lush compositions filled with Black idioms and traditional execution leave a lasting effect on the listener. Though her music is performed today, it does not receive the recognition that it deserves. *Scenes from the Life of a Martyr*, a powerful tribute to one of the nation’s greatest activists, is rarely performed, which is due in part to the piece only being available through a single publisher, and the fact the the music has never been digitally notated by said publisher and is only available in a copyist manuscript, making the piece difficult to read at times. Moore’s solo vocal works are still introduced with the caveat of “Black music,” and only published in special collections of works instead of in anthologies of

American music, where they belong. Undine Smith Moore's compositional prowess speaks for itself, and that alone is enough to advocate for her place in the pantheon of great American composers.

Chapter III

Florence Price

Composer Biography

Considered the first Black female composer to receive national renown, Florence Price (1887-1953) was a successful teacher, composer, pianist, and organist that overcame several barriers in her life to achieve the acclaim that she is now attributed with. From racial barriers, to gender hurdles, to domestic violence, she battled to overcome these negative forces in her life to combine the skills she learned from a traditional, Eurocentric training with the influences of Black folk music to create her unique compositional style.

Florence Price was born on April 9th, 1887 in Little Rock, AR to James and Florence Smith. Her father James was the only black dentist in the central Arkansas area, serving both the white and Black communities. His success allowed for him and his family to live in relative comfort. Price's mother, and namesake, was a soprano and concert pianist. She provided Price with her first piano lessons, leading to Price's first piano performance at the age of four. She also reportedly published her first composition, which is now lost, at the age of eleven. In 1902, Price graduated as valedictorian from

Capitol Hill School in Little Rock at the age of 15.⁹ After graduation, she was accepted in the New England Conservatory of Music, one of the few music conservatories at the time that accepted Black students.

After taking a year off from school after graduation, potentially due to her young age, Price began her studies at the New England Conservatory of Music in 1903. While there, she enrolled in both the solo organist program, studying with Henry M. Dunham (1853-1929), and the piano teacher degree program. Though her studies were primarily based around organ and teaching, Price began to become more serious about composition. After composing her first symphony, which is lost, she was taken in as a student by the director of the conservatory, George W. Chadwick (1884-1931). A staunch supporter of creating a more American sound in music and moving away from the Romantic German influences of the day, Chadwick encouraged Price to further her use of Negro music in her compositions¹⁰. Price graduated from the New England Conservatory of Music in 1906 as the only student that year to complete two degree programs.¹¹

Upon graduation from the New England Conservatory, Price surprisingly moved back home to Little Rock. Though she excelled greatly as a solo pianist and organist, Price was most likely very aware that the likelihood of her supporting herself in the predominantly white northern United State was very low. She accepted her first teaching position at the Cotton Plant-Arkadelphia Academy in Cotton Plant, AR, a small secondary school for Black children. After spending less than a year in this position, Price accepted a post at Shorter College in North Little Rock, serving as the head of the

⁹ Rae Linda Brown, *The Heart of a Woman: The Life and Music of Florence B. Price* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2020), 39.

¹⁰ Brown, 50.

¹¹ Brown, 53.

music department. She held this position from 1907-1910. In April of 1910, Price's personal life took a large hit when her father died at the age of 67. His death prompted Price's mother to sell all of her belongings and move back to her hometown of Indianapolis, Indiana. Potentially due to her loss of family in the area, Price accepted an offer to become the Head of the Music Department at Clark University in Atlanta, GA in September of 1910, a mere five months after her father's passing. However, her time spent at Clark University would ultimately prove to be a relatively short tenure, as Price returned to Little Rock in the summer of 1912 to marry lawyer and family friend Thomas Jewell Price.

Once married, Price abandoned her collegiate teaching career, becoming a stay-at-home wife and mother, with their first child Thomas's birth occurring relatively soon after their marriage. Unfortunately, Thomas passed away as an infant, which almost certainly had a profound effect on Price, though we do not have any record of her personally stating so. The Prices eventually had two daughters, Florence Louise and Edith Cassandra, born in 1917 and 1921 respectively. In her spare time, Price taught private piano and violin lessons from her home, and overtime became a highly sought-after music teacher in the Little Rock area. Price continued to compose music during this time, entering some of her piano pieces into competitions, such as *In the Land O' Cotton* and *Memories of Dixieland*, both of which won second place in *Opportunity* magazine's Holstein prize in 1926 and 1927 respectively. Due to financial issues with Thomas's law practice and the racial tensions in the South with the rise of Jim Crow laws, the Prices moved to Chicago, IL in 1927.

The move to Chicago proved to be greatly beneficial for Price and her compositional aspirations, as she found her niche in writing piano pieces for students. Many of these pieces began to be published in 1928 by music companies still around today, such as G. Schirmer, Theodore Presser, and Carl Fischer. Though she found great success, she could not entirely escape financial hardships. This led to Price picking up other gigs to make ends meet, the most interesting of which is playing organ for the local silent film theaters¹². While the financial struggles made life difficult for Price and her family, even worse was the abuse that she suffered from her husband. His increasing mental, physical and emotional violence towards her led Price to file for divorce, which was finalized in 1931.

Price's divorce from her husband may have freed her from the abuse inflicted on her, but she was left with the financial uncertainty that a Black, single woman with children in the early 20th Century often faced. So, it is no surprise that Price remarried merely one month following her divorce, this time to a widower and insurance agent named Pusey Arnett, who was thirteen years her senior. Arnett's success and financial security allowed Price to more diligently pursue her compositional aspirations. In 1932, Price completed her Symphony in E minor, which she entered into the Wanamaker Music Contest, which took first place in its division. That same year, her student and friend Margaret Bonds won the art song division for her song "The Sea Ghost." This success as a composer and teacher garnered Price much attention on a national scale, including having her Symphony in E minor being premiered by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra

¹² Brown, 99.

in 1933, making Price the first Black female composer to have a work performed by a national orchestra.

Following her success with her *Symphony in E minor*, Price began receiving requests to have her works performed at various venues, as well as to perform as a pianist. These requests came from organizations such as the Detroit Symphony Orchestra, the Chicago Women's Symphony, and the Women's Symphony Orchestra of Chicago. The early 1930s would also prove to be a prolific compositional period for Price, as she composed a flurry of pieces for piano, solo voice, and chorus. However, while her career was in full swing, again she found herself with marital issues. By 1934, Price separated from her second husband for unknown reasons¹³. There is no record of the two ever officially divorcing, but this would be the last time that Price would marry.

The rest of Price's life was filled with composing, lectures, and concerts. By the 1940s, Price had become known for her compositions in the Black community. Her works were in the regular rotation of Black artists that wanted to showcase music by Black composers. One of the most reputable artists to champion Price's music was the internationally known contralto Marian Anderson (1897-1993). She often performed Price's art songs and spirituals in concerts, including her famous Lincoln Memorial concert in 1939, which she ended with Price's arrangement of "My Soul's Been Anchored in the Lord."

Price's popularity continued to grow into the 1950s, ultimately leading to her garnering international fame, traveling to Europe to perform her works in 1951. Though she had planned a second series of concerts in Europe for 1953, Price would

¹³ Brown, 169.

unfortunately not live to see it come to fruition. On June 3, 1953, Florence Price died of a stroke at St. Luke's hospital in Chicago. A small funeral was held two days later, and she was buried in Lincoln Cemetery.

“Night”

Florence Price's setting of the poem by Louise C. Wallace (1902-1973) is a beautiful, ethereal song that personifies the beauty of the night. The text is as follows:

Night comes, a Madonna clad in scented blue.
Rose red her mouth and deep her eyes,
She lights her stars, and turns to where,
Beneath her silver lamp the moon,
Upon a couch of shadow lies
A dreamy child,
The wearied Day.

One of the ways that Price creates this ethereal setting is through her use of very long, extended phrases. As shown in Figure 4.1, Price stretches the first line of text over six measures, building the vocal line tension as it moves higher, and higher on the staff, until it ultimately ends in the word “blue” stretched over six beats. This elongation of the text continues throughout the entire song, creating a piece that is filled with phrases that seem to stretch forever.



Figure 3.1 Florence Price, “Night”, mm. 1-6

Another way in which Price accomplishes this ethereal sound is her setting of the accompaniment. One of the first things of note is the frequent use of pedal. Almost every measure in this song is played with pedal. This allows for the constant moving eighth notes in the right hand, and often left hand, to be as smooth and connected as possible, adding to the sense that the night will continue forever.

“Song to the Dark Virgin”

Price sets this beautiful text by Langston Hughes as a collaboration between the piano and voice. The two work together to build a mountain of emotions to a climactic ending, led by the text:

Would That I were a jewel,
A shattered jewel,
That all my shining brilliants
Might fall at thy feet,
Thou dark one.

Would That I were a garment,
A shimmering, silken garment,
That all my folds
Might wrap about thy body,
Absorb thy body,
Hold and hide thy body,
Thou dark one.

Would That I were a flame,
But one sharp, leaping flame
To annihilate thy body,
Thou dark one.

Price uses the accompaniment to set the scene from Hughes' ethereal text. The piano gracefully passes arpeggiation from the left to right hands, creating a dream-like feeling. This fits appropriately with the text, which reads as a prayer to the "dark one," who serves as a Black version of the Virgin Mary.

The vocal line for this song builds up to a climax in each verse. Each verse begins lower in the register and moves vertically to the highest note. This climax in the first verse is on the word “feet” and on “about” in the second verse. In the first two verses, the vocal line comes back down to the lower register on the words “Thou dark one.” However, this trend is changed for the final verse. While the final verse does follow the vertical accent towards the highest note in the first verse, this final verse continues even higher on the final statement of “Thou dark one.” This up and down motion on the first two verses followed by a direct ascension on the final verse helps to build the climax even beyond what was previously shown, finally sending the completed prayer off to the “dark one.”

“The Poet and His Song”

“The Poet and His Song” is a piece rife with text painting. Price takes the text by Paul Laurence Dunbar and sets a musical background to it that helps to tell the story of an individual who finds joy in singing their song through all of the strife that they encounter in their life.

A song is but a little thing,
And yet what joy it is to sing!
In hours of toil it gives me zest,
And when at last I long for rest;
When cows come home along the bars,
And in the fold I hear the bell,
At Night, the shepherd herds his stars,
I sing my song, and all is well.

My days are never days of ease;
I till my ground and prune my trees.
When ripened gold is all the plain,
I put my sickle to the grain.
I labor hard, and toil and sweat,
While others dream within the dell;
But even while my brow is wet,
I sing my song, and all is well.

Sometimes the sun, unkindly hot,
My garden makes a desert spot;
Sometimes a blight upon the tree
Takes all my fruit away from me;
And then with throes of bitter pain
Rebellious passions rise and swell;
But life is more than fruit or grain,
And so I sing, and all is well.

Price sets this text as an ABA format, which helps to emphasize the duality of the story that the text presents. The first section begins in a major tonality as the text speaks happily of the joy one can experience when they sing a simple song as life goes on around them. The vocal line in this section flows up and down easily through the phrases

and ends on a hopeful repetition of the same note four times in a row. The texture of the accompaniment is relatively chordal, keeping the peaceful mood.

The middle section of the song shifts to a minor tonality. Along with this comes a much busier right hand in the piano as well as a denser texture overall, emphasizing the toil that the text speaks of. The vocal line also becomes more complicated, with more dynamic variation than the first section, ranging from mezzo-piano to forte. This all comes to a head as the song recapitulates back to the music of the first section.

The final section regains the peaceful, easy-going tone of the first section, moving back to a major tonality. The similarities continue until the words “rebellious passions rise and swell,” where Price brings back the dense accompaniment texture for three measures, hearkening back to the troubles of the middle section. However, this quickly fades back to the easy-going feeling and ends in a triumphant way, with the loudest dynamic marking of the song, fortissimo. The text painting that Price does in this song takes the listener on a journey, which helps to enrich the story that Dunbar’s text provides.

“Sympathy”

“Sympathy” is another beautiful composition where Price tells the story of a poem by Paul Laurence Dunbar. She uses a similar technique as that in “The Poet and His Song” to convey the text as follows:

I know what the caged bird feels, alas!
When the sun is bright on the upland slopes;
When the wind stirs soft through the springing grass,
And the river flows like a stream of glass;
When the first bird sings and the first bud opes,

And the faint perfume from its chalice steals —
I know what the caged bird feels!

I know why the caged bird beats his wing
Till its blood is red on the cruel bars;
For he must fly back to his perch and cling
When he fain would be on the bough a-swing;
And a pain still throbs in the old, old scars
And they pulse again with a keener sting —
I know why he beats his wing!

I know why the caged bird sings, ah me,
When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore,—
When he beats his bars and he would be free;
It is not a carol of joy or glee,
But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core,
But a plea, that upward to Heaven he flings —
I know why the caged bird sings!

In this song, Price again uses text painting to emphasize the meaning of the text. In the first section, she uses a lyrical melody that flows easily up and down the staff above a very legato accompaniment, as the text describes a serene setting of rivers flowing with the sun bright in the sky. With the exception to two pick-up notes, the

duration of each note in the vocal line is never shorter than an eighth note, creating an even, peaceful melody.

The second section moves from a major tonality to a minor one, signifying a shift in mood, which is reflected in the text. The vocal line immediately begins to use shorter durations, which give the feeling of a quickening pace, bringing out the intensity of the text. Price adds a section of 12/8 and 9/8 measures during this part of the song, which is very different from the steady 4/4 that the song has been in up to this point. This throws off the timing of the song, adding to the anxious feeling of this section.

The final section of the song returns to the major tonality of the first section and brings back the lyrical, even lines in the melody. This signifies that through everything that the “caged bird” feels, there is still hope. Price finishes the song with a climactic ending, building up to the highest note in the piece. This evokes the “prayer” that the “caged bird” sends off to Heaven.

“My Soul’s Been Anchored in the Lord”

Perhaps the most famous of Florence Price’s spiritual arrangements, “My Soul’s Been Anchored in the Lord” has been performed by famous Black singers such as Leontyne Price and Marian Anderson. The text is as follows:

In the Lord, in the Lord,
My soul’s been anchored in the Lord.
Before I’d stay in hell one day,
My soul’s been anchored in the Lord;
I’d sing and pray myself away,
My soul’s been anchored in the Lord.

I'm going to pray and never stop,
My soul's been anchored in the Lord;
Until I've reached the mountain top,
My soul's been anchored in the Lord.

Price's arrangement of this rousing spiritual has a very declamatory feeling to it. This is caused in part by the chordal structure that Price uses in the accompaniment. Though the right hand in the piano does at times have flowing eighth note figures, mainly during the verses, for the most part, the piano is playing quarter note and half note chords. This coupled with the andantino tempo marking keep the piece grounded and brings out a stoic feeling of the text.

Price further adds onto the feeling of declamation by her markings on the last three measures of music. Here she uses "poco rit. Marcato" in the first of these three measures and follows it up with "meno mosso marcato" in the penultimate measure, slowing the piece down even further to make the ending even grander than the song has been thus far. Along with these markings, Price also adds accent marks over the words "Lord; God knows my" in the first of the last three measures, adding even more emphasis to this powerful ending that leads to the exciting climax of the song.

Florence Price helped pave the road for Black female composers. Her success helped break the racial barriers and glass ceiling for composers like Betty Jackson King, Undine Smith Moore, and Margaret Bonds. Her music drew on both her classical training and the Black music, art and literature that she was surrounded with in her life. Though her music unfortunately went into obscurity after her death in 1953, the discovery of new

compositions in the 21st Century and a renewal of love for former popular ones have helped to place her again in the spotlight where she belongs.

Chapter IV

Margaret Bonds

Composer Biography

Margaret Bonds (1913-1972) is regarded as one of the most influential Black composers of the 20th Century. A strong-willed and outgoing woman, Bonds infused her music with her interest in the political and social events in the Black community. Having seen herself as a “link between Negro composers of the past,”¹⁴ Bonds used influences from both spirituals and jazz to develop her unique compositional style. This “linkage” of past ethnic musical idioms to contemporary musical styles helped to further the ideals of Black music and bring it to newer, modern audiences.

Margaret Bonds’ early life was filled with musical and activist influences. She was born Margaret Jeanette Allison Majors in Chicago, IL on March 3, 1913 to Estella C. Bonds and Dr. Monroe Alphas Majors. Estella Bonds was a musician in her own right, being a well-known piano teacher, church organist, and choir director. She kept an impressive company, opening her home to many famous creative artists such as Roland Hayes, Will Marion Cook, and Langston Hughes. Along with being a physician,

¹⁴ Margaret Bonds, Interview by James Hatch, Los Angeles, December 28, 1971. Quoted in Helen Walker-Hill, *From Spirituals to Symphonies: African-American Women Composers and Their Music* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 156.

Margaret's father was a prominent Black activist, poet, journalist, and publisher. Bonds' parents divorced in 1917 when Margaret was just four years old. With her mother returning to her maiden name, Margaret's surname was subsequently changed to Bonds. Despite their separation, Bonds kept a close relationship with both her mother and father.

Bonds' mother identified Margaret's musical abilities at a very young age and began giving her piano lessons as a toddler. She continued to hone her skills, studying with several teachers including Tom Theodore Taylor (1885-1965) and Florence Price (1887-1953).¹⁵ Due to her mother being a charter member of the National Association of Negro Musicians, Bonds was granted several performance opportunities and scholarships through the newly formed organization, allowing her to continue studying music through high school and into her undergraduate studies. She even helped establish the Junior Music Association at Park High School, becoming the organization's representative at NANM conventions.

Though Bonds was a gifted pianist, she also had interests in studying composition. Her studies with Florence Price and William Dawson (1899-1990) greatly influenced this desire, and ultimately led to Bonds entering Northwestern University at the age of 16 in 1929, one of only a few Black students attending the institution at that time. While there, Bonds continued studying piano and composition. During this time, Black students were not allowed access to several amenities at the university, including housing, causing Bonds to commute daily via train from her childhood home in Chicago

¹⁵ Walker-Hill, 146.

to Evanston. Though inconvenient, Bonds made the most of these train rides by jotting down ideas for compositions.

The lack of access to simple accommodations and overt racism at Northwestern University began to weigh heavily on Bonds. To get her through these struggles she would take to the basement of the library, which is where she had her first encounter with the works of Langston Hughes (1901-1967) through his poem “The Negro Speaks of Rivers.” It was this poem that gave her the strength to continue her studies, determined to learn as much as she could. This determination led to various awards and honors for her compositions and piano skills, including 1932 Rodman Wanamaker Competition for her song “Sea Ghost”, and a Rosenwald Fellowship which allowed her to finish her master’s degree at Northwestern University. She eventually became the first Black person to perform with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, with whom she was contracted to play piano on her friend Florence Price’s *Symphony in E Minor*.¹⁶

After completing her master’s degree in 1934, Bonds continued to compose, perform, and teach in the Chicago area, one of her students being Ned Rorem (1923-2022), who went on to become a prominent composer in his own right. She worked with various artists and writers, forming close bonds with several of them. Of these relationships, one of the most notable is that with Langston Hughes. Bonds and Hughes became very close friends after their initial meeting at a mutual friend’s home in 1936. Bonds described their relationship as “like brother and sister.”¹⁷ Upon Hughes’ departure from Chicago later that year, the two kept in close contact, writing friendly

¹⁶ Walker-Hill, 147.

¹⁷ Margaret Bonds, “A Reminiscence,” in *International Library of Negro Life and History*, ed. Lindsay Patterson (New York, New York: Publishers Co., 1966), pp. 190-193, 191.

correspondence that included Bonds' various songs that she had written based on Hughes' poetry. In return, Hughes shared Bonds' compositions with big names in the Black music world, such as H.T. Burleigh (1866-1949), Cab Calloway (1907-1994), and Duke Ellington (1899-1974). As her recognition began to increase, Bonds continued her musical endeavors in Chicago and founded the Allied Arts Academy. The school taught dance, art and music to talented Black students in the Chicago area. Alas, this was to be a short-lived venture as the Great Depression had a great financial effect on the school and Bonds' musical activities in general, prompting her to move to New York City in 1939.

The move to New York presented its own challenges, but Bonds was willing to do what it took to be successful. She took on whatever jobs became available to her, including playing for different gigs, rehearsals, and even bottle washing. She eventually found success, playing piano and composing music for the Apollo Theater in Harlem, acting as a rehearsal accompanist for Broadway shows, and becoming the editor for songwriter Clarence Williams' publishing company, allowing her access to New York's Tin Pan Alley. This period brought about various popular song compositions from Bonds, such as "Peachtree Street", which was composed for the famous 1939 film *Gone with the Wind*. Along with her ever increasing success, Bonds met a New York probation officer named Lawrence Richardson, and the two married in the summer of 1940. Soon after, Bonds received a scholarship to study composition at Juilliard School of Music with composer Roy Harris.

The 1940s brought about more success for Bonds and a large change in responsibility with the birth of her daughter Djane in 1946, whom Bonds named after Djane Hertz, her piano teacher at Juilliard. However, the role of motherhood did not slow

Bonds in her musical career, as she became more popular as a solo pianist in the late '40s, eventually making a tour of Southern Black colleges in 1947.¹⁸ This musical success continued into the next decade, beginning in 1950, when Bonds became the first Black person to perform with the Scranton Philharmonic Orchestra. Though she received mixed reviews from critics, Bonds was determined to continue pushing forward, ultimately expanding her touring distance, performing in St. Louis, Cleveland, Toledo, and Chicago all in February 1953.

While she was enjoying a successful solo pianist career, Bonds continued to write songs, with a large output being based on Langston Hughes' poems. This flurry of production includes "Minstrel Man", the first song in her song cycle *Three Dream Portraits*, which was composed in 1955. In 1956, Bonds founded the "Margaret Bonds Chamber Music Society" which had great success, performing at Carnegie Recital Hall in 1956. Unfortunately, Bonds' mother soon became sick and died in her Bonds' home in February 1957. In order to cope with her mother's passing, Margaret threw herself further into her work. She continued composing songs, completing *Three Dream Portraits*, which was published by Ricordi in 1959.

In 1960, Bonds' Christmas cantata based on text by Langston Hughes, *Ballad of the Brown King*, received its first performance, which was televised by CBS. The cantata was ultimately published in 1961 and was subsequently performed throughout the United States and internationally. Her other works were beginning to be more frequently performed as well. Bonds was becoming even more sought after for her compositions,

¹⁸ Walker-Hill, 151.

and she received commissions for orchestral arrangements of her songs from the likes of individuals such as Leontyne Price (b.1927). Margaret Bonds' works began to be programmed more and more. Bonds would continue to find success throughout the 1960s, receiving several awards and honors, including an Alumni Merit Award from Northwestern University and having January 31st proclaimed Margaret Bonds Day in Chicago in 1967. However, that year also brought about sorrowful news. Margaret's good friend Langton Hughes died in New York on May 22, 1967. This loss greatly affected Bonds, and she was yearning for a change of scenery. Accepting a job with the Los Angeles Inner City Cultural Center and Repertory Theater, Bonds decided to leave behind her husband and daughter in New York City and move to the West coast.¹⁹

The move to Los Angeles brought about several changes for Bonds. She worked on several musical productions at the Inner City Repertory Theater, and she set up a music school in the basement of the Cultural Center. While she found joy in serving in these roles, Bonds' depression began to get the best of her, leading her to drinking heavily to numb the pain. On April 25, 1972, Margaret's student Gary Olsby brought her home after an evening reception. Unfortunately, Olsby would be the last person to see Bonds alive, as after three days of missed appointments, Margaret's worried friends broke into her apartment and found that she had died of a heart attack. Some believe that her depression and alcoholism were contributing factors that lead to her untimely death at the age of 59.²⁰ Bonds received several memorial services in Los Angeles, New York, and Chicago. She was interred at Mount Glenwood Memorial Cemetery in Chicago, next

¹⁹ Walker-Hill, 155.

²⁰ Walker-Hill, 155.

to her mother. Margaret Bonds' life was filled with music and determination. She fought through racism, sexism, and financial hardship. Her effect on the landscape of solo song and piano was not small, and she deserves to be recognized alongside the greatest of American composers.

Three Dream Portraits

Margaret Bonds' song cycle *Three Dream Portraits* is perhaps the most successful of her solo voice compositions. From its original publishing in 1959, it has been regularly performed by some of the most well-known vocalists, such as Leontyne Price. Based on the poems of Langston Hughes, the three songs "Minstrel Man", "Dream Variation", and "I, Too" reflect the struggles and realities of a Black person in America. The marriage of Bonds' music with Hughes' text creates a unique representation of the Black American experience.

The first song in the cycle, "Minstrel Man", juxtaposes the idea of a joyful minstrel mask with that of the painful experience that is hidden behind it. The text reads:

Because my mouth is wide with laughter
And my throat is deep with song
You do not think I suffer
After I have held my pain so long
Because my mouth is wide with laughter
You do not hear my inner cry
Because my feet are gay with dancing
You do not know I die.

Bonds set this poem with a vocal line that has long phrases and tied held notes. These help demonstrate the anguish that the speaker is feeling. The vocal line stays in the lower register for the first stanza of the text. Bonds uses text painting on the word “long”, having it held for eleven and a half beats. At the second stanza, Bonds repeats the opening line of music, but it changes in the third line, shifting to a higher register for the climax of the piece on the word “dancing”. After the climax, the vocal line comes back down, ending the song with the word “die” held for a full twelve beats, the longest duration in the piece. Underneath this vocal line is an almost dancing accompaniment set in 3/4 time. This denotes the fact that although this individual is expressing their pains and anguish that they hide from the audience, they are still expected to perform. This constantly moving piano part is contrasted with the melancholy key of Bb minor shows the conflict that the performer feels. Although they have decided to express their true emotions, the audience still only cares to see the performance.

“Dream Variation” is the next song in the cycle. Its text is decidedly more hopeful than that of “Minstrel Man”:

To fling my arms wide in some place in the sun
To whirl and to dance till the white day is done
Then rest at cool evening beneath a tall tree
while night comes on gently, dark like me
That is my dream
To fling my arms wide in the face of sun
Dance! Whirl! Whirl! till the quick day is done,
Rest at pale evening, a tall, slim tree
Night coming tenderly, black like me.

The lilting accompaniment is the first thing one notices in Bonds' setting of this poem. The piano plays an upward figure that repeats several times throughout the piece. The right hand spends quite a bit of time above the staff in the first half of the song, creating a dream-like setting. However, this changes as the second stanza. The registration shifts lower, as night is "coming tenderly". On top of this is a similarly lilting vocal line. Each phrase ends on a higher pitch than it began, furthering this hopeful feeling. Towards the end of the song, the words "Night coming tenderly" are repeated, each time with the marking "espressivo" above them. Beneath, there is an ominous sounding chord, yet the vocal line changes. The first time this is stated, the melody follows into the dark nature of the chord. However, the repetition of this phrase ends with a hopeful note that is not part of the chord, signaling that although the dream may be surrounded by darkness, the light shines through.

Finally, "I, Too" ends the song cycle. Its text reads as more assured, and brave than that of the first two:

I, too sing America
I am the darker brother
They send me to eat in the kitchen when company comes
But I laugh and eat well and grow strong,
Tomorrow I'll sit at the table when company comes
Nobody'll dare say to me "Eat in the kitchen" then,
Besides, they'll see how beautiful I am and be ashamed.

The song begins with a very confident opening, both from the accompaniment and the vocal line, with powerful chords from the piano, and a perfect fifth declaration on the words "I, too." The music becomes a bit more chromatic as the text discusses how

the speaker is made to “eat in the kitchen when company comes.” This intensity continues as the speaker bides their time growing stronger, waiting for their time. The dynamics shift a bit softer as the discussion shifts to what tomorrow will be like. There is a brief forte section on the words “Nobody’ll dare say to me ‘Eat in the kitchen’ then,” along with more chromaticism in the piano to accompany this remembrance of hurtful words. And then the dynamics again shift, as the marking states, to a section “with warmth,” as the speaker imagines how ashamed they will be once the realization sets in of how beautiful they truly are.

“Hyacinth”

The song “Hyacinth” is based on a poem by Edna St. Vincent Millay (1892-1950) that discusses an individual whose lover is more concerned with their hyacinths in the garden than how the individual feels dear to them. The text reads:

I am in love with him to whom a hyacinth is dearer
Than I shall ever be dear
At night when the field mice are abroad he cannot sleep
He hears their narrow teeth at the bulbs of his hyacinths
But the gnawing at my heart he does not hear.

Bonds sets this piece with a high level of chromaticism, both in the voice and accompaniment. The piano begins with a descending chromatic line leading to a mournful vocal line. This mournfulness begins to shift into the piano as well, until it comes back with the “narrow teeth” of the field mice on the hyacinths. There is a brief silence in the music, and the mournful melody and accompaniment pick back up and last until the end of the piece.

Another concept that Bonds uses to convey that sorrow in this song is her use of very long phrases. Each phrase is stretched over multiple measure, typically ending with a whole note tied to another note in the next measure. She ends the piece with her longest phrase on the word “hear,” which is three whole notes tied together over three measures. This brings out a longing, dire feeling from the text.

“He’s Got the Whole World in His Hand”

Bonds’ arrangement of “He’s Got the Whole World In His Hand” was made popular by famous sopranos Leontyne Price and Kathleen Battle. The melody and text are well known throughout the world, and the words are an expression of assurance that God has everything in control.

He’s got the whole world in his hand
He’s got the woods and the waters in his hand
He’s got the sun and the moon right in his hand
He’s got the birds and the bees right in his hand
He’s got the beasts of the field right in his hand
He’s got you and me right in his hand
He’s got everybody in his hand
He’s got the whole world in his hand

The song begins with a piano introduction that Bonds marks as “Heroic” in the score. The tempo marking is shown as “Religioso”. Given the text, these markings are very appropriate. The accompaniment in the first verse of the song is very chordal and hymn-like, with the traditional melody over it in the vocal line. Throughout the piece, Bonds adds small variations to the chordal texture. These changes begin on the third verse of the song with the words “He’s got the birds and the bees right in his hand.” She

uses text painting with sixteenth note figures to denote these flying animals. She goes back to a more chordal structure as the piece ramps up to the climax in the last verse. The dynamic marking is fortissimo and there are markings of “*poco allargando*” and “triumphant” in the vocal line. The melody in the voice also shifts up in the higher end of the register. The chords become grander in the piano, ultimately leading to a more “gospel” sounding chord on a fermata right before the highest note in the piece. Bonds chooses to end the piece by repeating the words “He’s got the whole world in his hands,” but this time with a marking of “*molto allargando*” and three fermatas. Overall, the piece becomes grander as the end closes, making for a strong show-stopper.

Margaret Allison Bonds’ ability to take her life experiences and influences and mold them into such an expressive compositional style is impressive. Each song that she wrote is filled with her combination of classical training and popular music influences. Even in a song with a melody as simple as “He’s Got the Whole World In His Hand”, Bonds left her mark.

Chapter V

Conclusion

The songs that I prepared for this recital challenged me in ways that I did not believe imaginable. As a Black man, I knew that performing a program of all Black female composers was important to me, but I was not aware of how deep that importance would eventually become. These songs pushed me to not only connect with my ethnicity, but they challenged my singing technique, my knowledge of appropriate stylistic choices, as well as my grip with the significance of my programming these songs on my capstone recital. For these reasons and more, I believe that these four Black female composers' works are too important to continue to be pigeon-holed into a niche genre. Each one of these pieces challenged me in ways that I have yet to experience through songs listed in the white male dominated world of classical music. These songs, along with many others by Black female composers, deserve to be in the classical vocal canon alongside the other works by great composers that occupy this space. My hope is that we as a society will continue to embrace the works of persons of color and challenge the norm of what belongs in the voice studio.

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