

## A Pianist's Guide to the Piano Repertoire of Florence Price and Margaret Bonds

By Emily K. Stoll and Abigail Silverberg

The work of these composers covers elementary to advanced difficulty levels and offers a unique soundscape to a pianist's repertoire list. Their music should be approached with the flexibility of romantic and impressionistic music but with attention to the rhythmic dance patterns included in many of their works. Time can be well spent listening to African American folk, spirituals, and dances to develop one's ear to hear the idiomatic nuances within these composer's music.

<p>Florence Price's music is a mixture of styles.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Americana</li><li>• African American Folk and Spirituals</li><li>• Late Romantic and Impressionism</li><li>• Juba &amp; Cakewalk rhythms</li></ul>	<p>Margaret Bond's music is a mixture of styles.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Jazz/Gospel</li><li>• Improvisatory writing</li><li>• African American Spirituals</li><li>• Juba &amp; Cakewalk Rhythms</li></ul>
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Schirmer publishing has begun to reprint some of the works of Price and thus her piano repertoire is now much easier to obtain. The pieces included in this article are obtainable through retailers, library loans, or some are in the public domain on the International Music Score Library Project (IMSLP) website Listed Below:

[https://www.sheetmusicplus.com/title/piano-music-of-africa-and-the-african-diaspora-volume-1-sheet-music/18426769?d=sem\\_sidecar&popup=false&d=sem\\_sidecar&popup=false&country\\_code=USA&utm\\_source=google&utm\\_medium=cpc&adpos=&scid=scplp18426769&sc\\_intid=18426769&d=sem\\_ggl\\_%7Bcampaign\\_id%7D\\_%7D&gclid=EAIaIQobChMI-o3Q1ubV7gIVtwytBh3COggsEAQYASABEgIwrfD\\_BwE](https://www.sheetmusicplus.com/title/piano-music-of-africa-and-the-african-diaspora-volume-1-sheet-music/18426769?d=sem_sidecar&popup=false&d=sem_sidecar&popup=false&country_code=USA&utm_source=google&utm_medium=cpc&adpos=&scid=scplp18426769&sc_intid=18426769&d=sem_ggl_%7Bcampaign_id%7D_%7D&gclid=EAIaIQobChMI-o3Q1ubV7gIVtwytBh3COggsEAQYASABEgIwrfD_BwE)

<https://classicalondemand.com/catalogsearch/result/?cat=0&q=Florence+Price>

<https://www.classicalvocalrep.com/products/Spiritual-Suite-for-Piano-by-Margaret-Bonds-401461.html>

[https://www.hildegard.com/resources.php?page=afro\\_american](https://www.hildegard.com/resources.php?page=afro_american)

[https://imslp.org/wiki/Category:Price,\\_Florence](https://imslp.org/wiki/Category:Price,_Florence)

## **Advanced Literature:**

### **Margaret Bonds**

#### **Spiritual Suite for Piano**

##### **The Bells**

Opening is an impressionistic soundscape filled with ascending and descending bell-like sonorities into which the spiritual style melody slips in. The movement requires attention to the shifting harmonies and their careful resolutions. The gospel style A section is interrupted by a boisterous jazz inspired bridge to the B section which contains African American folk rhythms and frequent hand crossing. Voicing may be challenging in this movement.

##### **I Dry Bones**

This short movement has a mysterious post romantic opening which gives way to the A section with an African American Folk inspired choral texture. The syncopated and somewhat dissonant B section is in the blues style, reminiscent of George Gershwin with its swung accompaniment and cantabile right-hand melody. This correlation to jazz and blues is affirmed with the ending tremolo.

##### **Troubled Waters.**

This movement is rhythmically complex, the work uses jazz and gospel style harmonies. The spirituals Wade and the Water and God's Gonna Trouble the Water can be heard throughout the piece. This movement requires a pianist to reach an octave with a fifth in the middle comfortably and play neighboring notes of the same intervals legato. This also piece requires skillful pedaling.<sup>1</sup> There are numerous flourishes of arpeggios and large leaps between registers of the piano. Playing the slurs will prove challenging in areas that require the pianist to play thirds and seconds in contrary arpeggiated embellishments of extended chords.

### **Florence Price**

#### **Clouds**

This piece needs a light touch especially for the harp like arpeggios and trills in the impressionistic style similar to works of Debussy. The descending scales and rising arpeggios require supple wrists and nimble fingers. The piece is very gestural in nature having ascending and descending technical elements. The difficulty level is comparable to some of Debussy's second book of preludes.

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<sup>1</sup> Dees, P.Y. "Piano Music by Women Composers. Vol. 2, Women Born After 1900". Westport, CT: Greenwood Press. (2004), p.27

## Concerto in D Minor in One Movement

This piano concerto has three sections within its single movement. The first section has romantic style elements. It begins with a trumpet solo that is interrupted by cadenza like responses from the piano. There hints of a melody until the first theme is completely stated. The main theme lends itself to the style of African American spirituals. The 2<sup>nd</sup> section has beautiful use of call and response from the African American tradition. Price never quotes a preexisting spiritual but uses rhythms and melodic and harmonic expressions from the style. The third section is a Juba dance.<sup>2</sup>

## Fantasia Negre

No. 1

This piece is dedicated to Margaret Bonds and is based on the spiritual “Sinner, Please Don’t This Harvest Pass.”<sup>3</sup> Frequent plagal motion and use of the Neapolitan. It begins with cadenza like passage work. This piece has frequent changes in rhythmic patterns, often with dotted and syncopated rhythms. A notable difficulty is the use of a descending chromatic scale sequences using the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> fingers of the right hand over inverted chords within the same hand. This fantasy requires agility and powerful playing especially in the final section as it has chromatic and arpeggiated octaves marked fortissimo. There is a near constant use of chromatic running sixteenth notes in either hand balanced against the melody.

No.2

This Fantasy begins with a folk melody much like a piece by Bartok, followed by light impressionistic arpeggios. Fragmentations of that main theme appear as motives in a call and response dialogue before the main melody emerges above the arpeggiated base. The melody shifts to the middle with the outer voices becoming the accompaniment. Technically, this piece is challenging as it requires agility for fast chromatic runs and frequent running arpeggio sequences. It also requires good voicing and fullness of sound for its large leaps and “Lisztian” octaves over a melody balanced between the hands or in the left hand. There is a need for ability to discern melody from the accompanying textures. There is a brief use of a cakewalk dance rhythm in the coda.

No.4

There are four versions of this work. The final work is the Romantic style with hints of blues style idioms. There are flourishes with thirty-second notes and uses of running chromatic sixteenth notes over chromatic eighth-note octaves and use of arpeggios. This piece is a virtuosic piano fantasia with flourishes of technical elements interrupting the two main themes. One theme shows European influence the other is African American spiritual inspired.<sup>4</sup> The piece requires a comfortable span of an octave with thirds on the top and bottom. The performer should also be comfortable with legato sixths and arpeggios with added thirds and fourths.

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<sup>2</sup> Cann, Michelle. “Pianist Michelle Cann Discusses Composer Florence Price.” Retrieved Electronically December 17, 2020 <https://youtu.be/2KYp1SjY7GA>.

<sup>3</sup> Walker-Hill, Helen. “Black Women Composers: A Century of Piano Music (1893-1990)” Hildegard Publishing Company. p.ii.

<sup>4</sup> Price, Florence. “Fantasia Nègre no.4 in B Minor.” Score. Edited by Cooper, M. John. Schirmer. (After 1932) p.iv

## **On A Quiet Lake**

The left-hand carries the melody in the beginning. The hands do have some three against four cross rhythms. The melody is very thin and would be difficult to balance properly. Good control and relaxation are necessary for the right-hand tremolo in the A section.

## **Sonata in E Minor**

The sonata has a majestic opening followed by two main melodies in the first movement.<sup>5</sup> One of the themes sounds reminiscent of the Spiritual Joshua Fit the Battle of Jericho. The second movement is a lyrical spiritual infused slow movement. This movement needs a musical sensitivity. A cakewalk element also transpires within the second movement.<sup>6</sup> The last section, a scherzo is fast and rhythmic.

## **Your Hands in Mine**

This character piece has frequent hand crossing and numerous jumps between registers. The right hand frequently plays separate thirds and fourths while also playing the legato melody underneath. Octaves occasionally are present in the right-hand melody. The piece requires good finger independence in the weak finger of the right hand. The piece has large, rolled chords and large leaps near the end that requires dexterity.

## **Late intermediate Literature**

### **Barcarolle**

Styled in the late romantic salon fashion, this piece has some light passage work in the left hand similar in difficulty with an easier Chopin waltz. There are big jumps between octaves in the bass and chords in the middle register. Voicing is important as the melody is often in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> fingers of the right hand and alternates with chords in the other fingers.

### **Memory mist**

This piece requires a velvet touch. It has some complex harmonies and two against three. The chords in the A section are awkward to play. The swung eighth notes in the B section create a difficult rhythm between the hands. The left hand has arpeggiated accompaniment figures in the opening section. The melody is in the left hand in the B section.

### **Song Without Words in A Major**

This will require great finger independence and clever weight distribution as there is a three-part texture throughout with the inner and bottom part often having two note slurs. The melody weaves through the various parts. Caution should be used in the brief two beat polyrhythm of three against four that comes at the bridge to the closing section. This piece needs careful balance of the inner blocked chords. This piece is similar in difficulty to some of Edvard Grieg's moderate lyric pieces.

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<sup>5</sup> Hinson, M. "Guide to the Pianist's Repertoire" (3rd ed.) Bloomington: Indiana University Press. (2000), p. 615

<sup>6</sup> Hinson, M. "Guide to the Pianist's Repertoire" (3rd ed.) Bloomington: Indiana University Press. (2000), p. 615

## **Summer Moon**

This piece is a mixture of jazz and impressionism. It has chromatic passages in thirds. Additionally, some care should be taken to ensure the 4th and 5th intervals do not sound detached. There are chords idiomatic to jazz, such as sevenths and ninth chords.<sup>7</sup>

## **Intermediate Literature**

### **Dances in the Canebrakes**

Nimble feet

This lively piece is rag similar to some of Debussy's children's pieces. It features frequent hand crossings, difficult rhythms, and some jumps between large chords in the right hand. The melody does present itself in the left-hand at times. Similar in difficulty as Scott Joplin's "Maple Leaf Rag."

### **Down a Southern Lane**

Right hand melody is made up of different intervals that need to be voiced properly. This piece has influences of southern gospel hymns in the A section. The rag like B section has a "jumping left hand" under running notes in the right hand that may prove difficult to control.

### **The Goblin and the Mosquito**

This character piece is an early intermediate toccata style piece with alternating intervals between hands. There are multiple articulations such as staccato, accents, and two note slurs. The sixteenth note grace notes are accessible, they fit under the hand and are more like notated glissandi.

### **Meditation**

The piece has a syncopated left-hand accompaniment with a salon style romantic melody with touches of impressionistic chromaticism and use of sevenths. The piece is a unique blend of a western European melody with small infusions of African American folk pentatonic melodies as the melody sometimes moves to the middle of the chords that are being played.

### **Remembrance**

Similar in difficulty to an easier Chopin Mazurka. Large jumps in the left-hand waltz accompaniment will require dexterity. Balance in this piece will be tricky as the melody moves between voices within the three-part texture. The voicing of the allegretto section will take some skill as the melody also moves to between the hands while the right hand jumps up to the higher registers of the piano. This work begins in G major but frequently uses a major sixth, the secondary dominant of scale degree two, and uses some other accidentals from E major lending an African American folk idiom to the work. There are also skilled uses of chromaticism with the work.

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<sup>7</sup>Price, Florence "Down A Southern Lane" Score. Edited by Cooper, M. John (2020) New York, New York. Schirmer. p.ii

## **Three Roses**

### **Red Rose**

Melody is in the left hand in the B section. There are arpeggiated passages that will require a light, nimble, touch. There is use of chromatic secondary and seventh chords within this piece which is a good theory exercise. The first section of this piece is tonally ambiguous – for example, the first measure begins with spelling a D major triad that transitions to B diminished on the last beat of the measure. This kind of chromatic alteration that emphasizes the sixth scale degree lends a certain blues flavor to the piece.

### **Yellow Rose**

Alternating 8<sup>th</sup> notes between the hands that will be difficult to control. Phrasing may prove challenging as the melody is often in the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> fingers of the right hand while a chord alternates in the same hand. Careful attention should be paid to balancing the intervals in the syncopated eighth notes in the A section.

### **White Rose**

This piece appears in two versions, version A is short and will be challenging to phrases as it has phrases made of full half note chords. Version B is longer and includes an African American folk styled melody in the B section using a pentatonic melody in the left hand. The melody throughout could be difficult to balance properly.

## **Village Scenes**

### **Church Spires in the Moonlight**

The voicing of the melody will take careful consideration as it moves around the stationary chords. Left hand syncopation throughout. Left hand accompaniment has large leaps.

### **A Shaded Lane**

This piece features large jumps in the left-hand accompaniment. Melody is hard to discern among all the chords and arpeggiations at the beginning. Relaxation will be necessary for the tremolo in the second section.

### **The Park**

Musically, this will be difficult as there are many articulations. There is a need for nimble playing as the tempo is fast and the piece requires a lot of movement between areas on the piano.

## Elementary Literature

### **A Morning Sunbeam**

This character piece uses multiple hand positions. The piece is arranged in four measure phrases but requires the student to play slurs of different lengths. There are more notes in the accompaniment than the melody and the melody switches to the left hand in the B section, so this piece will be good practice for those students who struggle with good balance.

### **Bight Eyes**

This is meant as a teaching piece which requires the student to practice moving their hands to G, C and A minor hand positions. The piece also promotes the practice of articulations: staccato, legato, and two note slurs. There are two measure motives that alternate between sparse textures and legato melodic runs. The other challenge will be controlling the dynamics, while jumping between motives.

### Resources:

- Ammer, Christine. "Unsung: A History of Women in American Music." (Century ed.) Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press (2001) p. 174-176.
- Cann, Michelle. "Pianist Michelle Cann Discusses Composer Florence Price." Retrieved Electronically December 17, 2020 <https://youtu.be/2KYp1SjY7GA>.
- Brown, L. Rae. "The Heart of a Women. The Life and Music of Florence B. Price." Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press. (2020) p.33, 108-109, 111, 127-129 & 285-290.
- Dees, P.Y. "Piano Music by Women Composers. Vol. 2, Women Born After 1900". Westport, CT: Greenwood Press. (2004) p. 27.
- Elkins, Stephanie. "Margaret Bonds And Florence Price Offered Friendship, Mutual Support As Artists The Pair Forged A Path As Black Women Composers In 1930s Chicago." Wisconsin Public Radio. Retrieved February 4, 2021. <https://www.wpr.org/margaret-bonds-and-florence-price-offered-friendship-mutual-support-artists>.
- Huizenga, Tom "Revisiting The Pioneering Composer Florence Price" NPR. January 21, 2019 Retrieved December 2, 2020: <https://www.npr.org/2019/01/21/686622572/revisiting-the-pioneering-composer-florence-Price>.
- Hinson, M. "Guide to the Pianist's Repertoire" (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) Bloomington: Indiana University Press. (2000) p.615.
- Price, Florence "Down A Southern Lane" Score. Edited by Cooper, M. John (2020) New York, New York. Schirmer. p.ii.
- Price, Florence. "Fantasie Nègre no.4 in B Minor." Score. Edited by Cooper, M. John. Schirmer. (After 1932) p.iv.
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