

## CATHERINE MOORE, PIANO & MEZZO SOPRANO

### FANNY MENDELSSOHN HENSEL - *VIER LIEDER OHNE WORTE FÜR DAS PIANOFORTE*, OP. 8

In a genre popularized by her brother Felix, Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel's compositional merit in her own right shines through in these four "Lieder ohne Worte," or songs without words. Regarded as one of Hensel's most experimental and successful compositions in the genre, the set of pieces features a highly complex and deceptive harmonic language. Throughout her lifetime, her works largely went unpublished, except for few that were published under her brother's name, out of fear they would not garner the same respect because of her gender. Hensel passed away just months before her brother's own early death, and in the six months between her own death and his, he fought to ensure that his sister's compositions be published and distributed by his publisher, Breitkopf & Härtel. In 1850, three years after their deaths, Opus 8 became her first independently published composition by a major publisher. Hensel has very recently become a popularly programmed women composer. The "Easter Sonata," discovered in 1970 under the name "F. Mendelssohn" and originally attributed to Felix, has been shown to be Fanny's own composition, and was premiered under her own name in 2012 by pianist Andrea Lam.

### R. NATHANIEL DETT - *EIGHT BIBLE VIGNETTES*

Written between 1941 and 1943, *Eight Bible Vignettes* was one of the final compositions R. Nathaniel Dett wrote before he passed away in 1943. A Canadian-American Black composer, Dett's compositions spanned genres, instrumentation, and theme. This suite of eight character pieces are the culmination of a life as a church musician, composer, pianist, and choral conductor. The suite features eight pieces, where the number 8 in Christianity symbolizes new beginnings. The suite is broken into two thematic sections, where the first four pieces are representative of characters and themes from the old testament, and the last four from the new testament. Dett explores religious and spiritual texts and melodies to make a larger statement about the importance of faith and hope through times of suffering.

**"Father Abraham"** combines two spiritual melodies, the Hebrew National Anthem "Leoni," and the Negro Spiritual "Father Abraham" to allude to both groups' quest for emancipation, and happiness in a future life. The texture of this piece is more like choral writing and mimics the "shouting" of a church choir. In the second piece, **"Desert Interlude,"** Dett reflects on the biblical passage in Genesis when Abraham banished Hagar and son Ishmael to the wilderness. Hagar was a slave and bore Abraham a child after his wife Sarah could not conceive. Sarah becomes jealous of Hagar and her child, Ishmael, after God blessed her with her son Isaac, who was promised a great inheritance. To please his wife, Abraham sends Hagar and their son Ishmael out into the desert, and Dett notes of this: "What should she do? Was there no hope? Had God, even as Abraham, forsaken her?" With very sophisticated harmonic writing, the piece wanders in the same way that Hagar and Ishmael did,

hoping for some sense of relief from their suffering, and to find the promise of abundance that God had promised. **“As His Own Soul”** is written in reflection of this passage from 1 Samuel 18:1: “And it came to pass.... that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.” With flowing counterpoint and passionate keyboard writing similar to that of Russian keyboardists like Rachmaninoff, Dett’s melodic writing is simple, with a deeply emotional harmonic language and flourishing left hand accompaniment. **“Barcarolle of Tears”** is the only piece from *Eight Bible Vignettes* to which Dett chooses not to link a biblical passage or character to. Clipper Erickson, a pianist who has studied and recorded the complete piano works of Dett, writes: “This movement expresses deep sadness, hope, despair, and peaceful deliverance. Perhaps, since no particular Biblical reference is present, its nature is autobiographical.”

In this first piece of the “New Testament,” **“I Am the True Vine”** features the words of Jesus, “I am the True Vine, and my father is the husbandman... I am the vine, ye are the branches” (John 15: 1-5). Dett sets this text to music in a three-voice fugue in a meter of three, symbolic of the triune divinity. Dett presents another female character in **“Martha Complained,”** with keyboard writing that combines the textural writing of Chopin, and harmonic language of the blues. With a repeating left hand accompaniment, Martha grows tired of her housework without the help of her sister, who had neglected her duties to listen to Jesus speak. Martha breaks a dish in her frustration and goes to Jesus with her contempt, asking him to order her sister to return to help her. Jesus responds that her sister has “chosen the good part” in worshipping God and that Mary must continue to do so, and Martha begrudgingly returns to her work and ways. The music then shifts from a minor to major key, showing some sort of enlightenment that has come over her. **“Other Sheep,”** the longest and most complex piece of the suite, opens with a chant that was sung by a native African student of Dett’s, and a set of variations follows that builds in harmonic and rhythmic intensity. The piece alludes to the “other sheep” that God also protects outside of his “chosen people,” alluding to the way that marginalized people join together in one “fold,” as Dett writes. “Other Sheep” features heavy use of polyrhythm, or the stacking of indivisible rhythms on top of each other, like two against three. The final piece, **“Madrigal Divine,”** is a text setting of Psalm 23, “The Lord is My Shepherd.” With a resounding repeating bass and broad harmonies, it creates a sound like church bells, and features lush gospel and whole tone harmonies. It is a magnificent ending to a suite that spans musical genres, textures, and themes, and leaves the listener with a true sense of hope.

## ROSEPHANYE POWELL – *HEALING*

*Then, Here, and Now* is a new cycle of four art songs by contemporary composer Rosephanye Powell. Each song features a new setting of traditional African American spiritual texts in response to Powell’s “visceral and emotional reactions to dramatic events which transpired during 2020.” *Healing* utilizes text from “There is a Balm in Gilead” and is a reflection where Powell likens the balm to medicine that flows like a river through our bodies when we are sick. Powell chooses to replace the text of “sin-sick soul” to “troubled soul” in this setting, possibly suggesting that in a time where many are physically sick and in need of lifesaving medical care, faith serves a greater purpose in healing our worries, rather than our sicknesses.

There is a balm in Gilead  
To make the wounded whole.  
There is a balm in Gilead  
to heal the troubled soul.

ADOLPHUS HAILSTORK - *IF I CAN STOP ONE HEART FROM BREAKING*

Adolphus Hailstork is an African-American composer, choral conductor, and professor of music, currently residing in Virginia where he is a Professor of Music and Eminent Scholar at Old Dominion University in Norfolk. A student of famed French composer and pedagogue Nadia Boulanger, his precise dedication to colorful composition is evidenced through his decades of choral, vocal, and orchestral compositions, in which he masterfully combines the timbres of French and religious music traditions, specifically African-American spiritual idioms. Hailstork sets Emily Dickinson's poem in this stunning piece originally composed for voice and string quartet. In this piano reduction, Hailstork captures the power and directness of Dickinson's message with a simple repeating piano accompaniment. In a moment where the troubles of many seem too massive to attempt to help, Dickinson and Hailstork remind us that even the smallest gestures and actions can make a world of difference.

If I can stop one heart from breaking,  
I shall not live in vain;  
If I can ease one life the aching,  
Or cool one pain,  
Or help one fainting robin  
Unto his nest again,  
I shall not live in vain.

AMY BEACH - *HYMN OF TRUST*

Amy Beach was one of the first successful female composers of large-scale art music, and also was well known for her over 150 art songs. Her most famous composition, the "Gaelic Symphony," was premiered by the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1896 and was the first major symphony composed and published by an American woman. A pianist herself, "Hymn of Trust" is written like a piano trio with voice and violin, where the melody is masterfully passed between the three voices. The poet, Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr., was one of the "fireside poets," a group of New England poets in the 19th century that included other famed writers like Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. The text of "Hymn of Trust" is taken from Holmes's 1860 volume *The Professor at the Breakfast-Table*. Instead of referring directly to a love interest, the subject of this song seems to be love itself, and the way that love for someone or something can instill a faith that could rival religious belief.

O Love Divine, that stooped to share  
Our sharpest pang, our bitterest tear,  
On Thee we cast each earth-born care,  
We smile at pain while Thou art near!

Though long the weary way we tread,  
And sorrow crown each lingering year,  
No path we shun, no darkness dread,  
Our hearts still whispering, Thou art near!

When drooping pleasure turns to grief,  
And trembling faith is changed to fear,  
The murmuring wind, the quivering leaf,  
Shall softly tell us, Thou art near!

On Thee we fling our burdening woe,  
O Love Divine, forever dear,  
Content to suffer while we know,  
Living and dying, Thou art near!

#### FLORENCE PRICE - *HOLD FAST TO DREAMS*

The daughter of a community leader and professional musician, Florence Price was both a proponent for social justice and the advancement of women and Black people in music. She wrote in a 1943 letter to Serge Koussevitzky, conductor of the Boston Symphony and an important proponent of much contemporary music in America, although not hers, “Unfortunately the work of a woman composer is preconceived by many to be light, froth, lacking in depth, logic and virility. Add to that the incident of race — I have Colored blood in my veins — and you will understand some of the difficulties that confront one in such a position.” Overcoming these obstacles, she became the first Black woman to have a work performed by a major American orchestra, and a celebrated composer of especially piano literature. “Hold Fast To Dreams” is a setting of Langston Hughes’ poem “Dreams,” and is a perfect representation of Price as a composer, musician, and person.

Hold fast to dreams  
For if dreams die  
Life is a broken-winged bird  
That cannot fly.

Hold fast to dreams  
For when dreams go  
Life is a barren field  
Frozen with snow.