



AMERICAN CLASSICS



Florence Beatrice
PRICE

Symphonies

No. 1 in E minor

No. 4 in D minor

**Fort Smith
Symphony**

John Jeter

Florence Beatrice Price (1887–1953)

Symphony No. 1 in E minor (1932) • Symphony No. 4 in D minor (1945)

The broad arc of Florence Price's life in many ways resembled those of the millions of African Americans who moved away from the southern United States in search of new professional opportunities and greater personal autonomy during the Jim Crow era. Born into a middle-class family in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1887, Price received a sound musical education from her mother after the city's pre-eminent white instructors refused to teach her. Since opportunities for more advanced musical training were largely unavailable for women of color in the South, her mother enrolled her at the New England Conservatory after she completed high school in 1903. There she pursued courses of study in organ and piano pedagogy while receiving tutelage in all musical disciplines from conservatory faculty, including director George Whitefield Chadwick.

After graduating from the conservatory in 1906, Price began her professional career as an instructor at segregated academies in Arkansas and Georgia. She married an attorney, Thomas Jewell Price, six years later, and the two remained in Little Rock until a brutal lynching and financial difficulties prompted the family to relocate to Chicago in 1927. During this 15-year period, she managed a large private piano studio, composed an extensive collection of pedagogical music for children, and began raising her two daughters, Florence and Edith. Price's career as a composer erupted after she moved to Chicago, where she had developed contacts while taking summer courses at the Chicago Musical College. With the added support of leading figures within the Chicago Black Renaissance, especially Estelle Bonds, whose home served as a central gathering place for artists, Price's works won several contests designed to support black composers. These victories propelled her into the national spotlight and garnered attention from musical luminaries like contralto Marian Anderson, with whom she collaborated extensively, and Chicago Symphony Orchestra director Frederick Stock. Over the course of her later career, Price wrote in a variety of genres for the

classical and popular marketplaces and participated actively in local chapters of the National Association for Negro Musicians (NANM) and the National Federation of Music Clubs.

With few connections to a local orchestra before moving to Chicago, Price had little incentive to pursue symphonic composition. But the Rodman Wanamaker prize sponsored by the NANM, which featured an orchestral music category, afforded her a potentially gainful opportunity to explore symphonic writing without the need to secure a performance. Her *Symphony in E minor* won the \$500 first prize in 1932. Frederick Stock took an interest in the piece and agreed to give its premiere with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra at the city's Century of Progress International Exhibition in June 1933. This concert marked the first time a major American orchestra had performed a piece written by an African American woman.

Price wrote at least two other symphonies (*No. 3* and *No. 4*), while a fourth (*No. 2*) is presumed missing or incomplete; only a few finished measures survive. The circumstances surrounding the composition of her *Fourth Symphony*, which is featured on this recording, are opaque, for it remained unperformed during her lifetime and no evidence suggests that she wrote it for a contest. Price faced health complications during the 1940s and 1950s that might have prevented her from pursuing a performance as actively as she might have otherwise. In the months leading up to her sudden death, she was preparing for opportunities abroad and might have attempted to secure a premiere overseas had she been able to complete the journey.

As musicologist Rae Linda Brown has shown in her critical edition of the *Symphony in E minor*, which was used for this recording, the piece owes a stylistic debt to Antonín Dvořák's *Symphony No. 9 in E minor "From the New World"* (1893), and to the music of Samuel Coleridge-Taylor. Both composers integrated elements of the Negro spirituals and traditional Negro dances into

their large-scale symphonic works, and Price followed suit. She once wrote, "We are waking up to the fact pregnant with possibilities that we *already* have a folk music in the Negro spirituals – music which is potent, poignant, compelling. It is simple heart music and therefore powerful." Like Dvořák, Price did not tend to quote from Negro spirituals or dances directly, but rather infused the symphony with idiomatic gestures drawn from their melodies and rhythms.

The symphony follows the standard four-movement plan: an *allegro* in sonata form; a slow, lyrical second movement; a dance-like *rondo*; and a *presto* finale. The opening *Allegro ma non troppo* combines a brooding agitation reminiscent of Johannes Brahms' orchestral music in minor keys (the *Tragic Overture* or the *First Symphony*, for example) and a flair for the grand gesture akin to William Grant Still's roughly contemporary "*Afro-American*" *Symphony*. The movement's broad, lyrical themes openly draw from Negro folk idioms with the heavy use of the pentatonic scale and judicious syncopation. The stately, hymn-like theme of the second movement, *Largo, maestoso*, presented by a full chorus of brass instruments, draws from Price's experiences as an organist. A series of call-and-response units between various soloists and the brass chorale culminates in a grand restatement of the opening, replete with tubular bells.

Whereas symphonists in the Germanic tradition typically included a *scherzo* (literally, "a joke") in the third movement, certain composers used vernacular dances in its place. The American composer George Frederick Bristow, for example, used a polka in his *Second Symphony*. As in many of her works in conventional genres, here Price drew from the wellspring of Negro vernacular dance by writing a "juba," an antebellum slave style characterized by complex body percussion (foot stomping, chest patting) and syncopated melodies. Price's colorful treatment, which includes a slide whistle, fully captures the style's lighthearted character. The rollicking *Finale* is another example of one of the oldest symphonic traditions: a light, propulsive *perpetuum*

mobile in a dancelike compound meter that culminates in a satisfying climax.

The *Symphony No. 4 in D minor* is cut from the same stylistic cloth, and it shares the standard four-movement arrangement, complete with a *Juba Dance*. The intense character of the opening movement, *Tempo moderato*, closely matches that of the earlier work, but the primary melody, sounded in the winds and brass after a brief introduction, is less sweeping; it also contains a quick reference to the Negro spiritual "*Wade in the Water*." This compactness allowed Price to use specific motives (or bits and pieces of the tune) as the basis for extensive development and colorful elaboration throughout the rest of the movement – as if she took three notes and turned the dial on her musical kaleidoscope. After a restatement of the main theme following this developmental process, the expected secondary theme appears in its full glory in a moment that sounds like Price pulled all the stops of her organ. A grandiose coda provides a fitting close.

The primary melody of the brief second movement, marked *Andante cantabile* and sounded first in the oboe, is reminiscent of a gentle lullaby. A series of compact variations highlights Price's penchant for tight ensemble writing among the orchestra's distinct instrument groupings. She returned to an upbeat but easygoing *Juba Dance* in the next movement. The strings and woodwinds drive the highly syncopated melody in the opening section with the lower strings providing characteristic offbeat punctuation. A contrasting middle section unlike anything else in Price's symphonic *oeuvre* interrupts the dance. A long, sinewy melody in the oboe, underpinned by pizzicato strings, paints a portrait of a different time and place altogether. The musical language strongly evokes Duke Ellington's "jungle style," which had become his signature by this time. As in the *First Symphony*, the breathless final movement, *Scherzo*, alternates between stern and playful moods that rise to an explosive conclusion.

Douglas Shadle
Vanderbilt University

FORT SMITH SYMPHONY

John Jeter, Music Director

FIRST VIOLIN

Er-Gene Kahng,
Concertmaster
Lori Fay,
Associate Concertmaster
Karen Jeter,
Associate Concertmaster
Carol Harrison,
Assistant Concertmaster
Arthur Busby
Mia Catania
Mike Burkepille
Raúl A. Munguía
Becky Rathbun
Klaudia Cop
Chris Pinkston
Shannon Bohall
Christy Paxton
Randy Lyle
Laura Pulcifer
Yuko Tatsumi Mansell

SECOND VIOLIN

Patrick Conlon, Principal
Diane Halliburton,
Assistant Principal
Steven Hughes II
Michelle Fraser
Heather Wickersham
Elizabeth Venegas
Karina Sim
Anne Bonnett
Saralyn Workman
Gus Weaver
Nicole Melki
Greta Lane
Carla Geter
Erika Burns

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Anitra Fay,
Assistant Principal
Kathy Murray,
Assistant Principal
Ned Horner
Curtis Hansen
Jennifer Scott
Imelda Tecson
Genny Triana
Sterling Tyler
Anthony Verge
Juan Carlos Flores
Elijah Evans
Sabrina Mackenzie

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Principal
Barbara Godette,
Assistant Principal
Dan Mays
Chas Helge
Steve Fraser
William Elliott
Jose Palacios
Kourtney Newton
Nathaniel Cook
Tess Crowther
Jayne Jostad
Martyna Kolano

BASS

Jerry Lane, Principal
John Schimek,
Assistant Principal
Kirby Nunez,
Assistant Principal
Benji Wilson
Talon Davis
Brandon Patterson
Joel Schimek

Harry Dearman
Mark Phillips
Ian Grems

FLUTE

Elizabeth Shuhan,
Principal
Emmaline Smyth
Jennifer Peck

PICCOLO

Jennifer Peck, Principal
Margaret Fischer

OBOE

Theresa Delaplain,
Principal
Suzanne McGowen
Fiona Slaughter

ENGLISH HORN

Suzanne McGowen,
Principal

CLARINET

Andrew DeBoer, Principal
Christina Giacona

BASS CLARINET

Rebecca Wenck, Principal

BASSOON

Brent Fillmer, Principal
Charles Hall

HORN

Alex Shuhan, Principal
Evan Mino,
Assistant Principal
Richard Ruhe
Jack Jackson II
Jane Waters Showalter

TRUMPET

Angela Richards, Principal
Paul Hankins,
Assistant Principal
Randy Graham
Penny Schimek

TROMBONE

Brian Haapanen, Principal
Vernon Howard

BASS TROMBONE

Paul Johnston, Principal

TUBA

Ryan Robinson, Principal

TIMPANI

Benjamin Finley, Principal

HARP

Faith O'Neal, Principal

CELESTA

Robert Mueller, Principal
Saralyn Workman

PERCUSSION

David Ewing, Co-Principal
Tommy Dobbs,
Co-Principal
Dustin Chambers
Christine Souza
Jamie Wind Whitmarsh

LIBRARIAN

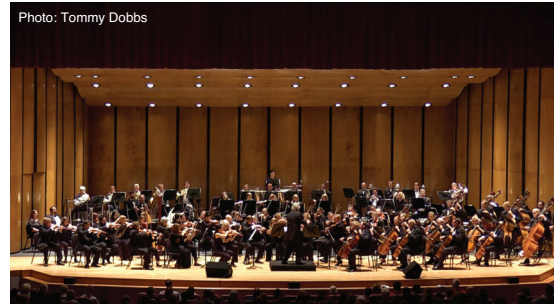
David Ewing

STAGE MANAGER

Becky Yates
Tony Yates, Assistant

Fort Smith Symphony

Photo: Tommy Dobbs



Founded in 1923, the Fort Smith Symphony is the oldest orchestra in the state of Arkansas. The orchestra is a per-service professional ensemble drawn from musicians throughout the region. The orchestra performs classics, pops and educational concerts in the ArcBest Performing Arts Center in downtown Fort Smith. Committed to education, the orchestra presents numerous educational programs including the "Kool Cats" Jazz Quartet, "Jolt™" Electric Rock Quartet, Symphony-in-the-Schools and "Earquake!™" multi-media concerts for school children.

www.fortsmithsymphony.org

John Jeter



Photo: Bedford Camera and Video

John Jeter has been the music director and conductor of the Fort Smith Symphony since 1997. He is the recipient of the 2012 Governor's Award for "Individual Artist of the State of Arkansas" as well as the 2002 Helen M. Thompson Award presented by the American Symphony Orchestra League. The Thompson Award is given to one outstanding music director in the United States every two years. He is the recipient of the Mayor's Achievement Award for his services to the City of Fort Smith. Jeter has guest conducted numerous orchestras including the Springfield Symphony, the Indianapolis Symphony Orchestra, the Oklahoma City Philharmonic, the Arkansas Symphony Orchestra, the North Arkansas Symphony Orchestra, the Charleston Symphony, the Gulf Coast Symphony and the Illinois Chamber Symphony, among many others. He has co-hosted numerous radio programs and is involved in many radio and television projects concerning classical music. He received his formal education at the University of Hartford's Hartt School of Music and Butler University's Jordan College of Fine Arts.



Florence Price at the Piano
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Florence Beatrice
PRICE
(1887–1953)

Symphonies Nos. 1 and 4

Symphony No. 1 in E minor (1932) 37:22

- 1** I. Allegro ma non troppo 16:36
- 2** II. Largo, maestoso 12:11
- 3** III. Juba Dance 3:36
- 4** IV. Finale 4:45

Symphony No. 4 in D minor (1945)* 31:34

- 5** I. Tempo moderato 15:10
- 6** II. Andante cantabile 5:40
- 7** III. Juba Dance 5:13
- 8** IV. Scherzo 5:24

***WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING**

Fort Smith Symphony John Jeter

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Cover: Portrait of Florence Price

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AMERICAN CLASSICS

Florence Price was born in Little Rock, Arkansas and studied at the New England Conservatory, but it was in Chicago that her composing career accelerated. The concert in 1933 at which her *Symphony No. 1 in E minor* was premiered was the first time a major American orchestra had performed a piece written by an African American woman. Influenced by Dvořák and Coleridge-Taylor, she drew on the wellspring of Negro spirituals and vernacular dances, full of lyricism and syncopation. The *Symphony No. 4 in D minor* demonstrates her tight ensemble writing, her distinct sense of orchestral color, her Ellingtonian ‘jungle style’ language and her penchant for the ‘juba’ dance.

www.naxos.com

Playing
Time:
69:04