



NAXOS

AMERICAN CLASSICS



Florence Beatrice

PRICE

Symphony No. 3 in C minor

The Mississippi River • Ethiopia's Shadow in America

ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra • John Jeter

Florence Beatrice Price (1887–1953): Symphony No. 3 in C minor

The Mississippi River • Ethiopia's Shadow in America

Florence Beatrice Price, affectionately called “Bea” by friends and family, was one of the most versatile and accomplished American musicians of her generation. Born in Little Rock, Arkansas, she graduated with honors from the New England Conservatory in 1906. Following in her parents’ footsteps, she then pursued a career as an educator in southern schools and colleges dedicated to African American students. Some of her earliest compositions written in this context became staples of her teaching repertoire. Amid increasing racial violence in Little Rock, however, Price and her family moved to Chicago in 1927, where she reunited with relatives who helped integrate her into the local musical ecosystem.

The musicologist Samantha Ege has shown that the vitality of Chicago’s classical music scene, especially among Black women, proved to be a boundless source of inspiration for Price the composer. During her first five years in residence, she completed some of her most significant works, including her *Symphony in E minor*, *Ethiopia's Shadow in America*, and the *Piano Concerto in One Movement*. The first two of these won awards in a 1932 competition for Black composers sponsored by the National Association of Negro Musicians. Her winning symphony attracted the attention of Frederick Stock, conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, who programmed it during the Century of Progress Exposition the following year. Beginning in 1935, Price also developed a close working relationship with the renowned contralto Marian Anderson, who championed her music on the recital stage.

Although Price was welcomed as the first African American member of local groups like the Chicago Club of Women Organists and the Musicians Club of Women, prevailing patterns of racial and gender discrimination at times hindered her professional progress. Conductors Serge Koussevitzky and Artur Rodziński, for example, declined to perform her *Third* and *Fourth Symphonies* despite successes in Chicago that exceeded those of other composers they chose to perform. Price’s pieces for voice, piano, and organ nevertheless remained staples of

the repertoire for decades to come. The recovery of dozens of manuscript scores in 2009 has enabled more of her extensive body of work to reach new audiences.

Despite the ongoing economic depression, the 1930s proved to be a period of great creative energy for Price. Her success in competitions early in the decade gave way to participation in events sponsored by the Works Progress Administration’s (WPA) Federal Music Project – a New Deal initiative designed to support struggling professional musicians while providing communities with much-needed access to concerts. With government sponsored venues now available, Price was able to secure several public performances of older pieces while continuing to compose new large-scale works, including the *Third Symphony*. The Michigan WPA Symphony Orchestra of Detroit premiered the work in November 1940 under the direction of Valter Poole.

A letter written before the symphony’s premiere offers one of the only first-hand accounts of Price’s compositional approach. “It is intended to be Negro in character and expression,” she wrote, but “no attempt has been made to project Negro music solely in the purely traditional manner.” That is, she wanted to project aspects of her cultural heritage in a symphonic framework without making direct references to an existing body of folk songs and dances – a broad creative challenge broached by many composers around the world.

The symphony’s first and fourth movements illustrate this approach well. As Price explained in her letter, they were “meant to follow conventional lines of form and development” – what music theorists call “sonata-allegro form”. In this standard three-part mold, two contrasting melodies appear in close succession near the beginning of the movement, become fragmented and rearranged in the middle (as through a kaleidoscope), and return in slightly varied forms near the end. Both movements broadly fit this pattern, but the melodies are clearly informed by folk songs and dances of the African diaspora. The second theme in the first movement, for example, breathes the spirit of “Deep River”.

The two inner movements display what Price described in her letter as “the spiritualistic theme” and “the strongly syncopated rhythms of the Juba”. When bringing African American cultural heritage to bear in her symphonic music, she believed both aspects were essential. The second movement, emphasizing the “spiritualistic theme”, is a pensive meditation with particularly effective writing for woodwind and brass choirs, learned in part from her experiences as a performing organist. As in her other symphonies, the third movement is an upbeat “Juba dance” rife with humor accentuated by sharp character contrasts. A slithering middle section offers a brief respite before the Juba finishes with a flourish as the upper woodwind sign off with a rising V–I cadence.

In contrast to the symphony, *The Mississippi River* intentionally quotes several tunes with origins in the African diaspora, granting it a profound sense of place. Rivers, of course, pervade the spirituals repertoire, while the Mississippi River itself was a dominant geographic feature of Price’s life as she moved from Arkansas to Boston and back again before traveling upriver to Illinois. The specific songs quoted in the suite capture the combined struggles and dynamism of Black migration across the United States.

Price’s orchestral portrait certainly matches the river’s grandeur. The headwaters in Minnesota are introduced by brass chorales and birdsong that give way to a gentle southward flow through Indigenous lands, marked by soft drumbeats. A distant quotation of “Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen” sets off a new section featuring harder rapids, perhaps near Nauvoo, Illinois and the northern border of legalized slavery in antebellum Missouri. As the rapids die away, a full-blown dance band enters the scene but is sharply interrupted by a profound meditation on several spirituals in succession: “Stand Still Jordan”, “Deep River”, and “Go Down, Moses”. Snippets of “Lalotte”, a Creole tune well known in antebellum New Orleans, and “Steamboat Bill”, a song made famous in the

1928 cartoon *Steamboat Willie*, offer moments of levity before another meditation on “Nobody Knows” sets off a turbulent climax with echoes of other spirituals periodically emerging from the texture.

Ethiopia's Shadow in America is one of only a few pieces in Price’s catalog for which she provided a descriptive accompanying narrative. The first page of the manuscript score explains that she wanted it to portray “I – The Arrival of the Negro in America when first brought here as a slave. II – His Resignation and Faith. III – His Adaptation, A fusion of his native and acquired impulses.” Her use of a three-part historical arc to trace the American experience of enslaved Africans aligns with works of certain Harlem Renaissance figures like Will Marion Cook, William Grant Still, and Duke Ellington.

A brief introduction featuring a solo clarinet draws listeners into the story before launching into the two-part opening movement. The first part, a lushly orchestrated *Adagio*, moves seamlessly between simple melodic material reminiscent of folk music and the complex harmonic language used to enhance dramatic situations in opera and film. A quiet close gives way to a buoyant *Allegretto* introduced by the wood block and plucked strings. The first violins then take off with a sinewy syncopated melody that unfolds in various guises throughout the movement while percussion instruments add sparkle. The second movement carries a religious mood as a string choir accompanies the soft lament of a solo violinist. A cellist later takes up this restrained tune before it fades to an echo in the French horn, clarinet, and oboe. A catchy melody accompanied by dance rhythms whips the third movement into a whirling array of orchestral color before a recollection of the opening *Adagio* grinds it to a halt. Not to be overtaken by the past, the dance resumes, closing the piece in grand fashion.

Douglas W. Shadle
Vanderbilt University

ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra



An ensemble of international renown, the ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra (ORF Vienna RSO) is a paragon of Viennese orchestral tradition. Known for its exceptional programming, the Orchestra combines 19th-century repertoire with contemporary works and rarely performed pieces from other periods. All ORF Vienna RSO performances are broadcast on the radio, and the orchestra performs in two subscription series in Vienna, in the Musikverein and the Konzerthaus. In addition, it regularly appears at major festivals in Austria and internationally such as the Salzburg Festival, musikprotokoll im steierischen herbst, and Wien Modern. The ORF Vienna RSO enjoys a successful collaboration with the Theater an der Wien, has an excellent reputation as an opera orchestra, and is also equally at home in the film music genre. The Orchestra regularly tours internationally, and its discography spans a broad range of cross-genre recordings. Under the leadership of its former chief conductors, which include Milan Horvat, Leif Segerstam, Lothar Zagrosek, Pinchas Steinberg, Dennis Russell Davies, Bertrand de Billy and Cornelius Meister, the Orchestra has continuously expanded its repertoire and its international reputation. Marin Alsop has been serving as the Orchestra's chief conductor since 2019. www.rso.orf.at

John Jeter



John Jeter has been music director and conductor of the Fort Smith Symphony since 1997. He received the 2012 Governor's Award for "Individual Artist of the State of Arkansas", the 2002 Helen M. Thompson Award presented by the League of American Orchestras, and the Mayor's Achievement Award for services to the City of Fort Smith. Jeter has guest conducted numerous orchestras in the US, including the Springfield Symphony, Indianapolis Symphony, Oklahoma City Philharmonic, Arkansas Symphony and Illinois Chamber Symphony. His orchestral education programmes have reached up to 10,000 students annually, and he is involved alongside Fort Smith Symphony with music and health research and education in conjunction with the Arkansas College of Health Education Health Research Institute Health & Wellness Center in Fort Smith. Aside from conducting and teaching, Jeter has co-hosted numerous radio programmes and is involved in several 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 Beatrice PRICE

(1887–1953)

Symphony No. 3 in C minor (1940) 27:32

- 1** I. Andante – Allegro 9:26
- 2** II. Andante ma non troppo 7:54
- 3** III. Juba 4:57
- 4** IV. Scherzo. Finale 5:07

The Mississippi River (1934) 26:20

- 5** Andante (bars 1–239) – 8:37
- 6** Andante con moto – Allegretto (bars 240–337) – 3:56
- 7** Allegro – Andante – Adagio – Allegretto (bars 338–475) – 6:09
- 8** Andante – Allegretto – Allegro (bars 476–682) 7:38

Ethiopia's Shadow in America (1932)* 12:49

- 9** I. The Arrival of the Negro in America when first brought here as a slave: Introduction and Allegretto 6:46
- 10** II. His Resignation and Faith: Andante 2:51
- 11** III. His Adaptation, A fusion of his native and acquired impulses: Allegro 3:12

***WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING**

**ORF Vienna Radio
Symphony Orchestra**

John Jeter

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AMERICAN CLASSICS

Florence Price was one of the most versatile and accomplished American musicians of her generation whose unstoppable creativity and earliest successes were set against the backdrop of 1930s economic depression. The *Third Symphony* expresses aspects of Price's cultural heritage in a symphonic framework. Avoiding direct references to existing folk songs and dances, it creates highly distinctive African spiritual moods and uses the syncopated rhythms of the *Juba* in its jazzy third movement. This world premiere recording of *Ethiopia's Shadow in America* traces the American experience of enslaved Africans, while *The Mississippi River* suite quotes several famous spirituals, capturing the struggles of Black migration across the United States.

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Playing
Time:
66:48