

*The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Department of Music
presents*

**SANYA SHAH, SOPRANO
LAUREN RAGSDALE, MEZZO-SOPRANO**

Friday, October 2, 2020

1:00 PM

Virtual First Fridays

Program

In the Springtime

Betty Jackson King
(1928 - 1994)

I'm a Poor Lil' Orphan in this World

Julia Perry
(1924 - 1979)

Song to the Dark Virgin

Florence Price
(1887 - 1953)

Sympathy

Florence Price
(1887 - 1953)

Calvary

Betty Jackson King
(1928 - 1994)

Night

Florence Price
(1887 - 1953)

Hold Fast to Dreams

Florence Price
(1887 - 1953)

Sanya Shah is pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree in Vocal Performance and a Bachelor of Science in Neuroscience. Lauren Ragsdale is pursuing a Bachelor of Arts degree in Vocal Performance and Dramatic Arts. Both performers study with Dr. Jeanne Fischer, and thank her for her continued guidance, kindness, and support.

Florence Price was born on April 9, 1887 in Little Rock, Arkansas. Being musically gifted in piano and organ performance from a young age, she attended the New England Conservatory. She returned to Arkansas after graduating and taught music at segregated Black schools. After racial discrimination worsened and lynchings became a regular occurrence, she and her family moved to Chicago in 1927. She further educated herself in composition and orchestration, befriending many influential musicians, artists, and writers such as Margaret Bonds, Marian Anderson, and Langston Hughes. Her most notable accomplishment was the world premiere of her *Symphony No. 1 in E minor* by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. She became the first female Black composer to have her work performed by a major orchestra. In particular, her compositions are characterized by bright vocal landscapes coupled with intricate and profound lyrical themes.

Night (Louise C. Wallace)

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

This piece personifies night. One can follow the progression from dusk to dawn, starting with the odor of nighttime with a red sunset and ending with the beginning of another day. It is beautiful, dreamlike, and peaceful. Nighttime was when Black people had some semblance of freedom and escape from overt and covert racism, when they weren't scrutinized, when they were able to simply be. They came alive at night and were weary when the sun rose once again.

Hold fast to dreams (Langston Hughes)

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

This poem exemplifies the importance of dreams as a form of hope and life. Hughes personifies dreams, stressing that if dreams die so will the person's spirit. Without dreams, one would be bound to a barren earth and lose the human potential to soar. In context, this is extraordinarily powerful as Black peoples were continuously oppressed and subjected to systemic racism. But at least they could dream.

Sympathy (Paul Laurence Dunbar)

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!

The sorrows of a confined, abused bird are used to personify the struggles felt by Black people. Despite his bloodied, bruised, and sore wings he continues to sing. The song is not joyful, but rather a prayer asking for his suffering to end soon so that he can be free.

Song to the Dark Virgin (Langston Hughes)

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.

Black women in the 1960s were not only suppressed due to racism, but also sexism. They were likely the most oppressed and maltreated group of people. The singer in this song strives to protect a Black woman by covering the color of her skin. She starts with jewels so that their shine might cover her darkness. Then she tries to use a silken garment, and when that does not work she resorts to fire. She determines that the only way to free the Black woman from suffering is to destroy her body.

Betty Jackson King was born in Chicago and inherited her musical skill from her father, who wrote the libretto for King's three operas. She studied piano before earning her master's degree in composition from the Chicago Musical College of Roosevelt University. After her time spent in school, she began teaching and mentoring young singers in places such as the University of Chicago, public schools in the area, and finally settling at Dillard University in New Orleans. King also began and conducted a group of voices called "The Betty Jackson King Artists", which performed throughout the Chicago area. Pieces by King have been sung by a multitude of successful opera singers, including soprano Kathleen Battle, who performed one of the composer's pieces at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in 1991.

Calvary

Calvary, Calvary, Calvary, Calvary, Calvary, Calvary
Surely He died on Calvary

Ev'ry time I think about Jesus
Ev'ry time I think about Jesus
Ev'ry time I think about Jesus
Surely He died on Calvary

Don't you see the blood a-flowing?
Don't you see the blood a-flowing?
Don't you see the blood a-flowing?
Surely He died on Calvary

Don't you hear those hammers rising?
Don't you hear those hammers rising?
Don't you hear those hammers rising?
Surely He died on Calvary

In this spiritual, King uses a gradual and even tempo, allowing the music to take its time, parallel to the cadence of Jesus' walk up the mountain to Calvary, where he was to be crucified. The repetitions of questions posed by King emphasize the grief and terror the singer experiences while thinking about Jesus.

In the Springtime (William Shakespeare)

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

In this art song, the jaunty introduction sets up a nostalgic tone for the piece, allowing for a clear entrance by the performer, like a breath of fresh air. The piano accompaniment, especially around the lyrics, "ring-a-ding ding" mimic the call of birds in the spring. The flowy connection of each phrase feels like the

wind enveloping the audience, before introducing a key change, which is reminiscent of the air becoming warmer as spring progresses.

Julia Perry was born in 1924 in Lexington, KY to a very musical family; her father played the piano with tenor Roland Hayes on tour and Julia's sisters studied violin alongside their sibling. Perry studied at Westminster Choir College, where she ultimately received her master's degree in music. Soon after, she traveled to Europe, where she resided for a decade studying with many famous composers, before returning to the U.S. to teach at Florida A&M College and Atlanta University. Her work has received numerous accolades and has been performed by the New York Philharmonic, among many other respected orchestras. By the time of her death in 1979, Perry had composed twelve symphonies, two concertos, and three operas.

I'm A Poor L'il Orphan In This World

I'm a poor little orphan in this world
I'm a poor little orphan in this world
I'm a poor little orphan in this world
Good Lord! Can't stay here by myself

My mother broke the ice and gone
My mother broke the ice and gone
My mother broke the ice and gone
Good Lord! Can't stay here by myself

I promised her I'd follow on
I promised her I'd follow on
I promised her I'd follow on
Good Lord! Can't stay here by myself

Perry depicts the suffering of a young child who has been abandoned by her mother. The slight piano accompaniment under the melody line mimics the instability the orphan feels now that they are alone, and the child must figure out how to move forward.



Sanya Shah is a junior at UNC Chapel Hill majoring in Neuroscience and Music and plans to attend medical school after graduating. She enjoys learning about how the brain and music influence each other, and hopes to use this knowledge to help people struggling with PTSD, Autism, Alzheimer's, and other impairments. She works as an Undergraduate Research Assistant in the Zylka Lab, focusing on a project that studies pain and opioid effectiveness. She is currently working on starting a Music Medicine group through the pre-health honors society (AED) in order to provide patients with the healing benefits of music. She studied with Sara Westermark for 8 years before joining Dr. Jeanne Fischer's studio at the beginning college. She especially loves performing with UNC Opera and the Carolina Ukulele Ensemble!



Lauren Ragsdale is a junior at UNC majoring in Music and Dramatic Arts B.A. programs, and hopes to pursue a minor in Entrepreneurship. Originally from Tennessee, she moved to North Carolina and has lived in Charlotte for two years. She has studied under Dr. Jeanne Fischer since her freshman year, and has performed with UNC Opera, Black Arts Theatre Company, Kenan Theatre Company, Pauper Players, and LAB. Lauren's recent collaborations include Theatre in the Park, Burning Coal Theatre, Women's Theatre Festival, and Eno River Players, in both Durham and Raleigh. At UNC, she founded and remains president of the book club A Novel Idea, and is a member of A Moment of Magic, where she volunteers as a princess and visits UNC hospitals and local homes for children. She also teaches voice with Musical Empowerment, and organizes Praise Nite at Newman Church. After college, she hopes to attend graduate school and receive an M.F.A. in either acting or vocal performance.