

BALTIMORE SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

BSO SESSIONS

Marin Alsop, Music Director, Harvey M. and Lyn P. Meyerhoff Chair
Peter T. Kjome, President and CEO



BSO SESSIONS

SEASON 1, EPISODE 3: HIDDEN TREASURES

Nicholas Hersh, conductor

PRICE

String Quartet No. 2 in A Minor

- II. Andante Cantabile
- III. Juba (Allegro)

FINE

***Serious Song*, A Lament for String Orchestra**

SHOSTAKOVICH
(arr. Barshai)

**Chamber Symphony in C Minor for
String Orchestra, op. 110a**

- I. Largo
- II. Allegro molto
- III. Allegretto
- IV. Largo
- V. Largo

SUPPORTING
SPONSOR:



ZUCKERMAN
SPAEDER

Share your #BSOSessions view with us!



FLORENCE PRICE

String Quartet No. 2 in A Minor

“I have two handicaps—those of sex and race... I should like to be judged on merit alone.” – Price

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

Born 1887 in Little Rock, AR; died 1953 in Chicago, IL

- Florence Price, née Smith, began her musical career early by studying piano with her mother. She gave her first piano recital at age four and had her first composition published at age 11.
- By the age of 14, she had graduated high school as valedictorian.
- Price attended the New England Conservatory of Music where she graduated with honors.
- Price married the lawyer Thomas J. Price and the two moved back to Little Rock, AR, where Thomas had his practice. With racial tensions in the area rising, the couple eventually decided to relocate to Chicago.
- In 1931, Price divorced Thomas, becoming a single mother of two daughters. She moved in with another composer, Margaret Bonds, and began playing organ for silent film screenings and composing songs for radio ads to make ends meet.
- In 1932, Price entered the Wanamaker Foundation Awards – her Symphony in E Minor won first prize. The Chicago Symphony Orchestra performed the work, making her the first Black woman to have her music performed by a major U.S. orchestra.
- After her passing, Price’s music became overlooked in the predominantly white, male canon of classical music. In 2009, a substantial amount of her work was found in Illinois during a renovation of an old house that was once Price’s summer home. This has helped spark a renewed recognition.

FUN FACT

Florence Price used the pen name “Vee Jay” when she wrote jingles and popular songs.

ABOUT THE PIECE

- Florence Price wrote her String Quartet No. 2 in 1935.
- The second movement, *Andante Cantabile*, which means flowing and songlike, is just that. The alluring melody dances between dissonance and resolution in this romantically lush work.
- The third movement, *Juba*, is named after an African-American dance that involves percussive sounds made on the body. Juba dancing, or “patting juba” was a style of dancing developed by enslaved African Americans who were banned from playing musical instruments and instead used their bodies to create music. It is thought that Juba dancing was an influence on modern tap dancing. Price weaves in dance-like syncopated rhythms throughout the movement.

THE WORLD AT A GLANCE

1935

⋮

MUSIC

Frank Sinatra gets his first break through a radio contest

⋮

TECHNOLOGY

Amelia Earhart: first person to fly solo across the Pacific

⋮

ART

Frida Kahlo’s “Self Portrait with Curly Hair”

⋮

SPORTS

Babe Ruth’s final home run

⋮

POP CULTURE

Monopoly is released

⋮

HISTORY

FDR’s Second New Deal brings the Social Security Act and the Works Progress Administration

IRVING FINE*Serious Song*, A Lament for String Orchestra

“A minute’s music is a tremendous accomplishment.” - Fine

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

Born in 1914, Boston, MA; died 1962, Natick, MA

- Irving Fine was an American composer with a gift for lyricism. He was described by Copland as having “an ear one could trust.”
- Fine began his musical studies on piano at a young age and went on to study composition at Harvard University. There, he studied with Serge Koussevitzky, the conductor of the Boston Symphony Orchestra who commissioned a great deal of new music during his tenure.
- Fine also studied with Nadia Boulanger, one of the preeminent composition teachers of the time whose students included Astor Piazzolla, Aaron Copland, and Philip Glass.
- Fine went on to teach at Harvard where he formed professional relationships with Stravinsky, Bernstein, and Copland.
- While teaching at Harvard, Fine was critical of the music department, which he claimed did not focus enough on music performance.
- Fine passed away unexpectedly at the age of 47, leaving behind his wife Verna and three daughters. Verna remained a passionate advocate of Fine’s works throughout the remainder of her life and stayed close with Fine’s musical friends.

FUN FACT

Irving Fine led the Glee Club at Harvard.

ABOUT THE PIECE

- Written in 1955, *Serious Song* was commissioned by the Rockefeller Foundation and premiered by the Louisville Orchestra.
- The work, which Fine described as “essentially an extended aria for string orchestra,” is a densely orchestrated musical poem.
- The piece received critical acclaim upon its release and was said to be Leonard Bernstein’s favorite work by Fine, which he described as “rich, sensitive, emotional music.”

THE WORLD AT A GLANCE**1955****MUSIC**

Little Richard’s
“Tutti Frutti”

**TECHNOLOGY**

Velcro is patented

**FILM**

Disney’s *Lady and the Tramp*

**LITERATURE**

The first *Guinness Book of World Records* is published

**ART**

Pablo Picasso’s
“Don Quixote”

**HISTORY**

Rosa Parks is arrested after refusing to give up her bus seat to a white passenger in Montgomery, AL

DMITRI SHOSTAKOVICH

Chamber Symphony in C Minor for String Orchestra, op. 110a

“If they cut off both hands, I will compose music anyway holding the pen in my teeth.” – Shostakovich

ABOUT THE COMPOSER

Born 1906 in St. Petersburg, Russia; died 1975 in Moscow, Russia

- Shostakovich displayed musical talent early on when he began taking piano lessons with his mother at age 9.
- As he was completing his conservatory studies, Shostakovich wrote his First Symphony as a graduation piece. The work was well received and gained him recognition early in his career.
- Shostakovich continued to gain prominence as a composer but before long started running into trouble with authorities under Stalin’s regime.
- Shostakovich’s music was denounced by the government on several occasions. This led to the loss of commissions and a ban on performances of his music.
- Shostakovich feared for his life during this time, and many people close to him were arrested or killed, including his brother-in-law, mother-in-law, and uncle.
- For a time, in order to keep a low profile, Shostakovich wrote three types of music: film music to pay rent, official works to appease authorities, and serious works “for the desk drawer.”
- After Stalin’s death, Shostakovich returned to favor and was appointed General Secretary of the Composer’s Union by the Communist party. To this day, he is considered one of the most important composers of the 20th century.

FUN FACT

Shostakovich included a musical motif that represented his initials in many of his works.

ABOUT THE PIECE

- This piece, originally composed for string quartet, was written in 3 days in 1960, shortly after Shostakovich reluctantly joined the Communist party.
- The work was composed during a particularly dark time in Shostakovich’s life. He was in Dresden with the purpose of composing film music but could not focus on the task at hand and instead wrote this piece.
- According to the score, the piece was dedicated to “the victims of fascism and the war,” although it is believed there is a different meaning behind the piece. Shostakovich wrote to a friend about the piece, “I’ve been thinking that when I die, it’s hardly likely that anybody will ever write a work dedicated to my memory. So, I have decided to write one for myself.”
- The work is considered autobiographical and contains Shostakovich’s musical monogram in every movement. In addition, several of his previous works are quoted throughout the piece.
- The piece was premiered in 1960 by the Borodin Quartet. Apparently when the Borodin Quartet performed the work for the first time to Shostakovich in his home, he buried his face in his hands and wept. After the quartet finished playing, they silently packed up and left.

THE WORLD AT A GLANCE

1960

⋮

MUSIC

The Beatles are formed

⋮

TECHNOLOGY

Xerox introduces the first photocopier

⋮

FILM

Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho*

⋮

LITERATURE

Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*

⋮

SPORTS

Muhammed Ali (under the name Cassius Clay) wins first professional fight

⋮

HISTORY

The U.S. announces that 3,500 soldiers will be sent to Vietnam