



Connections Across Time and Space

**Co-presented by The Temple Emanu-El Streicker Center
and Orchestra of St. Luke's**

Monday, November 16th, 2020 at 6:30pm

Streamed live from The Temple Emanu-El Streicker Center

Performers

Jesse Mills, Alexander Fortes, *violin*
David Cerutti, Dana Kelley, *viola*
Alberto Parrini, Joel Noyes, *cello*

Program

CHRISTINE DELPHINE HEDDEN

Cuimhne (co-commissioned by OSL)

FLORENCE PRICE

String Quartet No. 2 in A minor
Moderato
Andante cantabile
Juba

JOHANNES BRAHMS

String Sextet No. 1 in Bb Major, Op. 18
Allegro
Andante
Scherzo
Rondo

Program Notes

Cuimhne by Christine Delphine Hedden

About the composer

Christine Delphine Hedden, draws upon many wells: traditional, classical and contemporary. She is a composer, a fiddle player and violist, a percussive dancer, and a storyteller in word and song. Hailing from the highlands of western Connecticut, Christine grew up playing New England folk music and fell in love with Irish traditional music along the way. Her album, *When the Aster Blooms*, is a diverse storybook of original tunes and songs inspired by her native New England folk music and her love of Irish traditional music.

From the Composer

At the beginning of writing this piece, I was about to embark on a long-awaited journey to Ireland, to be there for a longer period of time than ever before. After returning home, I missed Ireland far more intensely than I had in the wake of my previous visits. It is one thing to go to a place, be stunned by its beauty and leave again, always a guest. It's another to visit again and again, all the while knowing that your home lies elsewhere. On this past visit, I found that it is still yet another thing to journey to a place knowing that it is only beginning to become a part of you and that this part will continue to grow.

"Cuimhne" is the Irish word for memory. This piece is written from a place of recollection where, in the words of John O'Donohue, "absence is transfigured and our time in the world is secretly held for us." *Cuimhne* was co-commissioned by Orchestra of St. Luke's and the Gabriela Lena Frank Creative Academy of Music.

String Quartet No.2 by Florence Price

"It is a faultless work...a work that speaks its own message with restraint and yet with passion. Miss Price's symphony is worthy of a place in the repertory," wrote Eugene Stinson in the *Chicago Daily News* on June 16, 1933, reviewing the world premiere of Florence Beatrice Price's Symphony No. 1 in E minor with Music Director Frederick Stock conducting the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Price had come to the attention of Stock the year before, when she won the Wanamaker Competition with her Symphony in E Minor. The premiere was a milestone in the 46-year old Price's career as a composer, but it also represented a significant milestone in American musical history: it was the first time a major American symphony orchestra had performed a work written by a Black woman.

Florence Beatrice Price was born on April 9, 1887 to an upper-class Black family in Little Rock, Arkansas. Her father—the city's only Black dentist—and her mother nurtured Price's musical gifts and encouraged their daughter to pursue higher education. She

attended the New England Conservatory in Boston, where she was the only student to double major, graduating with a bachelor of music in piano and organ performance in 1906. While at the New England Conservatory, Price wrote her first symphony, but after returning to Little Rock with her degree, she dedicated herself to teaching, finding employment in segregated black schools in Arkansas and Georgia, as well as maintaining a private studio.

Life in Little Rock became increasingly difficult, dangerous, and hostile toward Black Americans after Price returned home from Boston. The enforcement of racist, segregationist “Jim Crow” laws in the South severely limited the rights (including voting rights) and liberties of Black Americans and reversed any economic and social progress made during the Reconstructionist era following the Civil War. As racial tensions increased, Price—who founded the Little Rock Club of Musicians after being refused admission to the all-white Arkansas Music Teachers Association—her husband Thomas and their two daughters left Little Rock in 1927 for Chicago.

In Chicago, Price was quickly embraced by other Black classical musicians, joining the R. Nathaniel Dett Club of Music and Allied Arts and the Chicago Music Club, as well as forging a lifelong friendship with fellow composer Margaret Bonds. For the first time since graduating New England Conservatory of Music, Price began writing chamber music and large-scale compositions and in 1932, was encouraged to enter the Wanamaker Competition, where she was awarded first prize for her Symphony No. 1 in E Minor and second prize for her Piano Sonata.

For the next two decades, Price’s compositions for orchestra, chamber ensemble, organ, and solo voice were performed by performers such as Marian Anderson and orchestras including the Pittsburgh Symphony, the Bronx Symphony, and the

Brooklyn Symphony but her entrance into the canon of Western classical music was denied due to what she herself once described as her “two handicaps”: her sex and her race. Now, thanks to the scholarship of musicologists like the late Rae Linda Brown and Douglas Schadle that brought Price’s work back into the light and the 2009 discovery of dozens of lost manuscripts, Price’s music is finally beginning to receive the recognition and the performances it has long deserved.

Price’s String Quartet No. 2 in A Minor was published in 1935. Its four movements exemplify Price’s talent for melding 20th century modernism with African-American musical idioms (such as traditional Spirituals, church music, jazz, and the blues) and traditional African rhythms. The first movement is characterized by the tension between a brooding opening theme and sweeping melodies colored with blues thirds that erupts into a dramatic coda. The second movement, labeled *Andante cantabile*, is full of subtle, barely perceptible shifts in contrast. It’s pensive, then mournful, with flashes of joy; weariness gives way to tranquility; serenity blends into worry, landing on a calm resignation. Fragments of melodies are bent and sharpened with dissonances. The third movement gets its name *Juba* from the rhythmically exuberant and high-spirited African dance, also known as the hambone, which typically involves stamping and body-slapping. Here, Price uses the *Juba* as the traditional dance-inflected *Scherzo* movement, something she had also done in the third movement of her Symphony No. 1 in E minor. The *Rondo* finale displays Price’s unique, unexpected use of harmony and texture as a way to build drama and variety.

String Sextet No.1 by Johannes Brahms

With his groundbreaking string quartets and titanic symphonies that came to define each of these genres, Beethoven set precedents and expectations that loomed over nearly every composer born in the 19th century, from Schubert and Schumann

to Richard Strauss, Gustav Mahler, and Antonin Dvorak. Many of these composers were eager to scale these summits early on in their careers, bravely taking on the weight of comparisons that inevitably pointed fingers back to Beethoven. But not Johannes Brahms.

Today, Johannes Brahms is often mentioned in the same breath as Bach and Beethoven, suggesting a direct musical lineage, but for most of his career he feared being measured against the great composers who came before him. He labored over his first symphony for two decades, finishing it in when he was 43. (Beethoven and Mahler both wrote their first symphonies in their late twenties, and Schubert's first symphony was written when he was 16). Of his 22 string quartets, Brahms destroyed all but two. In fact, Brahms was known to destroy works—or earlier versions of later works—that he felt weren't good enough, had been received poorly, or had received less than enthusiastic feedback from his trusted circle of musician friends.

While the string quartet carried with it nearly a century of baggage, the string sextet was a relative rarity and presented an opportunity for Brahms to experiment with writing music for an all-string ensemble without the threat of being compared to others. Written between 1858 and 1860, Brahms' String Sextet No. 1 in B-flat Major was the first chamber piece to which he assigned an opus number that did not feature the piano. He was encouraged to write a string sextet by his friend, violinist Joseph Joachim. After playing through the string sextet, Joachim was so enthusiastic about

the piece that he arranged for its world premiere performance in Hanover in October 1860. In attendance was Clara Wieck Schumann, Brahms' longtime friend and frequent champion, who told him that the piece "...was even more beautiful than I had anticipated." The piece was repeated a month later at the Leipzig Conservatory and became an instant success. Today, it remains one of Brahms' most beloved compositions.

The first *Allegro ma non troppo* movement is characterized by an endless succession of Brahms' signature long phrases stretched deliciously over bar lines and often underscored by cross rhythms and syncopations that add to a feeling of elegant weightlessness and spontaneity. In the *Andante ma moderato* second movement, Brahms architects a stunning set of variations based on a Hungarian-inspired melody set over a persistent, driving ground bass. The force of this rhythm can still be felt as it recedes into the background and through the movement's slow fade to silence. The third *Scherzo* movement is a typically high-spirited romp with multiple thrilling twists and turns with Brahms once again pulling melodies beyond their expected lengths and through surprising harmonies. As with the variations of the second movement, the *Rondo* finale presents Brahms with the opportunity to establish one-of-a-kind melodies that he then utterly transforms. Brahms hypnotizes the listener with constant and dizzying melodic, rhythmic, and sonic permutations, then suddenly gathers and accelerates the ensemble into one final, brief combustion of activity.

About Orchestra of St. Luke's

Called “[New York’s] hometown band” by The New York Times, OSL performs at venues throughout the city including Carnegie Hall, Lincoln Center, New York City Center, Merkin Hall, The Morgan Library and Museum, Brooklyn Museum, and many more. OSL is dedicated to cultivating a lifetime of engagement with classical music and offers free instrumental training and mentorship for students from elementary school through conservatory and beyond; produces guided community and educational performances for thousands of students and families; and owns and operates The DiMenna Center for Classical Music, New York City’s only rehearsal, recording, education, and performance facility expressly dedicated to classical music, serving more than 500 ensembles and more than 30,000 musicians each year. OSL has participated in 118 recordings, four of which have won Grammy Awards; has commissioned more than 50 new works; and has given more than 179 world, US, and New York City premieres. Recent guests and collaborators include cellist Alisa Weilerstein, tenor Jonas Kauffman, composer Eleanor Alberga, violinist Christian Tetzlaff, and pianist Jeremy Denk. As New York Magazine notes, the Orchestra has a “...reputation for being able to play virtually any score as if the musicians had all grown up with it under their pillows.” Learn more at OSLmusic.org or @OSLmusic on Instagram, Facebook, Spotify and more.

About Temple Emanu-El

Founded in 1845, Temple Emanu-El is the third-oldest Reform Jewish congregation in the United States. Its odyssey mirrors that of the Jewish community in New York.

Temple Emanu-El is also one of the great Jewish houses of worship in the world. Within our walls, an enormous range of social, educational, and cultural programs are offered.

Awe and soaring spirituality are feelings that are invoked when one first steps into the majestic 2,500-seat Main Sanctuary. In the vastness of the space and the quiet dignity of the mood we feel the presence of God. The play of light refracted through the clerestory windows against the arched side walls is a luminous reminder that this sanctuary is expressive of God’s spirit.

About The Streicker Center

From history to culture, food to politics, music to Israel. Night after night, the Streicker Center offers opportunities for discussion and debate about the most challenging and important issues of the day, from anti-Semitism, fake news, immigration, and racism to the future of the Jewish people.