Introduction

SAMANTHA EGE AND ALEXANDRA KORI HILL

On July 5, 1943, Florence B. Price closed her second letter to the Boston Symphony Orchestra's conductor, Serge Koussevitzky, with the assertion, "I have an unwavering and compelling faith that a national music very beautiful and very American can come from the melting pot just as the nation itself has done. . . . Will you examine one of my scores?" She had already conquered the Midwest, first with the 1933 Chicago Symphony Orchestra debut of her Symphony No. 1 in E Minor, then with further high-profile performances of her works by the Woman's Symphony Orchestra of Chicago and the Detroit WPA Symphony Orchestra.[1] Now, her sights were set on that ever-elusive East Coast symphonic debut.

As Price advocated for her place and pertinence in the making of a national music via her correspondence with Koussevitzky, she foregrounded the "handicaps" of her race and sex, which set her apart from the white male norm of the classical music world. "I am a woman; and I have some Negro blood in my veins." This was, however, less a plea for sympathy and more an upfront declaration of her identity, for which she did not apologize. Wishing to be "judged on merit alone," Price proceeded to share the brilliant insights that she brought to her craft, highlighting, most notably, the way in which her Southern upbringing – as a daughter of Little Rock, Arkansas – shaped her understanding of what she called "real Negro music."[2]

Although Price's letters to Koussevitzky went unanswered, her voice persisted in various pockets of classical music-making, encompassing Black churches, HBCUs, Black classical music clubs, and the repertoire of countless African American vocalists and instrumentalists. Such communities took seriously Price's "unwavering and compelling faith that a national music very beautiful and very American can come from the melting pot just as the nation itself has done" and found alignment with their own advocacy of a more socially just world.

The Cambridge Companion to Florence B. Price emerges from this history of Black classical music community building and sits within three major strains of musicological research: (1) score analysis; (2) positivistic study of composers and repertoires; and (3) cultural, critical, and semiotic

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analysis of music. This is because Price is a composer who requires all three: her music, particularly her instrumental works, are understudied; the first biographical monograph, Rae Linda Brown's *The Heart of a Woman*, only appeared in 2020; and methods from Black music studies, gender studies, and Black feminist theory help illuminate Price's distinct experience as a Black woman building a composing career in segregated America. As her music is heard by more and more people, it is imperative that listeners and performers have access to close analyses of Price's repertoire, her life, and her times.

The Cambridge Companion to Florence B. Price is structured from the position that Price's style – African American and Western tonalities, rhythms, and forms in Western classical genres – is an aesthetic fact, not an epistemological quandary. As a composer with stylistic commonalities with the first generation of Black composers (such as R. Nathaniel Dett and Clarence Cameron White) identified by Eileen Southern, Price participated in an aesthetic nationalist movement with precedents in Europe just a few decades before her birth. While the "merging" of "Black" music and "white" classical music was (and still is) considered unique, rare, or strange, Price's application of juba rhythms, varied repetition, and art-song settings of Negro spirituals is little different from Johannes Brahms's arrangements of Hungarian folk dances; Béla Bartók's incorporation of Hungarian tonalities and polyrhythms in his aesthetic; or Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's evocation of Ottoman *mehterân* bands in the final movement of his fifth violin concerto.

Classical composers have always found inspiration and ideas in folk and popular genres; they were never siloed off from the traditions and trends of their day. Yet, due to our rigid conceptions of race, gender, class, and culture, such practices are typically foregrounded when applied by racially minoritized composers and treated as a conceptual problem. This text, however, relishes the stylistic and aesthetic insights Price's style provides for our understanding of idiomatic diversity in American classical music specifically and classical music more broadly.

The Cambridge Companion to Florence B. Price is not unique in this regard; musicologists such as Brown, Helen Walker-Hill, Marcia J. Citron, Mildred Denby Green, Barbara Garvey Jackson, and more have challenged our understanding of classical music because of *whom* these scholars studied and *how* they studied them. Through their various publications, upon which subsequent generations of scholars, performers, and scholar-performers have built, these women asserted that the picture of the

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American musical landscape was incomplete without Price, her contemporaries, and antecedents.

Their output rewrote the narrative of women's significance in the American concert tradition and in some cases fed the foundations of Price's posthumous legacy. For Brown, Walker-Hill, Green, and Jackson, in particular, assembling and recovering the building blocks of Price's biography were essential – work that we, as the editors of this companion, are fortunate to build on, rather than redo. Like our predecessors, we continue to engage the broader cultural and aesthetic questions that can be answered and should be explored through her music. Whether drawing upon elements of her biography for interpretations or centering African American music aesthetics in discussion of her works, Price scholarship thrives when the scholarly tools used are multidimensional – just like Price's style. In a time when studying biography and historical context may seem less than thrilling, it remains an essential element in studies of composers, as it provides the launch pad for the exciting, illuminating facets of a person's creative output.

It is also especially urgent in the work on minoritized composers, who are either under-documented, have archival materials that remain unpublished, or are relegated to "the first," as Price was initially. Studying biography does not mean absorption of material; it means the continued pursuit of verification of detail and observation when new or conflicting information appears. Cultural, semiotic, and analytic theorizing is not twisting material for one's own sake; it is considering how compositions can enhance our knowledge about style, culture, and the time in which those ideas were crafted.

This book is a reminder of the importance of studying composers from the angle of biography, cultural and social context, and semiotic analysis, simultaneously. We need, as Brown notes, "to *know* about these women . . . to understand something of the prevailing ideologies and social contexts in which they created," and, might we add, to understand the theoretical, cultural, and personal significance of their works.[3]

And now, here we are. Across the fourteen chapters of this volume, authors from an array of intellectual and artistic backgrounds – cultural history, musicology, music theory, music therapy, performance, and social activism – have examined Price's multifaceted life and melting-pot practice through perspectives that value all that she was and all that she did. While Price may have wished for Koussevitzky to listen only to her music, not to society's prejudices and preconceptions around her Black womanhood, the authors here choose to recognize issues of race and gender as ongoing

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points of navigation and negotiation for Price, and as necessary intersectional dimensions to consider in the study of her trajectory. Their goal is not to reduce Price to her identity but to enlarge our capacity to hear the vitality of her compositional voice.

Thus, in the vein of other studies on Black women's intellectual histories, the authors of this companion have shown how Price's musical pursuits and ideas were shaped by a life "lived at the crossroads of race, gender, and justice."[4] With overlapping points of focus, throughout the volume, on historiographical unsilencing,[5] musical analysis, and sociocultural dynamics, each author has pushed Price scholarship into a new era, benefiting immensely from the scholarly and creative interventions and innovations that came before.

In Part I ("Archives and Sources"), Samantha Ege, Carlene J. Brown and C. E. Aaron, and Louise Toppin show how the study of biography can highlight and rectify historical gaps and archival silences. Ege opens with a critical analysis on how to "hear" Price's presence in the archive; Brown and Aaron use Rae Linda Brown's search for Price to highlight the limits and possibilities of the archive and the importance of oral history; and Toppin shows the depth of detail in the archive on the United States' Black concert tradition.

Part II ("Genre and Style") looks like a typical analysis section, but each author thoroughly integrates aspects of cultural context, analysis, and theory in their chapter. Jane Forner and Ellie M. Hisama explore new and community-oriented analytic approaches to Price's music. Minnita Daniel-Cox weaves Price's biography into her analysis of the composer's art songs, focusing on settings of poetry by Paul Laurence Dunbar, Langston Hughes, and Price herself. Elektra V. Carter situates Price's concert spirituals within Negro-spiritual performance, study, and theorization explored by Price's contemporaries and modern-day pedagogues.

Gwynne Kuhner Brown and Joe Williams use music analysis and Black feminist theory in their discussion of Price's solo keyboard works. Katharine Uhde and R. Larry Todd place Price's violin fantasies and second violin concerto in conversation with the stylistic and technical precedents of her contemporary, Clarence Cameron White; and Alexandra Kori Hill continues the discussion with a focus on Price's use of African American idioms in her concertos and chamber works. Douglas W. Shadle's chapter closes this section, offering a summary of Price's symphonies and tone poems that provides a rich, comprehensive narrative of her orchestral writing.

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Part III ("Community and Reception") is squarely within the arena of social and cultural analysis, beginning with Rae Linda Brown's essay on Harry T. Burleigh's impact on Price and her contemporaries. Next is Elizabeth Durrant's Black feminist analysis of the working relationship between Price, Marian Anderson, and Margaret Bonds, followed by Lucy Caplan's perceptive look at the Black press as a method of recognition, preservation, and remembrance. Tammy L. Kernodle closes the volume with a linchpin: Price was never forgotten, and the work of past and present generations should serve as a model to retain and renew her memory from this point forward.

Revealed across these chapters is the reality that Price scholarship is a communal endeavor and must continue to take shape as such. As the gender studies scholar Katherine McKittrick reminds us, "when we are doing our very best work, we are acknowledging the shared and collaborative intellectual praxis that makes our research what it is."[6] On the one hand, this perspective is at odds with the territorial nature of academia, which asserts expertise by diminishing that which came before. On the other hand, this complements the ways in which Price's legacy has reached us today. Communities, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds, are what helped reverse Price's inaudibility and invisibility in mainstream concert halls and music classes. Communities are what countered the impact of gatekeepers such as Koussevitzky and others. And communities are what will sustain the groundswell of interest in Price today.

So, what does it look like for new research to remain in dialogue with the past; to express evolving knowledge in a creative duet with the intellectual genealogies undergirding these paths; to evince a melting pot of inspiration over siloed discourses? As the coeditors of this volume, we hope that our readers identify in *The Cambridge Companion to Florence B. Price* one such example.

Notes

1. The WPA was the Works Progress Administration, launched in 1935 and renamed Work Projects Administration in 1939.
2. Florence Price to Serge Koussevitzky, July 5, 1943, box 50, folder 4, Serge Koussevitzky Archive, Music Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.
3. Rae Linda Brown, *The Heart of a Woman: The Life and Music of Florence B. Price* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2020), 2 (emphasis in original).

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4. Mia Bay, Farah J. Griffin, Martha S. Jones, and Barbara D. Savage, "Introduction," in *Toward an Intellectual History of Black Women*, edited by Mia Bay, Farah J. Griffin, Martha S. Jones, and Barbara D. Savage (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 1.
5. Brittney C. Cooper writes about "historiographical silences" in *Beyond Respectability: The Intellectual Thought of Race Women* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017), 123.
6. Katherine McKittrick, *Dear Science and Other Stories* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021), 31.

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