

PROGRAM NOTE

The Old Boatman is a two-page piano piece Florence Price (1887-1953) composed for the benefit of her developing piano students. Upon hearing it, Dana Paul Perna found it very reminiscent of Edvard Grieg, specifically his *Lyric Pieces*, and 19 *Norwegian Folk Tunes*, Op. 66. With that in mind, he proceeded to score her work in a literal transcription for string orchestra in 2002. Upon the advice of the renowned conductor, John McLaughlin Williams, Perna extended his initial transcription of Price's piece, completing the more comprehensive arrangement, as published here for the first time.

This arrangement's world premiere occurred on October 19, 2017 at MATCH (Midtown Arts and Theatre Center Houston) in Houston, Texas by Orchestra Unlimited under the direction of Kirk Smith.



ABOUT THE COMPOSER

Florence Beatrice Price (1887-1953) was a composer, organist and music teacher, noted as the first African American woman to be recognized as a symphonic composer and the first to have a composition played by a major orchestra.

Born in Little Rock, Arkansas, as Florence Beatrice Smith, her family was well respected in the community, with her father working as a dentist and her mother a music teacher who guided Florence's early musical training. Graduating valedictorian at the age of 14, she then enrolled in the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, Massachusetts, where she studied composition and counterpoint with composers George Chadwick and Frederick Converse, and also wrote her first string trio and symphony.

Following her 1906 graduation with honors, Florence returned to Arkansas, before moving to Atlanta, Georgia, in 1910, there becoming head of the music department of what is now Clark Atlanta University, a historically black college. Marrying Thomas J. Price in 1912, she moved back to Little Rock, where her husband had a law practice, staying there and having three children before moving to Chicago following a series of racial incidents in 1927.

In Chicago, Price restarted her composition career, studying with various teachers and conservatories. Following a divorce in 1931, she worked as an organist for silent film screenings and composed songs for radio ads under a pen name to make ends meet. During this time, she moved in with her student and friend, Margaret Bonds, a fellow pianist and composer, who introduced her to writer Langston Hughes and contralto Marian Anderson, both prominent figures who aided in Price's future success as a composer. In 1932, Price submitted compositions for the Wanamaker Foundation Awards, and winning first prize for her Symphony in E minor, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra premiered the work in 1933. In addition to orchestral compositions, she also composed chamber works, art songs, works for violin, organ, and piano.

Florence Price's style, while informed by her training in European tradition, consists predominantly of the American idiom, revealing her Southern roots and incorporating elements of African American spirituals with blues-inspired melodies. Following her death from a stroke in 1953, her work was overshadowed as new musical styles emerged. Some of her work has been lost, but interest has been steadily increasing over the years.