

University of Richmond

UR Scholarship Repository

Music Department Concert Programs

Music

2-18-2024

Hold Fast to Dreams: Emily Riggs, soprano [and] David Ballena, piano

Department of Music, University of Richmond

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.richmond.edu/all-music-programs>



Part of the [Music Performance Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Department of Music, University of Richmond, "Hold Fast to Dreams: Emily Riggs, soprano [and] David Ballena, piano" (2024). *Music Department Concert Programs*. 1639.

<https://scholarship.richmond.edu/all-music-programs/1639>

This Program is brought to you for free and open access by the Music at UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Music Department Concert Programs by an authorized administrator of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu.

UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND

Department of Music

2023 – 2024 Concert Series

Hold Fast to Dreams

Emily Riggs, soprano

David Ballena, piano

Sunday, February 18, 2024

3:00 PM

Perkinson Recital Hall



UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND
School of Arts & Sciences™

DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC

music.richmond.edu

PROGRAM

<i>Three Browning Songs</i> , op.44 (Robert Browning) The Year's at the Spring Ah, Love but a Day! I Send My Heart Up to Thee	Amy Beach (1867–1944)
Hold Fast to Dreams (Langston Hughes) To My Little Son (Julia Johnson Davis) Sympathy (Paul Laurence Dunbar)	Florence B. Price (1887–1953)
A Letter from Sullivan Ballou <i>A letter from Major Sullivan Ballou dated July 14, 1961</i>	John Kander (b. 1927)
For You There is No Song (Edna St. Vincent Millay) Branch by Branch (Edna St. Vincent Millay) Amazing Grace (H. Leslie Adams)	H. Leslie Adams (b. 1932)
<i>Iconic Legacies:</i> <i>First Ladies at the Smithsonian</i> (Gene Scheer) Eleanor Roosevelt: Marian Anderson's Mink Coat Mary Todd Lincoln: Abraham Lincoln's Hat Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis: White House Christmas Card, 1963 Barbara Bush: The Muppets	Jake Heggie (b. 1961)
I Dream a World (Langston Hughes) Is There Anybody Here Who Loves My Jesus? (Traditional) You Can Tell the World (Traditional)	Christine Jobson & Sarah Ruff (b. 1985 & b. 1982) arr. Undine Smith Moore (1904-1989) arr. Margaret Bonds (1913-1972)

*Please silence cell phones before the concert.
Recording, Taping, Photographing are strictly prohibited.*

-Recital Notes-

The title of this afternoon's recital, *Hold Fast to Dreams*, is the first line of Langston Hughes' poem, "Dreams," originally published in the May 1923 issue of *The World Tomorrow*. The poem encapsulates one of the many throughlines in this curated program that spans over 150 years of music and poetry. These selections give voice to the universal desire to dream, hope, and strive for more—for love returned, for a more peaceful world, for an end to injustice, for the promise of opportunity, and for a life freely and fully lived.

Amy Beach's late-19th-century settings of the poetry of Robert Browning embody the Romantic understanding of the Divine as experienced through nature and love. A staunch admirer of the works of Brahms and Chopin, her richly chromatic and expressive accompaniments and soaring vocal lines pay homage to the heights of European Romanticism. Beach spent a great deal of time in New England, specifically at the MacDowell Colony in New Hampshire. For fifteen seasons, she would retreat to the wooded studio to write and recharge. She was moved by the beauty of the New England forests and drew inspiration from the bird songs that greeted her each morning. While the three works on today's program predate her time at MacDowell, her affinity for nature and her ability to craft vivid landscapes through her compositions can already be heard, particularly in the first and third songs in this group. While the joy and hope of "The Year's at the Spring" and "I Send My Heart Up to Thee!" bookend the set, the middle composition, "Ah, Love but a Day," drips with angst. This song is an expression of the underlying fear and anxiety experienced by someone deeply in love—the fear that this love may be as fleeting as the changing seasons.

Florence B. Price was born in 1887 in Little Rock, Arkansas, an intellectually and artistically vibrant city that offered opportunity for upward mobility to its many Black residents. In 1903, Price left Little Rock to pursue music at the New England Conservatory in Boston. Following her time in Boston, she moved again to Atlanta, Georgia where she served as the director of the music department at Shorter University. She returned to Little Rock in 1912 to marry Thomas Price, at which time she found her hometown vastly changed. Jim Crow laws had stripped Black residents across the South of their personal and political rights, and a sharp increase in violence and intimidation terrorized Little Rock's Black community. The lynching of John Carter in May 1927 was a breaking point for the community. Price and her husband moved their family to Chicago along with an estimated six million other Black Americans from the South who relocated to cities in the Northeast and Midwest as part of the Great Migration. In Chicago, she found a community of artists and patrons who encouraged her composition and helped shape her musical development.

Price has long occupied an important place in American music history as the first Black female composer to have a symphony performed by a major American orchestra. In recent years, a renewed interest in her work has helped shine a much-deserved light on many of Price's lesser-known vocal and instrumental compositions. In 2009, an unsuspecting couple discovered a trove of Price's works, including a stash of previously unknown songs, in a dilapidated home in the suburbs of Chicago. The discovery sent a wave of excitement through the classical music community, and the eventual publication of these works promises to add to the richness and importance of her contributions to the genre of American song. **"Hold Fast to Dreams," "To My Son,"** and **"Sympathy"** were published in 2015 as part of a new collection titled *44 Songs of*

Florence Price, and are settings of texts by Langston Hughes, Julia Johnson Davis, and Paul Laurance Dunbar, respectively.

John Kander's poignant setting of the final letter penned by Major Sullivan Ballou of the Rhode Island Division, reminds us of the human cost of war. Known primarily for his work in musical theater (as one half of the songwriting team, Kander & Ebb, who wrote *Cabaret* and *Chicago*), this dramatic contribution to the song literature highlights the personal sacrifice that many have paid in the pursuit of the freedoms we now enjoy.

Scan here to view the text of the letter on the National Park Service's website:



The rich harmonies of **H. Leslie Adams'** compositions reflect the powerful texts to which he was drawn. Edna St. Vincent Millay's poems were among his favorites, and he dedicated an entire collection of songs to her texts. "**For You There is No Song**" and "**Branch by Branch**" are both part of this collection of *Five Millay Songs* and offer a sobering reflection on our collective responsibility to shine a light on injustice and be a voice for those who have been silenced. "**Amazing Grace**" features both text and music by the composer and is his personal response to the widely known hymn of the same name.

American composer **Jake Heggie** wrote this set of four songs, *Iconic Legacies: First Ladies at the Smithsonian*, in collaboration with lyricist Gene Scheer. The cycle features original texts inspired by iconic objects in the Smithsonian's permanent collections: a

portrait of Marian Anderson in her mink coat, a signed Christmas card from the Kennedys, Abe Lincoln's famous top hat, and a photo of Barbara Bush on the set of *Sesame Street*.

Scan to visit the "Virtual Gallery"

This gallery includes links to images and narrative context surrounding the objects and people that are the subjects of Jake Heggie's *Iconic Legacies*.



Connections: It is interesting to note the close relationship between Marian Anderson and Florence Price. As Anderson gained recognition as one of the great contraltos of the 20th century, she used her fame to elevate the voices of Black composers (and especially Black women composers). It was no accident that at her 1939 Easter Sunday recital at the Lincoln Memorial, Marian Anderson chose to close her recital with a performance of Price's "My Soul is Anchored in the Lord."

The final group of songs celebrates the role of jazz and the African-American spiritual in shaping the rich tradition of American song. Contemporary American art song often blends the language of classical music, jazz, and musical theatre. The first piece in this group, "**I Dream a World**," is a contemporary setting, brimming with jazz influences, of one of Langston Hughes' most iconic texts. Hughes' dream of equality seems as relevant today as when the words were first penned in 1941. This fresh setting by pianist

Sarah Ruff and soprano **Christine Jobson** is a welcome addition to the contemporary song literature.

Undine Smith Moore's arrangement of **“Is There Anybody Here That Loves My Jesus?”** is a moving interpretation of the traditional spiritual. The text and music celebrate the promise of a life in glory, long after the suffering of our earthly life has faded away. Moore, known as the “Dean of Black Women Composers,” was an influence on generations of composers who followed in her footsteps. Moore was a professor of music at Virginia State University. While there, she co-founded the Black Music Center, dedicated to promoting the works of Black composers, scholars, and artists.

“You Can Tell the World” is from a collection of *Five Creek-Freedman Spirituals* arranged by **Margaret Bonds**. By 1861, it is estimated that 8,000-10,000 Africans were enslaved throughout Native American territory. “You Can Tell the World” is the last of five songs in this collection attributed to the enslaved people of the Creek (Muscogee) Tribe. This work was out of print until 2021, when the Videmus label released a new anthology, *Rediscovering Margaret Bonds: Art Songs, Spirituals, Musical Theater, and Popular Songs*. The anthology includes several previously unpublished works by the prolific composer.

Connections: Margaret Bonds is undoubtedly one of the most influential American composers of the 20th century. She collaborated with many of the great singers of her time, including Marian Anderson and Leontyne Price. She was also a student of Florence B. Price.

You are Invited:

EMILY RIGGS

Master Class

Monday, February 19, 2024

10:00 – 11:30 AM

Perkinson Recital Hall



music.richmond.edu