

Florence Price

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Piano Teacher and Composer

Florence Price was a very gifted pianist, composer, and piano teacher. She provided her students with a solid background in technique and theory. Her students performed piano literature each week and did exercises in musical transposition. During this time, she discovered she had a gift for writing teaching pieces for children, primarily for the piano. "Rather than relying solely on piano method books of others, Price wrote in her own "studies" at the beginning, intermediate, and advanced levels, each emphasizing a different aspect of piano technique. Many of these pieces have fanciful titles that appeal to the imagination of children; none of the pieces at the elementary level was published (Brown, 119)." There are many simple works she composed from which she drew inspiration from African American folk traditions. Composing these pieces became a profitable endeavor and created a niche for her compositions. She was able to secure a publisher for her works, and many were accepted, but sadly many were not published.

Methodology

Florence Price's "Little Pieces on Black Keys" is not a piano method, but they are pieces accessible as supplementary repertoire for younger students. Many teachers today can teach these pieces by rote due to the current way it is written on the staff using sharps and flats. Using original copies of Price's compositions and the Volume 1: Beginning Pieces from this set edited by Lia Jensen-Abbott, I transcribed her music into pre-staff notation, making it more usable for today's beginner piano students that are familiar with this type of music. These pieces provide great alternatives for students to learn about Price and to experience the music of someone who was ahead of her time. These black key pieces did not have titles except for one. While many of today's methods have colorful illustrations, these did not. I worked with my beginner piano students in helping me create titles and images for some of her work. Some of my students were very creative in their art. They were very excited about helping their teacher with her project. I introduced them to Florence by showing them a picture of her and providing some history about her and her accomplishments as the first black American female composer. I hope to increase the relevancy of Price's work for today's students and for them to be more accessible for 21st-century beginner students.

20th Century Piano Teaching Pieces for Today's Beginners

Biography

Noticeably unrepresented in current method books, Florence Price's *Piano Teaching Music* provides a historical look into her life during the early 20th century. Florence Price was born in Little Rock, Arkansas, during post-Reconstruction. She gave her first piano recital at the age of four. Price composed her first piece at the age of eleven and submitted it to be published. Sadly, the whereabouts of these compositions are still unknown. She was valedictorian of her high school at the age of 14. Price entered the New England Conservatory of Music at the age of 15, where she majored in organ performance and piano pedagogy. It was there that she began to embrace her culture and use it as a basis for her compositions.

Original Work of Florence Price



Music for today's beginner students

#3 The Band

Florence Price
arr. D. Dear

#4 Lullaby

Florence Price
arr. D. Dear

Handwritten musical notation for 'The Band' and 'Lullaby' is shown below the illustrations. The notation uses pre-staff notation with numbers 1-5 and letters L, R for left and right hands. It includes piano (p) and forte (f) markings. A keyboard diagram is provided for each piece, showing the specific keys to be played.