

Florence Price wrote Song of Hope in 1930 for orchestra, large choir, and multiple vocal soloists, but it was never performed. It was discovered in an envelope with "return postage guaranteed" written on it, indicating that she had sent it to a publisher, but it was rejected. The piece was lost to time until G. Schirmer bought the rights to her music in 2018. A friend of mine found her original manuscript in the Library of Congress and passed it along to me, knowing that I was in the process of planning my final graduate conducting recital. The piece was published professionally less than a year ago, and by all accounts, we will be premiering a 92 year old piece on March 26, 2022.

The project has been an amazing examination of community allyship. I have emphasized time and time again to the orchestra that this performance isn't about me and it's not about them...it's about elevating the voice of a historically and systemically excluded composer and giving a new light to her music. Programming a piece for which no recordings exist and the composer isn't alive to make corrections or give advice is unfathomable, and incredibly uncommon. It's my hope that the resources that we have here at Ithaca College will serve as a springboard to bring this piece into the canon of classical music.

The piece will be a collaboration between the three primary educational institutions in Ithaca, with the choir being comprised of the Ithaca High School Chorale, Cornell University Chamber Singers, and Ithaca College Madrigal Singers alongside the Ithaca College Symphony Orchestra. The two soloists are Naya Griles (current senior) and Holden Turner (former student).

One of the major issues facing the sphere of classical music is its eurocentric roots. With white performers and composers dominating the idiom for so long because of our privilege, little space and opportunity has existed for non-white musicians. The process of working on a piece with no known recordings is unique in and of itself, but understanding the reasons why it hasn't yet been performed or recorded is a small step in grasping the impact of the music itself.

When Price composed the poetry in 1930, she had just moved to Chicago from Atlanta in order to escape the legal bounty that had been placed on her daughter's head under Jim Crow law. Her original poetry is a reflection of the determination, defiance, and hope that she felt as a Black woman living through immense struggle:

*I dare look up. The heaven's blue is mine!
Held in contempt and hated, still, Lord, I am Thine.
Tho' torn asunder, poisoned arrows reach my soul.
Because Thou Livest do I know that Thou shalt make me whole.*

*I dare look up through flames that, mounting high,
Consume my flesh. In faith I see Thee. Thou art nigh.
I would not that my anguish to Thy throne ascend,
For pain and sin and sorrow doth Thy mercy, Lord, transcend.*

*I dare look up! Thy promise made to me –
A humble creature, groping, will yet make me free.
Thy mighty plan, beyond my simple ken, assures
Thy love, surpassing human hope, protects me; still endures!*

By recognizing and acknowledging Price's hardships, we are better prepared and equipped to perform her music in a way that brings honor to her capabilities as a musician. As a white musician myself, I believe that the best way for me to be an ally is to continue to elevate the voices of Black musicians in a way that removes the focus from me and allows their stories to be heard.