

Program Notes

Undine Smith Moore (1904-1989) was often called “the Dean of African- American Women Composers.” Moore was the recipient of numerous honors for her work in music, including the Virginia Governor’s Award in the Arts; the Humanitarian Award from Fisk University; and Music Laureate of the State of Virginia, alongside many other awards and two honorary doctorates.

Born in rural Virginia, her family and community were enthusiastic supporters of her musical education. She received her bachelor’s degree from Fisk University in Tennessee, after which she returned to Virginia to accept a job teaching music at the high school level. Soon after, she was invited to join the faculty at Virginia State College (now Virginia State University) as a pianist. Later, she would become co-founder and co-director of the Black Music Center at Virginia State, which opened in 1968 and ran until she and its co-founder both retired in 1972. The center aimed to highlight the contributions of Black people to American music – both classical and popular - through public concerts and seminars.

From the beginning of her career at Virginia State, Moore’s duties included working with choirs at both the college and high school levels. She began creating arrangements and original compositions for her students to perform, and received much acclaim for her choral arrangements in particular. While choral works comprise the greatest part of her compositional output, she also composed numerous art songs for solo voice and piano, solo arrangements of spirituals, several compositions for piano, works for various chamber ensembles, and oratorios. The last group includes her “Scenes from the Life of a Martyr” based on the life of Martin Luther King. Her compositions number well over 100 in all.

This is noteworthy, given that for much of her career, especially in the early years, Moore thought of herself as a pianist and music educator, rather than as a composer. Only 26 of her works were published during her lifetime. Many of her compositions have been described as traditional and conservative in style.

The two songs we’re about to hear fit this description. Unapologetically tonal, both were composed for a soprano at Virginia State College where they were premiered in the mid-1970s. The words are by Florence Hines Willette, a writer about whom little is known. “**I am in Doubt**” describes a fragile love relationship. “**Lyric for Truelove**” is an unbridled rhapsodic declaration of passionate love.

Composed in 1896 when Rachmaninoff was just 23, the ***Moments Musicaux*** Op. 16 reflect his youthful passion and emerging virtuosity. No. 4 in E minor, marked *Presto*, is a brilliant toccata brimming with relentless rhythmic drive and stormy intensity, showcasing Rachmaninoff’s gift for creating drama through texture and momentum. In contrast, No. 5 in D-flat major, *Adagio sostenuto*, offers a moment of lyrical introspection. Rich, singing lines unfold over gentle, bell-like chords, evoking the Russian Orthodox chant style that so deeply influenced the composer. Together, these pieces highlight the emotional and technical range that would define Rachmaninoff’s mature style.

“**Vantage Points**” was written in 2019 for trombonist Douglas Mark and violinist Anne-Gaëlle Ravetto. At its core, the piece is a dialogue between the two instruments. Similar to a conversation between two people, the mood changes throughout the piece (mellow, pleasant, and even contentious at times). The title refers to the idea of looking at something (an object, an issue, or a situation) and arriving at different conclusions, based on the circumstances surrounding that entity.

Arkansas-born composer **Florence Price** (1887-1953) received her musical education in piano and organ at New England Conservatory in Boston. After graduation, she taught at various schools, including Shorter College in Little Rock, Arkansas and Clark University in Atlanta, where she served as head of the music department. In 1927, she moved her family to Chicago where she immersed herself in the musical scene. Price won the 1932 Wannamaker Prize for composition for

her Symphony in E Minor. The prize was a performance of the work by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. With this achievement, Price became the first African American woman to have a work played by a major symphony orchestra. Through her friendship with fellow-composer Margaret Bonds, Price became acquainted with the poet Langston Hughes, and with the great contralto, Marian Anderson. Anderson would later perform Price's arrangement of "My Souls' Been Anchored" in the Lord at her famous 1939 concert at the Lincoln Memorial.

Her compositional output totals more than 300 works, among them art songs, spirituals, chamber works, symphonies, and pieces for piano, organ, and violin. Her style, based in classical European tradition, also encompassed the sound of African American spirituals, especially certain rhythms.

This is true of "**My Soul's Been Anchored in the Lord**. "Note that while the vocal line is repetitive, the rhythms in the piano part vary with the emphasized beat landing at different parts of the bar with each verse.

The words to "**Night**" are by Louise C. Wallace. Little is known about the poet, other than that Price was acquainted with her, respected her and her work, and set this and one other poem by Wallace to music. "Night" is a lyrical song in a highly Romantic style.

Ellen Mandel is a composer known for her art songs set to texts by poets like E.E. Cummings, Seamus Heaney, W.B. Yeats, and Thomas Hardy. Her songs have been performed at notable venues and festivals in the U.S. and internationally, including in Ireland, Scotland, and Germany. Mandel has also composed music for over 80 plays, earning nominations and awards for productions such as Medea and Death of a Salesman. Her theatre work spans companies like the Phoenix Theatre Ensemble and New Yiddish Rep. Additionally, she has created music and lyrics for children's shows, scored indie films, and contributed to dance, cabaret, and improv comedy.

Mandel has released six CDs featuring her settings of poetry and theatre music, with works ranging from Cummings and Heaney to Shakespeare. Her ability to bridge multiple genres, from theatre to cabaret, has earned her widespread recognition.

Performer Bios

Dr. Valentin M. Bogdan has been a professor at The W since 2013. He has performed across Europe, North America, and the Middle East, including the US, Canada, the Netherlands, Great Britain, France, Russia, Italy, Romania, and Jordan. Notable venues include the Assisi Festival (Italy), Moscow Composers' House (Russia), Prokofiev Museum (Russia), Spectrum Festival (Russia), Sala Patria (Romania), and Transilvania University Concert Series (Romania), plus many more in the US.

Dr. Bogdan has appeared as a soloist with the Starkville Symphony, the Assisi Performing Arts Orchestra (Italy), the Varna Symphony (Bulgaria), and the Wayne State Symphony (Michigan). His discography includes two solo albums, The Grands of Piano and Live in Concert, and two piano duo albums, Journey for Two and Music by Women, recorded with his partner in the Mortyakova/Bogdan piano duo.

Throughout his career, Dr. Bogdan has earned numerous awards, including the Mississippi Arts Commission Artist Fellowship (2018 and 2024), 2nd prize at the Ellis Duo Piano Competition, 2nd prize at the International Varna Symphonic Workshop Concerto Competition, and the WSU Concerto Competition. He received the Livonia Arts Commission Award, the Mu Phi Epsilon Prize, and the ASCAP PLUS Award. Dr. Bogdan earned his Doctor of Music degree from the University of Miami Frost School of Music, two Master of Music degrees from the University of Miami and Michigan State University, and a Bachelor of Music degree from Wayne State University.

Dr. Susan Hurley has performed 25 principal operatic roles and sung as a concert soloist in Germany, Austria, and throughout the U.S. She is the founding Artistic Director of Phoenix Arizona's AIDS Quilt Songbook benefit concert series, which will present its eleventh concert this November. Dr. Hurley has presented numerous performances, lecture recitals, masterclasses, and talks for the International Congress of Voice Teachers (Vienna, 2022 and Stockholm, 2017); Southern Regional NATS; Mississippi NATS; Music Teachers National Association; College Music Society, and at universities throughout the South and midwest. Dr. Hurley also authored the chapter on Tomatis listening in the book, *So You Want to Sing with Awareness* which was published in 2020 by Rowman and Littlefield.

She serves as Professor of Voice at Mississippi University for Women in Columbus, MS, where she teaches Applied Voice, Opera Workshop, and Voice Pedagogy. Current and former voice students have won top prizes at national, regional, and state competitions and have advanced to masters level study at competitive graduate programs. She earned her Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Vocal Performance from Arizona State University.

Zane Lynn, tenor, currently serves as Instructor of Voice at Mississippi University for Women in Columbus, MS. His performance career encompasses a range of concert, recital, and operatic engagements. Operatic roles include Fernando in Mozart's *Così fan tutte* with the Portland Opera Workshop, Herr Vogelsang in *Der Schauspieldirektor*, Mayor Upfold in Britten's *Albert Herring*, and Marcellus in Nancy Van de Vate's *Hamlet* with the Moravian Philharmonic. These diverse performance experiences continue to inform his pedagogical approach, integrating professional artistry with applied instruction in vocal technique and interpretation.

Prior to his appointment at Mississippi University for Women, Zane served on the faculty of Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College, where his responsibilities included directing two choirs, teaching applied voice, leading a music theatre workshop, and instructing courses in music theory. He holds a Bachelor of Music in Music Education from Mississippi University for Women and a Master of Music in Vocal Performance from the University of Mississippi. His teaching emphasizes the development of technical skill, musical expression, and professional preparation, while fostering an environment that supports student growth as both vocalists and musicians.

Dr. Douglas Mark is Associate Professor of Brass at the Mississippi University for Women in Columbus, MS. He provides instruction in applied brass, music education, music appreciation, and directs the MUW brass ensembles. Prior to his arrival at the W, he was Professor of Trombone/Low Brass at Delta State University in Cleveland, MS. He has held similar positions at the Hochstein School of Music, Hamilton College, Nazareth College, and Colgate University, all located in western NY.

An advocate of community music projects, Dr. Mark has participated in the NEA Chamber Music Rural Residency in Liberal, KS. He has performed internationally in Canada, France, Germany, Japan, Mexico, Russia and Taiwan.

In the summer months, Dr. Mark serves as resident artist and Dean of Students at the Atlantic Music Festival, located in Waterville, ME.

Dr. Mark received his DMA from the Eastman School of Music, where he studied with John Marcellus. He earned his MM from the New England Conservatory of Music and undergraduate degrees in music performance and sociology from Northwestern University. His musical training also included studies with John Swallow, Frank Crisafulli, and Per Brevig.

Dr. Mark is an artist-clinician for the Buffet Group USA and Antoine Courtois-Paris trombones.

Dr. Julia Mortyakova serves as Professor and Chair of the Department of Music at the Mississippi University for Women, a position she has held since 2012. A pianist, Dr. Mortyakova maintains an international performing career. She has performed solo recitals and appeared as soloist with orchestras in Bulgaria, Canada, Colombia, Ireland, Italy, Romania, Russia, Spain, Ukraine as well as throughout the United States. She is the recipient of the 2026 and 2022 Performing Arts Fellowships from the Mississippi Arts Commission, the 2023-2024 MUW Excellence in Creative Activity Award, and the 2023 Programming Award from the International Alliance for Women in Music. She is on the Mississippi Artist Roster.

Professor Mortyakova is the 2017 Mississippi Honored Artist (Mississippi State Committee of the National Museum of Women in the Arts). She is a member of the Mortyakova/Bogdan Piano Duo, the Second Prize winners of the 2017 Ellis Duo Piano Competition. Dr. Mortyakova's teaching was recently recognized by the 2025 Kossen Faculty Excellence Award (Mississippi University for Women), the 2023-2024 MUW Excellence in Teaching in Creative Spaces Award, and the 2023 Steinway Top Piano Teacher Award. Dr. Mortyakova is a strong advocate for women composers on and off the stage and she is the Founder and Artistic Director of the International Annual Music by Women Festival at the W, celebrating ten years (2017-present).

Professor Mortyakova is the author of *Class Piano* textbook, a method of individual and group piano study, now in its second edition and available from Kendall Hunt publishing. She has released multiple solo and piano duo albums featuring music by women composers and available on all major streaming services. Dr. Mortyakova is a graduate of Interlochen Arts Academy, Vanderbilt University, New York University, and the University of Miami.

Ms. Anne-Gaëlle Ravetto, violinist, serves as a faculty lecturer in the Mississippi University for Women Department of Music. She offers applied instruction in violin and is an instructor of string pedagogy in the music education curriculum.

Ms. Ravetto previously served as an adjunct faculty member at Delta State University in Cleveland, MS, Mississippi State University in Starkville, MS, and was on the violin faculty at the Hochstein School of Music in Rochester, NY. She performed regularly with the Rochester Oratorio Society, Air de Cour, the Kunde Chorale and the Rochester Broadway Theatre League.

She was a Resident Artist of the Banff (Alberta, Canada) Centre of the Arts, and received her Master of Music degree from the Eastman School of Music. Locally, she has performed with the Tupelo Symphony Orchestra and served as faculty member with the Mississippi Summer Arts Institute.

She has performed at numerous music festivals and academic conferences including the Heidelberg Castle Festival, the Ohio Light Opera, the Atlantic Music Festival, both National and regional conferences of the College Music Society, the Big 12 Trombone Conference and the American Trombone Workshop. Regional recital appearances include MUW's Music by Women festival, Rhodes College, University of Memphis, Henderson State University and UT- Martin, among others.

Dr. William Reber has been Music Director for more than 150 productions of operas and musicals and has been conductor of the Corpus Christi (TX) ballet since 1986. As a collaborative pianist, he has performed recitals with singers and instrumentalists in Germany, Austria, Macedonia and throughout the United States. He is the pianist and music director for the annual AIDS Quilt Songbook benefit performances in Phoenix. Dr. Reber earned his Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Opera and Conducting at The University of Texas at Austin.

He is currently Director of Choirs and Staff Pianist at MUW, Professor Emeritus of Opera and Music Theatre at Arizona State University where he was on the faculty for 24 years and served as Artistic Director and Principal Conductor of the Lyric Opera Theatre. He is former vocal coach, pianist and conductor for the Mittelsächsisches Theater in Germany, was head of the vocal coaching program for the American Institute of Musical Studies in Graz, Austria (12 years) and was Music Director of the German Opera Experience in Freiberg, Germany (10 years). In summer 2019, he joined the faculty of Spotlight on Opera as conductor and collaborative pianist and was appointed music director from 2020-2023.