

Summer Concert



Saturday 6th July 2024
St Mary's Church, Banbury

Programme Free



Concert Dates for Your Diary

Trinity
Camerata

Sunday 14th July 2024

Ludwig van Beethoven - Symphony No.9

4.00 p.m. – St Edburg’s Church, Bicester

Banbury Symphony Orchestra

Autumn Concert

Saturday 23rd November 2024

Ethel Smyth – *Overture, The Boatswain's Mate*

George Gershwin – *Concerto in F*

Soloist – Madalina Rusu

Ruth Gipps – *Symphony No.3*

7.30 p.m. – Deddington Church

Banbury Symphony Orchestra

Christmas Concert

Saturday 7th December 2024

A programme of fun festive favourites!

4.00 pm - St Mary’s Church, Banbury

Tickets from

www.banburysymphony.com

Programme

Vítězslava Kaprálová — *Suita Rustica*

- I Allegro
- II Lento – Vivo – Lento
- III Allegro ma non troppo

Igor Stravinsky — *The Firebird Suite (1919)*

- I Introduction,
The Firebird and its Dance,
Variation of the Firebird
- II The Princesses' Khorovod (Rondo)
- III Infernal Dance of King Kashchei
- IV Lullaby
- V Finale

Interval

Florence Price — *Symphony No.1*

- I Allegro [ma] non troppo (E minor)
- II Largo, maestoso (E major)
- III Juba Dance: Allegro (A minor → C major)
- IV Finale: Presto (E minor)

Welcome to the Church of St Mary's

I am very pleased to welcome you all to our latest concert in the imposing surrounds of St Mary's Church in Banbury.

We have three pieces for you tonight: *Suita Rustica* by Vítězslava Kaprálová, composed in 1938, Stravinsky's 1919 suite from *The Firebird*, and finally Florence Price's *Symphony in E minor*, composed in 1932.

Vítězslava Kaprálová was only 23 when she composed her *Suita Rustica* in Paris, and it is a striking and very individual work, drawing on Czech folk idioms with influences of Stravinsky, Bartók and Martinů (who was also in Paris and who became passionately attached to her). Unfortunately, the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia in March 1939 cut off the source of much of her income, and made her life in Paris very difficult. Kaprálová died in the summer of 1940, probably of typhoid fever, aged only 25.

Igor Stravinsky's ballet music for *The Firebird*, first produced in Paris in 1910, was the composition which launched his career and made him into an overnight sensation. The music breaks new ground for the period, being full of driving rhythms, novel orchestral effects and vivid characterisation. The suite that you will hear tonight is the version he made in 1919.

Finally, we will be performing the *Symphony in E minor* by Florence Price, composed in Chicago in 1932, and premiered by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in the following year. This symphony is obviously inspired more by Dvořák than by Stravinsky, and

incorporates a number of influences from African-American spirituals and other aspects of African-American culture. The light-hearted third movement is particularly memorable for its jazzy dance tune.

I do hope that you enjoy the mix of familiar and unfamiliar pieces that we are performing tonight, and that you will return for our next concert in November.

Dave Settle,

Chair, Banbury Symphony Orchestra

chair@banburysymphony.org



Paul Willett – Conductor

Paul Willett is our Conductor and Musical Director. Paul studied violin, singing and piano as a student but his main instrument was the French horn on which he gained his Performance Diploma from The Royal College of Music at the age of 16. He then went on to read music on scholarship at The Queen's College, Oxford, and studied for his teaching certificate in Music and Physical Education at Reading University.

For several years Paul combined teaching and freelance playing. He has given solo recitals and performed concertos throughout the country. He was a member of The Five Winds, a group that performed both at home and abroad, and also on BBC radio. Paul worked as a brass teacher for Oxfordshire Music Service and was director of a Saturday Music School of 200 students.

Paul was the Director of Didcot Sixth Form and whilst he is now mostly retired to concentrate on his music making and



being a 'stay-at-home' dad to his son Alfie, he has continued working part-time at Didcot Girls' School where he was Deputy Headteacher for many years.

Anna Fleming - Leader

Anna was born in South Africa where she started playing the violin at the age of ten. She joined the South African National Youth Orchestra and after successfully completing her music degree, majoring in orchestral studies, Anna joined the Cape Philharmonic Orchestra in 1992.

Anna moved to England in December 1996 and a couple of months later, joined Banbury Symphony Orchestra. She became the leader 2000, a post that she has held ever since. As a committed Christian, Anna enjoys worshipping on the violin in her church worship group. Focusing primarily on private violin and viola tuition, Anna teaches all ages and particularly enjoys helping adults to learn to play. She can be contacted by email: annamusic@hotmail.co.uk.



Vítězslava Kaprálová

Suita Rustica

In Season Three of Amazon's series *Mozart in the Jungle*, at the grand opening of her cabaret called "Rustica," Lizzie introduces a composer:

"Vítězslava Kaprálová died when she was 25, but before she did, she wrote and conducted more than 50 pieces, at a time when women were supposed to be muses, not artists."

Vítězslava Kaprálová is not a made-up composer for a far-from-realistic television show about classical musicians. She was a real composer, and what "Lizzie" said about her is true.

She was born in Brno in what is now the Czech Republic. Her father was a composer and her mother was a singer. A prodigious child, she started composition lessons with her father. She entered the Brno conservatory when she was fifteen, and made her conducting debut when she was 20, the year she graduated from Brno. She then went to Prague to study composition and conducting at the conservatory there. While there, she completed what would be her most important work, the *Military Sinfonietta*. She graduated with high distinction from the Prague Conservatory in 1937 and then moved to Paris to study with Bohuslav Martinů—perhaps the most famous living Czech composer—and conducting with Charles



Munch. In 1938 she conducted her *Military Sinfonietta* for the International Society for Contemporary Music. That performance received praise in *Time* magazine:

"In its 16 years of existence, the society has now and then turned up a really golden egg... [the] *Military Sinfonietta* in one movement by 22-year-old Vítězslava Kaprálová, a good-looking Czechoslovakian girl. To composer Kaprálová, who conducted her own lusty, sprawling composition, went the afternoon's biggest hand."

In 1940, Kaprálová married Jiří Mucha. Two short months later, Kaprálová died from typhoid fever. She was soon forgotten except for the occasional footnote in studies of Martinů—her relationship with him deepened beyond

that of teacher/student. Only in the last decade has there been a resurgence in interest in Vítězslava Kaprálová.

She wrote her delightful *Suita Rustica*, on commission from Universal Edition, in less than a month. Conservative in style and based on Czech folk songs (she uses some of the same material that Bedřich Smetana uses in his *Bartered Bride*), it is one of her most popular works.

Igor Stravinsky

The Firebird Suite (1919)

The legend of a large glowing firebird with magical feathers and crystal eyes had appeared in many Russian fairy tales, and several of these involve Prince Ivan, son of the Tsar. In the early twentieth century, the great Russian impresario Sergei Diaghilev, founder of



the famous Ballet Russes, had introduced Russian culture and stories to life via ballet to Europe, and in 1909 he decided that a setting of *The Firebird* would be a fine choice after his success with the *Polovtsian Dances* from Borodin's *Prince Igor* in May of that year. For his new topic, he mixed a Russian story "Koschei the Deathless" and a child's poem from *A Winter's Journey*:

*...And in my dreams I see myself on a
wolf's back*

Riding along a forest path

*To do battle with a sorcerer-tsar
[Koschei]*

*In that land where a princess sits
under lock and key,*

Pining behind massive walls.

*There gardens surround a palace all
of glass;*

There Firebirds sing by night

And peck at golden fruit;...

In this version, the fairy tale narrates that Prince Ivan becomes lost while hunting and finds himself in a magic garden filled with golden apples and the exquisite firebird which he captures. For her freedom, she offers him a golden feather to give him aid should he ever need it. He does not know that he has actually trespassed into a garden owned by the evil Koschei, who can, at will, turn people into stone. Continuing on, he

finds himself in front of a large castle, Koschei's residence. On the front lawn, he meets 13 princesses (falling in love with number 13: Tsarevna) who are prisoners of Koschei: though allowed to play outside, they are turned into stone every day. Although he is captured by castle guards, he is saved from being turned to stone by the magic feather. The firebird then leads Koschei and his supporters in a wild dance, so exhausting that they fall asleep. The firebird tells him that Koschei's soul is housed in a large egg hidden in a casket. He destroys the egg, and therefore, the spell. The princesses are saved and he is betrothed to Tsarevna.

Diaghilev first asked Nikolai Tcherepnin for a score, but the composer fought with the choreographer, Michael Fokine, and quit. Diaghilev then asked Anatoly Lyadov to write the music but Lyadov for one reason or another (Procrastination? Confusion about whether he ever signed a commission to do so?) never seemed to get around to it and was basically fired. Thirdly, he gambled on the young, unknown Igor Stravinsky. The composer recalled: "The Firebird did not attract me as a subject. Like all story ballets it demanded descriptive music of a kind I did not want to write. I had not yet proved myself as a composer...in truth my reservations about the subject were a defence for my not being sure I could... I was flattered, of course, by the promise of a performance of my music in Paris..." He turned away from his work on his

opera, *The Nightingale*, to address this opportunity. As it turned out, in one night, Firebird launched Stravinsky into enormous prominence and was transformative in his career. "Mark him well...he is a man on the eve of celebrity," Diaghilev had prophesized to the ballerina Tamara Karsavina who was dancing the starring role, and he was right. Three very popular orchestral suites were later derived from the original score in 1911, 1919, and 1945.

The lavish Firebird premiere on June 25, 1910, was a huge success in every respect. The dancers, costumes, choreography, stage sets, and music dazzled Parisian audiences and critics alike. Stravinsky remembered, "The first night audience at the Paris opera glittered indeed... I sat in Diaghilev's box where at intermissions a stream of celebrities, artists, dowagers, writers, balletomanes appeared... I was called to the stage to bow at the conclusion and was recalled several times..."

Stravinsky's music followed the narrative closely per Diaghilev's instructions, but it was his orchestral coloration, sound effects, intoxicating themes, and novel rhythms that electrified the audience and illumed the fairy tale. In the final scene, the firebird does not appear. Apparently, she has flown away.

"I am more proud of the orchestration than the music itself." Stravinsky stated.

Some listening points:

In the beginning, the strings are asked to play sul ponticello (near the bridge), giving a special effect with shuddering repetitions (tremolos) lots of harp glissandi throughout (there are three harps) which add a swirling de-stabilized atmosphere. At the end of the introduction (the Magic Garden), notice the fairy-like effect of the string sliding notes (glissandi) at the close.

Notice herein, the Firebird's depiction, in the introduction, Stravinsky's use of chromatic lines which add a shimmering sound, reflecting glittering bird feathers.

In the Firebird's solo dance, syncopations add birdlike behaviour in rendering a musical bird portrait.

In the big Infernal Dance, listen for the brutal rhythms, the simultaneous combinations of different rhythms to create an unsettling and disorienting effect. The scoring is heavy with loud dynamics marked *fff* ... Trombone glissandi add to the frenzy, and the harps sometimes play on top of the strings to generate strange harmonic overtones.

At the conclusion, revel in the huge orchestration, and the extended seven-measure closing.

Florence Price

Symphony No.1

In 2009, a couple bought an old house outside of Chicago. In the attic, they found boxes filled with yellowed sheets of music. Every piece was written by the same woman — Florence Price. “Who is Florence Price?” they wondered.

This question, posed in these opening lines of a recent children's book, is one the entire music world has been asking in recent years. The old, dilapidated house sits in St. Anne, a tiny community little more than an hour south of Chicago, in Kankakee County. This had been Florence Price's summerhouse, long ago abandoned. The couple, the Gatwoods, were planning to renovate. Their discovery jump-started the renaissance of one of America's important musical figures, a Black



woman composer with strong ties to Chicago and to the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, whose music had long been overlooked, neglected and dismissed.

Florence Price had moved to Chicago with her family in 1927, making the Great Migration followed by thousands of Black Americans fleeing the terrors of living in the South and hoping to find a land of opportunity in Chicago. When she grew up in Little Rock, Arkansas, her father, Dr James H. Smith, a prosperous dentist, was one of Little Rock's most highly respected Black men. (The governor was rumoured to be his secret patient.) But Florence already saw herself as part of a larger musical world. In 1903, she began studies at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, completing the four-year program in three years and graduating with diplomas in both piano and organ, the only student to receive two degrees that year.

After graduation, Florence set aside her musical ambitions; she returned to Little Rock to teach and lived at home with her parents. After her father died in 1910, Florence's mother, who was of mixed race, sold all the family possessions, chose to pass for white, moved back to her hometown of Indianapolis, and vanished into the society of the majority. Florence moved from one teaching job to another, continued to give organ and piano recitals, married Thomas Jewell Price (the attorney who had helped

settle Dr Smith's estate), started a family, and settled into a comfortable middle-class life in a predominantly Black neighbourhood in Little Rock. Aside from the song she wrote after the birth of her first child, *To My Little Son*, she rarely found the time to compose anything.

But she did not give up. She spent the summers of 1926 and 1927 in Chicago, where she studied composition at Chicago Musical College, and no doubt realized that this was the place to build her career and live a better life, remote from the rising racial tension in Little Rock and the attacks and crimes and lynchings that had begun to spread throughout the city, sweeping into her family's own neighbourhood. Her arrival in Chicago placed her on the cusp of the Black Chicago Renaissance.

Even in Chicago, composing music did not come easily. After the Depression, her husband was often without work; he grew angry and abusive. He moved out of the family house in March 1930. The next January, Price was granted a divorce and custody of their two daughters. By then she had begun to write music on a larger scale, reflecting a new certainty that composing was her calling.

In January 1931, Price began the score that would change her life — a symphony in E minor, her first big orchestral piece. She worked on the score for much of the year (a broken foot

gave her a bonus of uninterrupted time to compose). Sometimes, to make ends meet, she accompanied silent films on the organ in movie houses along “The Stroll,” a stretch of South State Street between Twenty-sixth and Thirty-ninth Streets, the heart of Chicago’s Black community. As she struggled to put her life back together and become the composer she wanted to be, in a world that viewed her through a prism of fierce prejudices, she cannot have dreamed that the most unlikely thing would happen: that Frederick Stock and the Chicago Symphony would give the world premiere of her symphony at the 1933 World’s Fair—the Century of Progress International Exposition.

In February 1932, Price entered four of her new works in the Rodman Wanamaker Competition, named for the department store owner and established five years earlier to support African American composers. Price’s symphony took the \$500 first prize in the orchestral category (her tone poem, *Ethiopia’s Shadow in America*, received honourable mention). That same year, Stock was named music advisor for the exposition, set in Chicago to honour the city’s centennial, and he began to look around for new scores that would represent the state of music in America. “Chicago talent first and American talent second,” he said. “European representation will be drastically limited.” Although Stock did not know Price, he picked her unpublished first symphony as the

centrepiece of a concert to be given on 15 June 1933, in the Auditorium Theatre. (We have since learned that Maude Roberts George, president of the Chicago Music Association, and a critic for the *Chicago Defender*, raised the funds to underwrite the cost of the concert.) Despite the excitement and the applause that night, no one at the time entirely recognized the history-book significance of the occasion: this was the first performance of a large-scale composition by a Black woman composer given by one of the major U.S. orchestras.

“It is a faultless work, a work that speaks its own message with restraint and yet with passion,” the critic for the *Chicago Daily News* wrote, “. . . worthy of a place in the regular symphonic repertory.” More telling was the reception in the Black press. “No one could have sat through that program . . . and not felt, with a sense of deep satisfaction, that the Race is making progress in music,” wrote Robert Abbot, editor of the *Chicago Defender*, arguably the most important and most widely read Black publication in America at the time. “First there was a feeling of awe as the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, an aggregation of master musicians of the white race, and directed by Dr Frederick Stock, internationally known conductor, swung into the beautiful, harmonious strains of a composition by a Race woman.” In the same paper, Nahum Daniel Brasher

wrote, “It is the beginning of a new era for us in the world of music.”

Dressed in a long, white gown, Price was called to the stage again and again after the performance to share the enthusiastic response with Stock and the Orchestra members. It was a startlingly unfamiliar sight: a lone Black woman in an all-white, all-male community, the image perfectly symbolizing the singularity of Black success in the blinding whiteness of the mainstream classical music world.

As in the old European model — including Dvořák’s long-famous *New World Symphony* of 1893 — Price’s *Symphony No. 1* has four movements in the familiar sequence: a broad and vigorous opening *Allegro* in sonata form, a slow movement, a dance-like “scherzo,” and a big, rousing finale. But the material they are made from — the colours of their harmonies, the cut of their melodies, the sonorities of the instrumental combinations — often come from a different world. Price begins her first symphony with a syncopated bassoon solo that immediately recalls Dvořák’s *New World*, but as the first movement continues — in textbook sonata form — Price’s own distinct voice emerges from the fabric of late-nineteenth-century symphonic tradition. For her second movement, a stately *Largo*, Price writes a new hymn for brass choir that grows into a

movement nearly as spacious and substantial as the first.

For the third movement — where Mozart wrote minuets and Beethoven composed scherzos — Price writes “Juba,” based on the syncopations of “pattin’ juba” — the sort of slave fiddler and banjo player music Solomon Northup describes in his 1853 autobiography, *Twelve Years a Slave*:

The patting is performed by striking the hands on the knees, then striking the hands together, then striking the right shoulder with one hand, the left with the other — all the while keeping time with the feet and singing.

The finale is an energetic rondo that makes abundant use of the pentatonic scale, familiar throughout jazz and blues, a new-world interpretation of an old-world form.

An important postscript

Six months after the premiere, Price ran into Stock on Michigan Avenue. They stopped to talk. He agreed to let her sit in on some Chicago Symphony rehearsals — two days later she heard Artur Schnabel and Stock prepare Beethoven’s Fourth Piano Concerto — and he encouraged her to continue work on her new piano concerto. But he did not program it — or any of Price’s other works. Her subsequent appeals to Serge Koussevitzky, music director of the Boston Symphony and a well-known champion of new music, are now classics

in the long history of composers cast aside because of their colour or gender. She wrote to him seven times, beginning in 1935, making the case for her symphonies. “To begin with,” she wrote in a long letter on 5 July, 1943, “I have two handicaps — those of sex and race. I am a woman; and I have some Negro blood in my veins. I should like to be judged on merit alone.” In another: “Unfortunately the work of a woman composer is preconceived by many to be light, froth, lacking in depth, logic, and virility,” she said. “Add to that the incident of race — I have Coloured blood in my veins — and you will understand some of the difficulties that confront one in such a position.”

She received two responses from Koussevitzky’s secretary. In 1944, Koussevitzky finally looked at one of Price’s scores, but he never conducted any of her music. Early in 1951, Price received a telegram from Sir John Barbirolli, who had heard about her during his time as music director of the New York Philharmonic, asking her to write a concert overture or a suite based on Black American spirituals that he could play with his current orchestra, the Hallé Orchestra in Manchester, England. Price did write an overture — the score is now lost—and Barbirolli premiered it in the spring of 1951, but Price was in the hospital at the time for an extended stay and could not travel to hear it. She died of a stroke in Chicago two years later.

In 1964, an elementary school on South Drexel Boulevard, in North Kenwood, near Price’s old neighborhood, was named for her. But in 2011, Chicago Public School officials closed Florence B. Price Elementary after four years of chronic poor performance on state standardized tests. The manuscripts discovered in St. Anne contained many lost works, including two violin concertos and a fourth symphony— music that came painfully close to vanishing forever. The Chicago Symphony did not play another note of Price’s music until May 2013, when it programmed her Mississippi River Suite. Riccardo Muti originally planned to give the first Chicago performances of Price’s Third Symphony in Orchestra Hall in the spring of 2020, but those concerts were among the first to be cancelled in the pandemic. Muti was able to perform the Third Symphony in May 2022 —eighty-nine years after the Orchestra unveiled her first symphony (her second is lost, aside from a single page). He and the Orchestra then took the Third Symphony on tour in January, where it was given its first European performances in Luxembourg and in Vienna’s legendary Musikverein concert hall.

As the book *Who Is Florence Price?* says at the end, “Today Florence’s music can be heard all around the world, just like she dreamed of when she was young.”

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