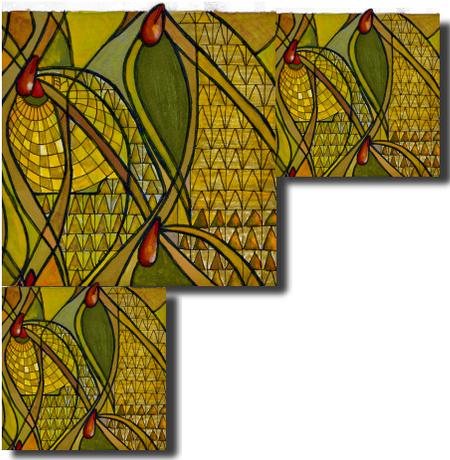


Women Are...

A Reflection and Celebration of
Women's Challenges, Persistence
and Growth

Our story





WOMEN ARE...

An all-female commissioning project by
Hats + Heels in Summer 2020

INSPIRATION:

This project was inspired by the year 2020 - the 200th anniversary of voting rights activist's Susan B. Anthony's birth and 100th anniversary after the passage of the 19th Amendment, which guaranteed women the right to vote in every state in the Union. In essence, it's the year of women.

With that in mind, we developed a project that included the commissioning of current female composers and artists to create new, interdisciplinary repertoire and images that focused on stories, figures, characters, and topics about women.

While it was important to reflect back upon the remarkable suffragettes who made such huge contributions to women's lives, we wanted to also acknowledge what it means to be a woman today and consider the challenges and growth across time. We provided very general guidelines to our commissioned composers allowing them the autonomy to draw upon their own inspiration and experiences for their work. Meanwhile, while the commissioned composers developed their pieces, we looked for existing repertoire, also written by women, that would fit our theme. In our search we discovered some fantastic works by Megan Bledsoe Ward and Florence Price that rounded out our current concert.

WOMEN ARE CURIOUS – Alice in Wonderland by Esther Swift

- i Drink Me
- ii Drowning in my Tears
- iii I'm Mad, You're Mad
- iv Everything has a Moral

"I have always loved the story of Alice In Wonderland, partly because of its absurdity and partly because of Alice's autonomy and self-conviction in the face of adversity. To me it presents as an alternative coming-of-age story in which the heroin is adventure and bravery, always choosing to act on her curiosity.

Drink Me leads Alice down the rabbit hole with a hesitant tune that gathers momentum and confidence as it goes on. At first Alice questions whether she should take the plunge into the unknown, but her curiosity gets the better of her and she drinks the potion and let's the adventure unfold.





Drowned In My Own Tears uses an image of despair mixed with ridiculousness. It highlights a play-fullness that recurs in the story, reminding us not to take ourselves too seriously, even when we feel despair.

I'm Mad, You're Mad is a gradual but glorious unravelling of Alice's state of mind, and questions the expectations put on girls to appear meek and quiet, even if deep down they feel like screaming. This movement highlights the sweet release of chaos and the freedom found in losing control.

Everything Has A Moral returns to themes from the first three movements but with a new found reflective calm. Alice is going home after she has conquered her adversaries using her courage, conviction and wit. A wise warrior now, she can face the real world again as a strong, independently minded young woman." – Esther Swift

EDUCATION:

Throughout the development of our project we continued our topic exploration which included a visit to the recently re-opened Susan B. Anthony Museum here in Rochester, NY. Despite having lived in Rochester for 8 years, this was our first visit.

Susan B. Anthony was one of the leaders of the original suffragettes. She co-founded and presided over the National American Woman Suffrage Association along with Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The goal of the group was to coordinate and spearhead the movement. The suffragette movement set the stage for the writing of the 19th amendment, also known as the Susan B. Anthony Amendment during its passage. The Amendment, ratified in August 1920, guaranteed (some) women the right to vote.

"Oh, if I could but live another century and see the fruition of all the work for women! There is so much yet to be done." — Susan B. Anthony

"The day may be approaching when the whole world will recognize woman as the equal of man." — Susan B. Anthony

Susan B. was a close friend to the famed abolitionist, author and diplomat Frederick Douglass. Douglass was a staunch feminist and fought for women's rights. Susan B., in turn, was an avid supporter of black men having the right to vote. Douglass could be quite the controversial figure and quite often Susan B. would ask that he not attend certain suffragette protests both for





his own safety and theirs. Although these two notable figures supported each other's causes, this was not universal across the board. Some abolitionists did not believe women should have the right to vote and some suffragettes believed that black people should not have the right to vote. Interestingly, despite the connection between Douglass and Susan B., it was the British suffragette movement that paid for Douglass' freedom from slavery.

Additionally, Susan B. worked with black women fighting for rights both as women and people of color. The poet Frances E.W. Harper, in May, 1866, addressed the Eleventh National Women's Rights Convention in New York City where she sat on the platform with Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. We recommend you read the [address](#) if you get the chance. She speaks of her husband's death and how a neighbor went before a magistrate and swore that Harper was not a resident of her home, forcing her eviction, due to the color of her skin. She also mentions that fighting for and winning the right to vote will not magically fix prejudice, and indeed it hasn't, but it was a significant step towards having a voice and autonomy within society.

WOMEN ARE INVENTIVE – com-po-si by Amy Nam

"Prompted to base the piece loosely on women's social movements, I recalled learning in an introductory French class that the lack of neutral gender in grammar has been an issue that French feminists have attempted to address many times. Especially since the 1980s, there has been a huge push for (and subsequent pushback against) *écriture inclusive*, inclusive writing. Feminists argue that gendered language leads to sexist outcomes, while traditionalists claim it is a waste of resources to change a language, inherited from thousands of years of development, and that additionally there is not enough research to support the assertion that language changes reality.

I have personal experience interfacing with this lack of neutral gender in French—during my time studying in Montreal, I had to choose whether I was a "compositeur" or a "compositrice" when my music was presented on recital programs. On one hand, I am glad that this binary isn't present in English and that I can usually just call myself a "composer." But I did enjoy the dignity of having my own word, as opposed to being a "woman composer" as I am often called in English. While I don't have a problem with that term on its own, I find it is used in an asymmetrical way. I've never heard anyone say "man composer" (apparently this is the default?).

One night as I mulled over these things, I had a half-asleep vision in which a bassoon said "compositeur," and a harp answered, "compositrice!" I imagined the bassoon and harp saying those words over and over again in different rhythms to form an evolving ostinato, and this became the beginning of the piece.





In 2017, the prime minister of France banned gender neutral French in all government documents. But being prompted to write the piece in response to the idea that “women are optimistic,” and believing this myself, the music grew into an energetic dialog between the two instruments, playful, driving, and forward looking.” – Amy Nam

REFLECTION:

There is one composer represented in our program that could not speak for herself about her pieces, as she is a composer of the past. We want to take a moment to tell her story. She was a remarkable woman who lived right in the middle of many movements, including suffragette. Born in 1887, Florence Price was a prodigy - publishing her first composition at 11 years old and enrolling in the New England Conservatory (NEC) at 15. While studying, she won numerous diplomas for her piano and organ playing and was often selected to perform on special recitals. It was at the NEC that she received her formal composition lessons.

After her schooling, Price would go on to Little Rock, Arkansas to teach music at an Academy and local College, ultimately becoming the head of the music department at Clark Atlanta University in Atlanta, Georgia.

She, her husband, and their children moved to Chicago in the late 1920's, and in 1931 divorced, making Florence a single mother of two. Not a year later, while continuing her composition studies at local universities, her career as a composer kicked off. She won the Wanamaker Music Composition Contest with a symphony and then became nationally known. Over the course of her career she would compose 300 works, many orchestral, chamber and vocal songs, which were published by major publishing houses, and some were featured weekly on the WGN radio broadcasts.

As a woman, becoming a nationally recognized composer in the 1930's was truly a spectacular feat. But even more remarkable was that she did this as a black woman. The Wanamaker Music Competition she won in 1932 was performed by the all-white male Chicago Symphony Orchestra, making her the first black woman to be performed by a major American orchestra.

She was a “black nationalist” and a strong supporter of women, using inspiration from her background and own experiences - such as spirituals and poetry - in her works. Yet, even after being considered the first African American female symphonic composer, her name was often put last on programs, with her first name spelled out unlike her male counterparts. Her work long forgotten after her death in 1950, with many of her pieces now lost, she is still not taught in music schools today.





WOMEN ARE STRONG – Hold Fast to Dreams & My Little Son by Florence B. Price

The two selections are arrangements of vocal pieces with the following lyrics:

Hold Fast to Dreams by Langston Hughes

Hold fast to dreams
 For if dreams die
 Life is a broken winged bird
 That cannot fly

Hold fast to dreams
 For when dreams go
 Life is a barren field
 Frozen with snow

To My Little Son by Julia Johnson Davis

In your face I sometimes see
 Shadowings of the man to be,
 And, eager,
 Dream of what my son shall be,
 Dream of what my son will be,
 In twenty years and one.

When you are to manhood grown,
 And all your manhood ways are known,
 Then shall I, blissful, try to trace
 The child you once were in your face.

We selected these two pieces because we thought they rang true to parts of Price's identity, both professional and personal. The first is Hold Fast To Dreams - an idea that she herself fully pursued, despite resistance. The second song, My Little Son - a reflection on motherhood, written by Julia Davis. She ponders what type of man her son might grow up to be. Florence herself had a son, but unfortunately, he did not survive past infancy and therefore she would never know who he would become.





REPRESENTATION:

Rochester, NY, the home of Hats + Heels, happens to be the home of the suffragettes movement in America, as this is where Susan B. Anthony lived for forty years. Interestingly, Manchester, England, where Rosy is from, is the home of the British suffragettes movement under Emmeline Pankhurst. As we delved into this topic, we learned about some of the symbolism that both sides adopted - specifically colors and images.

The suffragette colors of England wore Purple, Green, and White. Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, editor of Votes for Women newspaper stated:

"Purple, as everyone knows is the royal colour, it stands for the royal blood that flows in the veins of every suffragette, the instinct of freedom and dignity... white stands for purity in private and public life... green is the colour of hope and the emblem of spring."

In America the colors were Purple, White, and Gold. The reason America adopted gold instead of green was because in 1867 Kansas was considering passage of a state suffrage referendum and their state flower was a sunflower. Susan B. Anthony adopted the flower as the movement's symbol. To tip our hat to these symbols and have agreed to wear these colors and sunflowers whenever performing pieces from this collection.

WOMEN ARE COMPLICATED – My Doll Janie by Ellie Cherry

"My Doll Janie is a multimedia work combining spoken text with a musical dramatic underscore supplied by bassoon and harp. Both the title and textual elements are drawn from the 1920 poem "Sun-Up and Other Poems" by Irish-born American immigrant and author Lola Ridge (1873-1941), who throughout her life was an ardent activist in race, class, and gender issues. Her tireless interest in equalizing the rights of oppressed demographics often permeated her art. In "My Doll Janie," Ridge delivers a look into the impressions and experiences that shaped her as a person through the perspective of herself as a little girl. The little girl's doll, Janie, reappears at regular intervals throughout the poem, lacing it with a symbolic motif that is harrowing in its simultaneous darkness and innocence. With each subsequent appearance, the doll motif acquires more and more sinister elements, each of which is preceded by an incident in the little girl's life that brutally awakens her to the oppression and injustice of the world she is forced to grow up in. For example, when the little girl is yet optimistic about life and her potential and





worth as an individual, the first appearance of the little girl's doll in the poem is simple, innocent, and impassive:

Christmas day
 I found Janie on my pillow.
 Janie is made of rubber.
 Her red and blue jacket won't come off.

However, as both the poem and the little girl's comprehension of the world develop, she begins to abuse her doll and grow frustrated with its fixed physical appearances:

My doll Janie has no waist and her body is like a tub with feet on it.
 Sometimes I beat her
 but I always kiss her afterwards.
 When I have kissed all the paint off her body

I shall tie a ribbon about it
 so she shan't look shabby.
 But it must be blue--
 it mustn't be pink--
 pink shows the dirt on her face
 that won't wash off.

In my setting of Ridge's poem, I wanted to parallel the motivic and symbolic significance of the little girl's doll by uniting it with a recurring musical motif, which, like Janie, is initially innocent and benign in character but is then tainted with increasingly sinister sonic elements upon each subsequent appearance. As a symbol, I interpreted Janie and the little girl's treatment of her to be a reflection of the little girl's own evolving understanding of herself and her interactions with the adults in her life. Consequently, as the once confident and ambitious little girl is repeatedly beaten down by the forces of bias and oppression in her reality, admiration for her doll morphs into frustration as she in turn beats Janie. Not unlike Janie, the little girl's "red and blue jacket won't come off"; regardless of the contents of her mind, her body is female, and in the world she was born into, it is these fixed physical traits that are prioritized in the assessment of her function and value in society." – Ellie Cherry.

CONNECTION:

We want to take a moment and thank all of those who support this project. Thanks to you, not





only could we proceed with our vision of *Women Are*, but we were also able to pay it forward. Of the donations received, 50% went to [ROCmusic](#) Collaborative - an [El Sistema](#)-inspired after-school and summer musical education program in Rochester, NY. They provide tuition-free classical music and instrument instruction to urban youth in the neighborhoods in which they live. The director of the program stated that he was truly humbled by the support AND he would guarantee the funds would be specifically used for students and their instruction.

WOMEN ARE FEARLESS – Nevertheless by Megan Bledsoe Ward

Commissioned for BARP by Archipelago Collective

“This piece was inspired by Elizabeth Warren, who in 2017 objected to the confirmation of Jeff Sessions as U.S. Attorney General by reading a letter by Coretta Scott King that spoke to Sessions’ abuse of power in silencing minority voices and actively impeding social justice advocacy. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell objected to this letter being read on the senate floor, on the grounds that it impugned the conduct of a fellow senator. McConnell later spoke of the incident by stating that even though she was warned not to continue reading the letter, “Nevertheless, she persisted.”

This line, “Nevertheless, she persisted,” has become a rallying cry for progressives, feminists, and social justice advocates across the country, and it was very inspiring to me in its idea that regardless of how powerful the opposition, we should persist in doing what we know to be right and just.

So, this piece is partially a reaction to the divisive state of our country and our world. Even though it feels dire, nevertheless, I think it is important, if not crucial, to continue making art. This is also an apt title for this particular piece, because I was writing for two instruments that are often misunderstood. We often think of the harp as being associated with angels and heaven, and yes it can play beautiful music, but it can do a lot of other things too. The bassoon often gets lumped into playing “oom-pas” or, like the cello, imitating the vocal quality of the human voice. And while these instruments can and often do fulfill these roles, I wanted to highlight how effective they can be in other scenarios, that might be more like funk beats or rock and distortion sounds. Most of all, I wanted this to be a really fun piece to listen to and to play.”

