



Recital II

Kate Acone, Piano

June 23, 2022, at 7:30pm
Walter Hall

PROGRAMME

Sonata No. 3 (2000) Emma Lou Diemer
Serenade/Toccata (b. 1927)
Interlude
Tango Fantastique

Seeking (2018 – World Premiere) Nathan Thatcher
(b. 1989)

INTERMISSION

Three Pieces Op. 128 (1932) Amy Beach
Scherezino: A Peterborough Chipmunk (1867-1944)
Young Birches
A Humming Bird

Scenes in Tin Can Alley (1937-1941) Florence Price
The Huckster (1887-1953)
Children at Play
Night

Postcards (2014) Nina Shekhar
traffic jam (b. 1995)
on an old sidewalk
merry-go-round
light up

This recital is in partial fulfilment of the Doctor of Musical Arts in Piano Pedagogy.

Kate Acone is a student of Lydia Wong.

Kate Acone is an American pianist and pedagogue based in Toronto, Ontario. She has performed across North America and Europe, including Carnegie Hall's Weill Music room. A passionate teacher, she has held teaching faculty positions at the Faber Piano Institute and The American School in Switzerland and currently runs her own full-time studio. Her research interests include women composers, popular music pedagogies, and Taylor Swift.

Program Notes Recital II
Kate Acone, Piano

Emma Lou Diemer: Piano Sonata No. 3 (2000)

- I. **Serenade/Toccata**
- II. **Interlude**
- III. **Tango Fantastique**

Emma Lou Diemer, an American composer from Missouri, composed the *Sonata No. 3* over the course of 1996-1999 for Carol Lancaster, a Los Angeles pianist and pedagogue.¹ The first movement's title, "Serenade/Toccata," is illustrative of its two primary moods. It begins lyrically and gently, though with energy, and progressively gains a fiercer attack over the course of the piece. The 8/8 time (3+3+2) provides a consistent undertone throughout each section, whether tranquil or urgent.

The second movement, "Interlude," is a break between the energy of the outer movements. After opening bells ring, reflective musical elements swell, crescendo, and transform freely before dipping back to the ringing bells. Its thematic materials both call to mind the first movement and forecast the third. Finally, "Tango Fantastique" was inspired by Diemer's time in Argentina. This tango rhythm begins percussively, hides behind lyrical expressivity, and reemerges over and over again. Eventually, the rhythm disappears into a section of dampened strings before the tango rhythm sneaks back in. The theme spikes and dips as the piece burns with energy until the climactic finale.

Nathan Thatcher: Seeking (2018 – World Premiere)

Much of this program is firmly established in places: cities, home, forests, nature. This piece, however, exists in the tension of being uprooted. When I first heard this piece in 2018, my personal relationship with wilderness was metaphorical only, an abstract concept. In 2020, when I was abruptly pulled from my apartment, city, and country for an indefinite length of time, wandering became not merely a mental exercise but the entirety of my existence. Disconnected from both my belongings and my performing career, my sense of "place," "time," and "direction" all grew fuzzy.

Whether seeking is literal or existential, the process is more than just aimless meandering. As Jesus noted in his parables, seeking is a wholehearted, purposeful, and community-filled endeavor. As Mac Miller noted in his posthumous album *Circles*, sometimes seeking means "stumbling around, guessing your direction, next step you can't see at all," ending up right where you started.²

¹ Emma Lou Diemer, *Piano Sonata No. 3* (Hildegard Publishing Company, 2000): 0.

² Mac Miller, "Circles," track 1 on *Circles* (REMEMBER Music and Warner Records, 2020).

This piece touches on many of these experiences. Shattering realizations are followed by empty space, both essential. Recurrent thoughts, quick and repetitive, suspend our sense of time. These insistent patterns shift and change sometimes obviously, sometimes imperceptibly. There are points where the seeking feels frustrated and busy, and moments where it is the most solitary thing in the world. At one of the most poignant sections, a hymn plays and is absorbed into the surrounding texture. By the end, we have returned to almost where we began, though transformed: drawing circles.

Amy Beach: Three Pieces Op. 128 (1932)

- I. Scherzino: A Peterborough Chipmunk
- II. Young Birches
- III. A Humming Bird

Amy Beach was one of the most prominent American composers of her time. After marrying her husband at age eighteen, she promised to curtail her performing career and to never teach piano, instead devoting her energy almost exclusively towards composing. These marital constraints, common among upper-class women, also limited her access to composition lessons and formal training. Though she was nearly exclusively self-taught, she found ways invest in composer networks, especially after her husband's death in 1910. After 1921, she spent her summers at an artists' residency called the MacDowell Colony in Peterborough, New Hampshire with other composers, including several women.³

It is at this residency where she composed these three pieces, each depicting the local landscapes of New Hampshire. The first, "Peterborough Chipmunk", is a playful escapade with ambiguous tonality. The chipmunk scurries to and fro, stopping intermittently to pause and examine his surroundings before dashing out of sight completely. The second, "Young Birches", paints a serene picture of a birch forest, featuring three layers: bass accompaniment, murmuring treble ostinatos that could be nearby bubbling water, and a single melody line in the middle. The third and final movement captures the lithe and impossibly rapid movement of hummingbird wings, colorfully and artfully flitting about.

Florence Price: Scenes in Tin Can Alley (1937-1941)

- I. The Huckster
- II. Children at Play
- III. Night

Florence Price was one of the most accomplished composers of the 20th century. Despite omnipresent structural racism and sexism that erected barriers both logistical and interpersonal, she composed prolifically and was the first African-American woman composer programmed by a major American orchestra. In an extremely close call of historical archiving,

³ Adrienne Fried Block, "Beach [Cheney], Amy Marcy" in *Oxford Music Online*, ed. E. Douglas Bomberger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 4.

many of her works were left abandoned in an empty house in Illinois until 2009. This particular set of pieces was not published until 2020.⁴

Price, despite her many successes, did not enjoy the material conditions of her white American artistic peers. After lynchings in her home state of Arkansas forced her family to move north to Chicago, she dealt with significant financial challenges, especially upon divorcing her abusive husband and becoming a single mother in 1931.⁵ These pieces, *Scenes in Tin Can Alley*, are a social critique of the urban poverty she witnessed herself.

“The Huckster” is the original scammer - a shady door-to-door salesman peddling wares of questionable quality and purpose. His charisma and charm are betrayed only by moments of ominous undertones. The second depicts “Children at Play.” Children scamper, tease, and jump out of hide-and-seek with uninhibited joy. In the middle, the tone suddenly changes:

Children at play pause to stare at an old, crippled woman who passes along searching in the garbage cans for food. The pitiful figure disappears, is soon forgotten and the children quickly resume their play.⁶

Price does not sanitize the conditions the children are living in, but rather contrasts the bright hope of the children with the conditions they were living in, where the disabled and poor were abandoned. Finally, the set ends with “Night,” appropriately the darkest of the set. Price’s note reads:

The scene is sordid. There comes a slinking figure. Occasionally there is a swift movement – something scurrying to its shelter. From within a squalid tenement comes the plaintive wail of a child, also the complaint of an older member of the family.⁷

This honest depiction of intergenerational living in tenements does not allow for a feel-good ending to the set, but rather leaves the listener in the discomfort of many people’s reality.

Nina Shekhar: Postcards (2014)

- I. traffic jam
- II. on an old sidewalk
- III. merry-go-round
- IV. light it up

These four pieces illustrate scenes of urban life. In the first, “traffic jam,” irritated car horns blare over the quiet, yet omnipresent, rumble of engines and people. Traffic, the steady stream of cars and people, is the urban equivalent of a river: while it feels familiar, you are never in the

⁴ John Michael Cooper, foreword to *Scenes in Tin Can Alley* by Florence Beatrice Price (New York, NY: G. Schirmer Inc., 2020), iii.

⁵ Rae Linda Brown, Guthrie Ramsey, and Carlene J. Brown, *The Heart of a Woman: The Life and Music of Florence B. Price* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2020), 85.

⁶ Florence Beatrice Price, *Scenes in Tin Can Alley* (New York, NY: G. Schirmer Inc., 2020), 7.

⁷ *Ibid*, 14.

same one twice. This is mirrored in the piece's perpetual-motion undercurrent: while the pattern sounds similar throughout, it is never repeated exactly.

"On an old sidewalk" explores what Shekhar refers to as the "urban wasteland" of city living⁸. The vast space of this piece highlights the contrast of loneliness and melancholy even within population density.

"Merry-go-round" is a playful carnival, opening with twinkling lights. This carousel, at first spinning high, whirls into a flurry before disappearing back into the twinkle lights.

Finally, "light up" seethes with optimistic energy that bursts and retracts several times before crescendoing to the finish line. The repeated note pattern has sudden and seemingly random accented flashes, like the sun's shifting glints off glass-windowed skyscrapers as the day begins. The city awakens to the potential of newness.

References

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⁸ Nina Shekhar *Postcards* (2014).