THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF FOUR
AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN COMPOSERS
TO AMERICAN ART SONG

D.M.A. DOCUMENT

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By

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ABSTRACT

Although African-American women have been composing art songs since the advent of the genre in the United States in the early twentieth century, little is known about their many important contributions to the art song form. These women greatly enhanced the genre by combining African-American musical idioms and western European musical ideas. While many of these women are known for their arrangements of Negro spirituals, most of their art song compositions have been neglected. There are two primary reasons for this neglect. In the early twentieth century women were considered of inferior intelligence and too emotional for the seriousness of composing, rendering it virtually impossible for them to have their music published. This task was doubly difficult for African-American women who dealt with both sexual and racial bias. Due to these prejudices, African-American women were largely unable to have their songs published or performed, thus creating a vacuum of unpublished solo vocal compositions.

This document examines the lives and selected art songs of African-American women composers Florence Price (1888-1953), Margaret Bonds (1913-1972), Undine Smith Moore (1904-1989) and Dorothy Rudd Moore (b. 1940). Contrasting the lives and art song compositions of these four women shows a developing "migration" of styles that spans the twentieth century. By exploring the impact of social and educational
race and gender on their compositional styles and selection of text, it is hoped that this document will make a valuable contribution to the currently minimal scholarship available on the art songs of these composers.

The following steps were taken to present a comprehensive portrait of these composers in relation to their songs: 1) examination of original manuscripts, journal articles and other documents housed at institutions around the country; 2) a personal interview with Dorothy Rudd Moore; 3) interviews with former students and friends of the composers.

These four represent only a small fraction of African-American women composers active in the twentieth century. It is crucial that research continue if scholars and musicians are to begin to correct the decades of neglect of these composers and their songs.
Dedicated to the memories of
my grandmother, Sarah Anderson (1911-1983)
and my mentor, Carol Brice (1918-1985)
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I am eternally grateful to Dorothy Rudd Moore for taking time from her very hectic schedule to give me insight into her life as a composer; to my dear friend Dennis Turner whose wonderful gift of a computer helped immensely with this project.

I thank Dr. Robert Taylor who spent many hours helping me locate and obtain obscure recordings; my friend Tammy Kernodle for exchanging ideas and books with me; the membership of Black Music Students Association for being there for me; Lea Pearson and Dr. Anthony McDonald and their family for all of their help and support; and Michael Lester who has been a special friend and colleague since my first day at Ohio State.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vita</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Examples</td>
<td>ix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapters:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Florence Beatrice Price (1888-1953)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Margaret Allison Bonds (1913-1972)</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Undine Smith Moore (1904-1989)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Dorothy Rudd Moore (1940- )</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>index of Songs</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### LIST OF EXAMPLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning of <em>Because</em> in the key of A-minor and marked <em>Tempo Moderato</em>; also note the descending octave pattern in the bass line and the repetition of the word “because” in measure 9-11</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Because</em> shifts into cut time in measure 24; the major chord on the word “boon” shows text painting</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning of <em>Arabella</em>, marked <em>allegro</em> shows the passionate sixteenth-note passages</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Arabella</em> -- modulation to third relation key of A-major in measures 7-8 which correspond to the rise to the <em>forte</em> dynamic level measure in measure 7</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key shifts in measures 6-11 of <em>Dream Ships</em>; also note Price’s continued use of sweeping sixteenth-note passages</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning of <em>A White Rose</em> -- the passion motif first occurs in measure 4, then recurs throughout the piece; augmented harmonies accent the words “passion” and “falcon”, and “love and “dove” in measures 5 and 9, and measures 7 and 11</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passion motif recurs in the piano in measure 23 of <em>A White Rose</em> before the sweeping sextolets in the final few measures</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning of <em>The Washerwoman</em> showing repetition of pedal tone C and chords in the accompaniment</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.9 The last measures of *The Washerwoman* revealing an observer .................................. 26

2.1 *To A Brown Girl Dead*, reminiscent of a New Orleans funeral march ................................................................. 36

2.2 *To A Brown Girl Dead* -- climatic forte outburst followed by calm piano marking .................................................. 37

2.3 Beginning of *Rainbow Gold* which is reminiscent of a television theme, cowboy song or theme from a Broadway musical ................................................................. 38

2.4 The B section of *Rainbow Gold* which begins forte and continues to crescendo until piano marking in measure 66 ........................................................................... 39

3.1 The first page of *Love Let the Wind Cry* in the key of D-flat major with frequent key shifts and changes of time signature. The first measure displays the triplet followed by duple figure in the vocal line .................................................. 49

3.2 *Lyric for Truelove* has no key signature, however, it has frequent key shifts; it is recitative-like and through-composed ........................................................................... 50

3.3 The first page of *My True Love Hath My Heart* shows Moore’s simple, straightforward chordal accompaniment; measure 7 shows one of the harmonic variances ................................................................. 51

3.4 The third relation key of B-flat major beginning in measure 48 of *My True Love Hath My Heart* .................................. 52

4.1 The opening of *I Had No Thought of Violets of Late*, a theme that will recur frequently throughout the cycle ........................................................................................................ 64

4.2 An excerpt after the time signature changes to 6/8 in measure 22 of *I Had No Thought of Violets of Late* that shows Moore’s sensitivity to text painting ............................................................................. 65
4.3 The opening of Joy with sextolets in the piano, sixteenth note passages in the voice and pizzicato violin ........................................................................................................ 66

4.4 Measure 18 marks the time signature change to 3/4 in Joy; measure 25 marks the return of the opening thematic material in a slow triplet figure before the return to 2/4 time ........................................................................................................ 67

4.5 The beginning measures of Some Things Are Very Dear to Me which Moore marked “caressingly,” the seductiveness of the song is aided by the muted violin and languid theme in the piano; tied notes fuse the clarity of the rhythm ........................................................................................................ 68

4.6 The intense opening of He Came in Silvern Armour played in the piano and violin; the frantic beginning denotes the fear of a nightmare ........................................................................................................ 69

4.7 In measure 22 of He Came in Silvern Armour the music becomes more lyrical; the theme from I Had No Thought of Violets of Late recurs in the violin in measures 27-29 ........................................................................................................ 70

4.8 The square dance theme played in the violin part of Song for a Dark Girl; syncopation in the piano and voice parts aid in adding anger, fear and panic; Moore adds wailing glissandos and moans that are reminiscent of jazz and blues idioms ........................................................................................................ 71

4.9 The final statement in Song for a Dark Girl as the woman declares that “love is a naked (pronounced neked) shadow on a gnarled and naked tree;” the violin and piano proceed angrily with material from the opening theme of the song ........................................................................................................ 72

4.10 The chordal, somber entrance of Idolatry as the woman mourns the death of her lover ........................................................................................................ 73

4.11 The juxtaposition of major and minor chords in measures of Idolatry that indicates the tolling of the bells ........................................................................................................ 73
4.12 The descending passages of the violin solo at the beginning of *Youth Sings a Song of Rosebuds*; the entrance of the piano brings dissonance in measure 7 and the time signature changes to 3/8 as the voice enters in measure 9 ................................................................. 74

4.13 *Youth Sings a Song of Rosebuds* -- the theme from *I Had No Thought of Violets of Late* is heard in the vocal line beginning in measure 66 ................................................................. 75

4.14 The rapid thirty-second notes in the beginning measures of *Invocation* represent rain falling ................................................................. 76

4.15 The melodic theme from *Song for a Dark Girl* can be heard in the bass line of the piano on the lyrics “where once a gnarled tree stood” in measure 13 of *Invocation* ................................................................. 76
INTRODUCTION

The *Harvard Dictionary of Music* defines an art song as “a song of serious artistic intent written by a trained composer.” By virtue of this definition such American vocal forms as spirituals and folk songs would be omitted from any discussion of art songs as they do not wholly correspond to these limitations. This omission holds true for mainstream American vocal forms, such as popular, jazz, blues, and country and western songs as well.

The advent of the art song in the United States as defined above occurred early in the twentieth century when composers such as Charles Ives (1874-1954), John Alden Carpenter (1876-1951) and Charles Tomlinson Griffes (1884-1920) began to combine United States folk song elements with European musical idioms. Although African-American composers such as Harry T. Burleigh (1866-1949), Nora Holt (1866-1956), Robert Nathaniel Dett (1882-1978), Camille Nickerson (1887-1982) and William Grant Still (1895-1978) began writing art songs during this same time period, the social climate during the years following the Emancipation Proclamation provided limited opportunity for African-American composers to have their works performed and published. Nevertheless, these composers persevered, further enriching the art song genre in the United States with musical idioms derived from the African-American culture, such as polyrhythms, blue notes and themes from Negro spirituals, as well as setting the texts of
such notable African-American poets and writers as Paul Laurence Dunbar, Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Bennett, Countee Cullen and Helene Johnson.

Songs written by African-American composers are often referred to as “African-American art songs;” however, this term is a misnomer since emphasis is placed on the race of the composer in relation to the song. Indeed, in most cases, both black and white American composers in the early twentieth century studied at the same institutions with the same teachers and with few exceptions, one would be unable to discern the race of the composer by merely listening to the song. Regrettably, this is yet another occurrence in which social division in the United States interfered with the enrichment of the society as a whole. It has only been in the past two decades that African-American composers and musicians have come to be judged on the merit of their work alone.

The first African-American to gain wide acclaim as a composer was Harry T. Burleigh. Burleigh was well-educated, having studied at the National Conservatory of Music in New York with Max Spicker. He was also a long-time student and friend of composer Antonín Dvořák, who had come to the United States to teach at the Conservatory. Because of his fine baritone voice, Burleigh held positions as soloist for over forty years at two of New York’s eminent religious institutions, St. George’s Episcopal Church and the Temple Emmanu-El. He also served as music editor for G. Ricordi and Company in New York and Milan, Italy.

Burleigh was the first composer to notate Negro spirituals for their preservation and for performance on the concert stage. It is mostly for these arrangements of spirituals that he is known; however, he wrote over three hundred compositions which
include at least three song cycles and over sixty art songs. Burleigh's contributions paved the way for other African-American composers to explore the area of art song composition.

Although African-American men faced racial roadblocks as composers, the trials of African-American women composers were compounded. Not only did they face racial bias, they also were confronted with sexist attitudes from those who held the belief that the tendency of women toward “emotionalism” made them unfit for the seriousness of composing. While it is a fact that women composers cannot divorce themselves from their gender, it is virtually impossible to conclude that a woman penned a composition upon hearing the work. The fact that most critics, musicologists and publishers were white men further hindered the progress of African-American women in the world of composition. Despite these obstacles, an amazing number of African-American women composers persisted, adding their unique compositional gifts to the field of music.

This document examines the lives and selected art song compositions of four African-American women composers whose careers span the twentieth century: Florence Price (1888-1953), Margaret Bonds (1913-1972), Undine Smith Moore (1904-1989), and Dorothy Rudd Moore (b.1940). Choosing only four women was a difficult task since there are a large number of African-American women composers whose art song compositions are of exceptional quality. Therefore, four women were selected whose compositional styles, in the opinion of the author, are representative of the periods in which they wrote, and whose contributions to the art song genre reflect the development of compositional techniques in the twentieth century American art song. Furthermore,
since the author of this document has performed many song compositions written by Price, Bonds, Undine Moore and Dorothy Moore, a greater degree of depth and introspection is added to this discussion and examination of their lives and works. The eighteen compositions of these women discussed in this document were selected from their large song output for three primary reasons: 1) they are illustrative of the styles of each of these composers; 2) little is known about them; and 3) with only two exceptions, none have been published. In this author’s opinion, these songs are charming and sophisticated and deserve wider recognition and performance.

Florence Price wrote over 300 compositions and was the first African-American woman to gain international recognition as a composer. Her neo-romantic songs written in diatonic harmonies are indicative of the compositional styles of composers of the early twentieth century. Margaret Bonds, a close friend and student of Price’s, began writing art songs in the neo-romantic style; however, her compositions soon developed to include jazz and African-American folk idioms as well as themes of social and racial awareness. Although she was born in 1904, nine years before Margaret Bonds, Undine Smith Moore became still more inventive in her compositional style, including more use of dissonance and atonality in her songs, characteristic of the middle to late twentieth century. The songs of Dorothy Rudd Moore (the only living composer of this group) are contrapuntal, harmonically and rhythmically sophisticated, and make dramatic use of contemporary compositional devices, such as dissonances, frequent key shifts and melodic and rhythmic motifs.
If the *Harvard Dictionary*’s definition of an art song is employed, these four women and their art song compositions certainly qualify. Having begun their musical studies as small children, they were educated at some of the most highly respected music schools and conservatories in the United States and abroad where they studied with some of the most revered musical minds of the century. Their songs are a combination of the traditions of western Europe and the idioms of the African-American culture, making them an integral part of American music history. As the art song genre in the United States developed in the twentieth century to include more structural, rhythmic and harmonic variances and more complex subject matter, these four African-American women incorporated these nuances into their compositions.

As the concluding chapter of this document will show, many outstanding African-American women composers have contributed handsomely to the genesis of the twentieth century art song in the United States. Along with their male counterparts, their works were largely unknown until approximately the last twenty years when performers, musicologists and academic institutions brought them to light. The women studied in this document represent four of the finest such composers in American music history. Their lives and compositions form a unique thread around which one may weave a complete picture of the development of the art song from 1900 to the present day, and the careers of African-American women in music through the century.
CHAPTER 1

FLORENCE BEATRICE SMITH PRICE

(1888-1953)

Florence Price's art songs are very beautiful and expressive. It is truly a shame that more of them are not available for performance.

--Soprano Mattiwilda Dobbs on Florence Price

Florence Price was born in Little Rock, Arkansas, on April 9, 1888 to Dr. James Smith, a successful dentist and inventor, and Florence Smith, a singer and pianist. Undoubtedly, Price inherited fortitude from her father, who accomplished the immense task of establishing a prosperous dental practice in Little Rock despite the social climate in the South during this time period; from her mother she received her aptitude for music and her early musical training. She attended the black public schools of Little Rock,¹ where in addition to piano, she studied violin and organ. She was an excellent student and graduated from high school in 1902 at age fourteen. By the time she was

sixteen, one of Florence Price’s compositions had been printed and she had received pay for another. Given these facts, there was probably little doubt in the minds of those who knew her that she was destined to become a composer of some note. After her graduation from high school, Price enrolled in the New England Conservatory of Music where she counted among her teachers George Chadwick and Frederick Converse for composition and counterpoint, and Benjamin Cutter for theory, an ultimate testimony to her extraordinary talent. By the time she graduated with honors in 1906 with a degree in piano and organ, Price had written her first string trio and her first symphony.

Like most women of the era, teaching was one of the few career options available to Price, therefore, she returned to Arkansas after graduation and taught for a year at the Cotton Plant Arkadelphia Academy, a school for blacks supported by white church organizations. In 1907, she accepted a position at Shorter College in Little Rock where she taught until 1910. At age 22, she took a position as head of the music department at Clark College in Atlanta (now Clark Atlanta University), remaining there until 1912. Price returned to her hometown of Little Rock in 1912 to marry Thomas J. Price, a local prominent attorney; they had two daughters, Florence and Edith, and a son, Tommy, who

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5 Ibid.
died in infancy. In his memory Price composed the song *To My Little Son*, from text by Julia Johnson Davis.\(^6\)

In order to devote more time to her family, Price left teaching after her marriage and opened a private studio where she taught violin, organ and piano and continued composing. Racial tensions were high in the southern states during this period, and though Price was well-respected as an educator, neither she nor her family were exempt from these racial biases. To escape such circumstances, the Price family left Arkansas in 1927\(^7\) and settled permanently in Chicago where Price again opened a private studio.

Chicago offered greater opportunities for Price to continue her musical studies which she seized by attending the Chicago Musical College and by studying with Leo Sowerby at the American Musical College.\(^8\) She further enhanced her musical knowledge by studying composition and counterpoint with Carl Busch and Wesley LaViolette and orchestration and instrumental technique with Arthur Olaf Anderson.\(^9\)

It was also after her move to Chicago that Price met and formed a close friendship with Estella C. Bonds and her daughter, Margaret Bonds. Mrs. Bonds was a prominent figure in the African-American social and cultural scene in Chicago and had a vast mixture of illustrious and influential friends, including violinist/composer Will Marion Cook, singer Roland Hayes and poet Langston Hughes. Price was exposed to this

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\(^6\) Ibid.


\(^8\) *International Encyclopedia of Women Composers*, 562.

\(^9\) Ibid.
talented circle, drawing upon these acquaintances and friendships to enhance and promote her musical compositions. During this period Price also became Margaret’s piano and composition teacher, offering her guidance while simultaneously encouraging her to develop her own compositional style.  

Price also won many awards for her compositions. In 1925 she won *Opportunity* magazine’s Holstein award for her vocal composition *In the Land of Cotton*, and she won the award a second time in 1927 for her song *Memories of Dixieland*. Price went on to win first place in the prestigious Rodman Wanamaker Competition in 1932 for her *Symphony in E Minor* (also called *Symphonic Love Poem*). The symphony was premiered in 1933 by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra at the Chicago World’s Fair, conducted by Frederick Stock, marking the first time a major symphony orchestra had performed a work composed by a black woman.

Price’s fame grew steadily following this premier and several major symphony orchestras began to perform her works. In 1934 the Chicago Women’s Symphony Orchestra programmed her *Concerto in F Minor* with Price conducting and Bonds at the piano. Her *Symphony No. 3 in C Minor* was premiered by the WPA Symphony Orchestra in Detroit in 1940. Pianists performed her concerti and her songs were sung

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10 *Black Women Composers: A Genesis*, 34. Margaret Bonds will be discussed further in Chapter 4 of this document.


by some of the most renowned singers of the day, including Marian Anderson, Carol Brice, Roland Hayes, Mattiwilda Dobbs and Leontyne Price. After hearing Marian
Anderson perform Price's composition *Songs to the Dark Virgin* in concert, the music
critic for the *Chicago Daily News* hailed it as "one of the greatest immediate successes
ever won by an American art song."\(^{15}\)

Although Nora Holt, Camille Nickerson and others were active African-American
women composers, Price was the first African-American woman to gain international
prominence as a composer during her lifetime. She wrote over 300 compositions and her
music was widely performed, yet most of her works, with the exception of a few art
songs and piano pieces, remain unpublished today.\(^{16}\) Price continued to conduct a private
studio and work as a composer until her death in Chicago on June 3, 1953.

None of the five songs composed by Price discussed in this document are
published, however, many of her solo vocal works are housed at the University of
Arkansas, the University of Pennsylvania and some are disseminated among her family
and friends. They remain an untapped and tantalizing source of investigation for music
historians and performers.

\(^{14}\) *Black Women Composers: A Genesis*, 34.

\(^{15}\) *The Norton/Grove Dictionary of Women Composers*, 374. *Songs to the Dark Virgin*, written in
1935 and dedicated to Marian Anderson, was published in 1941 by G. Schirmer. The poem was written by
Langston Hughes.

\(^{16}\) Ibid.
THE SONGS

Although she preferred composing larger forms, such as orchestral and chamber works, Price learned early in her career that publishers sought shorter pieces. In an effort to comply with the demands of publishers, she turned to composing art songs, and it is primarily for these art songs and arrangements of spirituals that she is known today.

Like most of her contemporaries at the turn of the twentieth century, Price employed two specific traits in her song compositions: 1) neo-romanticism, the term used to describe that period in which artists returned to tonality in their compositions and to placing greater emphasis on emotions rather than intellect; and 2) nationalism, which refers to placing a stronger emphasis on cultural and ethnic characteristics. While much of her music adhered to the conservative style of the day, Price also incorporated into her works many African-American idioms, such as the spiritual songs and dance rhythms of the Negro slaves, in keeping with the black cultural revolution that became known as the “Harlem Renaissance.”

The Harlem Renaissance was centered around the Harlem district of New York City in the 1920’s and is thought by many scholars to be the first significant movement of African-American artists in the United States. The artists of the Harlem Renaissance aspired to carve out more African-related cultures for black Americans while improving

\[17\] Black Women Composers: A Genesis, 34.


\[19\] For further information on the Harlem Renaissance see Nathan Huggins, Harlem Renaissance (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971).
relations between black and white Americans. The Harlem Renaissance marked the
turning point in which the music, art and writings of African-Americans began to reflect
an awareness of African-American culture. The Renaissance brought to the forefront
many African-American writers, musicians and artists, such as, Langston Hughes,
Countee Cullen, Zora Neale Hurst, W.E.B. DuBois, Gwendolyn Bennett, Harry T.
Burleigh, Paul Robeson and Florence Price.

As with her Songs to the Dark Virgin, Price’s few other published solo vocal
works, An April Day (1949), Out of the South Blew A Wind (1946) and Night (1946) all
display her preference for descriptive poetry, as well as her skillful usage of text painting
and chromaticism. These traits also abound in her many unpublished songs.

It was usually the beauty and rhythmic flow of the text that dictated the style and
timbre of Price’s songs. Her great interest in text prompted her to set to music the poems
of some very prolific and well-known poets; two of the most famous were Paul Laurence
Dunbar and Langston Hughes.

The five unpublished songs selected for study here reflect the diversity of Price’s
art song compositions. The original manuscripts are contained in the Marian Anderson
collection at the University of Pennsylvania Library.²⁰

Because

The lyrics for Because are based on the poem by Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-
1906). Dunbar was among Price’s poetic sources for lyrics and the rhythmic regularity of

²⁰ For a list of Price’s works see: Helen Walker-Hill, Music by Black Women Composers: A
his verses lent themselves well to her compositional techniques. She set to music many of Dunbar's most notable verses, including *Ships that Pass in the Night* and *Sympathy*.²¹

Dunbar's popularity in the United States among his peers and the general public was unrivaled at the turn of the twentieth century, especially after the publication of his second volume of poems entitled *Majors and Minors*.²² Dunbar's poems were set to music by other American composers besides Price, including Harry T. Burleigh, Samuel Coleridge Taylor, Margaret Bonds and William Grant Still. James Weldon Johnson wrote of Dunbar in *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (Harcourt Brace & Company, 1922):

Dunbar was the first to demonstrate a high degree of poetic talent combined with literary training and technical proficiency.

Dunbar was also greatly admired by his peers. Johnson added:

He was imitated by many writers, both white and colored, none of whom quite equaled him in humor, tenderness and charm and in the finish with which he generally worked.

In the song *Because* the nationalistic qualities in Price's music are quickly evident. In the key of A-minor, its melancholy nature and repeated refrains give *Because* the feel of a Negro spiritual, demonstrating the nationalistic qualities prevalent in Price's music (Example 1.1). Best suited for medium voice, the vocal range of the song spans only one octave and the simple, sparse piano accompaniment is often omitted altogether

²¹ No date of composition was given for *Because*, *Ships that Pass in the Night* and *Sympathy*, however, the compositional style indicates that they were probably written between 1935-1945.

²² Other collections of Dunbar's poetry include *Lyrics of Lowly Life* (1896), *Lyrics of the Hearthside* (1899), *Lyrics of Love and Laughter* (1903) and *Lyrics of Sunshine and Shadow* (1905).
leaving the voice to sing a cappella, allowing for greater vocal expressiveness. Although sparse and apparently simple, Because shows a wealth of interesting compositional devices to make the song especially appealing to the performer and listener. One such device is the chordal, drone-like setting over a recurring descending octave pattern in the bass as in measures 10-13 and 18-23. Text painting occurs in measure 19 as Price uses a chord not in the key on the word “faltering.” Also in measure 19, Price curiously changes the text of Dunbar’s poem and replaces the word “breath” with “trill,” perhaps because she was notating the poem from memory. The repetition of the word “because” and the answering melody in the accompaniment in measures 9-12 and 17-20 effects a swaying motion reminiscent of the call and response technique often employed in Negro spirituals. The last strophe of the song “the Master in infinite mercy, offers the boon of death,” shifts urgently into cut time at measure 24. The change to a major chord on the word “boon” offers another instance of text painting (Example 1.2). Price’s setting of Because captures the unique courage of Dunbar’s poem and allows the singer much latitude for interpretation.

Two Short Songs

Aradella; Dream Ships

The poetry of Langston Hughes (1902-1967) was another source to which Price often turned for inspiration. Her composition Two Short Songs was written in 1935 and are based on two of Hughes’ poems, Aradella and Dream Ships.

Hughes is considered by many researchers and lovers of poetry to be the most influential African-American poet of the twentieth century. He was a central figure in
the Harlem Renaissance and his poems reflect the jazz and folk rhythms of African-American culture. Hughes did not avoid controversy in his poetry, which often addressed the racial issues facing African-Americans. Perhaps his most celebrated poem in this vein is *The Negro Speaks of Rivers* (1926), found in Hughes' poetry collection, *The Weary Blues* (1926), so named because the poetry depicts blues themes. Other collections of Hughes' verses include *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems* (1932) and *Collected Poems of Langston Hughes* (1994).

Both *Aradella* and *Dreamships* are brief songs (10 and 20 measures, respectively) and were intended by Price to be sung together. She notated on the score that the two songs are for medium voice, however, due to the subject matter they are probably best suited for tenor or lyric baritone.

In *Aradella* Price demonstrates her tendency for allowing the rhythm of the poetry to dictate that of the music as the poet compares a loved one to the night and sleep. This *allegro* song is in the key of C-major and is in 12/8 time. Though the song is only ten measures in duration, corresponding to a mere two couplets of poetry, the passion of the poem is none-the-less urgent and intense as demonstrated by Price's usage of sweeping sixteenth-note passages in the accompaniment (Example 1.3). After a *mezzo forte* entrance in measure 3, the vocal line soon ascends to *forte* in measure 7, corresponding to a two measure interlude in the third relation key of A-major (Example 1.4). This is followed by an enthusiastic return to C-major as the song ends. *Aradella* is a superb example of a brief song that illuminates a metaphor.
The companion piece, *Dream Ships*, continues the use of sixteenth-note patterns. It is in the key of E-major, however, measures 6-11 contain rapid non-harmonic chordal shifts, which parallel the crescendo on the lyrics “and life is gay” (Example 1.5). After the *poco ritard* in measure 11, the original tempo returns in measure 12. A rhythmic change occurs in measure 18 on the lyrics “and dreams like me” before the passionate sixteenth note pattern resumes for the final two measures.

Taken together these two pieces provide an intense and passionate setting of Hughes’ poems of fancy. They would prove to be excellent encores on any vocal recital or concert.

**A White Rose**

Text sources for Price’s songs were not limited to those of famed African-American writers. For example, *A White Rose* is a setting of a poem by a rather obscure Irish poet named John Boyle O’Reilly (1844-1890). This passionate love song in the key of G-major is reminiscent of the works of two noted composers of the day, Sigmund Romberg and Victor Herbert. It is in 6/8 time and the passion of the augmented harmonies correspond to that of the poem as the red rose is compared to “passion” and a “falcon” in measures 5 and 9 and the white rose to “love” and a “dove” in measures 7 and 11 (Example 1.6). A “passion motif” first occurs in the piano in measure 4 (\(\text{\#}\) \(\text{\#}\)) and recurs throughout the piece. The song builds from *mezzo piano* to *forte*, expounding that “love is sweetest with a kiss of desire on the lips” in measures 18-21. The passion motif is again heard in the piano in measures 23-25 before continuing with sweeping sextolets in the final two measures (Example 1.7). The lyrical, “salon” feel of *A White*
Rose may be compared to the quintessential Victorian settings of the songs of composer Amy Beach, a contemporary of Price’s.

The Washerwoman

Price’s song The Washerwoman shows her remarkable ability for developing the dramatic mood of a poem and is best suited for mezzo-soprano or baritone voice. The words are attributed to Otto Lelaad Bohanan. Extensive research revealed no information on Mr. Bohanan, however, since Price often set to music the lyrics of friends, it is speculated that Bohanan was a friend or an acquaintance. The song is in a steady 4/4 andante and the key is C-minor. The first bar of the accompaniment is repeated for the next thirteen allowing the singer to tell a story with strong dramatic expression. The pedal tone C in the bass and the repetition of the same chords and rhythm in the accompaniment seem to represent the drudgery and monotony of the washerwoman’s daily task (Example 1.8). Since so few career options were available to women during this period in American history, the subject of the song, “the washerwoman,” as well as the aforementioned repetition of the pedal tone C could be the composer’s statement as to the often monotonous plight of women.

Rhythmic and chromatic changes accompany the words “Fool, fool, thou hast toiled for fifty years and what has thou now but thou dusty tears,” pointing up the irony of the poem (measures 17-23). Finally, in the last strophe of the song the “moral” is expressed by the story-teller (Example 1.9) as the dynamic level diminishes. Since the first three strophes of the poem rhyme, it is likely that the poet wrote the word “clean” in the final strophe of the song; oddly, Price changed the word to “clear,” perhaps because
the word “clear” better expressed the clarity with which the observer saw the woman’s soul. *The Washerwoman* is a typical metaphor that shows hope in a world of drudgery.

Any of these five songs would be quality additions to an art song recital or concert. They are easily accessible with wide audience appeal and could also stand alone as encores. They do not require extreme vocal range or agility, however, they require a singer with imagination and a sense of drama.
Example 1.1: The beginning of *Because* in the key of A-minor and marked *Tempo Moderato*; also note the descending octave pattern in the bass and the repetition of the word “because” in measures 9-11.
Example 1.2: *Because* shifts into cut-time in measure 24. The major chord on the word “boon” shows text painting.
Example 1.3: The beginning of *Ardella*, marked allegro, shows the passionate sixteenth-note passages.

Example 1.4: *Ardella* – the modulation to the third relation key of A-major in measures 7-8 which correspond to the rise to the *forte* dynamic level in measure 7.
Example 1.5: The key shifts in measures of 6-11 of *Dream Ships*; also note Price's continued use of sweeping sixteenth-note passages.
Example 1.6: Measures 1-11 of A White Rose — note the passion motif which occurs first in measure 4, then recurs throughout the piece. The augmented harmonies accent the words “passion” and “falcon” and “love” and dove” in measures 5 and 9 and measures 7 and 11.
Example 1.7: The passion motif recurs in the piano in measure 23 of A White Rose before the sweeping sextolets in the final few measures.
Example 1.8: The beginning of The Washerwoman showing the repetition of both the pedal tone C and the chords in the accompaniment.
Example 1.9: The last eight measures of *The Washerwoman* as it diminishes to the end, revealing that she is being observed as she performs her daily task. Although the final word of the poem was probably "clean", Price changed it to "clear."
CHAPTER 2

MARGARET ALLISON BONDS

(1913-1972)

Margaret wrote some of the most intricate, inspired and beautiful music I have ever sung or heard. I used the word intricate because each word, each note and every nuance was of extreme importance to her. She loved composing. It was a driving force in her life.

--Contralto Carol Brice on Margaret Bonds

Margaret Bonds was born in Chicago on March 3, 1913 to Alpheus Majors, an eminent physician, and his second wife, Estella C. Bonds, an accomplished organist. There were many facets to the woman that Margaret Bonds would grow to be; composer, pianist, teacher and philanthropist, to name a few.

Bonds’ first musical influence and teacher was her mother. She displayed a talent for composition at age five when she composed her first piece for piano entitled Marquette Street Blues. Her mother entertained many of the foremost African-American musicians, artists and writers of the day in the family home when Bonds was a child, among them, violinist/composer Will Marion Cook, singer Abbie Mitchell and poets
Countee Cullen and Langston Hughes. These early friendships would serve to feed Bonds' creative spirit for composition and performance throughout her lifetime.

Bonds realized her strong aptitude for composition when she was in high school, and began studying composition with family friend Florence Price and William Dawson, and she also began piano studies with Price. She attended Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, where she received her Bachelor of Music in 1933, and a year later in 1934, at only 21 years old, she received the Master of Music. For the next five years she remained in the Chicago area where she continued to hone her craft and work as a freelance musician.

In 1939, yearning for new challenges, Bonds went to New York City to pursue a career as a concert pianist. Enrolling at the Juilliard School of Music, she studied piano with Djane Herz, who remained a lifelong friend and mentor. Her strong interest in composition soon resurfaced and she began studies with Robert Starer at Juilliard and privately with Roy Harris, Emerson Harper and Walter Gossett.

While in New York, Bonds met Lawrence Richardson, a New York Supreme Court probation officer, whom she married in 1940; however, already established as a composer, she further demonstrated her independent spirit by retaining her mother's maiden name, Bonds, as her own surname professionally. The couple had a daughter, Djane, named after Bonds' piano teacher at Juilliard.

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Bonds first gained recognition as a composer when her song *Sea Ghost* was awarded third prize in the prestigious Rodman Wanamaker competition in 1932. (Her friend and teacher, Florence Price, won the first and second prizes.\(^3\)) Her first major success as a composer came when her song *Peach Tree Street* was adapted for the movie *Gone with the Wind* in 1939, laying the foundation for her later career association with the movie industry. She was also successful in having published another of her popular songs entitled *Spring Will Be So Sad* (1941).\(^4\)

Most of Bonds’ peers recognized her genius as a composer and her songs were performed in concert by many African-American concert artists, among them, Martina Arroyo, McHenry Boatwright, Carol Brice, Todd Duncan and William Warfield. Leontyne Price often commissioned Bonds to write songs for her in the 1960’s.

Bonds also achieved acclaim as a concert pianist. In 1933, she became the first African-American soloist to appear with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. She was the piano soloist with the Women’s Symphony Orchestra in a performance of Florence Price’s *Concerto in F Minor* at the Chicago World’s Fair in 1934.\(^5\) Bonds toured throughout the United States and Canada appearing as guest soloist in concerts at Orchestra Hall in Chicago, Town Hall in New York, with the Scranton Philharmonic

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\(^3\) *The Norton Grove Dictionary of Women Composers*, 72.

\(^4\) *Black Women Composers: A Genesis*, 49.

\(^5\) *Norton Grove Dictionary of Women Composers*, 72.
(Scranton, PA) and the New York City Symphony Orchestra. A versatile musician, Bonds also played on radio programs and on duo piano concerts. ⁶

Bonds lent her musical genius to other areas of the arts as well. In the 1930’s, she was the driving force to open the Allied Arts Academy in Chicago for the study of ballet and music. The venture proved financially unsuccessful due to the Depression; however, Bonds continued to participate in many other musical endeavors. While in New York in the late 1930’s and early 1940’s, she taught at the American Theater Wing and was on the staff of Stage for Youth in New York. ⁷ She established a sight singing program at the Mt. Calvary Baptist Church in Harlem to help improve the musical skills of the church musicians.

Bonds is primarily known for her vocal works which include art songs and spirituals for the solo voice. However, she also wrote for chorus, orchestra, piano, theater and ballet. Her larger vocal works include Mass in D Minor for chorus and orchestra and Ballad of the Brown King, a Christmas cantata based on text by Langston Hughes. Her musical theater output consisted of such works as Shakespeare in Harlem, Romey and Julie and U.S.A.

Bonds was honored with many awards throughout her lifetime, among them, the National Association of Negro Musicians Award, the Roy Harris Fellowship, the Julius Rosenwald Fellowship, the Honor Roll of Most Distinguished Negro Women of the


Century (Illinois Centennial Authority) and ASCAP awards from 1964 to 1966. She received the Alumni medal from Northwestern University, the highest distinction awarded by Northwestern to its alumni members.\(^8\)

Bonds moved to Los Angeles to work in television and films in 1967, where she continued to make contributions as a teacher, taking a position as a piano and theory teacher at the Los Angeles Inner City Institute. Bonds remained in Los Angeles until her death on April 26, 1972.

Bonds' works display a strong sense of ethnicity, incorporating jazz harmonies, the melodies of Negro spirituals and themes pertaining to social and racial issues. Her last major work, \textit{Credo}, for baritone, chorus and orchestra, was premiered one month after her death in 1972 by the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra under the baton of Zubin Metha.

Due to her versatility as a musician, Bonds' career advanced beyond that of her teacher, Florence Price. She was in a position to reap the benefits of the Civil Rights movement which helped to bring about a heightened awareness of African-American composers and musicians, thus enabling her to have more of her music published and performed. Bonds was financially successful as a musician and composer, a feat largely denied African-American musicians before 1950.

THE SONGS

Bonds composed forty-two art songs which remain largely unpublished and unknown and, like Florence Price, wrote in the neo-romantic style.\(^9\) Though her songs are primarily diatonic in nature, they include elements from other American song forms such as jazz, blues and popular songs, adding to their nationalistic quality.\(^{10}\) Like most fine composers, Bonds chose to set to music the literary works of some of the most famous poets in America, including two of her personal favorites, Langston Hughes and Robert Frost.

Bonds was very familiar with Hughes’ writings and the awareness of social, cultural and racial issues that he explored in his poetry was the perfect catalyst to ignite her creativity, as she was always interested in championing the causes of African-Americans through her music. Many of Bonds’ most popular solo vocal compositions, for example, *Three Dream Portraits* (1959), and *The Negro Speaks of Rivers* (1941) were based on Hughes’ poems.

Her songs *The Pasture* (1963) and *Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening* (1963) are based on two poems by Robert Frost, whom she considered one of the finest poets in America. Other songs by Bonds include *Three Sheep in a Pasture* (1940), *I Shall Pass Through the World* (1966) and *Bright Star* (1970).

The two songs discussed here, *To A Brown Girl Dead* (1956) and *Rainbow Gold* (1956) are evidence of a skillful and sophisticated composer whose diversity of style was

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\(^9\) For a brief definition of “neo-romanticism” see Chapter 2, page 11 of this document.

\(^{10}\) For a brief definition of “nationalism” see Chapter 2, page 11 of this document.
influenced by her wide interest and exposure to other American song forms such as jazz, blues and popular music, as well as her own cultural background.\footnote{For a list of Bonds' works see: Helen Walker-Hill, \textit{Music by Black Women Composers: A Bibliography} (Chicago: Center for Black Music Research, Columbia, College, 1995).}

\textbf{To A Brown Girl Dead}

\textit{To A Brown Girl Dead} is based on a poem by African-American poet Countee Cullen (1903-1946), another key figure in the Harlem Renaissance.\footnote{For a brief discussion on the “Harlem Renaissance” see Chapter 2, Florence Price, page 6 of this document.} Cullen’s poems are lyrical in nature like those of his role models, nineteenth century poets John Keats and Percy Shelley. Although he rebelled against being labeled a “Negro poet,” his collections, such as, \textit{Color} (1925) and \textit{The Black Christ and Other Poems} (1929), are replete with themes of racial equality and social consciousness. These themes made Cullen the perfect lyricist for Bonds’ songs since such themes were of great interest to her.

\textit{To A Brown Girl Dead} focuses on the death of a black girl, referred to as a “dark Madonna” in the song, whose funeral dress and accouterments are in white –– the skin color of those who oppressed her in life, along with others of her race (Example 2.1). This two-page song was originally written in the key of G minor and is well-suited for medium to low voices.\footnote{\textit{To A Brown Girl Dead} has been transposed to B minor for higher voices.} It is diatonic throughout with a metronome marking of \textit{andante}. The accompaniment begins with the slow, steady rhythm of a New Orleans funeral march. Bonds maintains a mysterious quality by never allowing the dynamic level to rise
above *mezzo forte*. The phrase “her mother pawned her wedding ring to lay her out in white,” underscores the sacrifices that a mother is willing to make for her child.

A trait of Bonds’ songs is the building of emotional, musical outbursts, followed by calmer, quieter musical statements, as in the climactic *forte* on the words “she’d be so proud, she’d dance and sing” in measures 30-34 (Example 2.2), followed immediately by a *piano* marking in the next phrase. The song then resumes the slow, steady rhythm of the funeral march to the end.

*To A Brown Girl Dead* is a ballad with the feel of a work song or field song due to its plodding nature. It has great audience appeal and requires a singer who is capable of excellent dramatic expression. An original manuscript of *To A Brown Girl Dead* was given to the author of this document by Carol Brice, who received it from the composer and performed it regularly.

**Rainbow Gold**

The somewhat sacred text of *Rainbow Gold* speaks of freedom as being a more worthy prize than earthly riches, a theme present in many songs written by African-Americans.

*Rainbow Gold* is perhaps an early attempt at a “crossover” song as it is lighthearted in nature and reminiscent of a television theme song, cowboy song or a song from a Broadway musical. Bonds set the text by obscure lyricist Roger Chaney in a simple AABA form and it is seems best suited for medium voice. In cut time and marked *con moto* (with motion), the simple accompaniment is mostly chordal and the melody in the vocal line remains the same for each of the three A sections. (Example 1.3).
Bonds inserts a brief B section of only eleven measures in length beginning in measure 58 which differs not only with a change of melody, but a change in tempo as well to *poco meno mosso* (a little less movement). Here again is an example of the Bonds’ characteristic of an emotional climax followed by calm. The B section begins with a dynamic marking of *forte* and crescendos further to a full, chordal, eighth-note accompaniment leading to the *Tempo I* in measure 69 where the music returns to the original melody and tempo (Example 1.4). At this point, there is an immediate contrast in dynamics as the music also becomes suddenly soft at the *Tempo I*. Although now out-of-print, *Rainbow Gold* may be obtained from the Library of Congress in Washington, DC.

Throughout her lifetime Bonds strove diligently for the acceptance of the music of African-Americans by society’s mainstream and it was through her music that she highlighted issues related to African-Americans in the United States. Her financial success and her acceptance as a composer by Hollywood indicates the great strides that African-American women made in the second half of the twentieth century. It is hoped that in the near future Bonds’ art songs will gain as much appeal as her spirituals and popular music.
Example 2.1: The steady *andante* beginning of *To A Brown Girl Dead*, reminiscent of a New Orleans funeral march. Note that all of the funeral accouterments of the girl are in white.
Example 2.2: *To A Brown Girl Dead* — The climactic *forte* outburst on the lyrics “she’d be so proud, she’d dance and sing” followed by a calmer *piano* marking.
Rainbow Gold

Example 2.3: The first page of *Rainbow Gold* which is reminiscent of a television theme song, cowboy song or a song from a Broadway musical.
Example 2.4: The B section of *Rainbow Gold* which begins with a *forte* dynamic level and continues to crescendo until the *piano* marking and return to *Tempo I* in measure 69.
CHAPTER 3

UNDINE SMITH MOORE

(1904-1989)

I remember the weeping as we went across the field to see cousin Johnny; cousin Johnny dead. The mirrors covered; the clocks stopped. Aunt Sally and Martha Andrews dressed in black with long veils, but dancing in a corner; dropping deeply and rising rhythmically from the floor; Aunt Sarah with her hair always cornrowed; the timbre of the voices of Taus and Theandrus passing the farm at night giving their special hollers...

---Undine Smith Moore

Undine Smith Moore’s vivid memories of the events of her childhood undoubtedly played a considerable role in her development as a musician. It was her strong belief that remembrances such as the one noted above helped to shape the minds of budding artists. She added:

Such things heard and not heard, and seen and not seen, are lodged deeply in us; and the place in us where they are lodged is also the place from which our creativity comes.

The youngest of three children, Undine Smith Moore was born in 1904 in Jarratt, Virginia, to William Smith, a railroad brakeman, and Hardie Turnbull Smith. Unlike

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1 All direct quotes or references, unless otherwise noted, were excerpted from *Undine Smith Moore: An Autobiographical Lecture by the Imminent Black American Composer* (lecture presented at the First National Congress on Women in Music, New York, NY, 1981), Andrews Library, The College of Wooster, Wooster, OH.
Florence Price and Margaret Bonds, Moore’s parents were not affluent nor were they trained musicians. The family relocated to Petersburg, Virginia when Moore was three. As with many African-American musicians, she received her early exposure to music from the black churches. The musical environment in the black churches was one of encouragement because all were expected to participate in the music-making, regardless of musical ability. The church also provided several performance opportunities for the young Moore, i.e., Sunday school, church socials and church suppers, where she entertained the congregations with her piano skills.

The community also played an important part in Moore’s development as a musician. After she began taking piano lessons at age seven, members of the community inquired expectantly about her progress and expressed their great pride in her accomplishments. On many occasions she charmed friends and family with her pianistic abilities at afternoon teas and socials. Moore reminisced:

Petersburg in the days of my childhood was deeply involved in what were called “The Silver Teas.” Dramatic pieces were spoken, delectable foods were served, but above all else, music reigned.

It was a proud moment in Moore’s life, and the life of the community, when she was called up from the fifth grade to be the pianist for the commencement at Peabody High School in Petersburg. She displayed a talent for composing as a child, often jotting down and arranging melodies that she had heard or imagined.

Moore maintained her great interest in music throughout high school and, upon graduation in 1922, was encouraged by her piano teacher, Lillian Allen Darden, to attend
Fisk University. Darden was herself a graduate of Fisk, an historically black college in Nashville, Tennessee, and home of the internationally known Fisk Jubilee Singers. The Juilliard School of Music in New York, recognizing Moore’s musical gifts, made her the first recipient of a Juilliard scholarship for study at Fisk.\(^2\) It was also during her time at Fisk that Moore began to take serious note of her affinity for composition, writing several ensemble pieces which were performed on programs of original compositions at the University. Moore received her Bachelor of Music and Bachelor of Arts degrees from Fisk in 1926, graduating with honors. She went on to study composition with Howard Murphy at Columbia University in New York, where she received her Master of Music and a professional diploma in 1931.

After graduation from Fisk in 1926, Moore accepted a position for a short time as supervisor of music in the public schools of Goldsboro, North Carolina. In 1927, she joined the music faculty of Virginia State College (now Virginia State University) in Petersburg, Virginia, thus beginning a forty-five year career at that institution. It was also during this period that she met James Arthur Moore, an athletic director at Virginia State, whom she married in 1938, a union which produced one daughter, Mary Hardie.

While at Virginia State, Moore served as chairman of music theory, supervisor of student teaching in music, acting head of the department and she started the first course for integration of music and art. Moore was an enthusiastic educator and performer on both piano and organ, and it was her belief that teaching had a "valuable reciprocal

\(^2\) Moore did not attend college at Juilliard, rather, she was the first recipient of a special scholarship given by the Juilliard School of Music for musical studies at Fisk University.
relationship to the art of composition.” She maintained that, because of her great love of teaching, she came to think of herself as a “teacher who composes, rather than a composer who teaches.” Moore is much revered by her former students who use such words as “determined,” “passionate,” and “tenacious” to describe her. She remained on campus for long hours, both before and after classes, to assure her availability to her students. The list of outstanding students she inspired includes such names as jazz pianist Billy Taylor, conductor Leon Thompson, songwriter Phil Medley and opera singer Camilla Williams.

Moore was also co-founder and co-director, along with Altona Trent-Johns, of the Black Music Center in Petersburg from 1969-1972. The center was established to raise awareness of African-American music of all types and received partial funding from the National Endowment of the Humanities for its endeavor.

Moore’s tenure at Virginia State also marked the beginning of a long compositional period in which she wrote over one hundred works for orchestra, chamber groups, solo voice, chorus and solo instruments. Because Virginia State often did not have the resources to purchase new music, Moore frequently found herself either composing or arranging works for music students and faculty alike.

Perhaps one of her most well-known works is the 16-part cantata for narrator, chorus and orchestra entitled *Scenes from the Life of a Martyr*, in memory of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. In the cantata, Moore portrays the milestones in Dr. King’s life, drawing

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3 James Pettis and James Reeves, Undine Smith Moore Festival, Virginia State University, Petersburg, VA, discussions with author, March 8, 1997.
upon the King James Version of the Bible, as well as the writings of poets such as Langston Hughes, for the lyrics. Overall, the work is extremely powerful, incorporating dissonance and chromaticism to enhance the dramatic content. *Scenes from the Life of a Martyr,* which Moore designates as her most significant work, was premiered by the Richmond Symphony Orchestra on April 19, 1982 and was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize that same year.

Moore was presented with many awards and honors for her music and her teaching during her lifetime, among them, honorary doctorates from Virginia State and Indiana University, the National Association of Negro Musicians Distinguished Achievement Award and the National Black Caucus Award. In 1972, she received a citation of recognition from the City of New York in a Town Hall concert given by several of her former students. The concert was attended by the mayor of New York City who read from the citation:

To one who knows the true meaning of service, dedication, beauty and love.

After her retirement from Virginia State in 1972, Moore continued to lecture in colleges and universities across the country and abroad until her death in Petersburg on February 6, 1989.

**THE SONGS**

Like her predecessors in this document Moore frequently incorporated ethnic traits into her music. While her earlier vocal works were diatonic and romantic in nature,
her later compositions were often highly chromatic, atonal and dissonant. Although she is mostly known for her choral works and arrangements of spirituals, Moore wrote several memorable solo vocal compositions. Her celebration of the female gender is evident in that most of her songs are about romantic, passionate love and written for the soprano voice.

Moore drew much of her incentive to write for the solo voice from her desire to acquaint the public with the beautiful African-American melodies of her childhood. In many of her writings and lectures Moore asserted:

I was deeply touched by the fragments of spirituals my mother and father sang around the house. I would draw up a chair with my manuscript pad and write as my mother sang. I was struck at the time by how many of these melodies were not heard. This experience has become a part of everything I have done.

Moore also composed songs to commemorate special occasions for many of her students. Presented here are three such songs which are devoid of specific African-American nationalistic traits and are composed in the western European tradition. These three songs also depict Moore’s aptitude for setting romantic verses to music.

**Love Let The Wind Cry...How I Adore Thee**

Although Moore set the poems of many African-American poets, she obtained her lyrics from several diverse sources. The lyrics for her most notable art song *Love Let the Wind Cry...How I Adore Thee* (1977), were derived from a translation of a poem by the

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Greek poet Sappho. Much of the information about Sappho is speculative, and only a few fragments of her verses have survived. She was born on the Greek island of Lesbos in about 612 B.C. and is famous for her lyrics about love, which are considered by many scholars to be the height of eroticism. Composers of the Romantic era found the lyrical verses of Sappho very appealing; a noted example is the *Sapphische Ode* (Op. 94, No. 4) of Johannes Brahms.

Moore's setting of this poem is for a soprano with an extensive vocal range. It employs a lush, chordal piano accompaniment with a dramatic vocal line. The key signature is D-flat major with frequent key shifts until the change of key signature to C minor in measure 22. The recitative-like vocal line is sung over a chordal accompaniment with interludes of sixteenth-note passages. Moore accommodates the rhythmic pattern of the poetry through frequent changes of time signature and triplet figures followed by duples (Example 3.1). Several instances occur in which the piano either doubles or echoes the voice.

*Love Let the Wind Cry...How I Adore Thee* is an example of a dramatically passionate, through-composed love song that must be sung with enthusiasm.

**Lyric for TrueLove**

Moore wrote *Lyric for TrueLove* for soprano Carolyn Kizzie, a former choir director at Virginia State University. Completed on September 16, 1975 and based on lyrics by Florence Hynes Willette, it was written for a soprano with extended vocal range

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and dramatic abilities. No key signature is given and the song shifts keys on numerous occasions; for instance, the key relations G-flat minor, E-flat minor and C-flat minor in the opening two measures. The recitative-like setting is through-composed with key melodic themes over a sweeping, restless piano accompaniment. It is declamatory with frequent meter changes to accommodate the text (Example 3.2).

Karen Savage stated that Moore stressed to her in a coaching session that she “must jump in immediately at the top of the first run so that the passion would be there” Moore uses text painting, such as on the lyrics “young scented winds hastens by to remind us” (measure 4), which Moore has stipulated “pressing forward” to simulate the wind rushing by. Lyric for Truelove is replete with thirty-second note runs in the accompaniment which denotes the release of pent-up emotions and burning desires. It is an intensely emotional and erotic expression of love.

**My True Love Hath My Heart**

*My True Love Hath My Heart* was composed on June 6, 1978 for the wedding of Moore’s student, soprano Karen Floyd and her future husband, Harry Savage, Jr. It is based on a poem by English poet, Sir Philip Sydney (1504-1586), and is best suited for soprano voice. Moore’s sensitivity to the text is shown by the simple, chordal accompaniment that is reminiscent of an English folk song. It is in the key of G-flat major and contains a few harmonic variances, such as the B-flat minor seventh chord to the B diminished chord in measure 7 of the piano prelude (Example 3.3), a pattern which

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reappears near the end of the song. Measures 47 and 48 are in the third-relation key of B-flat (Example 3.4) leading to the B major chord (an enharmonic spelling of C-flat major) in measure 50. The unpretentious and straightforward style of *My True Love Hath My Heart* allows greater opportunity for vocal expression.

In comparison to Moore’s previous two songs discussed in this document, *My True Love Hath My Heart* is atypical of her art song compositional style. Though it lacks the sweeping sixteenth-note passages and urgency, it is none-the-less an expression of joyous and passionate love.

Many of Moore’s compositions have been widely performed and although several of them have been published, most remain in manuscript form and are in the possession of various former students and colleagues.
Love Let The Wind Cry ..... How I Adore Thee

Poem - Sappho
Rendered by Billie Connell
Based on the piano transcription of
N. Y. Wharton

With passion - pressing forward \( \frac{j}{d} \) - or 88 - 92

Love, let the wind cry on the dark

mountain... Bending the ash trees, and the tall hemlocks with the

great voice of thunderous legions....

Example 3.1: The first page of Love Let the Wind Cry -- it is in the key of D-flat major with frequent key shifts and changes of time signature. The first measure displays the triplet followed by duple figure in the vocal line.
Example 3.2: *Lyric for Truelove* has no key signature and frequent key shifts occur. It is recitative-like and through-composed.
Example 3.3: The first page of *My True Love Hath My Heart* shows Moore’s simple, straightforward chordal accompaniment. Measure 7 shows one of the harmonic variances in the song.
Example 3.4: The third-relation key of B-flat major beginning in measure 48 of *My True Love Hath My Heart*.
CHAPTER 4

DOROTHY RUDD MOORE

(1940- )

I was writing music before I knew the word composer. As a young child I used to make up melodies. I didn’t know I was being creative -- I just did it. Then, I decided that (composing) was what I wanted to do.¹

-- Dorothy Rudd Moore

Dorothy Rudd Moore, who resides and works in New York City, is the only composer discussed in this document alive today and this author enjoyed the privilege of interviewing her extensively in person and in several telephone conversations.

Moore, like her predecessors previously discussed in this document, displayed a gift for composing at an early age. She was born on June 4, 1940 in New Castle, Delaware, and her mother, a gifted singer, helped to guide her towards a career as a musician. Not only did Moore show an aptitude for composition as a child, she also revealed a talent for singing and began studying voice with her mother’s voice teacher, Lola Hayes.

¹ All direct quotes or references, unless otherwise noted, were excerpted from Dorothy Rudd Moore of New York, NY, discussions with author, July 8, 1996.
After graduation from high school in 1958, Moore attended college at Howard University in Washington, DC, where she majored in theory and composition, studying composition with Mark Fax. She added to her musical diversity by minoring in piano and voice.

It was during her tenure at Howard University that Moore began an active career as a composer, writing a cycle of twelve songs entitled *Songs from the Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* in 1962. The songs are based on text by Rudyard Kipling and are for soprano and oboe. The cycle was premiered in Paris, France in August, 1962 and received its United States debut on February 23, 1965 in a Carnegie Hall recital given by Moore. A review in the April, 1975 issue of *Music Journal* read, “the works are light, moody and inventive, achieving a sophisticated simplicity.” While in college, Moore also penned her orchestral work *Symphony No. 1*, a one movement piece premiered by the National Symphony Orchestra in Washington, DC in May, 1963.

Moore graduated magna cum laude from Howard in 1963 with a Bachelor of Music degree. During the summer of that same year she was awarded a Lucy Moten Scholarship for study at the American Conservatory in Fontainebleau, France, where she became a pupil of the famed French composition teacher, Nadia Boulanger. Upon her return to the United States, Moore settled in New York City and continued her study of composition with Chou Wen-chung.

In 1964, she composed *Baroque Suite for Unaccompanied Violin* as a wedding present for her husband, cellist Kermit Moore. The piece was first performed.
on November 21, 1965 at the Harlem School of the Arts in New York City with Mr. Moore as cellist.

Moore has been an educator much of her lifetime as well. From 1965-1966 she took a position at the Harlem School of the Arts, teaching theory and piano. She later taught music history and music appreciation at New York University in 1969 and at the Bronx Community College in 1971. In 1968, she helped found the Society of Black Composers, an organization which promotes the exposure and performance of compositions by African-American composers across the United States.

While she did explore a career as a performer, Moore always considered herself, first and foremost, a composer. She stated:

I was a reluctant performer, even though I had sung my whole life. I was always a composer. My husband calls me "the reluctant soprano."

Moore refuses to designate any of her works as “favorites” stating, “it’s like choosing which child you like the most,” however, she displays particular pride in Frederick Douglass, her three-act opera about the life of the escaped slave who became an abolitionist and journalist. The opera depicts eighteen years in Douglass’ life from his escape from slavery in 1844 to the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation which freed the slaves in 1862. Moore gave special attention to the libretto, which she wrote herself, using Douglass’ 1845 autobiography Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass as a guide to add realism and authenticity to the piece. The emotional triumphs and heartbreaks in Douglass’ efforts to emancipate the slaves are all the more vividly revealed through Moore’s melodic and often contrapuntal treatment of the music.
Frederick Douglass was premiered on June 28, 1985 by Opera Ebony in New York City and was met with rave reviews in the New York press. Gary Schmidgall reported on the premier in the October, 1985 issue of Opera News, “Moore displays rare ability to wed musical and dramatic motion, graceful lyric inventiveness and full command of the orchestral palate... it would not be surprising to see it (Frederick Douglass) take a place beside Lizzie Borden, (The Ballad of) Baby Doe and Thomson’s Mother of Us All. In one respect -- its inspiring theme -- it outclasses them all.”

Moore has been fortunate to have gained recognition as a composer early in her career and has continued to enjoy success to the present day. She is considered by concert reviewers of such prestigious publications as The New York Times, Music Journal and Opera News to be one of the most exceptional composers of art song today. She conducts a private studio in her home in New York, where she teaches voice, ear training, sight singing and maintains an active career as a composer and lectures both in this country and abroad.

THE SONGS

Moore declares a fondness for the works of many great composers, including Ludwig van Beethoven, Franz Schubert, Robert Schumann and Hugo Wolf. Her music, however, is contrapuntal and harmonically complex, reminiscent of her two primary influences, Johann Sebastian Bach and Duke Ellington; she stated:

If I could take only one composer with me on a desert island, it would be Bach because of the beauty and order of his compositions -- also

Duke Ellington because of the structure and inventiveness of his music.

Additionally, the hypnotic and lyrical way in which Moore spins the melodies in her compositions reveals quickly her background as a singer and her understanding of the human voice.

She writes a work only when commissioned to do so and the majority of Moore’s contributions to the genre of art songs, with the exception of *The Weary Blues* (1972), have been in the form of song cycles in the true and classic definition of the term. Moore’s cycles are composed with unifying melodic and rhythmic themes. She expressed to the author a strong preference for having the songs performed in the settings in which they were composed rather than excerpted. Since she is also a gifted poet, Moore is extremely particular about the verses she chooses to set to music, making each poem an innate part of her being through intense study and memorization. To achieve continuity within the cycle, Moore decides on a point-of-view from which she wishes to approach the cycle, relying on this viewpoint and the purpose for which the piece is being written to dictate the choice of text. Moore emphasizes that, for her, choosing the poetry is an intellectual and extremely personal exercise.

Moore has extolled the lives and loves of women, both as performers and as subjects of her compositions. In addition to *Songs from the Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, she has also composed the song cycles *From the Dark Tower* (1970), *Flowers of*
Darkness (1989) and Sonnets on Love, Rosebuds and Death (1976). The author has chosen her personal favorite Sonnets on Love, Rosebuds and Death for discussion in this document.

Sonnets on Love, Rosebuds and Death

Contents:

Introduction
1. I Had No Thoughts of Violets of Late (Alice Dunbar Nelson)
2. Joy (Clarissa Scott Delany)
3. Some Things Are Very Dear to Me (Gwendolyn B. Bennett)
4. He Came in Silvern Armour (Gwendolyn B. Bennett)
5. Song for a Dark Girl (Langston Hughes)
6. Idiotry (Countee Cullen)
7. Youth Sings a Song of Rosebuds (Arna Bontemps)
8. Invocation (Helene Johnson)

Sonnets on Love, Rosebuds and Death is a cycle of eight songs for soprano, piano and violin. Commissioned in 1976 by violinist Sanford Allen for soprano Miriam Burton on the occasion of her birthday, the cycle was premiered on May 23, 1976 in New York's Alice Tully Hall by Burton and Allen with Kelly Wyatt at the piano. Unlike the works discussed earlier in this document, Dorothy Rudd Moore's, Sonnets on Love, Rosebuds and Death requires a soprano with extensive range, good diction, an excellent ear and an exceptional ability to communicate difficult poetic ideas. The cycle also demands a superb pianist and violinist.

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4 From the Dark Tower is a cycle of eight songs for mezzo-soprano, cello and piano. It was later adapted for mezzo-soprano and chamber orchestra (1972) by the composer. The text is derived from the poems of African-American poets. The title song is based on a poem by Countee Cullen. Flowers of Darkness is a cycle of six songs for tenor and piano with text by African-American poets. The title song is based on a poem by Countee Cullen. The “flowers of darkness” is a reference to the beauty of African-American women.
The text is based on the poetry of the seven African-American poets noted above, most of whom were significant figures in the Harlem Renaissance. Moore selected the eight poems with a concept that the text would reflect a mature woman who is rediscovering love rather than learning of love for the first time. She weaves a thread which draws together the events of the woman’s life by employing recurring poetic and melodic ideas throughout the piece. These through-composed songs do not specify key signatures though key centers can be identified in many of them. Although the songs are tonal, Moore employed extensive chromaticism and dissonance.

The cycle begins with a ten-measure “introduction” by the piano and violin which contains compositional ideas Moore uses throughout the cycle; namely, descending melodic passages, chromatic motives, octave displacement, the pentatonic scale and juxtaposition of major and minor chords. The introduction leads directly into the first song I Had No Thought of Violets of Late, a theme that will recur later in the cycle (Example 4.1). The descending passages first heard in the introduction recur in measure 23 with an answering passage in the violin in measure 24.

The first poem describes a woman who had not recently thought of flowers, night life or other exciting events associated with romance. The composer displays her sensitivity to text painting by using a waltzing 6/8 time at measure 22 with pizzicato violin as she recalls a time long ago of “garish lights, and mincing little fops, cabarets and songs and dead’ning wine” (Example 4.2). The opening theme of the song is heard

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\footnote{For a brief discussion on the “Harlem Renaissance” see Chapter 1 of this document entitled “Florence Beatrice Price.”}
again in the violin at the end of the piece. Moore changes the time signature frequently to accommodate the rhythm of the poetry.

The second song in the cycle, *Joy*, begins in the key of A-minor but does contain several key shifts. The song is heavily chromatic and the sextolet passages against triplets and duplets occur frequently in the piece and aid in sustaining a sense of agitation and forward movement.

Moore depicts the elation of *Joy* in the beginning of the song with sweeping, dancing sextolets in the piano, sixteenth note passages in the voice and pizzicato violin (Example 4.3). A brief interlude in 3/4 time occurs before a return to the opening theme in the piano (measure 25) in a slow triplet figure (Example 4.4).

Moore calls *Some Things Are Very Dear to Me* the “pillow talk” song. Although it is in 6/8 time, Moore uses tied notes to defuse the clarity of the rhythm. The overall mood of the piece is seductive with the distant sound of the muted violin and a soft, languid theme in the piano. The addition of the alluring text, which Moore marked “caressingly” also serves to enhance the seductive quality of the song (Example 4.5). The violin continues to play a separate theme, as though it is not a part of the ensemble, yet, the voice, violin and piano are very intricately woven together. Moore employs ritards, crescendos and rich contrapuntal texture to further intensify this quality. The opening theme of *Joy* occurs in the violin in measure 22. Moore further blurs the rhythm by the use of hemiola in the final measures.

Following *Some Things Are Very Dear to Me* is the intense opening of *He Came in Silvery Armour* (Example 4.6). Moore stated that this piece is “a nightmare -- a
premonition of death when the woman has gone to sleep after the pillow talk."

Replacing the fury of the beginning measures is a motif in the bass of three against two that is suggestive of a galloping horse. Among the many recurring themes in this song is the melodic theme from *I Had No Thought of Violets of Late* that is played in the violin in measures 27-29 (Example 4.7) and in the vocal line in measures 33-35. Ironically, Moore denotes both the words "Love" and "Death" by leaps of a seventh. Fragments of the opening theme of the song occur in the piano as the piece ends.

In direct contrast, *Song for a Dark Girl* begins with the jocularity of a square dance as-fourths and fifths are used in the violin to depict the sound of a fiddle (Example 4.8). The poem describes the lynching of the woman’s lover upon a gnarled tree outside of the location of the dance. Moore notates this distress vocally by employing a wailing glissando on the words "Dixie," “me” and “lover” and a painful moan on the syllable “huhm,” reminiscent of blues and jazz ideas. In measure 45, the woman declares mournfully that “love is a naked (pronounced *naked* shadow on gnarled and *naked* tree” (Example 4.9) as the violin and piano proceed angrily with thematic material from the opening of the song. The rhythmic syncopation Moore employs in the voice, piano and violin throughout the piece fuels the underlying agitation, anger and sadness of the song. The setting is chordal and is less chromatic than the preceding pieces.

Moore stresses that, although *Song for a Dark Girl* describes a lynching, it should not be viewed as a part of African-American history only, but as a part of the totality of American history.
The first chord of *Idolatry*, in the key of C-minor, begins immediately without a pause (*attacca*). The chordal accompaniment has a somber and reverent feel as the woman mourns the death of her lover (Example 4.10). The word “died” in measure 23 occurs on a major chord and Moore uses the juxtaposition of major and minor chords to indicate tolling bells in the piano in measures 24-26 (Example 4.11). The song ends in the key of D major.

*Youth Sings A Song of Rosebuds* begins with a descending theme in the violin that also employs octave displacement (Example 4.12). Though the song is diatonic, it employs extensive use of chromaticism. It is evocative of a woman who is not yet old, however, she realizes that she will be one day. Her intention is to enjoy and appreciate life while she is still young so that there are no regrets as she grows old. Dissonance occurs at the entrance of the piano in measure 7 and the time signature changes to 3/8 to accommodate the poetry at measure 9. The theme from the first song, *I Had No Thought of Violets of Late*, recurs in the vocal line in measures 66-67 (Example 4.13) and again in measures 73-74. The beginning theme of the song is played in the violin above the dissonance in the piano in the final measures.

The first measures of *Invocation* are reminiscent of the beginning of the cycle with the addition of rapid thirty-second notes in the piano which represent rain falling (Example 4.14). Moore states, “when the singer comes in it is as though she is standing under a tree in the rain -- she has lived her life; she has no regrets.”

The song employs the pentatonic scale and a chordal accompaniment. The melodic theme from *Song for a Dark Girl* is heard in the bass line of measure 13.
(Example 4.15) and the theme from *I Had No Thought of Violets of Late* recurs in measure 24 of the vocal line. A chromatic, tension-building two against three figure is played the piano and violin beginning in measure 37. The theme from *I Had No Thought of Violets of Late* occurs once again and the final two measures shift from major to minor.

*Sonnets on Love, Rosebuds and Death* exemplifies Moore's trademark contrapuntal treatment of melodic material and her usage of underlying rich, harmonic textures. The cycle has substantive beauty and quality and demands a singer who possesses maturity and superb musicianship.

The works of Dorothy Rudd Moore highlighted in this document are unpublished, however, they may be obtained from the American Composers Alliance in New York.\(^6\)

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Example 4.1: The opening of *I Had No Thought of Violets of Late*, a theme that will recur frequently throughout the cycle.
Example 4.2: An excerpt after the time signature changes to 6/8 in measure 22 of *I Had No Thought of Violets of Late* that shows Moore's sensivity to text painting.
Example 4.3: The opening of Joy with sextolets in the piano, sixteenth note passages in the voice and pizzicato violin.
Example 4.4: Measure 18 marks the time signature change to 3/4 in *Joy*. Measure 25 marks the return of the opening thematic material in a slow triplet figure before the return to 2/4 time.
Example 4.5: The beginning measures of *Some Things Are Very Dear to Me* which Moore marked "caressingly." The seductiveness of the song is aided by the muted violin and languid theme in the piano. The tied notes defuse the clarity of the rhythm.
Example 4.6: The intense opening of *He Came in Silvern Armour* played by the piano and violin. The frantic beginning denotes fear of a nightmare.
Example 4.7: In measure 22 of *He Came in Silvern Armour* the music becomes more lyrical. The theme from *I Had No Thought of Violets of Late* recurs in the violin in measures 27-29.
Example 4.8: The square dance theme played in the violin part of Song for a Dark Girl. Syncopation in the piano and voice parts aid in adding anger, fear and panic. Moore adds wailing glissandos and moans that are reminiscent of jazz and blues idioms.
Example 4.9: The final statement in *Song for a Dark Girl* as the woman declares that “love is a naked (pronounced *naked*) shadow on a gnarled and naked tree.” The violin and piano proceed angrily with material from the opening theme of the song.
Example 4.10: The chordal, somber entrance of *Idolatry* as the woman mourns the death of her lover.

Example 4.11: The juxtaposition of major and minor chords in measures 24-27 of *Idolatry* that indicates the tolling of bells.
Example 4.12: The descending passages of the violin solo at the beginning of *Youth Sings a Song of Rosebuds*. The entrance of the piano brings dissonance in measure 7 and the time signature changes to 3/8 as the voice enters in measure 9.
Example 4.13: Youth Sings a Song of Rosebuds — The theme from I Had No Thought of Violets of Late is heard in the vocal line beginning in measure 66.
Example 4.14: The rapid thirty-second notes in the beginning measures of *Invocation* represent rain falling.

Example 4.15: The melodic theme from *Song for a Dark Girl* can be heard in the bass line of the piano on the lyrics “where once a gnarled tree stood” in measure 13 of *Invocation*.
CONCLUSION

Although not as well-known as their male counterparts, the four African-American women composers discussed in this document greatly contributed to the art song genre in the United States. They successfully combined idioms from African-American culture, such as blues and jazz harmonies, themes of social awareness and fragments of Negro spirituals, with those of western Europe. Additionally, these women, and others like them, set to music the events surrounding them as African-American women, indeed as American women. These facets helped to add dimension to a classical art form that speaks about the American culture as a whole. While certain musical attributes of African-American culture are easily identifiable, one must make a more in-depth examination to locate those gender-related characteristics that manifest themselves in the musical choices made by the composer. However, it remains important to emphasize that one cannot conclude that a work was composed by an African-American or a woman by simply listening to the music.

The compositional talents of Price, Bonds and Dorothy Moore were fostered at an early age by musical parents, while Undine Moore garnered her primary musical exposure from the church. Each of them attended premiere music institutions and were instructed by some of the most well-known music educators of the twentieth century.
Not surprisingly, the evolution of their solo vocal compositions conincided with the development of the art song form in this country.

Since Florence Price began composing art songs in the early twentieth century, she can be counted as one of the innovators of the genre. Her neo-romantic and nationalistic songs are appealing and indicative of the period. While they are not vocally demanding, they are dramatically challenging. Taking her cue from the cultural changes in the United States in the mid-twentieth century, Margaret Bonds became more inventive in her solo vocal compositions, adding jazz and blues idioms as well as themes of social and racial awareness. Her versatility as a composer afforded her the freedom to compose songs with wide “crossover” appeal. Bonds later went to Hollywood to write for television and movies.

The songs of Undine Smith Moore are mostly about passionate love and require a singer with an extensive vocal range. They evolved from diatonic and tonal settings to ones that are chromatic, atonal and dissonant, much like the songs of many composers during the 1960’s and 1970’s.

Dorothy Rudd Moore, a composer working successfully today, has contributed mostly song cycles to the art song genre. While her settings are lyrical and inventive, they are extremely sophisticated and demand a singer who is an excellent musician with an extensive vocal range and exceptional dramatic ability.

These women were also leaders in the African-American community. As educators in many fine institutions as well as in private studios, they helped to nurture future generations of outstanding musical talent. Price began teaching in educational
institutions but later opened a private studio, while Bonds taught in several diverse instructional musical venues. Undine Moore’s forty-five year career as an educator at Virginia State University and her deep commitment to teaching positioned her to foster the careers of many successful musicians. Her compositional output was certainly enhanced as composer-in-residence at that institution. Like most successful composers today Dorothy Moore makes her living solely as a musician; composing, lecturing and teaching privately in her home. Though she is an avid spokesperson for African-American composers, her lectures cover a diversity of topics and she counts among her students persons from all ethnic backgrounds.

Although this document examines the art song compositions of only four African-American women, many others have contributed to the genre. They include Zenobia Powell Perry (b. 1914), a native of Oklahoma now living in Wilberforce, Ohio. She received her Bachelor of Science degree in 1938 from the Tuskegee Institute; her Master of Arts degree from Colorado University; and, a second Master of Arts degree from Wyoming University in 1945. She counts as her musical mentors William Dawson and Darius Milhaud. Powell has composed chamber, orchestral and piano works as well as art songs, most of which are for soprano.

Delois White is a resident of Cleveland Ohio. She attended Oberlin Conservatory and the Cleveland Institute of Music, earning her Bachelor of Music degree and her Master of Music degree, respectively. White is a prolific composer of art songs and piano, chamber and choral works. She is on faculty at Cuyahoga Community College.
Betty Jackson King (1928-1994) was the daughter of musical parents. She received her Bachelors and Masters degrees from the Chicago Musical College. King wrote organ, piano, instrumental and choral compositions. Her art songs and spirituals are frequently performed by many prominent singers.

Valerie Capers (b. 1935) received her Bachelors and Masters degrees from the Juilliard School of Music. Although she was blinded by a strep infection at age six, she nevertheless made great musical strides with her multiple talents as pianist, conductor and composer. In addition to piano, instrumental and chamber music, Capers has written art songs and song cycles.

The compositional lives of the women discussed in this document not only mirror the evolution of the American art song, but the evolution of women in the United States as well. It is hoped that this document will be yet another step in bringing to the forefront the very fine solo vocal works of African-American women which deserve wider publication and performance.
APPENDIX

INDEX OF SONGS
### Index of Songs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPOSER</th>
<th>SONG TITLE</th>
<th>KEY</th>
<th>VOICE TYPE</th>
<th>DIFFICULTY</th>
<th>LOCATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Florence Price</td>
<td><em>Because</em></td>
<td>A-minor</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Univ. of Pennsylvania Library Philadelphia, PA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florence Price</td>
<td><em>Arabella</em></td>
<td>C-major</td>
<td>Tenor/Baritone</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Univ. of Pennsylvania Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florence Price</td>
<td><em>Dreamships</em></td>
<td>E-major</td>
<td>Tenor/Baritone</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Univ. of Pennsylvania Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florence Price</td>
<td><em>A White Rose</em></td>
<td>G-major</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Easy</td>
<td>Univ. of Pennsylvania Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florence Price</td>
<td><em>The Washerwoman</em></td>
<td>C-minor</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Univ. of Pennsylvania Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret Bonds</td>
<td><em>To A Brown Girl Dead</em></td>
<td>G-minor</td>
<td>Mezzo-soprano</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>The Author</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margaret Bonds</td>
<td><em>Rainbow Gold</em></td>
<td>B-flat major</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Easy</td>
<td>The Library of Congress Washington, DC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undine Smith Moore</td>
<td><em>Love Let the Wind Cry... How I Adore Thee</em></td>
<td>D-flat major</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
<td>Difficult</td>
<td>Anthology of Art Songs by Black American Composers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undine Smith Moore</td>
<td><em>Lyric for True Love</em></td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
<td>Difficult</td>
<td>The Author</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undine Smith Moore</td>
<td><em>My True Love Hath My Heart</em></td>
<td>B-flat-major</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>The Author</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorothy Rudd Moore</td>
<td><em>Somets on Love, Rosebuds and Death</em></td>
<td>Various</td>
<td>Soprano</td>
<td>Very Difficult</td>
<td>American Composers Alliance New York, NY</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
BIBLIOGRAPHY


