

Ellen Wakelin

1<sup>st</sup> June 2021

End of Year Piano Recital

Sonata in E minor  
I *Andante-Allegro*  
II *Andante*

Florence Price (1887-1953)

Fragile Dream

Joe Hisaishi (b.1950)

Lyric Pieces Op. 43  
*Papillon*  
*Vögljen*  
*An Den Frühling*

Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)

## **Sonata in E minor**

**Florence Price (1887-1953)**

I *Andante-Allegro*

II *Andante*

Florence Price was an African American composer of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century writing over 300 works, including songs, chamber works and solo piano pieces. In 1933 with her Symphony in E minor, she became the first African American female to have her work performed by a major Symphony Orchestra. Despite the recent increase of interest in her music, Price is still a relatively unknown composer who deserves a lot more recognition for her huge achievements. Her compositional style is a blend of the European classical tradition which reflects her classical training at the New England Conservatory of Music, and the influence of her African American heritage, both prominent within this work.

### **I *Andante-Allegro***

The sonata opens in E minor, with a grand chordal introduction with dotted rhythms and *forte* dynamics before moving into the expositions A theme. This has an uplifting march like feel in contrast to the 2<sup>nd</sup> theme in C major, which has a beautifully lyrical and relaxed melody. In the development section Price takes these themes through a journey of ever changing chromatic harmony, creating an exciting and tense atmosphere. This is relieved with contrasting sections of warm and tranquil melodies, whose short appearances make them even more enjoyable. The presto section of the recapitulation brings the movement to a climactic and powerful end.

### **II *Andante***

The slow movement opens with a beautifully lyrical melody with clear influence from the African American spiritual. With syncopated rhythms and subtle chromatic harmony, this piece is full of emotion and expression. As the piece progresses, tension is built through the B section with underlying triplets thickening the texture. This leads into a grand reiteration of the B theme which shines through the chordal texture, interweaving between voices. In the return of the A section, the piece reaches another climax with a triumphant repeat of the opening melody. Exhausted, the piece gently returns to the same calm, content and peaceful atmosphere that it opened with.

## **Fragile Dream**

**Joe Hisaishi (b.1950)**

Joe Hisaishi is a Japanese film composer most known for his prolific work in anime, scoring all but 1 of Hayao Miyazaki's Studio Ghibli films, including the Academy Award winning films *Spirited Away* (2002) and *Departures* (2008). His mixture of Japanese classical and American minimalist influences creates a very distinct style that has resulted in him winning the Japanese Academy Award for Best Music eight times. This worldwide recognition has earned him the label of 'The John Williams of Japan' (Pitchfork 2017).

The piece *Fragile Dream* is the 4<sup>th</sup> piece on the 4<sup>th</sup> collection of *Piano Stories* entitled 'Freedom', which was released in 2005 for piano and orchestra. This solo transcription opens with a flowing introduction creating a light and effortless feeling of drifting off to sleep before the main melody is introduced. This beautiful lilting melody originally played by the strings is accompanied by a simple crotchet waltz motif that develops throughout, creating an

increasing sense of movement leading toward the climactic C section. A sense of fragility is created through the use of occasional chromatic inflection, dissonance and unexpected harmonies, as well as metrically through the brief shift away from triple time to a single bar of 4/4 in the A section. This disrupts the flow of the piece and adds a sense of uneasiness to the overall dream like atmosphere.

## **Lyric Pieces Op. 43**

**Edvard Grieg (1843-1907)**

*Papillon*

*Vöglien*

*An Den Frühling*

Grieg was a composer of the late romantic period perhaps best known for his lyric pieces written for solo piano. Each piece has a descriptive title and each set contains a huge variation of character. He wrote 10 sets including 66 pieces in the years 1867-1901 of which Op. 43 was the 3<sup>rd</sup> set, published in 1887. Grieg referred to this set as ‘Spring Songs’ which is a very fitting title for the set including 6 short pieces, of which I will be playing no. 1, 4 and 6. Grieg’s Norwegian nationalism played a huge role in his musical output as well as the influence of other early romantic composers including Schumann and Mendelssohn.

### ***Papillon* (Butterfly)**

*Papillon*, meaning butterfly opens in A major with an ascending chromatic motif that remains prominent throughout the piece. This motif creates a picture of a butterfly taking off, with each repetition soaring to a higher climax than the last. It then settles back down briefly with a descending intervallic pattern before taking off once again. Through each repetition of the A section, the rise and fall in pitch, the swells in the dynamics and the tempo rubato all compliment the lyrical phrasing which creates a fluctuating arc of tension and release, representing the movements of a butterfly.

### ***Vöglien* (Little Bird)**

This is a very light hearted, short piece with a fluttering semiquaver motif, opening in the upper register of the piano with answering chords in the left hand. This is developed with descending quintuplets in the return of the A section, creating a rippling effect. This high pitched, fast and light motif creates the image of a bird chirping, and with the contrasting dynamics and extensive use of rests an almost humorous atmosphere is created. In the B section the semiquaver motif is in the bass with offbeat chords in the right hand instead. This playful communication between the two parts adds to the overall cheerful and humorous mood of the piece.

### ***An Den Frühling* (To Spring)**

Opening in 6/4 the right hand has a repetitive chordal accompaniment with a triplet feel whilst the melody in the left hand plays conflicting duplets. The cheerful and sprightly A section reflects a beautiful spring day, before it moves into the bass clef with a minor feel. The piece begins to accelerate and crescendo with offbeat accents creating a hemiola, all building tension up to the climax with *fortissimo* repetitive chords. The return of the A section brings with it a sense of release and the imagery of the sun coming out, with the melody in octaves in the right hand accompanied by rippling, ascending arpeggios. Toward the end, a sense of peace and tranquillity is created as the tempo begins to slow and the piece winds down, bringing this set of ‘Spring Songs’ to a gentle close.