



TRAILBLAZING WOMEN

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, AT 7 PM
FRIDAY & SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 16 & 17, AT 8 PM

NASHVILLE SYMPHONY

GIANCARLO GUERRERO, conductor
Martha & Bronson Ingram Music Director Chair

KAREN WALWYN, piano

LORELEI ENSEMBLE, vocal ensemble

JOAN TOWER **14 minutes**
1920/2019

FLORENCE PRICE **18 minutes**
Piano Concerto in One Movement

-INTERMISSION-

JULIA WOLFE **30 minutes**
Her Story **World Premiere**
Foment
Raise

This concert will last approximately one hour, 22 minutes, including a 20-minute intermission.

HER STORY CREATIVE TEAM

ANNE KAUFFMAN, Director

JEFF SUGG, Scenic, Lighting, and Production Designer

ANDREW COTTON, Sound Designer

MÁRION TALÁN DE LA ROSA, Costume Designer

KENNY SAVELSON, Project Manager

ASHER LLOYD EHRENBERG, Associate Director

PRODUCED BY BANG ON A CAN

Learn more about the Creative Team by scanning the QR code.



NATIONAL ENDOWMENT for the **ARTS**
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Her Story was Commissioned by the Boston Symphony Orchestra, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the Nashville Symphony, the National Symphony and the San Francisco Symphony, and with the generous support of Linda and Stuart Nelson and the National Endowment for the Arts.

This concert will be recorded live for future broadcast. To ensure the highest quality recording, please keep noise to a minimum.

JOAN TOWER

1920/2019

Born on September 6, 1938, in New Rochelle, New York

Currently resides in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

Composed:
2020

Estimated length:
14 minutes



First performance:

December 3, 2021, with Jaap Van Zweden conducting the New York Philharmonic in New York City.

First Nashville Symphony performance:

These are the first Nashville Symphony performances of this work.

Joan Tower’s career has been a trailblazing success story in more ways than one. Along with overcoming the challenges she faced merely to be heard amid the male-dominated classical canon, Tower found favor with a widespread audience as her music became better known through varied orchestral residencies and commissions. Her work holds a special significance for Nashville Symphony, whose first Tower recording (2008’s orchestral compilation *Made in America*) garnered three GRAMMY® Awards for the orchestra. In 2020, Tower was chosen Composer of the Year by *Musical America* and received Chamber Music America’s Richard J. Bogomolny National Service Award—two recent additions to a long list of honors that includes the first Grawemeyer Award to be won by a woman composer (1990).

Tower spent part of her youth in Bolivia, where Tower’s father was engaged in projects as a mining engineer. The mark left by her encounters with South American music can be felt in the vibrant timbral colors and imaginative use of percussion that are stylistic signatures. After pursuing a performing career as a pianist, Tower decided relatively late to devote herself to composing full-time, when she was in her late 40s—and when longstanding gender bias discouragingly limited the prospects for composers who happened to be women.

The issue of equal rights in fact provided the impetus for *1920/2019*. It was commissioned as part of the New York Philharmonic’s “Project 19” initiative. The orchestra commissioned 19 new works by women composers to celebrate the centennial of the 19th Amendment, ratified in 1920, which guarantees women the right to vote.

Tower dedicated the score to Deborah Borda, the New York Philharmonic’s President and CEO, to recognize her vision for the creation of Project 19. But in addition to 1920, Tower alludes to the year she began writing the piece: 2019, when, as she notes, “the #MeToo movement continued to grow,” fostering an environment in which “victims of sexual abuse, assault and harassment are ending their silence, finding strength by sharing their experiences and beliefs.” For Tower, 1920 and 2019 “were probably the two most historically significant years for the advancement of women in society.”

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

While her title refers to the commissioning project that led to writing *1920/2019*, the music “speaks for itself,” Tower explains, and is not meant to correspond to or illustrate historic events. A seasoned admirer of Stravinsky and Beethoven, she points to “the architectural narratives of rhythms” as the main driver of the piece. As it unfolds, *1920/2019* features numerous solos (for violin, cello, clarinet, trumpet and, later, percussion), a duet for piccolo and flute, and a passage for four horns. Tower uses these shifting close-ups to relieve the sound of the full orchestra as well as to feature members of the orchestra. Instead of a “knock ‘em dead ending,” Tower brings the piece to an ambivalent close that may be heard to offer “some kind of hope”—it’s left to the audience to decide.

Scored for 2 flutes (2nd doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, 3 percussionists, piano and strings.

FLORENCE PRICE

Piano Concerto in One Movement

Born on April 9, 1887
in Little Rock, Arkansas

Died on June 3, 1953,
in Chicago, Illinois

Composed:
1934

**Estimated
length:**
18 minutes



First performance:

June 24, 1934, at the graduating ceremonies of the Chicago Musical College, with Price as the soloist.

First Nashville Symphony performance:

These are the first Nashville Symphony performances of this work.

Florence Price has been making a major comeback in recent years, as evidenced by the increasing presence of her work in orchestral programming and new recordings. This is not a simple case of posthumous discovery. Although she faced widespread racism and misogyny throughout her life, Price won acclaim from her contemporaries, becoming “the most widely known African American woman composer from the 1930s to her death in 1953,” as the late musicologist Rae Linda Brown writes in *The Heart of a Woman*, the first-ever biography of the composer. No music by a Black woman had ever been played by a leading American orchestra before the Chicago Symphony, led by the conductor Frederick Stock, premiered her First Symphony in 1933.

Still, a vast portion of Price’s output remained unpublished, languishing in neglect after her death at the age of 66. Racism and gender inequality turned this extraordinarily accomplished artist into what Brown calls an “Invisible Woman.” Born Florence Beatrice Smith to mixed-race parents in the Reconstruction South in 1887, she studied organ, piano and composition at the New England Conservatory in Boston. In 1927, during the Great Migration, Price resettled in Chicago, which served as her home until she died in 1953.

Along with symphonies, concertos and other orchestral works, Price’s output includes chamber compositions, many pieces for solo piano and organ, and choral music. She was also a prolific composer of art songs and made arresting arrangements of spirituals. Following the success of her First Symphony, Stock encouraged Price to continue her new focus on orchestral writing

with a concerto for her own instrument, the piano. Price herself played the solo part at the concerto’s premiere in Chicago. The work was acclaimed and soon taken up by one of her piano students but never published. Long believed to have been lost, the full orchestral manuscript reappeared at an auction in 2018; another performing edition had meanwhile been reconstructed from various sources in 2016.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Price’s title *Piano Concerto in One Movement* belies a seamless structure corresponding to the traditional concerto’s three movements. Such European Romantics as Liszt had pioneered this innovation, and Price’s admiration of Brahms, Chopin and Dvořák is also apparent, but she intriguingly combines these influences with adaptations of African American vernacular music, such as the evocations of a spiritual (without actually quoting any) in the opening section in D minor, the orchestral writing at times imitating call-and-response gestures.

The Adagio middle section in D major foregrounds Price’s piano poetry, while the vivid, syncopated energy of the final section pays homage to the “juba,” an exuberant folk dance developed by enslaved Blacks who, forbidden the use of drums, would beat out rhythmic patterns by stomping and slapping their bodies.

In addition to solo piano, scored for flute, oboe, 2 clarinets, bassoon, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones, timpani, percussion and strings

JULIA WOLFE

Her Story

Born on December 18, 1958,
in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Currently resides in
New York City, New York

Composed:
2019-2022



© Peter Serling, 2022

First performance:

These Nashville Symphony performances are the world premiere.

Estimated length:

30 minutes

One of today's preeminent examples of the American maverick tradition of trailblazing composers, Julia Wolfe has had a formidable impact on the direction taken by the contemporary music scene. The body of work she has created, which reflects the collective's uninhibited, genre-defying attitude, taps into the power of music to illuminate the stories that make up our histories and, in the process, to evoke their contemporary resonance. Her contributions as co-founder and co-director of the influential music collective Bang on a Can (established in 1987) have further extended Wolfe's influence among the new generation of composers.

Her Story is the latest in an ongoing series of large-scale, immersive choral-instrumental compositions in which Wolfe reimagines the tradition of the oratorio to examine the landmark struggles that have shaped American history and culture. It originated when Beth Willer, the Artistic Director of Lorelei Ensemble, asked her to write a piece marking the year of suffrage and became the composer's main focus during the height of the pandemic.

In 2015, Wolfe won the Pulitzer Prize in music for *Anthracite Fields*, which pays homage to the lives and legacy of coalminers from her native Pennsylvania who helped transform the young nation into a global power. Other examples include 2009's *Steel Hammer*, a work that draws on the legends associated with John Henry and American folk idioms, and *Fire in my mouth* from 2019, which addresses the plight of garment industry

laborers in New York City at the turn of the century.

What *Her Story* shares with its predecessors is a command of compelling musical narrative that is enhanced by Wolfe's innovative use of documentary sources from the historical record and by her flair for striking sonic images. With this new work, the composer also continues her collaboration with director Anne Kauffman, scenic and lighting designer Jeff Sugg, and costumer designer Márion Talán to complement the dramatic arc traced by the music with a visual, theatrically engaging dimension.

It's a drama with very high stakes indeed: the still-unfinished quest for equal rights for women. While the original impetus for the piece was to mark the 19th Amendment's centennial, Wolfe expanded the vision of *Her Story* to encompass reminders of the struggle from the years well before it crystallized into the suffragist movement, as well as of the voices left out of the promise of fully equal rights—a promise that has remained unfulfilled, and even undermined, in the century since 1920.

Wolfe distilled the text for her two-movement oratorio from widely varying sources. The first movement, titled "Foment," presents an extract adapted from a letter Abigail Adams wrote in 1776 to her husband John, the future U.S. President, just months before he helped draft the Declaration of Independence. She reminds him that "the ladies," if overlooked, "are determined to foment a rebellion."

"Raise," the title of the second movement, juxtaposes texts from three distinct sources. First

is a sequence of negative adjectives culled from the propaganda of anti-suffragists. These insults underscore the reality that the ideological division in the U.S. remained strong even as the 19th Amendment finally passed in the summer of 1920. “The pro-suffrage movement itself was factious,” Wolfe points out, “as opinions differed on how to battle for the right to vote, which voices would be heard, and which voices left out. The derogatory adjectives and descriptions in the text here refer to all women fighting for representation.”

“I didn’t raise my girl to be a voter” is taken from a political cartoon from a 1915 edition of *Puck* magazine lampooning the anti-suffrage movement. It plays on a pacifist song popular as the Great War raged (“I didn’t raise my boy to be a soldier”).

With the words “Look at me,” Wolfe turns to the extraordinary figure of Isabelle Baumfree (1797-1883). Enslaved in New York state until young adulthood, she became a powerful advocate for the suffragist and abolitionist movements, changing her name to Sojourner Truth after a life-changing religious experience. In 1851 she delivered a famous extemporaneous speech that was later published in two different versions (both as edited by white allies) and became known by the title “Ain’t I a Woman?” Wolfe takes words from both written versions, thus amalgamating what she calls “the mythological, the representational and the very-possibly-true phrases” associated with the speech.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Though the text is historical, Wolfe’s music does not evoke “period” sounds. In its fusion of elements from folk and popular genres with inventive vocal textures and artful repetitions, her sound world is recognizably of our own time, and she enlarges the palette of her large orchestra with the contemporary sounds of electric guitar and bass guitar. The intention is to create the impression “that we are in the room with these women in a very immediate way.”

Wolfe’s score divides and remixes the ten amplified voices of the Lorelei Ensemble (five sopranos and five altos) in many different ways throughout *Her Story* to deepen or even interrogate the meaning of the text. Her vocal writing ranges from clear word painting—as in the off-kilter rhythms at “unbalanced”—to abstract textural colorings that defamiliarize the words, as we hear in her treatment of “remember” in “Foment.” Humor is also enlisted for the sarcastic setting of the political cartoon referenced in “Raise.” Contrasts of loud with quiet intensity play a significant role in articulating the fundamental drama of *Her Story*, which traces history’s pattern of hope, frustration, and final affirmation in the reawakened words of Sojourner Truth: “I am strong.”

Scored for 3 flutes (3rd doubling piccolo), 3 oboes, 3 clarinets (3rd doubling bass clarinet), 3 bassoons (3rd doubling contrabassoon), 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, 4 percussionists, electric guitar, electric bass guitar, piano, harp, strings and amplified choir of 5 sopranos and 5 altos.

— Thomas May is the Nashville Symphony’s program annotator.

Handel’s MESSIAH

WITH THE NASHVILLE SYMPHONY & CHORUS

DECEMBER 8, 9 & 11

Aram Demirjian, conductor | Tucker Biddlecombe, chorus director

Yulia Van Doren, soprano | Sofia Selowsky, mezzo-soprano | Matthew White, tenor | David Crawford, bass

TICKETS START AT \$35

BUY TICKETS: NashvilleSymphony.org/Messiah

ABOUT THE ARTISTS



KAREN WALWYN

Piano

Karen Walwyn is a concert pianist, composer, Albany Records recording artist and the Area Coordinator of Keyboard Studies at Howard University. She is also the first female African American pianist and composer to receive the Steinway Artist Award.

A native of New York, Walwyn made her New York solo piano debut at Merkin Hall as a follow-up to her 2-CD series for Albany Records entitled *Dark Fires*, offering premiere recordings of works by American composers of African descent. She also premiered Florence Price's *Piano Concerto in One Movement* with the New Black Music Repertory Ensemble.

As a composer, she received the Global Award: Gold Medal - Award of Excellence for the

recording of her composition, *Reflections on 9/11*. The demand for concerts of this seven-movement 'tour de force' continuously carries her across the nation for command performances, which was first premiered in full at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C.

As a Mellon Faculty Fellow at the John Hope Franklin Institute, Duke University, Walwyn composed her debut choral work entitled *Of Dance & Struggle: A Musical Tribute on the Life of Nelson Mandela*, commissioned and performed by the Elon University Chorale under the direction of Dr. Gerald Knight. It has been heralded by the South African Embassy in Washington, D.C. as "a monumental work for our beloved president, Nelson Mandela."

More at KarenWalwyn.com.



LORELEI ENSEMBLE

Vocals

Heralded for its "full-bodied and radiant sound" (*The New York Times*), Lorelei Ensemble is internationally recognized for its bold, inventive programs championing the extraordinary flexibility and virtuosity of the human voice. Led by founder and artistic director Beth Willer, Lorelei has established an inspiring mission, curating culturally relevant and artistically audacious programs that challenge artists' and audiences' expectations.

Lorelei Ensemble collaborates with leading composers to commission new works that expand and deepen the repertoire of sounds, timbres, words and stories that women use to reflect and challenge our world. This new repertoire for women's and treble voices allows unparalleled music making

that is born from the unique position of power and cultural influence that women hold. Collaborating composers include David Lang, Julia Wolfe, George Benjamin, Kati Agócs, Lisa Bielawa, Kareem Roustom, Jessica Meyer and more.

Lorelei Ensemble maintains a robust national touring schedule, including recent collaborations with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Boston Modern Orchestra Project and Tanglewood Music Center Orchestra, and performances at Carnegie Hall, the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Boston's Symphony Hall.

On the New Focus, Sono Luminus, Cantaloupe and BMOP Sound labels, Lorelei has recorded the music of Kati Agócs, Peter Gilbert, James Kallembach, William Billings, Guillaume Du Fay, Alfred Schnittke and many others. Recent releases include David Lang's *love fail* (Cantaloupe 2020) and *Impermanence* (Sono Luminus 2018).

Founded in Boston in 2007, Lorelei Ensemble's artists are based across the United States. More at LoreleiEnsemble.com.