

Program Notes for Alma Ensemble Concert at GCSU

Helen Stowasser's *Valse Volante* (translated as "Flying Waltz") is a charming and lively chamber work for flute, clarinet, and piano that captures the graceful motion and buoyant spirit of a Viennese waltz with a contemporary twist.

The piece showcases Stowasser's keen sense of melody and rhythmic playfulness, with the flute and clarinet weaving elegant, soaring lines above the piano's rich harmonic foundation. The waltz rhythm propels the music forward, creating an effervescent and whimsical character, while unexpected harmonic shifts and playful exchanges between the instruments add intrigue and delight.

Stowasser, an Australian composer and educator, was known for her contributions to music education and composition, and *Valse Volante* reflects her ability to blend traditional dance forms with fresh, engaging textures. This piece offers performers and audiences alike a joyful, lighthearted journey through the timeless elegance of the waltz, reimagined with a sense of airborne freedom and energy.

Lisa Neher's *Small Ways*, composed for flute, clarinet, and piano, draws its inspiration from the poignant poetry of Lisa Kagan. In her poem "Small Ways," Kagan evokes a sense of gentleness and resilience found in nature, reflecting on how flowers bloom with quiet dignity, unaware of the tumultuous world around them. This sentiment resonates throughout Neher's composition, which captures the delicate interplay between the instruments, mirroring the soft emergence of beauty amidst challenges.

Small Ways

by Lisa Kagan

from Coming Home to Myself

There is something kind rising

up from the earth right now

gentleness in the way the flowers open

they do not know of politics and pandemics

so they make good company

they are quiet

announcing over and over again

in their small ways

that beauty is still possible.

Small Ways is a celebration of hope and resilience, inviting listeners to reflect on the quiet beauty that surrounds us and to find solace in nature's enduring presence. This world premiere marks an exciting moment not only for the performers but also for the audience, as they embark on a journey of sound and emotion inspired by the evocative words of Kagan.

The importance of Florence Price's *Clouds* derives from its engagement with the very freedom of expression that was crucial to mid-twentieth-century music generally, and to societal identity for African Americans and women in particular. Not only does this work bring together in a single

coherent composition stylistic idioms that are rarely found together in a single piece, but it does so under the descriptive moniker of clouds, which in literature, poetry, and African American art in particular are one of the most potent and ubiquitous symbols of freedom — freedom of movement, freedom of shape and form, freedom of mood, freedom from virtually every restriction that binds humans and other objects. By integrating disparate musical styles, none of which bows to the prejudicial restrictions that Price's world would have placed upon her because of her race and her sex, under a title so powerfully evocative of freedom, Price in *Clouds* asserts her ability to resist — to refuse to let her mind be segregated, her imagination stilled, her genius bowed by others' expectations.

Valerie Coleman is an acclaimed American composer, flutist, and educator known for her innovative contributions to contemporary classical music. A graduate of the University of Michigan and the Mannes School of Music, Coleman is celebrated for her ability to blend diverse musical styles, incorporating elements of jazz, African American traditions, and classical forms into her compositions.

As a founding member of the internationally recognized woodwind quintet Imani Winds, she has gained prominence for her engaging performances and compositions that reflect cultural heritage and social themes. In addition to her composing and performing, Coleman is dedicated to music education and advocacy, inspiring the next generation of musicians through her teaching and mentorship.

Portraits of Langston is a vibrant and evocative work written for flute, clarinet, and piano that pays homage to the profound influence of Langston Hughes, one of the most celebrated figures of the Harlem Renaissance. Composed in 2016, this work captures the essence of Hughes's poetry, celebrating themes of identity, culture, and the richness of African American life through a captivating blend of musical styles.

In this performance, we will present three of the six movements from the suite, accompanied by poetry read by Michelle Smith Johnson.

Louise Farrenc's *Trio, Op. 45* is a remarkable chamber work that showcases the composer's talent and innovative spirit during the 19th century. Farrenc, a prominent French composer and pianist, was known for her strong musical voice in a male-dominated field. Her compositions are characterized by their elegance, depth, and mastery of form, and the *Trio, Op. 45* is no exception.

Originally written for piano, violin, and cello, this piece has been thoughtfully arranged for flute, clarinet, and piano by Michelle Smith Johnson, allowing for a fresh interpretation that highlights the unique qualities of each instrument.

In this performance, featuring Sarah Wardle Jones on flute, Michelle Smith Johnson on clarinet, and Erica Sipes on piano, audiences will experience the brilliance of Louise Farrenc's *Trio, Op. 45*, reimagined in a new arrangement that celebrates her legacy and the rich textures of the woodwind and piano combination. This work is not only a testament to Farrenc's compositional prowess but also a celebration of the collaborative spirit of chamber music.