

SCENES IN TIN CAN ALLEY

PIANO MUSIC OF
FLORENCE PRICE
JOSH TATSUO CULLEN



	SCENES IN TIN CAN ALLEY (1928)	
1	The Huckster	1:44
2	Children at Play	3:06
3	Night	6:23
	THUMBNAIL SKETCHES OF A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A WASHERWOMAN (1938-1942)	
4	Morning	1:24
5	Dreaming at the Washtub	1:52
6	A Gay Moment	0:37
7	Evening Shadows	2:21
8	CLOUDS (circa 1940's)	5:47
	VILLAGE SCENES (1942)	
9	Church Spires in Moonlight	5:34
10	A Shaded Lane	2:14
11	The Park	1:47
	PRELUDES (1926-1932)	
12	No. 1. Allegro moderato	1:49
13	No. 2. Andantino cantabile	2:33
14	No. 3. Allegro molto	1:08
15	No. 4. Wistful. Allegretto con tenerezza	2:58
16	No. 5. Allegro	1:40
	COTTON DANCE (circa 1940's)	
17	Presto	3:16
	THREE MINIATURE PORTRAITS OF UNCLE NED (1932-1941)	
18	At Age 17	1:03
19	At Age 27	1:16
20	At Age 70	1:51

Total time: 50:35

LINER NOTES

The prolific American composer Florence Beatrice Price is experiencing a long-overdue renaissance, particularly in the performance of her large-scale symphonic works. However, many of her solo piano works have remained unknown, despite the activism of researchers like Dr. John Michael Cooper, who has been tirelessly editing these works with the publishing company G. Schirmer. The works on this album are all connected with the discovery of a trove of manuscripts at Price's summer home in St. Anne, Illinois in 2009. Prior to that discovery, these compositions were either completely unknown, or they had only appeared in earlier or incomplete versions.

Many of these works are receiving their first commercial recording on this album. I want to emphasize that I chose these works not only because

they deserve to be heard, but because they spoke to me as an artist. As a person of mixed Japanese and European descent, I feel a strong connection to Price's desire to honor and elevate the marginalized people of her own mixed-race heritage personified in *Scenes in Tin Can Alley*, *Thumbnail Sketches of a Day in the Life of a Washerwoman*, and *Three Miniature Portraits of Uncle Ned*. Price's treatment of these neglected subjects using the classical idiom is also very powerful to me because like Price, I began studying classical piano at an early age. Some critics have noted that Price speaks in a borrowed idiom, in the sense that she uses musical language reminiscent of Schumann and Chopin, and not a language she invented herself or that derives from the vernacular of her own heritage. But I would argue that this is precisely what makes it authentic to her: as the daughter of a well-trained singer

and pianist, and educated at the New England Conservatory, the classical idiom was her idiom. And what a happy circumstance that is for me, as a fellow American musician whose chosen idiom also happens to be classical.

Scenes in Tin Can Alley (1928)

“The Huckster” is the first of the three movements, with an exuberant opening theme, though it also incorporates outbursts of despair and introspection.

The second and third movements each incorporate a program given by Price herself:

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

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

The only complete surviving manuscript of the *Scenes in Tin Can Alley* was discovered in 2009. Prior to that, only incomplete drafts existed, none of which had been published.

Thumbnail Sketches of a Day in the Life of a Washerwoman (1938-1942)

In Price’s time, the washerwoman was one of the most physically taxing jobs held by African American women. While the title doesn’t specify the race of the washerwoman, the African *juba dance* style of “A Gay Moment” suggests Price imagined a Black washerwoman as her protagonist. The second movement, “Dreaming at the Washtub,”

was included in an early manuscript, but a later manuscript omitted it from the set; in the spirit of sharing more of her music rather than less, I have decided to include it. Prior to 2009, an earlier version of these pieces had been published under the title “A Day in the Life of a Washerwoman.”

Clouds (ca. 1940s)

Clouds initially bears a resemblance to the Romantic era character pieces of Schumann and Chopin. The opening theme is lyrical and almost childlike in its simplicity; the rising arpeggio on the dominant followed by descending stepwise motion is reminiscent of “When You Wish Upon A Star.” The diatonic harmony quickly dissolves into whole tone scales, evoking the world of Debussy and chords similar to those found in his *Images*. Price paints the remoteness of the clouds via the striking use of chromatic mediant chords, and a stormy section in F minor envelops us in sweeping

arpeggios. This is a piece that takes us on a journey much more substantial than its sweet, one-word title initially suggests. An unfinished version of *Clouds* was published in 2017 based on an earlier manuscript. Thanks to the 2009 discovery, we can now hear *Clouds* in its entirety, including its *coda*.

Village Scenes (1942)

The first piece in this set, “Church Spires in Midnight,” uses impressionist language with its layering of bell-like sonorities, combined with brief moments of whole tone harmony, recalling the sound world of *Clouds* heard earlier on this album. All three of the pieces are in ternary form, bearing a resemblance to the character pieces of Schumann’s *Forest Scenes* and *Scenes from Childhood*.

Preludes (1926-1932)

The *Preludes* are unique among Price’s solo piano pieces in that they are the

only set of short pieces that do not bear descriptive titles. Two of the *Preludes* had been published prior to 2009 from earlier manuscripts, and four of them were among the papers found in the 2009 discovery, but the only complete manuscript of all five *Preludes* was found in the Margaret Bonds papers acquired by the Georgetown University Libraries in 2016. This suggests that Price may have gifted the completed manuscript to Bonds. This also makes the complete set of *Preludes* the most recently discovered of the music on this album.

Cotton Dance (Presto) (ca. 1940s)

An earlier manuscript of the work was titled simply *Presto*, and in a later manuscript, Price titled the work *Cotton Dance* with the word *presto* as its tempo marking. There is another Price work titled *Dance of the Cotton Blossoms* that some performers have referred to simply as *Cotton Dance*, so I have chosen to refer to this work as *Cotton Dance (Presto)* on this

album. The work is among her most virtuosic for the performer, with rapid repeated chords and fast leaps throughout. It also demonstrates Price's virtuosic compositional skill in that it seamlessly combines Black vernacular styles like boogie woogie bass with her complex use of chromatic sequences and whole tone harmony.

Three Miniature Portraits of Uncle Ned (1932-1941)

Originally, the title of these pieces referenced an “Uncle Joe” rather than “Uncle Ned.” In a later manuscript, the word “Joe” was erased and “Ned” had been written over, in pencil. This is significant because it suggests that she is referring not to a specific person, but to the stock character of “Old Uncle Ned” or “Uncle Joe” from the American minstrel tradition. The second movement, titled “At Age 27,” bears the marking “pompous” by the composer.

–Josh Tatsuo Cullen

BIOGRAPHY

JOSH TATSUO CULLEN (he/him) is acclaimed for his “astounding mixture of coolness and intensity” (*Stuttgarter Zeitung*) and has been praised for his “delicious” collaboration by *The New York Times*. He has performed as solo and collaborative pianist at venues throughout the world.

His recordings include Beethoven’s piano concertos nos. 1, 2 and 3, and Mozart’s concerto for two pianos in E-flat major with his mentor, Paul Badura-Skoda, all with the Czech National Symphony Orchestra led by Paul Freeman. At age nine he performed Mozart’s Piano Concerto in A major, K. 488 with the Moscow Philharmonic at Tchaikovsky Hall in Moscow, recording the work in studio the same week.



Josh holds a master’s degree in piano from The Juilliard School, and a master’s degree in collaborative piano from New York University. He earned his bachelor’s degree from the University of Michigan at age 16.

Born in Hawaii and raised outside of Detroit, Josh proudly served in the United States Army for over a decade as an interpreter and interrogator.



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