

# FRIDAY MUSIC AT MIDDAY



*National City Christian Church*

5 THOMAS CIRCLE, NW  
WASHINGTON, DC 20005

**SONDRA GOLDSMITH PROCTOR**

*Organist*

*March 12, 2021*

## PROGRAM

Music at Midday  
National City Christian Church  
Washington, D.C.

March 12, 2021

- Introduction Sondra Goldsmith Proctor
- We Shall Overcome Sharon J. Willis (b. 1949)  
*A Suite based on the songs and struggles of the Civil Rights Movement*  
*Narrated by Emmanuella Dwomo Agyei '21*
- I. Rosa: *We Shall Overcome*  
II. Martin and Ab: *Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me 'Round*  
III. Four Little Girls: *Jesus Loves the Little Children*  
IV. Hope: Black and White Together: *There is a Balm in Gilead*
- First Sonata for Organ Florence Beatrice Smith Price  
Finale: Allegro (1887-1953)  
ed. Calvert Johnson
- Lift Every Voice and Sing J. Rosamond Johnson (1873-1954)  
arr. Roger Lowe

*Recorded in Gunnison Memorial Chapel*  
*St. Lawrence University, Canton, New York*  
*February 4, 2021*  
*James Wildman, Recording Engineer*

## PROGRAM NOTES

**Sharon J. Willis** is Founder and Director of Americolor Opera Alliance. She has composed twelve operatic theater stage works that feature Afro-Centric, Social, Health and American subjects. In addition to her composition of operas, she is also a playwright writing on Afro-Centric and Biblical Dramas. Dr. Willis is the only woman composer in the United States to have founded an opera company, composed and premiered twelve operas and seven plays. She was awarded Composer of the Year by the National League of Pen Women, the Atlanta Chapter; was commissioned by the Georgia Music Educator's Conference to write for their annual composer's competition; and was commissioned by the American Guild of Organists as a conference composer in 2006. Willis holds a Doctorate of Musical Arts Degree from The University of Georgia, a Master's in Church Music from Scarritt Graduate School in Nashville, a Master's in Music Theory from Georgia State University and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Music from Clark College, now a University. Willis is the former Department Chair of Music at Clark Atlanta University and now chairs the Department of Music at Morris Brown College.

Born in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1887, **Florence Beatrice Smith Price** was the first African-American woman composer to achieve national recognition. Her father was Little Rock's first Black dentist. In addition he was a published author, an inventor, and during the Reconstruction years, he was active politically. Price's mother, Florence Irene Gulliver Smith, was an elementary school teacher and a successful businesswoman.

Educated in the Black public schools of Little Rock, Price graduated in 1902 at the age of fourteen. The next year she enrolled at the New England Conservatory of Music. Graduating in 1906 with an Artist's Diploma in organ and a Teacher's Diploma in piano, Price left school thoroughly trained in conducting choirs, playing the organ for worship services and concerts, and score reading. She was able to read full orchestral scores at sight. Only the best students were offered the opportunity to perform at the Conservatory. Price performed regularly throughout her three years. In her last year she performed several times on the evening recital series and on the commencement concert program. Her early professional life included a return to the Arkansas area to teach music at a high school and at Shorter College in North Little Rock. She headed Clark University's Music Department in Atlanta before she married Thomas J. Price, a distinguished attorney. The family settled in Chicago in 1927. In Chicago Price established her career as a well-respected organist, church pianist, studio teacher, and a nationally acclaimed composer.

In 1932 Price achieved national recognition when she won first prize in the Wanamaker Music Composition Contest for her *Symphony in E Minor*. With the Symphony's premiere in June of 1933, with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra under the baton of Frederick Stock, Price became the first African-American woman to have an orchestral work performed by a major American orchestra. Price composed over 300 works. In addition to her orchestral music, she composed chamber works, art songs, piano and organ music, and she arranged instrumental and vocal versions of spirituals.

When Price died in 1953 she had received many accolades during her career. While maintaining her work mostly as a teacher and composer, she also played numerous piano concerts.

**J. Rosamond Johnson**, composer of the music for ‘Lift Every Voice and Sing,’ was one of the most successful of early African-American composers. His brother, **James Weldon Johnson**, the noted poet, was principal of a school in Jacksonville, Florida. To prepare for a program celebrating Black history, James wrote the text of ‘Lift Every Voice and Sing,’ and asked his brother Rosamond to set it to music. In 1900 five hundred students sang the text and melody for the first time. Over the years, it has become recognized as the African-American National hymn. Recently, James Clyburn of South Carolina proposed that the Congress pass a bill to recognize ‘Lift Every Voice and Sing’ as the National African-American Hymn.

The two Johnson brothers worked together their entire life. In 1901 they moved to New York City to pursue their dreams in show business. J. Rosamond was known as a composer and arranger, primarily of spirituals, jubilees, plantation ballads, and musical theatre numbers. James Weldon was a novelist, poet and songwriter, a lawyer, and a diplomat. He also served as field secretary and executive secretary of the NAACP.

**Roger Lowe** is the arranger of this setting of **Lift Every Voice and Sing**. His background in rock and as an organist shines through the setting. Lowe opens with a few phrases of ‘I Want Jesus to Walk with Me.’ before he concludes with the majestic hymn ‘**Lift Every Voice and Sing.**’

## MEET THE ARTISTS

**Sondra Goldsmith Proctor** is currently Musician-in-Residence for Gunnison Memorial Chapel at St. Lawrence University in Canton, New York. Prior to her work at the university, she served in churches and schools in the Washington, D.C. area for forty-five years. She taught in public schools in Montgomery County, Maryland including Kensington Junior High, Albert Einstein High School and Paint Branch High School. During that time she also conducted Little Singers of Montgomery County who sang and performed in more than two dozen languages. She was the Associate Conductor/Keyboard Artist for the Paul Hill Chorale and Washington Singers based at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. As Founder of Circle Singers, a vocal chamber ensemble her forte was discovering new repertoire with which to challenge her singers and herself. She served as Conductor-in-Residence at The American University. Her last position in the DC area was at Westmoreland Congregational United Church of Christ where she served for nearly thirty years as Director of Music and Arts/Organist. Her program included ministry to all ages from the very young through the last years of life. Her recital career has taken her to many of the countries of Europe, England and the Caribbean, as well as the east coast of the United States and Canada.

**Emmanuella Dwomo Agyei**, a native of Ghana, is a Davis United World Colleges Scholar. The Davis Program is the world's largest, privately funded, international scholarship program—supporting more than 3,100 undergraduates from 164 nations. St. Lawrence University has participated in the Davis UWC network of over 90 U.S. colleges and hosts over 60 Scholars from all over the world. Emmanuella left Ghana to study in China to receive her International Baccalaureate and in 2017 arrived in Canton, New York to study at St. Lawrence University for her Bachelor's Degree in Science with a major in Biochemistry. Following graduation in April, she will matriculate in a graduate program to specialize in Biomedical Sciences or Public Health. Emmanuella has set a goal of contributing to the world of infectious diseases with a focus on understanding, treating and creating interventions for diseases that reach epidemic proportions. She wishes to contribute to the knowledge, education and advocacy for marginalized populations in the world. She has been the student worker in Gunnison Memorial Chapel for the past three years.

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Since 1981 National City Christian Church has presented midday concerts with a special emphasis on its heroic pipe organ. At most of our midday concerts you will hear the majestic roar of this 7,500-pipe, five-keyboard Möller organ (the city's third largest pipe organ) in 30-minute recitals of some of the most thrilling and audience-friendly music performed by some of the nation's finest organists.

**National City Christian Church** is the national church of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), a house of prayer for all people, and home to an open and affirming community of faith. The congregation dates back to 1843, and the current sanctuary, designed by celebrated architect John Russell Pope, was dedicated in 1930. Pope later planned and built the National Archives and the Jefferson Memorial. NCCC has long been a church of presidents. James A. Garfield and Lyndon B. Johnson were members and actively involved in this congregation. During the 1980-81 renovation of the sanctuary, stained glass windows were installed to memorialize these two great leaders of our country. NCCC is actively involved in social service projects and supports organizations such as Martha's Table and N Street Village. It also distributes 10,000 bags of food each year at its weekly food pantry and is home to a number of non-profit organizations. Please join us for worship on Sundays at 10:00 a.m. Our services are currently being broadcast on the church's YouTube channel and Facebook page. Please visit our [website](#) for a complete listing of our offerings, services, and events.



### NATIONAL CITY CHRISTIAN CHURCH

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Rev. Dr. Amy Butler, Interim Senior Minister

Rev. Dr. J. Michael McMahon, Artistic Director, Music at Midday

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