

UNBOUNDED

MUSIC BY AMERICAN WOMEN

Dawn Wohn
violin

Emely Phelps
piano



50 YEARS



As a second generation Korean-American woman, it has not always been easy to relate to the world of classical music, which is still largely Euro- and male-centric. Since delving into the diverse world of female composers, I have felt much joy, connection and ownership to the music that I perform. To be able to champion this repertoire feels unbounded—joyful and limitless. I am particularly excited to share this album, which celebrates the music of American women, as performed by two American women.

There is no denying that historically, female composers have faced challenges. Amy Beach was unable to take composition lessons or have a performing career for most of her life, as it was deemed improper for a married woman. The two Black composers on this album, Dorothy Rudd Moore and Irene Britton Smith, faced further struggles for widespread recognition during their lifetimes, due to the classical world's long reluctance to admit works by minority composers into the performing canon.

In an ideal world, there would be no need to call attention to the race or gender of these composers. In doing so, my concern is that the composers or their works will be overshadowed or grouped together by those labels. Just as Moore cautioned against typecasting, stating that “there are

many Black artists in all disciplines and each is an individual with his or her unique experiences,” it is important to listen to and recognize each composer as an individual.

However, an all-male composer program would not raise questions on how to present it without diminishing the music or pigeon-holing the music or the composers. So, with this album, I choose to amplify and celebrate music by these four composers and all they have created through adversity. I relate deeply to the optimism, humor and beauty in these works, and hope that it inspires the listener.

—Dawn Wohn



Amy Beach was a major American composer and virtuoso pianist. At the age of four she was already composing pieces for piano. Her career as a concert pianist began brilliantly when she was 16, with the critics

and audience expressing wild enthusiasm about her performance. However, when she married Dr. H.H.A. Beach at age 18,

she agreed to limit her performances and concentrate on composition instead.

By the time of the premiere of her “Gaelic” Symphony by the Boston Symphony in 1896, Beach was recognized as one of America’s foremost composers. Her opera, *Cabildo*, is available on Delos (DE 3170) and Dawn Wahn recorded Beach’s “Romance” on her Delos album *Perspectives* (DE 3547).

Written in 1896 when she was 29 years old, Beach’s Sonata for Violin and Piano was premiered by Franz Kneisel, concertmaster of the Boston Symphony, on violin and the composer herself at the piano. Beach showcases her lyrical, poetic and complex writing with true equality between both instruments.



Dorothy Rudd Moore’s mother was her first piano teacher, and her parents were supportive of her becoming a musician. Moore received a thorough grounding in music before she entered college at Howard Univer-

sity. She graduated magna cum laude with a Bachelor of Music degree and won a fel-

lowship to the American Conservatory at Fontainebleau, France, where she studied composition with Nadia Boulanger.

A co-founder of the Society of Black Composers, Moore went on to receive commissions from orchestras such as the National Symphony and Buffalo Philharmonic and taught music at the Harlem School of the Arts, New York University and Bronx Community College.

The “Three Pieces for Violin and Piano” are succinct, condensed statements that juxtapose playful and serious exchanges between the players. Moore explores the wide range of expressive possibilities of both instruments within the short time-frame of the pieces.



Jennifer Higdon is the winner of three Grammy Awards for “Best Contemporary Classical Composition” and the Pulitzer Prize for Music for her Violin Concerto. Although she did not begin composing until she was 21, she is one

of America’s most frequently performed living composers. She has received many

commissions from major American orchestras, chamber groups and soloists.

The composer, who grew up in rural Tennessee, has provided this note on her piece: *"I love that the definition of 'Air' is both that which we breathe in, and, and also in music it is considered to be a 'song without words.' One of my absolute favorite things about East Tennessee is the amazing feel and smell of the air of the Smokies. That deep breath that you take in, whether in an early morning dew, while hiking, or the magic of dusk on the Cades Cove Loop—this is a joy that marks one's soul. I spent a considerable amount of my growing up in those mountains, and they feel like home to me; they are the 'air' that feeds my soul."*



Irene Britton Smith was of African American, Cherokee and Crow descent. She wanted to study music at Northwestern University, but her family could not afford to send her there. Instead, she attended Chicago

Normal School and trained to become a teacher. She taught in the Chicago public

schools for over 40 years and became a specialist in literacy. While she was teaching, Smith studied music part-time at the American Conservatory of Music and received a Bachelor of Music degree from ACM in 1943.

During a sabbatical from teaching, Smith studied at Juilliard. She also studied at the Eastman School of Music; at Tanglemood in Massachusetts; with Nadia Boulanger at the American Conservatory at Fontainebleau, France; and at DePaul University, where she earned a Master of Music degree. She stopped composing in 1962, but her works continued to be performed during her lifetime.

Completed in 1947 during Smith's time at The Juilliard School, her Sonata for Violin and Piano is a substantial contribution to the repertoire. Neoclassical in style, the Sonata draws the listener in with its soaring melodies, wit and charm.

"Reminiscence," an unpublished work, is a short piece that has a more Romantic feel than the sonata and showcases Smith's melodic gift.

Highly sought after as a musician with a wide range of styles and interests, Korean-American violinist **Dawn Wohn** has



performed throughout North and South America, Asia and Europe. She has appeared as a soloist with orchestras including the Korean Broadcasting Symphony and the Aspen Conducting Academy Orchestra, and has performed recitals at prestigious venues including Carnegie Weill Hall, Alice Tully Hall in Lincoln Center and Jordan Hall.

Wohn began her musical studies at The Juilliard School's Pre-College Division as a full scholarship student of the renowned pedagogue Dorothy DeLay and continued

her undergraduate studies at Juilliard. After earning a Master of Music degree and Artist Diploma at Yale University, she completed her Doctor of Musical Arts degree at Stony Brook University.

An active chamber musician, Wohn has performed at the International Musicians Seminar, Prussia Cove in England; The Great Mountains Music Festival in South Korea; Festival de Febrero in Mexico; The Banff Centre; and Music@Menlo. Notable collaborators include members of the Emerson, Takács, Miami and Afiara String Quartets, as well as Colin Carr, Susan Hoepfner and Roberto Plano.

As an educator, Wohn is an active guest clinician at music schools around the country, and has been on the faculty at music festivals including Rocky Ridge Festival, International Music Festival of the Adriatic in Italy, and Académie Anglicorde in France. Previously she held the position of Associate Professor of Violin at Ohio University, and she is currently on the faculty of the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Mead Witter School of Music.

Wohn's debut recording, *Perspectives*, is on the Delos label (DE 3547). The album features pieces by female composers and was chosen as one of WQXR's best albums of 2019.

For more information and a complete biography, please visit www.dawnplaysviolin.com.

Pianist **Emely Phelps** enjoys a multifaceted career as a soloist, chamber musician and teacher. Praised by the *Boston Globe* for her “fleet, energetic, and bright-toned” playing, she made her solo orchestral debut with the National Symphony Orchestra as the grand prizewinner of their Young Soloists Competition. Phelps has been a featured soloist with many orchestras in the U.S. and has presented solo recitals throughout North America and Europe, with a diverse repertoire ranging from Bach to Carter.

An in-demand collaborator, Phelps is on the faculty of the Icicle Creek Chamber Music Festival, performs regularly with Electric Earth Concerts and maintains active duo partnerships with violist Jonathan Bagg and flutist Hannah Porter Occeña. She has appeared as guest artist with the Borromeo String Quartet and has participated in numerous chamber music festivals including Yellow Barn, Kneisel Hall and the International Holland Music Sessions. Phelps was a founding member of Trio Cleonice, with whom she spent eight years performing more than 150 concerts across the United States, Europe, and China. The group was Graduate Piano Trio-in-Resi-



dence at New England Conservatory from 2011–2014 and actively highlighted piano trios of the 20th and 21st centuries.

Phelps earned Bachelor of Music and Master of Music degrees from the Juilliard School, where she studied with Julian Martin and was awarded the John Erskine Prize for scholastic and artistic achievement. She completed her doctoral studies at Stony Brook University under Christina Dahl and is currently Artist-Teacher of Piano at Ohio University, where she heads the graduate collaborative piano degree program.

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Photo of Jennifer Higdon: Andrew Bogard

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Violin: Nicolo Gagliano, Naples, 1732

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—Dawn Wohn

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UNBOUNDED: MUSIC BY AMERICAN WOMEN

Dawn Wohn, violin ♦ **Emely Phelps**, piano

AMY BEACH (1867–1944)

Sonata for Violin and Piano in A Minor, Op. 34 (1896)

1. Allegro moderato (9:07)
2. Scherzo, molto vivace (4:48)
3. Largo con dolore (8:53)
4. Allegro con fuoco (8:13)

DOROTHY RUDD MOORE (1940–2022)

Three Pieces for Violin and Piano (1967)

5. Vignette (1:48)
6. Episode (2:00)
7. Caprice (1:26)

JENNIFER HIGDON (b. 1962)

8. **Smoky Mountain Air** (2021) (3:51)

IRENE BRITTON SMITH (1907–1999)

Sonata for Violin and Piano (1947)

9. Allegro cantabile (6:42)
10. Andante con sentimento (4:22)
11. Vivace (3:48)
12. **Reminiscence** (1941) (4:40)

Total Playing Time: 59:46