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## Biographies of Women and BIPOC Composers

### Baroque

#### **Gambarini, Elisabetta de (1731-1765) Britain**

Elisabetta de Gambarini was a composer, singer, harpsichordist and organist of Italian descent. As a mezzo soprano, she was heard frequently on the London stages, notably in some of Handel's Oratorios. Her "Six Sets of Lessons for the Harpsichord" seem to have been the first collection of keyboard pieces by a woman composer published in England. They were followed by "Lessons for the Harpsichord Intermixed with Italian and English Songs," in 1750. The impressive list of over 200 subscribers attached to these publications includes Handel himself, members of the Royal family and the Ambassador of Denmark, which attests to her fame as a composer.

#### **Elisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre (1665-1729) France**

Elisabeth was born into a family of musicians, composers and harpsichord makers. Her father, Claude, taught both his sons and his daughters to play. When King Louis XIV heard her play harpsichord at his court, he was so impressed by her talent that he decided to get directly involved in her education.

Well-known in her lifetime, she gave frequent concerts, always to great acclaim, composed and taught. Her first pieces for harpsichord were published in 1687, one of only four collections of works for keyboard printed in France in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. Her second volume was published in 1707.

Very early on, she gained the reputation of being a very innovative composer, and in his book "Le Parnasse François" (1732), Titon du Tillet ranked her just below Jean-Baptiste Lully, writing: "One might say that never a person of her sex had such great talent for the composition of music, and for the admirable manner in which she played on the harpsichord and on the organ."

#### **Ignatius Sancho (1729-1787) Britain**

Born on a slave ship, Ignatius Sancho was sold in slavery in the Spanish colony of New Grenada. When he was two years old, his owner gave him to three sisters living in Greenwich, England. After many years at their service, he ran away to the house of the Duke of Montagu,

who lived nearby. The Duke rescued him, hired him as a free man, and supervised his education, which included music lessons. The patronage and the encouragement of the duke and duchess led him to a creative career: he wrote poetry, plays and essays, as well as composed songs and instrumental pieces. His portrait by Thomas Gainsborough, now at the National Gallery of Canada, done at the same time as the portraits of the Duke and Duchess of Montagu, is a clear indication that the three of them stayed close over the years.

Parallel to his artistic career, he had a shop which became a meeting place for artists, musicians, writers and politicians. He became an important figure in the British abolitionist movement.

### **Elizabeth Turner (1700-1756) Britain**

Elizabeth Turner was one of the leading sopranos of her day. Her “Collection of Songs with Symphonies and a Through Bass with Six Lessons for the Harpsichord” was printed in 1756, making her one of the first English women composers to have been published. The list of subscribers to this work, which includes the names of G. F. Handel, John Stanley and William Boyce, leads us to believe that she likely had a solid reputation as a composer. The fact that some of her songs were still appearing in monthly issues of the “Lady’s Magazine” in the 1780’s and 90’s indicates that her works continued to be popular until at least the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

## **Classical**

### **Maria Teresa Agnesi Pinottini (1720-1795) Italy**

Although composer, harpsichordist, and singer Maria Teresa Agnesi was born and spent her life in Milan, she seems to have been even more popular in Austria and Lombardy, thanks to the patronage of Empress Maria Theresa and Maria Antonia Walpurgis, princess of Bavaria and Electress of Saxony, herself also a gifted composer. Indeed, in the 1740’s, Maria Teresa began sending her music to artistic-minded members of the aristocracy across Europe, hoping to build connections that would lead to more performances of her pieces. The ground was fertile, as at the time there was a conscious effort made in those countries to foster women in the arts and promote their music, and it appears that her works were indeed better received in Vienna and Dresden than in Milan. We know that she wrote operas, concerti, arias, works for small ensembles as well as challenging works for keyboard but, unfortunately, many of them have been lost.

### **Marianna Auenbrugger (D’Auenbrugg) (1759-1780) Austria**

Viennese pianist and composer Marianna Auenbrugger was the daughter of Leopold Auenbrugger, a renowned physician and friend of Joseph Haydn, and Antonio Salieri, who was

also Marianna's composition teacher. Her parents gave regular musical matinées where Marianna and her younger sister would perform frequently. Haydn held them both in high esteem, dedicating six Sonatas (Hob. XVI: 35-39 and 20) to them and writing to his publisher: "The approval of the Demoiselles von Auenbrugger...is most important to me, for their way of playing and genuine insight into music equal those of the greatest masters. Both deserve to be known throughout Europe through the public newspapers." Leopold Mozart, in a letter to his wife, talks specifically about Marianna when he writes: "...the older one is incomparable, and completely owns the music."

Of poor health since childhood, she died at the age of twenty-three from consumption. Salieri took it upon himself to publish her only printed work, the Sonata in E-flat, along with an Ode he composed in her honor, as "a friend and admirer of her rare abilities."

### **Joséphine Aurnhammer (1758/9-1820) Austria**

Pianist and composer Joséphine Aurnhammer was born in Vienna and is said to have been one of W. A. Mozart's favorite students. Indeed, they performed together on numerous occasions, and Mozart composed the Sonata for two Pianos K.448 and the Concerto for Two Pianos in E flat Major K.365 especially for him and Joséphine.

A very gifted pianist and improviser, she could often be heard in well-attended concerts. She composed mainly for the piano and seems to have been especially fond of Variations. Her works demonstrate her comprehensive knowledge of the technical resources and possibilities of the new instrument, as well as her artistry.

### **Cécilia Maria Barthélémon (1767-1859) Britain**

Cécilia Maria Barthélémon was born into a family of musicians. Her mother Maria, also known as Polly Young, was a well-known singer and composer, and her father, François-Hippolyte, was a violinist and singer. Cécilia learned to sing and play the harpsichord, the fortepiano, the organ and the harp from her parents and performed both as a singer and a keyboard player from a very young age.

Her opus 1, "Three Sonatas for the Piano-Forte or Harpsichord" was published in 1786. It was followed by four more Sonatas and by "The Capture of the Cape of Good Hope for the Forte-Piano or Harpsichord" (1795), an example of a very popular genre of the time, the battle sonata, celebrating a military victory.

When Joseph Haydn came to London in the 1790's, he became a family friend, and thought so highly of Cécilia that he listed her as one of the important musical personalities of London in his 1792 "London Notebook". She dedicated her opus 3 to him.

### **Juliane Benda-Reichardt (1752-1783) Germany**

Daughter of composer and violinist Franz Benda, she studied with him and appeared in concerts both as a singer and as a keyboard player. She married composer Johann Friedrich Reichardt, music writer and court conductor of Prussian King Frederick II (the Great). Two Sonatas for piano and thirty songs were published during her lifetime.

### **Anna Bon (1738 - after 1767) Italy**

Anna Bon's parents were both artists involved in music. Her father was a man of the theatre, a stage designer, painter and impresario who also composed, while her mother was a very successful singer, performing mostly in comic opera productions. Because of their respective careers, the family traveled to many places, from Italy and Russia to Germany and Austria.

Anna studied first at the Ospedale della Pietà in Venice. In 1756, she joined her parents in Bayreuth where she held the position of "chamber music virtuosa" at the court of Margrave Friedrich of Brandenburg Kulmbach. Her Sonatas for Flute were published at that time. In 1762, the family moved to the Esterhazy court at Eisenstadt, where she remained until at least 1765. Her set of 6 Sonatas for Harpsichord opus 2 and her six Divertimenti (Trio Sonatas) opus 3 date from this period. She then married a singer named Mongeri and moved to Thuringia, but as of 1767, there is no more trace of her.

### **Anne-Louise Brillon de Jouy (1744-1824) France**

A well-known harpsichordist, pianist and composer, Mme Brillon de Jouy held a Salon in Paris frequented notably by Luigi Boccherini and Benjamin Franklin, who became a friend and with whom she had a long correspondence. She was undeniably the musical star of these soirées. In his journal, Charles Burney talks in the highest terms of her talent both as pianist and composer, adding that, "She had not acquired her reputation in music without meriting it."

She wrote twelve Sonatas that we currently know of all in the Galant style.

### **Veronica Dussek Cianchettini (1769-1833) Bohemia - Britain**

Born in Bohemia, Veronica Dussek was the daughter of composer and organist Jan Josef Dussek. She studied with her father and played harpsichord and piano in public from an early age. When she moved to London around 1795, she appeared frequently in concert with her brother composer Jan Ladislav who was already well established in England. She became a virtuoso pianist, harpist, singer and composer, writing mostly for keyboard. Her three Sonatas, sets of variations, divertimenti, and dances (mostly waltzes, her favourite dance form), miscellaneous pieces on programmatic themes and chamber music works with piano were all published in London.

### **Sophia Corri Dussek (1775-1831) Scotland**

Sophia was the daughter of Domenico Corri, composer, music publisher and impresario, and of Signora Bachelli Corri, a professional singer. The couple had emigrated from Italy to Edinburgh around 1770. Sophia learned from her father, as did her four brothers who all became musicians, and she appeared in public for the first time as a pianist at the age of four. Around 1788, the family moved to London. She made her debut as a professional singer at the Solomon concerts in 1791 with F.J. Haydn conducting and was a soloist in the London premiere of Mozart's Requiem.

She married famous composer Jan Ladislav Dussek, and the couple occasionally performed together. After his death, she remarried, founded a music school, played the harp, sang and composed. Her works for keyboard include sonatas, rondos, and a set of variations for the harp or the piano forte. Her "Sonata opus 1 in D Major for the Piano Forte or Harpsichord with an accompaniment for Violin or German Flute" was published in 1793. The fact that her Sonatas opus 2 were published in at least three editions in the 1790's attests to their popularity, and there is no doubt at this point that those Sonatas, including the one in c minor sometimes attributed to Jan Ladislav, are from her.

### **Marguerite Salomé Edelmann (1741 or 1747-1797) France**

We know very little about Mlle Edelmann. She was born in Strasbourg, Alsace, the daughter of Caspar, a carpenter, and Maria Salomé. Music must have been in the family: her younger brother, Jean-Frédéric (1749-1794), was also a composer, a performer, and a teacher instrumental in promoting the new piano in France, and a nephew, also named Jean-Frédéric or Juan Federico (1795-1843), moved to Cuba where he had a very successful career as pianist, music publisher and music teacher.

She moved from Strasbourg to Paris with her family in the 1770's and composed several pieces for harpsichord or pianoforte. Now, we have her "Sonata in G Major" which appeared in a set of three with two other Sonatas by her brother (opus 8 no.2) and an "Andante in g minor" that can be found in a collection of keyboard pieces dating to 1783.

### **Elizabeth Hardin (1750-1780) Britain**

Elizabeth Hardin was a composer and organist at the St. Peter-le-Poor in London. The London magazine "Amintor's choice" published three works by her in 1767. They were followed by the publication of her "Six Sets of Lessons for the Harpsichord" in 1770. Generally in two movements, her works are playful, often featuring hand crossovers.

### **Chevalier de Saint-Georges Joseph de Bologne (1745-1799) Guadeloupe - France**

Le Chevalier de Saint-Georges was a virtuoso violinist, composer, concertmaster then conductor of one of the leading symphony orchestras in France, as well as a renowned champion fencer.

He was born in the then French colony of Guadeloupe, the son of a wealthy planter and of Anne (Ninon), an African slave. His father took him to France so that he would receive a good education. At thirteen years old, Joseph entered an elite boarding school for sons of the aristocracy where he mastered both the violin and the harpsichord and studied composition. He was concertmaster of "Le Concert des Amateurs", said to be "the best orchestra for symphonies" by "L'Almanach Musical", before becoming its conductor. It is with this orchestra that he commissioned and premiered Haydn's Paris Symphonies. For a few years, he was linked to the French court, having frequent contacts with Philippe d'Orléans and playing music frequently with Marie-Antoinette, but during the French Revolution, he joined the National Guard and became colonel of an all-Black regiment.

Admired both as a fencer and a dancer, he was one of the most celebrated people in Paris and was seen as a model by many young men who formed a court around him.

His compositions are very diverse and include string quartets, violin concerti, symphonies, symphonie-concertantes (a new genre), opera arias, a sonata for harp and flute, as well as "Sonatas for the Harpsichord or the Forte Piano with Violin," and the "Adagio in f minor."

### **Marianna Martinez(s) (1744-1812) Austria**

Marianna Martinez was a composer, harpsichordist and pianist of Spanish descent who lived among the aristocracy of Vienna. She studied voice and composition with Nicola Porpora and keyboard with Joseph Haydn, who was also accompanying her during her voice lessons. Her education was supervised by poet Pietro Metastasio, who was a friend of the family.

Her weekly musical soirées attracted the best-known musicians. Haydn was a frequent guest, and so was Mozart, who often played duets with her.

She was the first woman to become an honorary member of the Accademia Filarmonica of Bologna, an honour coveted by musicians throughout Europe. The entrance to this academy marked the emergence of a composer to prominence, bringing commissions for major events. She indeed became a composer of repute; her name and music being clearly known across Europe. She wrote more than 150 works of which only about 65 have survived, as unfortunately, many manuscripts of her compositions were destroyed in a fire in 1927. As far as we know, she is the author of the only symphony composed by a woman during the period 1750-1790. She also wrote several vocal and instrumental works, among which there are three Oratorios and two Masses. Of her 31 Sonatas, only three survived. They are in the Italian style and are quite

virtuosic. Some see similarities with the style of Carl Philip Emmanuel Bach, but the metaphor of “Haydn in athletic mode” would also be quite appropriate.

### **Hélène de Montgeroult (1764-1836) France**

Hélène de Montgeroult was a brilliant forte pianist and composer. Her virtuosity at the instrument literally saved her from the guillotine. Being an aristocrat, she was arrested during the terror that followed the French Revolution but at her inquest, she so impressed the members of the Committee for Public Safety that they let her go free. She was subsequently appointed professeur de piano première classe at the newly established Paris Conservatoire in 1795 and, as a teacher, she exerted a profound influence on early French piano pedagogy. She left us a few Sonatas for piano and a magistral “Cours Complet pour l’Enseignement du Forte-Piano”, a collection of technical exercises followed by 114 Etudes of progressive difficulty.

### **Maria Theresia von Paradis (1759-1824) Austria**

Born in Vienna, pianist, singer, and composer Maria Theresia von Paradis was the daughter of the imperial secretary in the court of Maria Theresa of Austria. Recognizing the girl’s exceptional musical gift, her parents, with the assistance of the Empress, ensured that she would get the best general education and broad musical training. By 1775, Maria Theresia could be heard frequently in concerts where she would perform notable new keyboard works, written probably for her by W.A. Mozart (Concerto K.456), A. Salieri (organ concerto) and J. Haydn.

In 1783, she began a concert tour across Europe that lasted at least four years. It was during that period that she began to compose. Gradually, her interests shifted, and by 1789 she was devoting more time to composition and teaching than to performing. In 1808, she founded her own music school in Vienna, where she taught piano, singing and theory, however it was not her first experience in pedagogy. Being blind herself since the age of three, she had established the first School for the Blind in Paris in 1784, with Valentin Haüy.

Widely respected by her musical peers, and popular in her day, Maria Theresia gradually faded into oblivion. Unfortunately, of her thirty or so works, many have been lost, while others are of dubious authenticity.

### **Maria Hester Park, née Reynolds (1760-1813) Britain**

Composer, keyboard player and singer Maria Hester Park was very active in London musical circles where she frequently performed on both harpsichord and piano and taught many students of the nobility. She became famous as a composer, and it is said that her music was very popular in 18<sup>th</sup>-century England; she was described as one of the most prolific women composers of her time. Her surviving music for keyboard includes Sonatas for the harpsichord or the pianoforte, a Concerto in E flat Major and a Waltz (1801).

### **Jane Savage (1752/3-1824) Britain**

Widely reported to be a virtuoso harpsichord and fortepiano player, Jane Savage was also an accomplished composer of keyboard music and songs. She wrote in the Galant style, and her music was quite popular in its time. Her published works for keyboard include Six Sonatas for Harpsichord or Piano (1783), Six Rondos opus 3 (1786), and a Keyboard Duet in C Major opus 6 (1789).

### **Elizabeth Weichsel-Billington (between 1765 and 1768-1818) Britain**

Joseph Haydn called her “a great genius”, and other contemporaries saw her as being “the greatest English soprano of all time.” Clearly, Elizabeth Billington enjoyed a very successful career across Europe as an operatic singer. Her mother was herself a well-known singer who had studied with Johann Christian Bach (he would also teach Elizabeth), and her father was principal oboist at the King’s Theatre in London. Learning harpsichord and fortepiano from him, she showed herself to be a child prodigy at the instrument. She started playing in public at a very young age, and her “Three Lessons for Harpsichord” were published in 1775, followed by “Six Progressive Lessons” in 1778. Nevertheless, she decided to pursue a career in opera, becoming “the ablest singer of her day and the richest professional woman in Europe”. She was the most celebrated, notorious diva of her age.

## **Romantic**

### **Agathe Backer Grondhal (1847-1907) Norway**

Composer and pianist Agathe Backer Grondhal studied in Berlin, where her interpretation of Beethoven’s Emperor Concerto brought her sudden fame. She had an outstanding career as a concert pianist, playing not only in the Nordic countries, but also in France, Germany, and England. She performed Edward Grieg’s piano Concerto in 1868, and the two of them became close friends. Both played major roles on the Norwegian musical scene of the time. Agathe Backer Grondhal wrote extensively for piano, mostly descriptive lyric pieces, some with considerable technical challenges.

### **Basile Barès (1845-1902) U.S.A.**

Basile Barès is the only American composer we know of to have had a copyright assigned to a composition published while he was still a slave. His “Grande Polka des Chasseurs à Pied de la Louisiane” was written in 1860, when he was fifteen years old. At the time, he was owned by Adolph Perier and his wife. The couple had a music store where Basile and his brother Adrien learned not only how to repair and tune pianos, but also how to play them. Sheet music was extremely popular in those days, with dances and marches being in great demand, and Basile started composing following the examples of Edmond Dédé, Eugène Victor Macarty and Lucien



Lambert, all Black composers born free and living in the city. At twenty years old, he was performing dance music in major venues, organizing concerts that were reaching more and more people, and becoming one of the most popular pianist/composers of dance music in New Orleans.

Following the Civil War, he continued to work at the same music shop after his emancipation and traveled several times to Paris on business for the Perier firm, performing notably at the Paris World Exposition of 1867. He is known to have been a prolific composer for piano, and at least 21 of his pieces have been published. They are in the style of what was then called “Salon” or “Parlor” music, mostly dances (Galops, Quadrilles, Waltzes, Polkas), often with descriptive titles.

### **Teresa Carreno (1853-1917) Venezuela**

Teresa’s grandfather was a famous Venezuelan composer who held the position of director of music of the Caracas Cathedral. Her father, a politician and amateur pianist, was her first music teacher and agent. Music was in her blood. An unusually talented prodigy, she was composing waltzes and polkas at six years old and made her concert debut at eight years old. In 1862, the family moved to New York where she studied with Louis Moreau Gottschalk. As a child, she toured many North American cities as well as Cuba, even playing for Abraham Lincoln. Three years later, in 1863, the family traveled to Europe where she was introduced to the Parisian Salons by Rossini, and studied with Georges Mathias, a student of Frédéric Chopin and Anton Rubinstein. She became one of the most accomplished pianists of her time, giving recitals all over the world, and appearing frequently as a soloist with the most important European Symphony Orchestras, including the Berlin Philharmonic in 1889 - quite an achievement for a woman at the time. She wrote more than 40 works for piano, often quite virtuosic. Most of them were published in Paris and some of them were extremely popular among amateur pianists and students. Over her 54-year-long career, she also became a much sought-after piano teacher. Her energy and passion were legendary and earned her the nickname “The Valkyrie of the piano”.

### **Edmond Dédé (1827-1901) U.S.A.**

Edmond Dédé was a free-born Black French Creole American composer, violinist and orchestra conductor from New Orleans. He started his instrumental studies on clarinet, but it was quickly discovered that he was a prodigy on violin. Because of the segregation prevalent at that time, he moved to Mexico where he lived for three years and then to Paris in 1855 to pursue his studies at the Conservatoire de Musique de Paris. He settled in France, becoming conductor of the orchestras of the Grand Théâtre, of Les Folies Bordelaises and of the Théâtre l’Alcazar of Bordeaux. He wrote popular songs as well as classical music compositions which are preserved at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

### **Louise Farrenc, née Dumont (1804-1875) France**

Louise Farrenc was a pianist, composer, teacher, and scholar. Very talented musically, she was already a pianist of professional caliber at fifteen years old, and quickly acquired considerable fame as a performer. It is also at that age that she started her studies in composition at the Conservatoire de Musique de Paris, showing great promise. In 1825, her earliest compositions were published simultaneously in France and in England, as well as in other European countries. Schumann wrote about her "Air Russe Varié: "so sure in outline, so logical in development...that we must fall under their (variations) charm". In 1840, a music critic predicted that her "30 Etudes in all the Major and Minor Keys" would become a piano classic "not only to develop technique but also to mold taste". Indeed, in 1845, they became a required study at the Conservatoire de Musique de Paris where she had been appointed professor of piano in 1842. She was the only woman in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to hold a permanent position of such importance at that institution, and the first to demand and receive equal pay. She later abandoned composition to work with her husband, Aristide Farrenc, on the monumental "Le Trésor des Pianistes", a 23-volume anthology of harpsichord and piano music focusing on early music performances practices, and to organize concerts where she and her students would perform pieces from the 17<sup>th</sup>- and 18<sup>th</sup>-century keyboard repertoire.

### **Antonio Carlos Gomes (1836-1896) Brazil**

Antonio Carlos Gomes was the son of a conductor, his older brother José Pedro was a violinist, and both encouraged his piano studies. As a teenager, Antonio would play for balls and popular concerts, often with his brother. At fifteen years old, he was composing waltzes, modinhas (a Brazilian sentimental song), quadrilles and polkas. He studied at the Musical Conservatory of Rio de Janeiro and upon his graduation in 1861, produced his first opera, which was followed by another one two years later. Their enormous success won him a scholarship to study in Italy in 1864, and he graduated from the Conservatory of Milan with the title of "Maestro Composer". Shortly after, Antonio presented his new opera, "Il Guarany" at the La Scala Theatre in Milan. The work, written on a Brazilian subject and introducing typical Brazilian instruments to the European public, was a phenomenal success, and it was subsequently presented in all the major European countries, making Antonio Gomes the first non-European opera composer to be successful in Italy and the first New World composer whose work was largely played in Europe. His piece for piano "A Cayumba", published in 1857, is said to be one of the first classical pieces to include a Brazilian rhythm, mixed with a polka rhythm.

### **Chiquinha Gonzaga (1847-1935) Brazil**

Composer and pianist Chiquinha Gonzaga was the first woman to conduct an orchestra in Brazil. As the daughter of a military officer, she received a very good education which included serious piano studies. She composed her first song at eleven years old. When she turned 16, her father arranged her marriage to the son of a colleague, giving her a piano as a wedding gift. The marriage was very unhappy, and Chiquinha found solace in her music. The husband took offense at the situation and asked her to choose between him and her instrument. She left him

and was hence expelled from the family by her father. Now an independent pianist and composer, she earned a living playing the piano in music stores and pastry shops, while also giving piano lessons. In 1877, her polka "Atraente" was published and became a hugely popular success. The following year, "Sultana" was an even bigger hit, breaking all sales records. Finally, her operettas brought her national celebrity; she wrote more than 77 stage works which she conducted herself. Mixing elements of the Brazilian popular culture with the sounds of the piano, she became the first popular composer of Brazil.

### **Clara Gottschalk Peterson (1837-1910) U.S.A.**

Pianist, composer, and editor Clara Gottschalk was the sister of virtuoso pianist Louis Moreau Gottschalk. She was born in New Orleans, one of seven children. Her parents being slave owners, the children were taken care of by a nanny who was originally from Saint-Domingue, as was their own grandmother. Thanks to the two women, the Creole legends and lullabies had a profound influence on them. They were all musically gifted, and all performed or composed at one point or another. Louis Moreau became a celebrated pianist and composer, Gaston an opera singer and voice teacher, and Clara and Blanche, professional pianists following their musical studies in Paris, where their mother had moved the family when leaving her husband in 1847. Herself a composer, Clara wrote piano pieces among which "Staccato Polka", "In Sylvan Glade", "Fleur des Champs", and "The Pixies' Merry-Making", although she is mostly remembered today as the editor of Louis Moreau's writings and a major promoter of his music.

### **Marie Jaëll, née Trautmann (1846-1925) France**

Pianist, composer and renowned pedagogue, Marie Jaëll was the first pianist to perform all of Beethoven's piano Sonatas in concert in Paris, and to introduce all piano works by Liszt and by Schumann to the Parisian public. She was a child prodigy, giving concerts across Europe. She entered the Conservatoire de Musique de Paris at ten years old and graduated at 16. In 1866, she married Alfred Jaëll, an Austrian concert pianist who had studied with Chopin. They travelled extensively and performed together, meeting many composers and performers during their trips. Liszt, who became her mentor, said of her: "Marie Jaëll has the brains of a philosopher and the fingers of an artist". Well respected by her contemporaries both as a performer and a composer, she was invited to join the Society of Music Composers, a great honor very rarely bestowed upon women at the time. When she suffered from tendonitis, she began to study neuroscience and physiology, and her research led her to the reading of very influential books on piano technique. Following her career as a concert pianist, Marie taught at the Conservatoire de Musique de Paris and composed over 80 pieces for piano for students of all levels.

### **Louise Japha-Langhans (1826-1910) Germany**

Born in Hamburg, pianist and composer Louise Japha-Langhans gave her first concert in 1838. She met Johannes Brahms around that time; they became lifelong friends, practising at the same piano factory, discussing their respective compositions and playing together. They were to

reconnect in 1853, when she moved to Dusseldorf to study with Clara Schumann. Louise married composer and music writer Wilhelm Langhans. While they sometimes performed together, she also had a solo career of her own and was especially popular in Paris for her interpretations of Schumann's and Brahms' piano works. She wrote an opera, string quartets, songs, as well as piano pieces.

### **Francis Johnson (1792-1844) U.S.A.**

Francis Johnson was a composer and famous band leader who was born in Martinique and moved to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1809, at the age of seventeen years old. A violin and Kent bugle virtuoso, he performed with his band for many important events throughout the U.S., even sailing to England to play for the coronation of Queen Victoria who gave him a silver bugle to thank him. He and his group were the first African American musicians to give concerts in Europe.

He became widely known in 1818 with the publication of the "Collection of New Cotillions", and his notoriety was such that some of his piano pieces were included in compilations alongside works by Beethoven, Czerny and Burgmüller. He was the first African American composer to have his works published, the first to give public concerts, and the first to participate in racially integrated concerts in the U.S. He directed military bands and society dance orchestras, taught music to mostly wealthy European American students, and performed on both violin and bugle. Introducing a unique and lively method of improvisation, he is seen by many as the forefather of ragtime and jazz.

### **Charles-Lucien Lambert (1828-1896) U.S.A.**

Composer, pianist and teacher Charles-Lucien Lambert was born a free person of colour in New Orleans. His father Charles-Richard was a prominent musician, composer and music teacher, and it is with him that Charles-Lucien and his half-brother Sidney started their piano studies. Because of the prevalent racism he was experiencing at home, he moved to France in 1854 where his compositions for piano quickly became popular, especially his "Variations et Final sur l'Air d'Au clair de la lune" which had to be reprinted five times due to the large demand. Having gained international fame both as a virtuoso pianist and a composer, he relocated to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, opened a piano and music store, and became part of the Brazilian National Institute of Music. His pieces are often inspired by popular romantic Creole songs.

### **Josephine Lang (1815-1880) Germany**

Composer, singer, pianist and teacher Josephine Lang was born into a musical family. Her father was a violinist and her mother an opera singer with whom she learned to play the piano. When she was five years old, her parents realized that she also had a gift for composition. Josephine started to teach at a very young age to help her family financially. Her talent was recognized by Felix Mendelssohn and Ferdinand Heller, who both gave her theory and composition lessons, and had her music published. Indeed, Heller, Mendelssohn and his sister

Fanny were very supportive of Josephine, and strongly encouraged her to stay active as a composer after her engagement. Nevertheless, she put her career on hiatus for a few years to take care of her family, resuming teaching and composing after the death of her husband in 1856. Facing financial difficulties, she was then helped by Clara Schumann and Ferdinand Heller who organized a benefit concert featuring Lang's music. Following the success of the event, Josephine became a prominent composer, a sought-after music teacher, had more works published and performed, and was part of Europe's most influential artistic circles.

### **Emilie Mayer (1812-1883) Germany**

The daughter of a pharmacist, Emilie Mayer started taking piano lessons at an early age, and soon began to compose. She was to become the most prolific German woman composer of the Romantic period. She wrote symphonies, overtures, chamber music works, lieder, as well as pieces for piano. She travelled all over Europe either to give private concerts herself or to attend performances of her works. Emilie Mayer was Associate Director of the Opera Academy of Berlin, and was also a prominent sculptor, some of her works being part of royal collections. If her music was printed and widely performed during her lifetime, bringing her great acclaim, it has been largely forgotten since her death.

### **Fanny Mendelssohn Hensel (1805-1847) Germany**

Fanny Mendelssohn was composer Felix Mendelssohn's older sister. They were very close, receiving the same thorough musical education and sharing a common passion for music. Fanny possessed prodigious musical talent; at thirteen years old, she played all 24 Preludes and Fugues by J.S. Bach for her father's anniversary. Bach was her favorite composer, and by the time she turned nineteen years old, she herself had written thirty-two Fugues. Her strong interest in Bach was instilled by her mother, who was her first piano teacher and knew of the Bach tradition through Johann Kirnberger, a student of Bach, as well as by her two great aunts: Sarah Levy, a highly skilled keyboard player who had studied with Wilhelm Friedmann Bach, had premiered a Concerto by C.P.E. Bach, and owned a unique collection of manuscripts by Johann Sebastian Bach, and Fanny von Arnstein who led a very well-known salon in Berlin. The two women were Fanny's role models.

Her father recognized her formidable talent both as a performer and a composer but adopted the prevailing social conventions of his time regarding the roles of women in society; he could perhaps tolerate but certainly not endorse her musical endeavors. He wrote to her: "Music will perhaps become his (Felix's) profession, while for you it can and must be only an ornament." Luckily, she found a great supporter in her husband, the painter Wilhelm Hensel. He encouraged her to play in public as well as to seek publication of her works. They had a son, named Sebastian in honor of Bach.

Fanny Hensel wrote over 450 pieces of music, among which a piano trio, a piano quartet, around 250 lieder and more than 125 pieces for piano, mostly in the form of “Songs without Words”.

### **Estelle Ricketts (1871-?) U.S.A.**

Little is known about Estelle Ricketts. Her name appears in a book entitled *The Work of the Afro-American Woman* by Gertrude Bustill Mossell, published in 1908. This book, highlighting the achievements of contemporary African American women in all fields, mentions her as a musical composer. Estelle Ricketts lived in Darby, Pennsylvania, very close to Philadelphia. Her father operated a horse stable. Her piece for piano “Rippling Spring Waltz”, published in 1893, is the earliest known solo work for piano by a Black female composer. No other pieces by her have been found.

### **Clara Wieck Schumann (1819-1896) Germany**

Hailed as one of the best concert pianists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Clara Schumann revolutionized the format and the repertoire of the piano recital over a performing career of more than 60 years. Indeed, she was the first to break from the tradition of presenting a mix of diverse types of performances, often virtuosic but sometimes without too much substance, offering programs of serious works and making it standard to play from memory. Her father, Friedrich Wieck, was a professional pianist and teacher and her mother, Mariane Tromlitz, was a very famous professional singer. A child prodigy, Clara was trained by her father. She made her concert debut at age nine at the Gewandhaus in Leipzig and began touring across Europe at eleven years old. She composed “Quatre Polonaises opus 1” (1831) and “4 Pieces caractéristiques opus 5” (1836) for her to play at her own recitals, writing: “composing gives me great pleasure... there is nothing that surpasses the joy of creation.” After her marriage to Robert Schumann in 1840, she wrote mostly lieder, choral works and chamber music until she stopped completely in 1848, influenced by the negative opinions of women’s abilities to compose that were prevalent at the time. “I once believed that I possessed creative talent, but I have given up this idea; a woman must not desire to compose. There has never yet been one able to do it. Should I expect to be the one?” After the death of her husband, she continued her concert tours in Europe, edited Robert’s works and became a very influential teacher, heading the piano department at the Conservatory of Frankfurt and attracting piano students from all over the world.

### **Maria Szymanowska, née Wolowska (1789-1831) Poland**

Pianist and composer Maria Szymanowska displayed her musical talent from an early age and made her debut in Warsaw and Paris in 1810 at the age of eleven. She counted John Field (Moscow) and Luigi Cherubini (Paris) among her mentors. She married a rich landowner, Josef Szymanowski, but the marriage was dissolved as he was refusing to let her pursue her professional career. After leaving him, she kept touring across Europe until 1828, always attracting large audiences, and the high price of her concert tickets is evidence that, indeed, she

was one of the most prominent pianists of her time. She was appointed court pianist to the Tsar of Russia in 1822, making Saint Petersburg her home base, and her salon became the centre of cultural life for Polish émigrés, a place where they could always find assistance.

She composed more than a hundred pieces, many of them short virtuoso piano works, often inspired by folk melodies or dances. Most were published by Breitkopf & Hartel in Germany.

## **Modern**

### **Grazyna Bacewicz (1909-1969) Poland**

Composer, violinist, and pianist Grazyna Bacewicz started her musical training with her father. She was a child prodigy, giving her first concert at seven years old and composing her “Préludes for Piano” at thirteen. She pursued her studies at the Warsaw Conservatory of Music in violin, piano, and composition and after graduation, joined a group of Polish students for further studies in composition with Nadia Boulanger at the Ecole Normale de Musique (Paris, France). Back in Warsaw, she became principal violinist of the Polish Radio Orchestra, and frequently performed as a soloist, either with orchestra or in recitals. During her concert tours, she would often interpret her own music, both on violin and piano. After World War II, she was appointed Professor at the State Conservatoire of Music in Lodz. Composition gradually played an increasingly important role in her professional life, until she finally decided to put an end to her career as a performer in order to make composing her sole occupation. Many of her works received awards; she was much admired and loved as a composer, and she opened the doors for many women composers in Poland. After Maria Szymanowska, she is the second Polish woman composer to have received national and international recognition.

### **Amy Beach (1867-1944) U.S.A.**

Celebrated during her lifetime as the foremost woman composer of the U.S., Amy Beach was initiated to the piano by her mother who was a talented amateur pianist and singer. At seven years old, she gave her first public recital, playing not only Handel, Beethoven, and Chopin, but also some of her own pieces. She made her debut with the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1885. Following her marriage to a surgeon, she stopped performing out of respect for her husband’s wishes and focused on composition. If her art songs made her known to the public, it is her large-scale works that gained her acceptance by her American colleagues and brought her national and international recognition. She was the first female composer to have a symphony performed by a major orchestra (Boston Symphony, 1896), and one of the first American composers to have her music acclaimed in Europe. Upon the death of her husband in 1910, she resumed her performing career and went to Europe, determined to establish her reputation both as a pianist and a composer. While her piano recitals showcased her piano works, her Symphonies were played by major orchestras, and the highly favorable reviews

described her as a “virtuoso pianist who has as a composer a musical nature tinged with genius”.

### **Margaret Bonds (1913-1972) U.S.A.**

Pianist and composer Margaret Bonds was born in Chicago, the daughter of a doctor heavily involved in the civil rights movement and a church choral director and organist. Her family home was a meeting place for many of the leading Black writers, artists and musicians of the time, and this environment had a profound influence on Margaret’s musical development. She showed an early interest for composition, writing her first piece at just five years old. Her mother was her first piano teacher, and Margaret subsequently studied piano and composition with Florence Price. Throughout her childhood and adolescence, she won many scholarships and, at a time when there were few Black students in American universities, she enrolled at Northwestern University where she graduated with a Masters’ Degree in piano and composition. In 1932, she won the prestigious national Wanamaker Foundation Prize, which brought her public notoriety. The following year, she performed as soloist with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, the first Black person to do so, and in 1934, it was the turn of the Woman’s Symphony of Chicago to invite her.

Margaret Bonds moved to New York in 1939, where she pursued further graduate work at the Juilliard School of Music, both in piano and composition. She became a music editor, held the position of minister of music of a church in Harlem while continuing to tour as a soloist. Margaret was also an active leader in the classical music community of New York, and got involved with many churches, theatres, cultural centres and multiple music associations, making it her mission to promote the works of African American classical composers and performers. Indeed, the transmission of her own musical heritage was of primary importance to her. In her own compositions, she “stuck to (her) own ethnic material and worked to develop it.” She wrote mostly for the voice, but her pieces for piano show that the piano was clearly her primary instrument and an ideal medium to combine the blues, jazz, and gospel idioms with romantic and impressionistic elements.

### **Mel (Mélanie) Bonis (1858-1937) France**

A prolific and inspired composer, Mélanie was self-taught, as her parents were vehemently opposed to her musical studies. When she was twelve years old, a family friend finally convinced them to give her a musical education, and at sixteen years old, she met composer César Frank who took her on as a piano student and showed interest in her compositions. He had her enroll at the Conservatoire de Musique de Paris where she studied accompaniment, harmony and composition alongside Claude Debussy and Gabriel Pierné. Unfortunately, her parents forced her to leave the Conservatoire, to the great disappointment of her teachers and the director of the Conservatoire, and arranged for her to marry a man who, although very nice, had no interest in music whatsoever.



She continued composing but, since at the time it was generally thought that women could not compose anything of value, she took the only option possible for her to develop her career: she adopted the pseudonym “Mel” to eliminate any clear allusion to her gender. She wrote piano music for all levels, from beginner to concert pieces, and her music was played by the best performers in the most renowned concert halls of Europe. She was the first woman to join the “Société des compositeurs de musique”, of which she became secretary in 1910, a unique achievement for a woman at the time. This position allowed her to work closely with the elite of the music world of Paris.

### **Henriette Bosmans (1895-1952) Netherlands**

Born in Amsterdam, Henriette Bosmans was the daughter of Henri Bosmans, principal cellist of the Concertgebouw Orchestra, and Sarah Benedicts, concert pianist and piano teacher at the Amsterdam Conservatory. She studied piano with her mother and became a renowned concert pianist, giving recitals in all the Netherlands' major concert halls, touring Europe and performing with leading orchestras, appearing no less than twenty-two times as a soloist with the Concertgebouw. She was also very active as a collaborative pianist and piano teacher. Henriette started to compose at fifteen years old and is considered one of the most important Dutch composers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Lili Boulanger (1893-1919) France**

Lili Boulanger was born into a family of professional musicians. Her sister Nadia, who herself became an internationally known composer and a very influential composition teacher, guided her early music instruction, while Gabriel Fauré was her first piano teacher. Lili was a child prodigy; her talent was apparent by the age of two. Despite suffering from chronic illnesses, she was determined to succeed as a composer. She entered the Conservatoire de Musique de Paris in 1909 and put all her energies in her studies. In 1913, she became the first woman to win the coveted “Prix de Rome” for composition, which brought a publishing contract with Ricordi. She wrote works for orchestra, piano, organ, violin, cello, oboe, flute, and voice.

### **Cécile Chaminade (1857-1944) France**

Cécile Chaminade started to play the piano at a very early age, first taking lessons from her mother. Her earliest compositions were written when she was about seven or eight years old. As her father was strongly opposed to her pursuing music studies at the Conservatoire de Musique de Paris, she took private lessons with members of its faculty. Her first piano recital at eighteen years old, which included her own compositions, was followed by numerous concerts in France, Belgium, and Austria. When she made her debut in England in 1892, her piano pieces were already very popular, and their publications always a huge financial success. They number close to 200, mainly character pieces, covering all levels, from beginner to concert works. Her piano pieces were also best sellers in the U.S. where she travelled in 1908 for a concert tour of twelve cities, meeting members of the Chaminade Clubs that had begun appearing all over the

country in 1900. Cécile Chaminade received the Légion d'Honneur in 1913; it was the first time it was granted to a female composer. She made several recordings of her piano works.

### **Samuel Coleridge-Taylor (1875-1912) England**

Samuel Coleridge-Taylor was a composer and a London-born conductor. His mother, a white British woman, was from a very musical family and his father was a Black African doctor from Sierra Leone studying medicine in the city who would later become a prominent administrator in West Africa. Samuel was raised by his mother and his grandfather, a violinist who quickly realized that Samuel was very gifted and started to teach him when he was five years old. He later arranged for his grandson to study piano, violin, and composition at the Royal College of Music. By 1896, Samuel was already well known as a composer, his Clarinet Quintet having been quite popular the year before. In 1898, his cantata "Hiawatha's Wedding Feast" for chorus and orchestra was called a "cataclysmic success" by critics and propelled him to immediate international fame and respect. His music was performed not only in England and the U.S., but also in Canada, New Zealand, and South Africa. By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he was one of Britain's most outstanding and celebrated composers. Coleridge-Taylor was very proud of his paternal racial heritage. In his compositions, he drew from traditional African music, integrating it into the classical tradition in a manner comparable to what Brahms did with Hungarian music and Dvorak with Bohemian music, thereby creating a "romantic nationalism style" of his own.

### **Brasílio Itiberé da Cunha (1846-1913) Brazil**

Brasílio Itiberé da Cunha was a composer, lawyer and diplomat born in the coastal city of Paranaguá. He was already well known as a concert pianist when he moved to São Paulo to pursue his studies in Law. Following his graduation, he joined the diplomatic service and served in Italy, Peru, Belgium, Paraguay, and Germany, continuing his musical career in parallel and making friends with the greatest pianists of his time, such as Franz Liszt and Anton Rubinstein. Itiberé wrote chamber music and choral works as well as pieces for piano into which he incorporated Brazilian folkloric elements, making him one of the forerunners of a new Nationalistic music movement.

### **Eugène Arcade Dédé (1867-1919) France**

Following in the footsteps of his father Edmond Dédé, Eugène also became a composer and a music hall conductor. He was born in Bordeaux, France, where his father had settled after his marriage to a French woman named Sylvie Leflet in 1864. Eugène was a prolific composer: the Bibliothèque Nationale de Paris houses more than 200 of his published compositions, mostly songs and orchestral works. His piano pieces are colorful and quite virtuosic, with descriptive titles like "Buenas Noches" opus 243, "Les Libellules, Caprice" opus 421, "If You Please, Polka Gigue Américaine" opus 295, "Polka des Confettis" opus 237, and "Chifonnette Polka" opus 263.

### **Nathaniel Dett (1882-1943) Canada – U.S.A.**

Composer, pianist, organist, choral director, and music professor Nathaniel Dett was born in Canada and moved to the U.S. with his family when he was eleven years old. At three years old, he was already showing a keen interest in music. He started formal piano lessons at five and at fourteen years old, he was playing at his local church. He pursued his studies in piano and composition at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, becoming the first Black American to graduate from this institution.

It was around that time, during his tours in North America, that he became aware of the strong impact Anton Dvorak had on the orientation of American music. Indeed, Dvorak had been encouraging composers to incorporate more American elements into their own works, doing just that himself with his “New World Symphony”. Influenced by both Dvorak and Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, Dett started to use spirituals and folk songs in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Romantic style of classical music; his pieces blend elements of blues, dances from the salon and romantic concert music traditions, are often composed of short movements and have descriptive titles, like “Enchantment”, “The Cinnamon Grove”, “Tropic Winter” or his most popular piece, “Juba Dance”.

Further studies at the Eastman School of Music (Master of Music) and in France with Nadia Boulanger followed. He became the first Black director of the music department of the Hampton Institute (Virginia), and his professional career befitted his diverse interests, as he was able to divide his time between composition, teaching, and administration.

### **Justin Elie (1883-1931) Haiti**

Pianist and composer Justin Elie is one of the best-known Haitian composers. He started piano lessons at six years old and in 1895, moved to Paris, France, where he studied piano and composition at the Conservatoire de Musique de Paris. He returned to Haiti in 1905 and embarked on a concert tour with colleague Ludovic Lamothe. Many more solo piano recitals followed in Latin America, South America, and the Caribbean islands, and he eventually became internationally renowned. In his compositions, Justin Elie brought back the méringue which had become a symbol of the resistance to the U.S. occupation of Haiti. As his reputation as a composer had grown in the US, in 1922 he moved to New York where he entered a very creative period, publishing many new pieces for piano and composing music for silent films while still performing on international stages.

### **James Reese Europe (1881-1919) U.S.A.**

James Reese Europe, also called Jim Europe, was an African American ragtime and early jazz band leader, arranger, and composer. He was born in Alabama and started playing piano with his mother, while learning about improvisation on fiddle and banjo from his father. When he was

nine years old, his family moved to Washington, D.C. and he went to a prestigious segregated school where he studied piano, violin, and composition.

In 1904, he moved to New York City and became involved in Black musical theatre, composing a few popular songs and directing major productions. He contributed to the founding of the Clef Club, a union representing African American artists in the music industry as well as a booking agency, and conducted the Clef Club Symphony Orchestra, a large band with a very unconventional group of instruments, formed by 125 Black musicians and performing music written solely by Black composers. Their concert programs consisted mostly of arrangements of plantation melodies, spirituals, and ragtime's. The band was the first Black orchestra to get a recording contract. Europe played a key role in the emerging popularity of jazz, and his orchestra was the first to bring that style of music to Carnegie Hall. He collaborated with famed ballroom dancers Irene and Vernon Castle, and some of his best-known compositions were written for them and have been transmitted in versions for piano.

During World War 1, Europe joined the 369<sup>th</sup> Infantry and was assigned to the French Army's 16<sup>th</sup> Division. He became a lieutenant in charge of one of the machine-gun squads, making him the first African American officer to command troops during wartime. Because of their valor and courage, his squads were given the surname of "Hell Fighters". Meanwhile, he was also conducting the regimental band, to great acclaim throughout France, and introducing ragtime and jazz music to Europe. Back to New York, where he was called "America's jazz King" a recording contract awaited him and his band. He had only just started an extensive national tour across the U.S. when he was attacked backstage by a fellow performer and later died from his wounds.

### **Scott Joplin (1868-1917) U.S.A.**

Composer and pianist Scott Joplin is famous for his ragtime pieces. He grew up in a musical family of railway laborers; his mother sang and played the banjo, and his father violin. Scott was serious about his piano studies from the start, and his mother proved to be very supportive. A German-born American Jewish pianist and music professor named Julius Weiss heard him and was so impressed by his talent that he offered to teach him free of charge, introducing him to classical music, including opera, as well as to folk music. Weiss was a strong influence on Scott, who never forgot him.

In his early 20's Scott became a traveling musician, performing in churches, cafes, bars, dance halls, theatres and Black clubs of the South, playing "jig-piano", a genre originating from the jigs and the march music played by African American bands. In 1893, the Chicago World's Fair, attended by 27 million visitors, spread the popularity of the Ragtime as we know it: a piece with a predominant left-hand pattern of bass notes on strong beats and chords on weak beats, accompanied by a syncopated, "ragged" melody in the right hand. It quickly became a craze all over the U.S.—the first African American music to have an impact on mainstream popular culture. In 1899, Scott Joplin published "Original Rags", followed six months later by his first hit: the "Maple Leaf Rag". That piece became the model, the archetype of the classic rag that was

to influence all others: a new art form, combining the African American folk music's rhythmic patterns and melodic lines, the march style popular at the time, and 19<sup>th</sup>-century European romanticism.

### **Esther Kahn (1877-1962) Australia**

Esther Kahn was born in London, England, and began piano lessons at a very young age, giving her first public performance at five years old. She had already been given a scholarship to study at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, but her parents decided to migrate to Australia shortly after her recital. She continued her studies in piano, organ and composition, and a number of her works were published in the 1890's, notably in the "Australian Musical Album". Her compositions include songs, many pieces for solo piano, works for solo organ and chamber music. As many women composers of her generation did, she published under male pseudonyms. Hers were Charles Stewart and Ivan Romanov. Esther Kahn was one of the first music therapists in Australia, and she used her own music very successfully in the treatment of her patients. Her pianistic style reflects the European tradition at the heart of her musical upbringing.

### **Ludovic Lamothe (1882-1953) Haiti**

Virtuoso pianist and composer Ludovic Lamothe is one of Haiti's most important classical composers. He was born into a literary and musical family, and his mother was his first piano teacher. Very early on, he demonstrated exceptional talent. In 1910, he won a scholarship to pursue his piano studies at the Conservatoire de Musique de Paris with renowned teacher Louis Diémer. Upon his return to Haiti in 1914, he taught and gave frequent recitals, becoming famous notably for his interpretations of the piano works of Frédéric Chopin, his favorite composer.

Ludovic Lamothe composed exclusively for the piano, and his music represents a fusion of different styles and cultural elements. He was strongly influenced by the European classical piano music, especially Chopin's, but if his music is "classical in form", it is "Créole in inspiration". Indeed, one finds traditional elements of Haitian Vodou ceremonial music and folklore, and of the méringue (a typically Haitian piece that combines African and Spanish influences) as well as of other Haitian dance forms interwoven with stylistic elements that explain why he would sometimes be called "The Black Chopin".

### **Ernesto Lecuona (1896-1963) Cuba**

Composer and pianist Ernesto Lecuona was born into a musical family. His six siblings were also musicians, and he first studied with his older sister Ernestina, a classically trained pianist and herself already a famed composer. He was considered a child prodigy and made his performing debut at five years old. His first composition, a two-step still often performed by Cuban military bands today, was published when he was eleven years old. As a teenager, he frequently played in silent movie houses as well as in ballrooms. He studied at the National Conservatory in Havana, graduating in 1913, and immediately started to tour across Europe and

the Americas, often playing duets with Ernestina. He began his recording career in 1917, just after his New York debut. He continued traveling the world as a concert pianist, playing works by the great Romantic composers as well as his own compositions, garnering international acclaim and raising interest in Cuban music. In his works for piano, he blended European concert music conventions with the Afro-Cuban roots of dance-oriented music. Indeed, his piano pieces follow the tradition of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century Cuban Danza, with a syncopated left hand creating the tension underneath beautiful, highly singable, right-hand melodies.

### **Tania León (1943) Cuba - U.S.A.**

A self-described Cuban American composer of mixed descent (French, Spanish, African and Chinese), Tania León started piano at age four. Born in Cuba, she began her career as a pianist before moving to the U.S. in 1967 to study composition at New York University. Associated with the “Arthur Mitchell’s Dance Theater of Harlem” as co-founder, pianist and first music director, she built herself a solid reputation as a composer, conductor, and advisor to different arts organizations. Many of her works have been commissioned, and she continues to lead a busy career as a conductor in the U.S., Europe, and South Africa. She was appointed at Brooklyn College in 1985, where she teaches and conducts. She is an outspoken advocate for cultural diversity. “My ancestors came from different parts of the world: they came from different cultures. I take great pride in the heritage each of them passed on to me, and I represent all of them within myself.”

### **Ernesto Nazareth (1863-1934) Brazil**

Composer and pianist Ernesto Nazareth was born in Rio de Janeiro. After a few years of piano lessons with his mother, he studied with Eduardo Madeira and Charles Lucien Lambert, a very well-known pianist and composer himself. Ernesto started his professional career very young; in 1877, at fourteen years old, he was already playing in cafes, balls, society parties and in the waiting rooms of movie theatres. His first composition “Voce Bem Sabe” was published that same year. A classically trained pianist, he was strongly influenced by Chopin, and wrote practically exclusively for piano. With this European heritage, he combined melodic elements from the Brazilian popular style and polka, habanera, lundu and ragtime rhythms, mixing influences from Europe, Africa, and the Americas to create a new genre that he called the Brazilian Tango. He thus became, as composer Heitor Villa-Lobos put it so well, “...the true incarnation of the Brazilian soul.”

### **Oscar Peterson (1925-2007) Canada**

Canadian virtuoso pianist and composer Oscar Peterson is one of history’s great jazz pianists. He was born in Montréal to Kathleen and Daniel Peterson, both immigrants from the West Indies, and he grew up in a predominantly Black neighborhood where he was immersed in jazz culture. His parents believed that music was very important and insisted that all give of their children learn piano as well as a brass instrument. Oscar studied classical piano with his sister Daisy (later Daisy Sweeney), a well-known professional concert pianist and piano teacher who

taught many of the most notable Canadian figures in jazz music. He pursued his studies with Hungarian-born pianist Paul de Marky, following in the 19<sup>th</sup>-century piano tradition of Franz Liszt, while also playing traditional jazz, boogie-woogie, and ragtime pieces. In 1940, at fourteen years old, he won the CBC Music Competition which launched his professional career: soon after, he could be heard in the main hotels and music halls of the city while also having his own weekly radio show. He made his debut with “Jazz at the Philharmonic” in New York at the Carnegie Hall in 1949, embarking on a life of touring and recording.

Oscar Peterson also taught piano and improvisation, mainly in Toronto, and was involved in the York University’s jazz program. He always credited his strong Classical training background for his brilliant piano technique and stunning virtuosity as a soloist – he himself kept practicing scales and playing classical études throughout his career – and he would therefore often stress the importance of mastering the core classical pianism, asking his students to study J.S. Bach, insisting in particular on the Well-Tempered Keyboard, the Goldberg Variations and the Art of the Fugue, as he himself considered these pieces essential for every serious pianist. His most significant and best-loved compositions for piano are his “Jazz Exercises and Pieces for the Young Jazz Pianist” and “Canadiana Suite”.

### **Florence Price (1887-1953) U.S.A.**

Florence Price was a classical composer, pianist, organist, and music teacher, the first African American to gain recognition as a symphonic composer, and the first to have a composition played by a major orchestra (the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, in 1933). She was born in a mixed-race family living in Arkansas. Her father was the only African American dentist of Little Rock, and her mother was a music teacher who initiated her daughter to the piano very early in life. Indeed, Florence gave her first piano performance at four years old and had her first piano piece published when she was eleven. She then studied piano, organ and composition at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston and graduated with an artist diploma in organ and a teaching certificate. After teaching in Arkansas for a while, she became the head of the music department of the Clark Atlanta University, a historically Black institution. Florence married a lawyer in 1912 and had two daughters. For the next fifteen years, she taught piano privately and, although she would write short piano pieces for pedagogical purposes, she did not consider herself “a serious composer”.

In 1927, the family moved to Chicago where the vitality of the music milieu gave Florence the impetus to compose intensively again. Her four pieces for piano, published in 1928, launched her career as a professional composer. To earn a living after her divorce in 1931, she started to play for silent movies, while also composing songs for radio ads. Winning two Wanamaker Foundation awards in 1932 with her Symphony in e minor and her Piano Sonata brought her national recognition. She was inducted into the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers in 1940, and her reputation finally reached Europe. Her songs, piano pieces, instrumental and orchestral works were widely performed in her day but disappeared from the concert stages over the years. They are now being rediscovered.

### **Charlotte Sohy (1887-1955) France**

Charlotte Sohy was born into a very artistic family; her interests in theatre, literature and music were strongly encouraged by her parents and nurtured by her milieu. She started piano and theory lessons with Georges Marty, a well-known French conductor and composer, and pursued her musical studies in organ and composition at the Schola Cantorum, the music school in competition with the Conservatoire de Musique de Paris. This is where she met her future husband Marcel Labey, also a composition student. They often worked in collaboration and were very supportive of each other. Charlotte wrote pieces for piano, masses, songs, trios, a string quartet, a symphony, and a lyrical drama, as well as plays and a novel. Generally, she would sign her works Ch. Sohy to hide the fact that she was a woman, but at times she also used pseudonyms like Charles Sohy, Louis Riviere, or Claude Vincent. She was a friend of composers Nadia Boulanger and Mel (Mélanie) Bonis. Her musical language, influenced by her literary background, is neo romantic and very expressive.

### **Germaine Tailleferre (1892-1983) France**

Pianist and composer Germaine Tailleferre was a child prodigy with an amazing memory. Despite the opposition of her father who saw music as an inappropriate activity for women and always refused to support her musical studies, she entered the Conservatoire de Paris at twelve years old in 1912. Erik Satie called her his musical daughter, became her mentor, and helped her develop her career. He introduced her to a group of young composers: Francis Poulenc, Darius Milhaud, Arthur Honegger, Georges Auric and Louis Durey. Together, they would form "Le Groupe des Six". She married twice, and both men objected to her musical career. This of course had an impact on her creative energy, but she nevertheless continued to compose in abundance, writing film scores, orchestral works, operas as well as pieces for piano in which she often shows an affinity with the 18<sup>th</sup>-century French clavecinistes. Her music is full of charm and grace, lighthearted and humorous.

### **George Walker (1922-2018) U.S.A.**

George Walker was born in Washington, D.C. of West Indian American parentage. He started piano lessons when he was five years old, and pursued his musical studies in piano and composition at the Oberlin Conservatory and the Curtis Institute of Music where he graduated in 1945 with an Artist Diploma in piano and composition, becoming the first Black graduate student of this school. Many more "firsts" followed: he was the first Black instrumentalist to present a debut recital in Town Hall, New York; the first to play a concerto with the Philadelphia Orchestra; the first to be signed by a major arts management (the National Concert Artists), and the first to receive a Pulitzer Prize for Music for his piece "Lilacs" in 1996. After a very successful concert tour of seven European countries in 1954, he decided to pursue graduate studies and became the first Black musician to receive a Doctoral degree as well as an Artist Diploma from the Eastman School of Music a year later. In parallel to his distinguished teaching career, George Walker has written over ninety works. One can hear the influence of jazz, folk songs, church



hymns as well as classical music in his compositions, and in his piano works, he favoured changing meters, syncopation as well as bitonal writing.

### **Errollyn Wallen (1958) Great Britain**

Composer, pianist and singer-songwriter Errollyn Wallen was born in Belize, in the Caribbean islands, and studied composition at the University of London and at Cambridge. She is both a singer-songwriter of pop-influenced songs and a composer of contemporary new music. Her motto is: "We don't break down barriers in music...we don't see any". She has been commissioned by institutions like the BBC, the Wigmore Hall and the Royal Opera House. Her music is performed regularly in concert halls around the world. She was the first Black woman composer to have one of her works presented at the Proms Festival in 1998. Errollyn Wallen is teaching at several conservatories in Great Britain and is often seen and heard on BBC television and radio.

### **Thomas "Blind Tom" Wiggins (1849-1908)**

Born a slave in Georgia, Tom Wiggins grew up on a plantation owned by General James Bethune. As he was blind from birth, he could not do the work normally expected of enslaved children and therefore was left on his own. He started to show unusual behavior very early on, imitating any sound he would hear and doing anything to create noise. While he could repeat conversations up to ten minutes long, he could only communicate with people by grunts and gestures, showing serious signs of autism. Upon hearing one of the owner's daughters play the piano, he became fascinated by the instrument. He gained access to it at four years old, started playing by himself and composed "The Rainstorm", imitating the sound of the downpour on a tin roof. His owner, recognizing his outstanding musical talent and seeing a possible source of income, set him up in a room with a piano and hired a piano teacher to give him lessons. When he was eight years old, General Bethune decided that the time was right to put him on stage and Tom began touring extensively in the U.S. as a "Barnum-circus-style freak". He quickly reached celebrity status, performing in packed theatres. At ten years old, he played at the White House, and his pieces "Oliver Galop" and "Virginia Polka" were published that same year. After he became emancipated, the Bethune family kept Tom under their management. He continued his career giving piano recitals in the U.S., Canada, and Europe, performing classical works (Bach, Chopin, Liszt and Beethoven), as well as popular and original compositions interspersed with numbers designed to wow audiences, where he would play three pieces at once, or perform with his back to the piano and his hands inverted.