



BOSTON CLASSICAL GUITAR SOCIETY

# BCGS



# newsletter

Volume 21, No. 3



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Photo by J. Henry Fair

### Sharon Isbin, In Concert

Friday, January 23 7:30pm

First Lutheran Church, Boston, MA

[www.bostonguitar.org](http://www.bostonguitar.org) for information and tickets

## Letter to Members



**Dear Members,**

Happy New Year! After a brief holiday respite, the BCGS is moving ahead full force with the preparations for an exciting next few months.

On January 23 we welcome a classical guitar legend to

Boston: Sharon Isbin. More than any other guitarist of her generation, Sharon has destroyed traditional boundaries between musical genres and is making the music we love accessible to new audiences. She is a multiple GRAMMY award winner who has appeared on numerous television and radio shows, major international concert halls, and at the White House. Her collaborations with Steve Vai, Steve Morse, Nancy Wilson (of Heart), Joan Baez, Mark O'Connor, Joshua Bell, Howard Shore, John Corigliano, and Josh Groban attest to the diversity of her talents and ability to enthrall listeners wherever she goes. We are very lucky to have her in Boston and I'm



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certain her concert will have an unforgettable atmosphere. Tickets are still available but going quickly, so do reserve them as soon as you can!

Polish virtuoso Marcin Dylla, one of the most arresting guitarists to emerge from Europe in the last decade, will visit us for a solo recital on March 14th. His Guitar Foundation of America competition victory catapulted him to great popularity with American guitar society concertgoers. On April 18, renowned composer/guitarist Carlo Domeniconi (and good friend of Pavel Steidl) will be the featured artist for our ensembles festival. He will coach, perform, and conduct the world premiere of a new work he has written for the occasion.

The BCGS is also proud to support this summer's Boston GuitarFest: "The Eternal Feminine," which will focus on the impact of women in music and the guitar world. The BCGS shares the goal of recognizing the importance of women in music through this season's concerts with Ana Vidovic and Sharon Isbin, and the Boston Guitar Orchestra performances of Margaret Bonds' *Three Dream Portraits* and Florence Price's *Night* at our past fall concerts.

In this newsletter, BGO member Adrienne Smith gives us a fascinating look at the careers of Florence Price and Margaret Bonds, including Price's surprising Boston connection. Please also read Oscar Azaret's account of the Viet-AID Member's Concert this past September. Oscar and BCGS member Nho Van Truong organized this wonderful event that showcased BCGS members' musical talents and their wonderful ability to engage new audiences in our community.

Warm regards,

Dan Acsadi  
*Director, BCGS*



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## BGO EMBRACES MUSIC OF TRAILBLAZING WOMEN

By Adrienne Smith



*Florence Price*



*Margaret Bonds*

Florence Price and Margaret Bonds were two talented, prolific black women musicians and composers. Their careers are accomplishments on their own - Price is the first black woman composer to have a composition played by a major American orchestra – but given the cultural backdrop of racism and sexism they worked against, their achievements are spectacular. And yet, they remain little known.

This fall, the Boston Guitar Orchestra broadened the range of voices heard in the classical music scene by playing pieces by both women. The group thus honored these trailblazing women, while showing off what a guitar orchestra can do with pieces written for piano and voice.

Price, the older of the two, was born in 1887 into an affluent family in Little Rock, Arkansas. A prodigy piano player, she attended Boston's own New England Conservatory when she was just sixteen years old. After graduating in 1906 with degrees in organ performance and piano pedagogy, Price spent years in Little Rock, teaching music and composing the art songs that would make up such a large part of her work. She moved to Chicago in 1927, after race relations in Little Rock completely deteriorated.

Chicago was the perfect place for Price to thrive. The city was alive with the music and culture that the Great Migration had brought North. Price began experimenting with incorporating black musical heritage into Western classical music and was one of the first composers to successfully bridge the gap between both traditions. Her *Symphony in E Minor* (1932), for example, included syncopated rhythms from the Juba dance.

Price won two Wanamaker Foundation Prizes for her symphony, and also caught the attention of Frederick Stock, music director of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. On June 15, 1933, Stock's orchestra played the *Symphony in E Minor* at the Chicago World Fair. This was the first time ever in the United States that an orchestra had played a composition written by a black woman. George Gershwin himself attended the sold-out concert. FDR wrote Price a congratulatory letter.

After the World Fair, Price enjoyed some success, but eventually hit a glass ceiling in the mainstream concert halls. In 1943, she appealed to Serge Koussevitzky, director of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, writing, "I have two handicaps – those of sex and race. I am a woman; and I have some Negro blood in my veins. . . . I should like to be judged on merit alone." Price's letters to Koussevitzky spanned nine years, but the BSO never played her music.

Despite her frustrations, Price remained incredibly prolific. In 1946, she composed "Night," which the BGO performed in opening for Ana Vidovic. All told, Price wrote over 300 compositions, many of which are still unpublished, ranging from art songs to symphonies and concertos. Some of the most renowned singers of her day, such as Marian Anderson and Leontyne Price, sang her songs. Price died in Chicago in 1953, while planning a trip to France to receive an award for her work.

Price's legacy paved the way for the next generation of black women composers and musicians. First among them was Price's student and good friend, Margaret Bonds. Born in Chicago in 1913, Bonds was a talented pianist and composer. She attended Northwestern and in 1933, as just a senior, she became the first black soloist ever to play with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. Also while at Northwestern, the same year Price won her awards, Bonds too won a Wanamaker Foundation Prize for her composition, "Sea Ghost."

Bonds settled in New York, where she studied at Juilliard, taught music, performed with major orchestras, developed community music programs, and worked as a music director for several theaters. She was a good friend of the poet Langston Hughes, and the two had a lifelong collaboration. As a composer, Bonds was deeply influenced by her forebearers, in particular Price, who brought African American folk music into classical compositions. Elements of jazz, blues, and spirituals show up in many of her works. Bonds finished her career in California working on films and with theaters. She died in 1972.

The BGO played one of Bond's renowned collaborations with Hughes, "Three Dream Portraits" in opening for Pavel Steidl. The three-piece song cycle is based on Hughes's collection of poems, "The Dream Keeper." The arrangements prove how, even without words, the guitar can communicate irony ("Minstrel Man"), hopefulness ("Dream Variation"), and triumph over adversity ("I, Too").

The choice to play pieces by Price and Bonds was inspired by the theme for Boston GuitarFest X, "The Eternal Feminine." The BGO will play the pieces again during GuitarFest, at Jordan Hall. For Price, this will be a homecoming (incidentally, Jordan Hall opened the year Price began her studies at NEC). And for both women, the performance will give their names and music the recognition they deserve.

## BCGS Member's Concert at VietAID Community Center in Dorchester

By Oscar Azaret

On September 21, several members of the BCGS, including a portion of the BGO, held an informal member's concert at the Vietnamese American Initiative Development Center in Dorchester. VietAID is a vibrant Community Center in Dorchester offering cultural, educational, professional, and civic engagement programs for the Fields Corner Dorchester Community. BCGS member Nho Van Truong, who is also a member of the VietAID Board, facilitated this exciting opportunity.



*VietAID Center  
42 Charles Street,  
Dorchester, Ma*



*Oscar Azaret introduces the program*



*Fiel Sahir*



*Don Hague*



*Nho Van Truong*



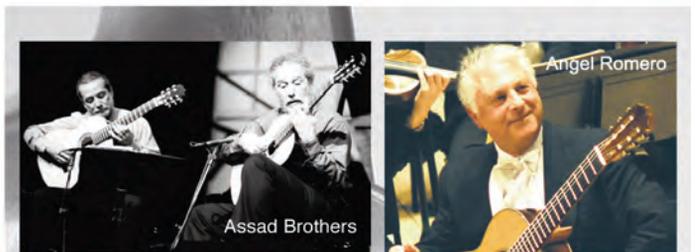
*Jeff Wyman*



*George Attisano*

It was a lovely warm fall afternoon. We arrived early to prepare the stage for the BGO and set up a professional sound system provided by Jeff Wyman. It was fun sharing the space during this time with the Girl Scout troop engaged in their activities in their "great room" area. The center was teeming with high energy. I had the opportunity during this time to speak with several parents about the BCGS and classical guitar in the Boston area.

We decided on a program with lots of variety and more widely approachable music, and also to take the time to introduce the music to the audience. The pieces were enthusiastically received by a very appreciative audience. It was clear that for some it had been a unique experience. Our BCGS performers were at their best – very musical, engaging, and gracious. After the show, those of us who could stay were treated to a delicious and very lively dinner at a local Pho restaurant, where we sampled exotic delicacies from Southeast Asia, and enjoyed a short walk on a warm September night in Fields Corner. We look forward to more connections with this group in the future, and hopefully we'll see them again at upcoming BCGS events!



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## Calendar

*BCGS events are in red. Please visit the BCGS website at [www.bostonguitar.org](http://www.bostonguitar.org) to see further information including a link to maps and directions. Members may enter their own events by contacting us for permission and instructions.*

**Saturday, January 17 1:30pm**

BCGS Performance Party (Union Music in Worcester, MA)

**Sunday, January 18 3:00pm**

Jose Lezcano - Hingham Sunday Sounds (Hingham Public Library)

**Friday, January 23 7:30pm**

BCGS Artist Series: Sharon Isbin, guitar (First Lutheran Church, Boston, MA)

**Saturday, January 24 8:00pm**

El Canto del Caballero: Renaissance Music from Spain, 1530-1630 (Lindsay Chapel, Cambridge, MA)

**Sunday, January 25 3:00pm**

El Canto del Caballero: Renaissance Music from Spain 1530-1630 (Somerville Museum)

**Sunday, February 15 3:00pm**

Gerry Johnston - Hingham Sunday Sounds (Hingham Public Library)

**Friday, March 6 8:00pm**

Aaron Larget-Caplan guitar solo & Duo w/ flutist Kristen Dye (Church of the Advent, Boston)

**Tuesday, March 10 8:00pm**

Aaron Larget-Caplan with Shakuhachi Master Elizabeth Reina Bennet (Distler Performance Hall, Medford, MA)

**Saturday, March 14 7:30pm**

BCGS Artist Series: Marcin Dylla, guitar (First Lutheran Church, Boston, MA)

**Sunday, March 15 3:00pm**

Back Bay Gtr Trio with John Muratore - Hingham Sunday Sounds (Hingham Public Library)

**Saturday, March 21 2:00pm**

BCGS Performance Party (at the home of Don and Naoko Hague, Pepperell, MA)

**Saturday, April 11 8:00pm**

Artistry of the Guitar Series with Aaron Larget-Caplan, Tim Farrell & Ken Bonfield (Gloucester, MA)

**Saturday, April 18 All Day**

New England Guitar Ensembles Festival with Carlo Domeniconi (First Lutheran Church, Boston, MA)

**Sunday, April 19 3:00pm**

Boston Guitar Orchestra - Hingham Sunday Sounds (Hingham Public Library)

## Classifieds

*Classifieds are \$15 per issue of the BCGS newsletter for a 32-word ad, and \$0.25 for each additional word. The fee includes posting on the BCGS webpage for three months. Email [director@bostonguitar.org](mailto:director@bostonguitar.org) with inquiries. Please send checks to BCGS, P.O. Box 470665, Brookline, MA 02447, or pay online.*

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Photo by J. Henry Fair

BCGS Artist Series  
Presents  
Sharon Isbin  
January 23, 2015



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