

## Listening Guide: *Piano Sonata in E Minor*

Florence Price's *Piano Sonata in E Minor* won the prestigious Wanamaker composition prize in 1932, and Price was the first African American woman to accomplish this! The word "**Afro Romantic**" was coined to describe her compositional style, which was a combination of African American and Romantic styles. *This listening guide augments content from the Winter 2024 issue of Piano Inspires Kids.*

A movement in **Sonata Form** contains three sections:

**Exposition:**

The main themes (melodies) are introduced. You may also hear transitions and closing themes at the end of the exposition.

**Development:**

The middle section "develops" the themes—new keys, new articulations, melodies upside down or backwards!

**Recapitulation:**

The last section brings back the main themes in their original form. Closing themes and a **Coda**, which brings the piece to an end, might also be included.

**Hear Here!**

[youtube.com/watch?v=xkp5M5YTJRU](https://youtube.com/watch?v=xkp5M5YTJRU)

Listen to Karen Walwyn's performance of *Piano Sonata in E Minor*. Use the guide below to follow along. Timestamps are given to help you know where each section begins and ends.

**Exposition:**

**1:48 Slow Introduction, *Andante***

- The Slow Introduction sets up many of the important ideas (**motives**) in this sonata: dotted rhythms, repeated melody notes, melodic thirds, half-step chromatic motion, and **syncopation**.

**2:55 Primary Theme, *Allegro***

- This tune uses repeated notes and thirds. Listen to how Dr. Walwyn **voices** the opening melody. Can you hear the melody clearly?

**3:18 Transition**

**4:04 Second Themes 1 and 2**

- **Second Theme 1** is in C major. **Second Theme 2 (5:25)** has a singing melody. Here, Dr. Walwyn really takes time to make it even more dramatic.

**5:42 Closing Theme 1, 2, and 3**

- Price uses *three* closing themes at the end of the exposition!
- **Closing Theme 1:** Listen to the arpeggios and how Dr. Walwyn shapes each gesture. Closing Theme 2 begins at **6:08** and the music is scalar at first. Then, there is a syncopated melody. In **Closing Theme 3, at 6:23**, Price starts in F# major, which is very different in sound from C major. Did you notice how Dr. Walwyn really sings the top notes of the big chords?

## Development:

### 6:59 Development Stages 1, 2, 3, and 4

- In **Stage 1** Dr. Walwyn voices the left-hand motives to show the relationship between the development and the exposition.
- **Stage 2 (7:09)** is based on the repeated notes and the shape of the primary theme. Listen to how the pianist brings out the main melody in the busy texture.
- In **Stage 3 (7:36)**, Price **inverts** (writes it upside down!) the primary theme.
- The chords in **Stage 4 (8:00)** sound hymn-like.

### 8:26 Cadenza Episode

- Dr. Walwyn plays this passage with great technical skill, and she paces the tempo to capture the dramatic build-up.

### 8:42 Retransition

## Recapitulation:

### 8:57 Recapitulation: Primary Theme

- The Recapitulation in a sonata form is meant to resolve the tension of the two keys from the Exposition. Notice how Dr. Walwyn plays this part differently than in the beginning.

### 9:17 Transition

### 9:36 Second Theme 1 expanded

- Price doesn't do what we expect: she surprises us by having the second theme now be in A major (not E minor!) Why do you think that she does this?

### 10:44 Closing Themes 1, 2, and 3

- Closing Theme 1 and 2 start to bring the piece to a conclusion but Closing Theme 3 (**11:26**) surprises us yet again by beginning in E-flat major! By delaying the home key, Price creates a lot of drama and tension!

### 12:02 Coda

- The Coda is where Price finally arrives in the home key of E minor. Dr. Walwyn's performance is wonderfully evocative and expressive throughout!