

Poet Rita Dove Dazzles With Her Words

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Poet Rita Dove took the audience in McAlister Auditorium on a lyrical, narrative journey through her latest book, *Sonata Mulattica*, during a reading on Monday (March 8) as part of the Tulane Poet Laureate Series.



Rita Dove, the first African American poet laureate of the United States, reads from her latest book in McAlister Auditorium on the uptown campus. (Photo by Sally Asher)

"Rita Dove makes you want to read more," said Peter Cooley, professor of English, who introduced Dove, a former poet laureate of the United States. "She makes the room expand."

The room did seem to expand to London, Paris and Vienna around the time of the French Revolution as Dove read her poems about the life of black violinist George Augustus Bridgetower.

Bridgetower was the son of a Polish woman and a self-styled African prince. He was a child prodigy at violin who played in the courts of Europe and England.

Bridgetower's only real claim to fame, though, is that Ludwig von Beethoven dedicated a sonata to him in 1803. And they performed it together, at least once, in Vienna, with Beethoven on piano and Bridgetower on violin.

Now known as the "Kreutzer Sonata," Beethoven's Sonata No. 9 in A major, opus 47, originally was named "The Bridgetower."

Dove said she began researching Bridgetower's story out of curiosity, trying to imagine what it was like to be a "mixed-race prodigy at that time." But then she couldn't let him go.

Bridgetower lived until age 80 and continued to perform in London after earning a music degree from Cambridge University, but he slipped into obscurity.

Dove's most poignant line of the evening, perhaps, was from the poem, "Ludwig von Beethoven's Return to Vienna," in which she describes the great composer grappling with his encroaching deafness. Dove recited, "Can't you see that I'm deaf? I also cannot stop listening."

Dove's appearance was presented by the [Creative Writing Fund](#) of the Department of English.