



COMPOSER BIOGRAPHY

**FLORENCE PRICE**

BORN: April 9, 1887

ERA/STYLE: Contemporary Classical

DIED: June 3, 1953

HOMETOWN: Little Rock, Arkansas

Florence Price was an American composer, pianist, organist, and music educator. She is the first African-American woman to be recognized as a composer, and the first to have her music played by a major symphony orchestra. She wrote numerous works including symphonies, concertos, choral works, chamber music, and an assortment of songs and smaller pieces for solo or accompanied instruments. Her unique works are known for including both African-American and European Classical melodies and rhythms.

Florence was born in Little Rock to a mixed-race family. Her father was the only Black dentist in Little Rock and her mother was a music teacher, who gave Price her first music lessons. She excelled as a pianist from a young age, giving her first performance at age 4, and publishing her first composition by age 11. After graduating as the valedictorian of her Catholic school at age 14, Price attended the New England Conservatory in Boston, graduating in 1906 with an artist diploma in organ and a teaching certificate.

After teaching for a few years in her hometown, Florence moved to Atlanta and became the head of the music department at a historically Black college, Clark Atlanta University. There, she met and married her husband, a lawyer, and the two moved back to Little Rock. But ongoing prejudice against African-Americans in the Deep South led the Price family to move to Chicago, along with many other southern Blacks, during the Great Migration of the early 20th century.

In Chicago, Florence began studying with the leading composition and organ teachers in the city, which greatly inspired her writing. After her marriage ended in 1931, she worked as an organist for silent films and composed jingles for commercials, all while raising two daughters on her own. She moved in with another Black woman composer, her friend and student Margaret Bonds. Price and Bonds worked together, performing each other's music and winning national recognition as composers and performers. It was during this time that the Chicago Symphony Orchestra performed Price's First Symphony at the Century of Progress World's Fair.

After her death in 1953, much of her music was forgotten until the early 21st century, when a large collection of manuscripts were discovered in what had been her summer home in Illinois. Her works gained new interest, and by 2018, her entire catalog of compositions was published and is now available to the world.