

### **Florence Price (1887-1953)**

Florence Beatrice Price (née Smith) was the first black American woman to have her works performed by major orchestras. The daughter of a dentist and a school teacher, Price grew up in Little Rock, Arkansas, where she was well acquainted with another future composer, William Grant Still.

She received her early musical education from her mother, but at the age of 15 she entered the New England Conservatory. After obtaining an artist's diploma in organ and a piano teacher's certificate, she spent several years teaching in Little Rock, and later Atlanta, before returning to Little Rock to marry the lawyer Thomas Price in 1912.

Around 1927, Price moved to Chicago with her husband and children, in part for economic reasons and in part to escape the racial tension and violence of Arkansas. She took the opportunity to further her studies of composition, harmony, and orchestration. In 1932 she gained national recognition as a composer when several of her pieces won her the Wanamaker Prize, with others receiving honorable mentions; one of her pupils, Margaret Bonds, was also a winner.

Price remained active as a teacher and as a pianist and organist as well as a composer, publishing a successful series of teaching pieces. In 1951 John Barbirolli commissioned an overture from her; she was to have traveled to Manchester to attend the premier, but had to cancel the trip due to a hospital stay. In May of 1953 she was again to have traveled to Europe to receive an award in Paris, but again her health intervened; she died the following month at St. Luke's Hospital, Chicago.

She composed more than 300 works, including four symphonies, four concertos, numerous chamber pieces, tone poems, songs, and arrangements of spirituals. Much of it may have been lost to history if not for the discovery in 2009 of original manuscripts, including her Symphony No. 4 (1945) and two violin concertos, by the buyers of her one-time summer home outside Chicago. Ensuing years have seen increased interest in her music: the International Florence Price Festival launched in 2020, and Grammys have gone to the New York Youth Symphony, for its 2023 recording of *Ethiopia's Shadow in America* (1929–32) and Piano Concerto in One Movement (1934), and to the Philadelphia Orchestra, for its 2022 recording of Symphonies Nos. 1 and 3 (1938–40).